

I AM HERE FOR YOU

我想傾聽你

A psychologist with over 260,000 social media followers brings his consulting room to the page.

Hung Chung-Ching applies his professional expertise and years of counselling experience to some of the most common psychological problems that occur between parent and child, between partners, and within our own egos. *I Am Here for You* is divided into four main sections: “Being Present and Listening”; “Understanding and Forgiveness”; “The Quest for Freeing Relationships” and “Building a New Self”.

This book goes far beyond the recounting of case studies or the citing of general platitudes. Hung Chung-Ching provides detailed analysis of the psychological conditions that motivate our actions, revealing the mental circuits underpinning the emotions. Only when we learn to listen and truly understand one another, he argues, can we move beyond the confusion and misunderstandings that cause us such emotional turmoil.

Hung also tackles some of the specific problems that are most pertinent to Asian society, such as the traditional childrearing techniques that so often cause conflict between the generations. His solution is a particular style of communication that deters recriminations and over-defensiveness through clarity of self-explanation and the vocalization of emotions. *I Am Here for You* explores the challenges of modern relationships using plain language that will allow any reader to grasp the universal principles of healthy relationships.

Hung Chung-Ching 洪仲清

After seven years as a clinical psychologist, Hung Chung-Ching now heads the Happy Family Psychotherapy Center. He started publishing advice on Facebook in 2011, and now has over 260,000 followers. He has published a series on spiritual growth, which includes the books *Notes on Healing* and *Getting On Well With Yourself*, and has appeared on television to share his exercises for the promotion of positive thinking.



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I AM HERE FOR YOU

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Realizing yourself in a relationship

When considering the family, I often think about what issues are common to all relationships, because the family unit includes all of most important forms of relationships that we have. In particular, families involve the two most emotive types of relationship: the parent-child and the romantic partner relationships. And of course, these two relationships interact within the family structure.

Researchers looking at easy-to-mind babies have found that they can be defined by a group of features including regular habits, positive emotions, quick adaptability to new environments, and moderate levels of activity. But children's adaptability depends on another key factor: the upbringing and environment given to them by their parents, which interacts with the child's own innate character.

In simple terms, discussions of "perfect" parenting are missing the point. More relevant is how well-matched the parent is to the child. In the same way, some imagined "perfect" partner might actually not be the best match for you.

Let's look first at the parent-child relationship. One child I know often finds himself in difficulties; he doesn't understand the world around him; he comes into conflict with his friends at school. I believe that if his parents were a little more relaxed and upbeat, they might be a little less attentive in their care but both child and parents would be much happier. If the parents did not insist on such rigid rules and high standards of etiquette, the boy could enjoy life more, and the parents would appreciate his strengths more. The whole family would break out of the stalemate that characterizes their relationship now.

Next, an example of romantic partners. I know of a family that seems perfect on the surface. However, the female partner feels trapped by the demands of housekeeping. It's not that she doesn't love her home. It's just that she feels she has no avenue for expressing her own achievements and abilities. Her husband wants her to be a traditional wife, and does not encourage her to develop herself, so she becomes increasingly unsatisfied, even though he is by most standards a very successful man.

A satisfying relationship is a relationship in which a person can actualize themselves. One of the key observable measures of this is whether the other person encourages us to grow and pursue our ambitions. This is true of both romantic relationships and the parent-child bond.

Most people in the helping professions hope that parents will take their child's talents and interests to be an important guide in how to help the child, rather than imposing their own fixed views as the child's only direction for development. But we still see parents controlling everything, and though these parents' children often have highly impressive academic results, they are not happy. They are an example of dissatisfaction with their parents.

Relationships often change. A desire for a relationship to stay permanently the same is impossible – unless time and our environment should suddenly stop advancing. In fact, the desire for things to stay the same is simply head-in-the-sand behavior. Even in romantic relationships, we may give much to our partners, but we cannot use this to bind them, to deprive our partners of the opportunity to grow.

I know one husband and wife who did not have children. The husband was the target of workplace bullying, and felt stripped of his self-respect by the unpleasant behavior of his manager and coworkers. The wife also worked, and the household was financially comfortable. Nevertheless, the wife strongly rejected her husband's desire to start his own company, out of fear that it would affect their stability. She also feared the responsibility of being the main breadwinner during the early startup period. As a result, she insisted that he stick it out in his job. She not only failed to support him, she used emotional behavior against him. The husband ultimately did start his own business, and succeeded, but the couple's relationship grew colder and colder.

