

# The Relationship Grid™



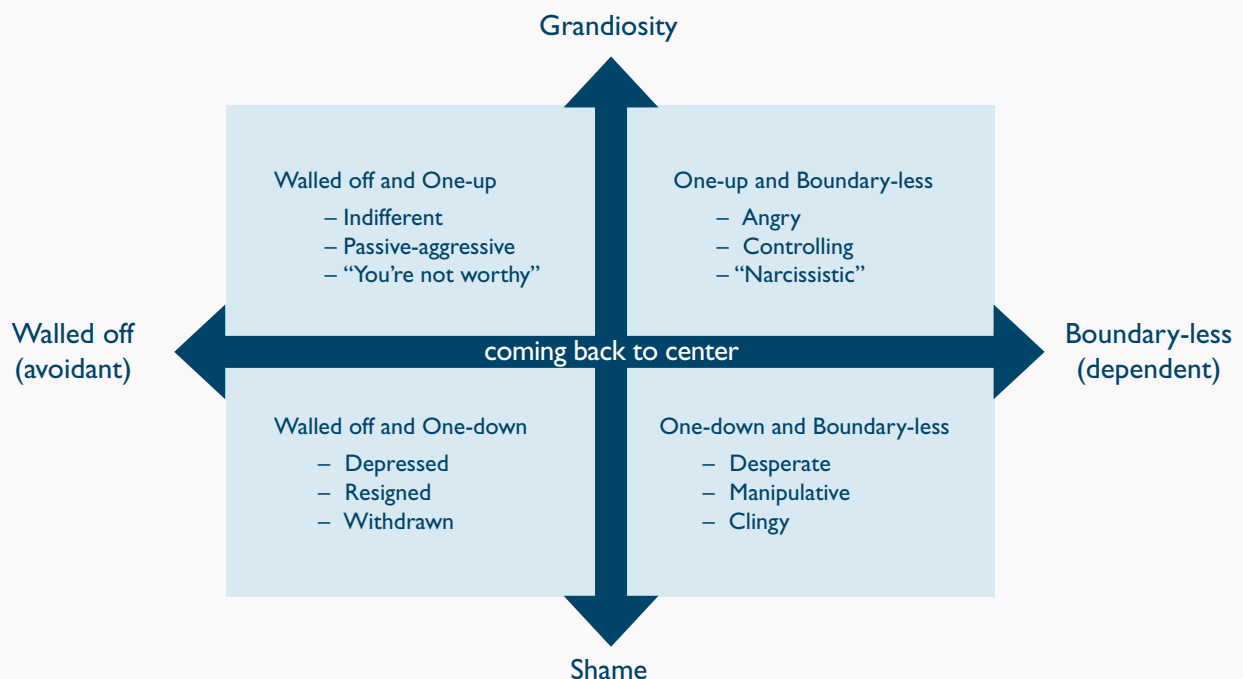
## Short overview

The Relationship Grid™ OR Relational Grid™ developed by family therapist Terry Real is a tool for reflection and assessment. It offers a snapshot of how a person is behaving or feeling “now” with some clues as to what steps to take toward a “healthy” balance.

This short introduction to the model is followed by an article by Terry Real. Short overview Adapted from *The Relationship Gardner* by Donna McIlldoon.

The Grid has four quadrants (in a workshop you might physically place yourself on one of the quadrants).

## Terry Real's Relational Grid™



The vertical line represents self-esteem.

- Grandiosity being at the top: At your worst moments do you tend to feel inflated and grandiose (“one-up” from your opponent)?
- Shame being at the bottom: Or do you feel shame-filled and “less-than”?

The horizontal line is for assessing boundaries, with again, health being at the mid-line

- Boundary-less being at the far-right point. Do you let too much out or in; do you express emotions without filter or consideration of consequences, are you overly-affected by everyone around you?
- Walled-off being at far-left point: Or are you avoidant, not able to share your thoughts and feelings. Do you cut yourself and retreat when wounded?

Most of us would like to think that we usually dwell around center point, which represents health, but we may have tendencies (at our worst points) where we gravitate toward negative or unhealthy behaviour.

- If we are walled off and one-up, we may tend toward critical judgement, condescending attitudes or passive-aggressive withdrawal.
- If we are boundary-less and one-up, we may tend toward unbridled self-expression, control, angry outbursts, verbal abuse without realizing the effect of our behaviour.
- If we are walled off and one-down (toward shame) we may experience disillusionment, depression, feeling lethargic, hopeless, or disengaged.
- If we are boundary-less and one-down, we easily feel shamed, assume we are to blame, adopt other’s emotional pain, feel love-needy (not okay on our own).

Just acknowledging our tendency allows us to observe it more regularly with an eye to altering unhealthy habits which do not support loving

connection and intimacy. We can then take a deep breath and commit to growing in the direction of center (health).

## Using the snapshot to go back to center

- If you identified yourself as tending toward being walled off and one-up, you may step toward growth by remembering that others may have differing opinions and ways of being, and choose to put judgements aside. Choose connection with others through approaching, endeavoring to understand others. Curiosity will be your best friend.
- If you identified yourself as tending toward being boundary-less and one-up, you may take a step toward growth and gaining self-control with deep-breathing, controlling your anger and unbridled self-expression, and reminding yourself that others needs and perspectives are important and valid. Count to 10 and let others speak first.
- If you identified yourself as tending toward being walled off and one-down, your growth work will be in moving away from temptation to choose passivity and isolation, electing instead to “stay at the table”. Use “I statements” (as in “I felt sad when I wasn’t invited to join in” ... or “I think that we should go to your parent’s house”). Have the courage to say what is true for you. Value yourself and your contribution by offering it. Commit to engage and congratulate yourself each time you do so.
- If you identified yourself as tending toward being boundary-less and one-down, you may make a step toward growth by developing an internal boundary which will allow you to identify when someone else’s baggage or “stuff” is at play. Taking a moment to reflect “wait a minute—is this about them, or about me?” will stand you in good stead. Choosing to make steps toward independence will also help.

