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The Four S's of a Healthy Relationship

The 4 S's of healthy attachment — **Safety, Security, being Seen and Soothed** — were originally used for helping parents create loving bonds with their children. These same four ideas can help any couple create a healthy relationship, even if they haven't known one previously.

Safety: We certainly need to be physically safe, but emotional safety is just as important for a healthy relationship. Try using soft tones and "I" statements to bring up difficult topics. For example, instead of, "You need to take out the garbage!" try "I'm overwhelmed with housework and would appreciate your help with the garbage." When someone feels unsafe, our brain tells us immediately to fight, flee or play dead (meaning zone out or withdraw). When someone feels safe, we want to be with them, love and nurture them. We can also increase a feeling of safety through being vulnerable. Not being afraid to go to your partner to seek comfort seems like a rather simple thing to do, but many people find it difficult and even scary to let someone know they need them. Yet by being vulnerable, we increase each other's ability to feel safe enough to bond.

Secure: Security is a sense of safety combined with stability. We need to feel our partner is sticking with us through the natural ebbs and flows of the relationship. Secure partners don't easily threaten to leave the relationship. They also reassure each other they're in the relationship to stay either directly or through their actions. "Security is an overall deeply felt state. For secure couples an argument is just a temporary blip that doesn't threaten their bond," says Bernadette Hayes, LCPC, a Chicago therapist. "Couples that are securely attached seem to be willing to broach difficult topics and have conversations to arrive at some resolution and often report feeling more bonded afterward."



Seen: We need to feel seen by and understood by our partner. No one will perfectly understand their partner all the time. The good news is that just trying to understand or see the world through a loved one's eyes makes a healthy difference. Instead of using general statements such as 'you are always there for me,' try being more specific such as 'You always cheer me on to try new things, even when I doubt myself'. Being seen through the eyes of our loved ones helps build one's sense of self.

Soothed: A healthy relationship soothes our nervous system. We can ask ourselves at any given time if we are acting in a way that is soothing. If not, we can take the time to breathe through our noses to calm our own nervous system and then make a repair with our partner to help soothe them. Making positive physical contact every day is an important way to soothe each other. For example, renowned couple researcher John Gottman talks about the importance of a daily 6-second kiss. He also notes the importance of soft tones of voice to help couple's nervous systems stay soothed.

At any given time, each partner can ask themselves if they are providing the 4 S's. If both are, that can signal a healthy relationship. If not, positive change is just an S away.

Modified from <https://psychcentral.com/blog/the-four-ss-of-a-healthy-relationship/> The Four S's of a healthy Relationship By [Kirsten Belzer, LCSW, CHT](#)

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