

How to Connect

A Woman Named Samara

You may already know her, or heard of her. She's that woman with the reputation, the one nobody wants their kids going near. None of your friends approve of her at all, and they don't want to befriend her.

Everyone in your community feels the same way. Nobody talks to her, and she certainly is not invited over for dinner. She is so shunned by your community that she only ventures out of the house when she knows nobody else will be around. The stares, the remarks and the gossip are too much to bear.

How does the woman named Samara feel?

Shamed, unseen, unheard, unimportant, misunderstood, invisible, worthless.

But you want to connect with her, because she is a human being; a lost, hurting human being.

So how do you connect with the woman named Samara?

How do we show others that we are genuinely listening to them, that we hear them and that we understand them? How do we genuinely make that first connection?

Dr John Warlow has been working as a clinical psychiatrist for twenty-five years, and knows that genuinely connecting with people is one of the first steps to understanding who they are.

Some personality types have a desire to fix the problem, but that's jumping to respond without spending time on the connect step first. In fact, it's often necessary to go back before going on.

It is often necessary – in fact, crucial - to connect and understand prior to considering making any kind of response. As we instinctively know, building relationship first is usually the only way we can truly get to know someone.

Connecting and understanding – perhaps colloquially known as walking in someone else's shoes - is more than 50% of the response. Building a relationship with someone is actually more about listening than anything else. But often, this feels like doing nothing. It's okay to feel like you're doing nothing – this may be just what someone needs.

Connecting may be just what somebody needs to prevent people from moving closer to disaster.

How do I connect?

Connect occurs when there is safety. It is impossible to connect without building a safe foundation for a relationship with someone else.

S: small and similar – relationship usually works best in a smaller setting or one-on-one with people who have similarities to each other

A: attitude – for genuine relationship to occur, ensure you use care, respect and consent in your interactions.

F: face and fun – relationships work best face-to-face; sometimes a text message just doesn't suffice. It doesn't need to be serious all the time – it's okay to have fun, too.

E: empathy – one of great hindrances to any relationship is the inability to walk in another person's shoes, or to make an attempt to understand the other person's viewpoint.

T: time – give a relationship your time.

Y: ask 'you' questions that mean that you can find out more about the other person

S

SMALL + SIMILAR

Relationship usually works best in a smaller setting or one-on-one with people who have similarities to each other.

A

ATTITUDE

For genuine relationship to occur, ensure you use care, respect and consent in your interactions.

F

FACE + FUN

Relationships work best face-to-face; sometimes a text message just doesn't suffice. It doesn't need to be serious all the time – it's okay to have fun, too.

E

EMPATHY

One of great hindrances to any relationship is the inability to walk in another person's shoes, or to make an attempt to understand the other person's viewpoint.

T

TIME

Give a relationship your time and give change time to happen.

Y

YOU

Ask 'you' questions that allow you to find out more about the other person.

How To Connect with Someone

Start with 'you' questions. Have an interest in who they are. Try to stand in someone else's shoes. It's uncomfortable to stand in other people's shoes but it builds empathy.

Knock on the door questions – how are you? More than the superficial greeting, this question might be better phrased as: where are you at? The key at this point is to let the other person know that you want to spend time with them, that they are important to you, even if it's a peripheral relationship at this point. If you get into too much serious talk, or if you are too superficial or fun, it can turn people off. You need both to set up a relationship.

There are three major attitudes that can be sensed but not easily seen and need to be present to connect with someone properly.

These are care, respect, and choice

When connecting with someone, be aware of boundaries. Trying to force someone into responding in a certain way can ruin the connection. Instead, wait for an invitation. Being sensitive to their needs is the heart of empathy.

WHY DO WE FEEL SUCH A DEEP NEED TO CONNECT?

The God who created us also created a perfect world in which we could walk with him in perfect connection. The connection was broken when sin entered the world, and this is perhaps why many of us feel like our connections with others are constantly under threat. But the God who created us still wants to walk with us and he still wants to connect.

Jesus came to earth as the connecting cable between God and us. He also showed us how to connect with each other. Jesus is a fellow traveller because he experienced what we experience. And so he also perfectly understands the struggles that we face.

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. - Hebrews 4:15-16

How To Connect In Groups

The smaller the size of group the easier it is to connect. For this reason, smaller groups function better than larger groups. Think about how comfortable you feel sharing something deeply personal while in a large group. It's intimidating and many people would choose not to share at all. If you pick up on something while part of a larger group, think about connecting with that person in a one-on-one context and invite them to talk about it later.

It may be necessary to ask someone else to connect with that person. It is often the case that the more we overlap or have similarity with someone, the easier it is to connect. This may depend on the context. Sometimes being completely different is beneficial.

Many of the examples of Jesus interacting with people show connection, and show us how to do connection. Indeed, the early church is a story of people connecting, and that's how the early church grew.

Inevitably, our relationships will still face brokenness and confusion. But by understanding the basic rules of connection, you will always have a starting point at which you can restore relationships. In this way, we can also need the caution in James 1:19: Be quick to listen and slow to respond.

This is the first step in loving people with truth.