## The Relationship Grid

By Terry Real

Several years ago, I developed a tool for both mental health professionals and the general public that gives an accurate snapshot of where you are and where you need to go at any given moment. It is an easy way to help you practice coming to center -- down from grandiosity or up from shame -- and likewise either to pull yourself in from being boundaryless or to open up from being walled off.

With the Grid in mind, you can do a “mental freeze” and ask yourself, “Where am I, and where do I need to go?” To use the Grid, you first check your self-esteem: Do you feel deflated and shame-filled, or do you feel inflated and grandiose?

Next, you check your boundaries, starting first with your containing boundary: “Am I uncontained and letting too much out, or walled-off and letting nothing out?” Then check the protective part of your boundary: “Am I too porous or not open enough?”

It is important not to over think your position when using the Relationship Grid. Simply place yourself in the appropriate quadrant. The beauty of it is that once you know where you are, the Grid will instantly and unfailingly tell you where you need to go in order to come to center.

### Boundaryless

For example, if you are *boundaryless* and *one-down*, chances are that your predominant need is for more protection and solidity. Close your eyes or look down at the floor and in your mind’s eye, see the protective part of your boundary grow stronger; feel how it shields you. Let yourself relax within this circle of protection. You don’t have to steel yourself against emotional upset or attack because your boundary will do that for you.

Conversely, if you are *boundaryless* and *one-up*, and if you’re feeling like a big, angry victim, stop it! Chances are that your predominant weakness will be containment. Strengthen the inside of the boundary. Feel it pressing in against you, like a hand on your stomach, sucking it in, reining you in.

Do not offend from the victim position. It’s not warranted, it’s not attractive, and it’s not good for you.

Use the Grid to help you come down into same-as, and let your boundary protect you from the stimulus you got yourself so upset about. Wait until you’re less reactive before thinking honestly and fairly, “Is there anything to this, or am I just ready to let it fly? Am I battling a caricature instead of seeing the life-sized issue in front of me?”

### Walled-off

On the opposite side of the chart, there are those who react by being walled off. If you are *walled off* and *one-down*, you feel de-energized and disillusioned. If you’re like a lot of people who adopt a walled-off, one-down position, you’re often passive. Perhaps you’re depressed or just resigned to what you’ve decided is your fate. You don’t want contact, or you don’t know how to make contact. You have a sense of failure before even beginning. It’s too difficult, too overwhelming, or just too ungratifying. You’d rather be left alone to comfort yourself as best you can with your usual distractions. Perhaps you’re addicted to or dependent on some substance, process, or person outside of your primary relationship.

You must have courage to rouse yourself from limbo. The combination of shame and walls is hard to punch through. You have to make yourself start moving again, make yourself reengage. Your lethargy is like that horrible feeling of getting up in the morning when it’s still dark and making yourself go to the gym to work out. But that’s all it is. Your resistance is no more substantial and no more difficult to conquer than that. You fear commitment – to a person, to work, or ambition, or everything. You fear you will fail. Far and away the most effective remedy for such fear is simple action and repetition. Don’t stall.

For someone in this position, “trying,” “understanding,” or “working on things” may be little more than sophisticated procrastination.

On the other hand, if you are *walled off* and *one-up*, you have to ask yourself, “What are you being so high and mighty about?” “Who are you kidding?” I want you to really see the way you walk around as if whomever you’re with isn’t good enough, isn’t quite worth your while. I want you to let in just how mean you are being. Yes, overtly shaming of others and mean.

Simply put, lose the attitude and connect with your partner (or child or parent or co-worker). Bring yourself down from your superiority and out from behind those walls. Come back into engagement. You were dying in there inside your empty fortress.

### Coming to Center

Like many people, you may find that you reside mostly in one quadrant of the Grid. You may also realize that in a former relationship your behavior was in another quadrant. Or you may feel that you skip around quite a bit from day to day, or even from minute to minute.

### Here's the deal on using the Grid: Keep it simple.

If you are in a shame state, bring yourself up. If you're being grandiose, bring yourself down. If you are boundaryless, pause and reset your boundary. If you are walled off, take a deep breathe and get back into engagement.

That said, this does take practice. It also takes courage to look at yourself, recognize where you are and will yourself back to center. Like a beginner at anything, at first you will find this internal work stilted, arduous and largely ineffective. Press on! Wait until the first time someone says something provocative to you and you feel that whoosh against your psychological boundary and have it bounce off. Or the first time you feel a hot wave of shame, and rather than feeling rotten for hours and hours about it, you can breathe your way back into center in a matter of a few minutes.

I look forward to your excitement the first time you don't just intellectually understand but have the palpable experience that this technique really does work – that you can directly and powerfully impact your own state of mind. ■

Posted by Terry Real on August 26, 2008 at 10:48 AM

You can read detailed examples of Terry using The Relationship Grid with his clients in the book *The New Rules of Marriage*.

