

Women in Transition: An Opportunity For Self-Discovery And Personal Transformation

By Jan Foster, L.P.C.C., R.Y.T.

Has your relationship with others developed an 'airless' quality, like there's little room to move or breathe?"

Transition is a euphemism for change. Change is not always fun, unless you're the one initiating the change. And it can still be scary, because you never know how those affected by the change are going to react to you.

For women, transitions are usually all about relationships, whether it's the woman's relationship to her body, to her self, her higher self, her work, her family, her friends or her romantic partner.

Are You Ripe for a Change in Relationship?

Most of us are strongly interested in protecting our primary relationships, whether at home, work or play. Once we have created what feels like a safe harbor in a family, marriage, job or friendship, we generally do not want to venture out into uncharted waters that test or risk the relationship. Instead, we are motivated to not "rock

the boat," and we protect the relationship by doing everything we can do to make it last. This orientation to relationship can result in a "positive bonding pattern."

In a positive bonding pattern the following exchange forms the basis of the relationship: I'm taking care of you more than I'm taking care of me, and you're taking care of me more than you're taking care of yourself. This dynamic is called a positive bonding pattern because it feels good, compared to a relationship filled with criticism and conflict.



However, a steady diet of denying your own needs, preferences and desires and squelching any negative reactions to the other person will often, suddenly without warning, flip the positive bonding pattern into a "negative bonding pattern," full of hurt, anger, blame and judgment – on both sides. Paradoxically, the avoidance of conflict and the denial of our own needs can bring about the very thing we don't want – the eventual deadening or ending of the relationship!

What are some warning signs that a positive bonding pattern has developed in a relationship?

Picking up on Positive Bonding Patterns in a Relationship

- Has the relationship developed an "airless" quality, like there's little room to move or breathe?
- Are you so tuned in to the other person that you bypass yourself and have lost track of your own wants or preferences?
- As you avoid making waves and tiptoe around certain subjects, has the number of topics that you can discuss diminished?
- Have you lost your reactivity? Are there no fights or arguments but less vitality, spontaneity, fun or enjoyment with the other person?
- Has the sexuality totally disappeared from your romantic relationship or does it happen out of a sense of responsibility to enjoy it or provide it?

- Do you feel much more dominant and "in charge" in the relationship?
- On the other hand, do you often feel at the mercy of the other person?

The Transformation of a Positive Bonding Pattern

How do you transition out of a positive bonding pattern so that you can be in a relationship without losing yourself?

A good way to start is to spend some time answering the following two questions:

- (1) What am I doing that I do not want to do?
- (2) What am I not doing that I want to do?

Once you are in touch with the parts of yourself that are being left out or denied in the relationship, you can begin to reclaim them. This reclamation process usually involves learning how to communicate your needs and negative reactions to the other person. When you stay emotionally and energetically linked to the other person and at the same time maintain good boundaries, you may be surprised that person usually doesn't get so upset. How to communicate in this way, with good boundaries and connection at the same time, will be the focus of the next article in this series.

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