I often say to my own friends that the most wonderful kind of love is love that allows the other person the freedom to be themselves. I know of examples of children who fail to support parents in changing the course of their lives. Despite the unstinting care that the parents might have shown to them, the children's only desire is that the parents do not become a burden on them. If you only wish to satisfy yourself in a relationship, fear change in the other, and do not concern yourself with the other's growth and development, then that is really a utilitarian love, a demand to be loved before you will give anything of yourself. Of course, relationships like this can be sustained. But both sides will discover that their emotions inevitably change, and often they are left with nothing but the outward appearance of a relationship.

Relationships may change in many ways. Of course they may end with a break up. Or they may turn cold and distant. Surely a better alternative is to encourage each other to grow? Even if we cannot improve the relationship, we at least have a chance of improving ourselves.

When do we truly fail?

She thinks she is not a good mother; she derives a much greater sense of achievement from her work than from being a parent. In her role as a mother, she is always worrying; every success is only a partial success. She feels adrift, never able to definitively say: "This is good." But at work, she is in control. She always knows what to do, she can clearly define the needs of the company. She has the respect of her juniors and peers, and her superiors clearly recognize her worth.

She says: "My son never listens to me. I feel like a failure as a mother!"

Our true moment of failure is the moment when we tell ourselves that we have failed, and then stop trying.

In today's world, when we are already juggling so many different roles, becoming a mother that everyone labels "successful" is a mission impossible. Because what is success as a parent? Are you a success if your children are obedient? Or do your children have to have conspicuous achievements? Or do you need others to acknowledge your success?

Every mother has to negotiate many kinds of difference with her child, because every healthy, normal person has ideas of their own. Every person has their own ways of doing things, which are not always the same as those favored by their parents. We should be more worried about the child who is too obedient: are they too controlled? Are they building up emotions that their parents have not noticed?

Adolescent rebellion sometimes comes early with clever children. A child might bring a new perspective to things which adults take for granted, and experiment with different kinds of behavior. Children like this will discuss and debate ideas that are very different to what their elders think. On the surface, they may not look like "good" boys or "good" girls. But these are the children who are developing the ability to think for themselves. Ultimately, they may become the individuals who are most likely to commit to and act on the values they believe in.

The obedience of the child is not a good standard for judging the success of a mother.

At work we have targets, and these targets are often quantified. We pursue efficiency. But you can't put numbers on the relationship between a parent and child. "Praise the child five times, for a projected ten-point increase in satisfaction with mother" – this is arrant nonsense, and is only likely to increase dissatisfaction.

In all relationships, we have to cope with a level of uncertainty. That is something that we have to learn to accept. No one stays the same all the time. Relationships suddenly change, and often we will not know why.

Adolescents are dealing with a hazy and distant future, plus drastic changes in their own bodies and personalities. A little confusion is inevitable. They don't even understand themselves, so how can they possibly have a clear grasp of their relationships with other people?

Many of the children I help are seen as "badly behaved". But badly-behaved people often have many good qualities worthy of appreciation. And I don't think that the only good way for a person to act is to do exactly what one is told.

If my child is badly-behaved, it means more work for me. It means problems and difficulties. But I would rather resolve these problems through conversations with the child, during which she can understand the effects of her actions, both positive and negative. I hope

that my child would realize what she wants, and what actions can help her to achieve it. I don't want to produce a child who only does what she's told, nor a child who is always looking to please me. I want her to be able to look after herself.

I don't want my child to lose her way. Even when a child is on a good path, there will always be bumps and injuries along the way. The best we can hope for is that a child doesn't regret the life she has chosen. If we can achieve that, then I am happy, and having a "difficult" child is a small price to pay.

Not doing what parents say doesn't show any lack of love. It is not a useful yardstick of parental success or failure. I would almost never tell a child to "be good and do what the grown-ups tell you."

Ideas like "disagreement is backchat" or "not living the way your parents want means no respect" are often nothing but a shortcut to deadlock. Problems become more and more pointed, and ultimately both sides lose.

Rather than worrying over our children's failure to listen to us, we should spend more time looking after and strengthening ourselves. In any relationship, the only element over which we have a significant amount of control is ourselves. Don't ignore the positive impact which positive emotions and thoughts can have on other people.