Being a teen these days is tough. Between school, family, friends, and extracurricular activities—sometimes it feels like you’re being pulled in a dozen different directions, and none of them are your way. On top of that, you may feel lonely, angry, or depressed; or you may wonder if you’re good enough, smart enough, or attractive enough to succeed in life. So, how can you overcome these self-doubts, cultivate the strength to face life’s challenges, and reach your full potential?

With this fun and illustrated guide, you’ll learn how to deal with all the pressures of the teen years, while also growing into the person you want to be. Using skills from mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), and positive psychology, you’ll discover new and effective ways to manage difficult emotions, break bad habits, and start believing in yourself. If you’re ready to take charge of your destiny and face problems head-on, this book has everything you need to get started today!

“This book is a gift to adolescents and their parents, as well as clinicians, teachers, counselors, and coaches who work with them.... Sixteen-year-old me really loves this book, and highly recommends it!”

—Lisa Coyne, PhD, coauthor of Stuff That’s Loud

Joseph V. Ciarrochi, PhD, is a professor at the Institute of Positive Psychology and Education at Australian Catholic University, and coauthor of Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens.

Louise L. Hayes, PhD, is an international ACT trainer and speaker. She is a clinical psychologist, researcher, and coauthor of Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life for Teens and The Thriving Adolescent.
“Your Life, Your Way takes a scientific model and makes it tangible and practical. Parents ought to buy this book for their teens. But, please parents, read it and try the exercises first. You might just change with your teens. Also, as a supervisor, I would certainly offer this book to trainees as a treatment outline. The structure is simple, direct, and flexible enough to fit real-world therapy.”

—Kelly Wilson, PhD, professor emeritus at the University of Mississippi, founding president of the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science (ACBS), and coauthor of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

“The DNA-V model is a game changer; one of the most exciting third-wave interventions in years. This cool-looking book presents the model in a way that teens will love and find helpful.”

—Ben Sedley, PhD, clinical psychologist, and author of Stuff That Sucks

“Your Life, Your Way speaks authentically to young people setting out to figure out who and how they want to be. The authors’ DNA-V model is a practical, accessible framework that is clearly grounded in well-researched principles of behavior change, as well as adolescent development. With meaningful questions to ponder and exercises to build new skills, this book provides exceptional tools to guide teens throughout their life’s journey.”

—Siri Ming, PhD, BCBA-D, behavior analyst, and coauthor of Using RFT to Promote Generative Language

“A unique, skillfully crafted tool kit for empowering young people, no matter what they are struggling with. This beautifully illustrated workbook shows young people that they are the person they have been waiting for—they have the power to transform and move their lives in a direction that sets their hearts on fire. I cannot think of a more perfect and timely resource for teens (and the adults who support them).”

—Evelyn Gould, PhD, BCBA-D, clinical behavior analyst at the New England Center for OCD and Anxiety, and research associate at Harvard Medical School
Adolescence is a time of discovery, of taking mindful risks, and of learning flexibility in the face of the uncertainty and adversity involved in growing up in our world as it is today. This book is a gift to adolescents and their parents, as well as clinicians, teachers, counselors, and coaches who work with them. Created by Joe Ciarrochi and Louise Hayes, this brilliant book based in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is just what every teen needs: a pragmatic, accessible, down-to-earth guide that will empower them to go out and live their way into their best lives. Sixteen-year-old me really, really loves this book, and highly recommends it!"

— Lisa W. Coyne, PhD, assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School; founder of the New England Center for OCD and Anxiety in Boston, MA; and author of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

"Your Life, Your Way is not only filled with thoughtful and valuable guidance, it is also filled with rich, textured, and fun images and exercises. It is the perfect book to aid teenagers in relating to their emotions in an effective fashion. It is ideal for helping them build resiliency. I was wonderfully captured by each page. Ciarrochi and Hayes have ‘nailed it’ with this amazing self-help guide for those who are young and struggling. I might even suggest that us grown-ups could use it too! Thank you for creating such an amazing journey; it will be invaluable to all who explore its pages."

— Robyn D. Walser, PhD, codirector of the Bay Area Trauma Recovery Clinic; assistant professor at the University of California, Berkeley; author of The Heart of ACT; and coauthor of Learning ACT and The Mindful Couple

“What would it be like to own your own life? I don’t mean a life that’s perfect, or smooth, or easy. I mean a life that’s about what your heart yearns for it to be about. That can happen, and this book is about how to get it to happen. It’s based on scores of studies about people just like you, but it is easy to read, clear, and wise. If you want your life, your way—this book will show you how.”

— Steven C. Hayes, PhD, Nevada Foundation Professor in the department of psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno; and codeveloper of ACT
“But it does not seem that I can trust anyone,” said Frodo. Sam looked at him unhappily. “It all depends on what you want,” put in Merry. “You can trust us to stick with you through thick and thin—to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours—closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo.”

/J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

**BUILD STRONG, SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

**Why You Might Read This Chapter**

- You struggle to connect with some people.
- You’re fighting with friends or family.
- People have hurt you.
- You struggle with the idea that friendship and love include the risk of getting hurt.
- You fear being hurt.

**What You’ll Learn**

- What makes someone want to hang out with you.
- What makes you want to hang out with someone.
- How to use DNA-V to build relationships.
- Discover your superpower: inside-outside vision.
- Powerful friendship rules.
Let’s start this chapter with a riddle:
Guess the problem. If you have more of this problem, you’ll have less...

Ability to plan and problem solve
Ability to sleep
Emotional satisfaction
Chance of living a long life

Did you guess that the problem was loneliness? Research shows that loneliness is as big a risk factor for death as smoking ten cigarettes a day or having a bad diet. We humans need each other. Literally. Relationships are like vitamins and minerals.

The hardest part of being human is that we need others, and yet this need also makes us afraid. Imagine you like someone a lot and you ask that person out on a date. Think of the extremes in emotion you would have if that other person says “yes” versus “no.” It’s like the difference between heaven and hell. The problem we all face is that there’s no social connection without social fear. They’re two sides of the same coin.

If we are to genuinely connect with people, we need to make space for the fear of getting hurt. We need to be willing to feel. This returns us to the willingness question we introduced in chapter 5. Think about this question for a moment:

Are you willing to feel the fear of rejection in order to experience the joy of connection?

Are you willing to take the life coin? Just as a regular coin has heads on one side and tails on the other, the coin of life has connection on one side and fear on the other. To take the coin, you must say yes to both.

Don’t worry if you can’t answer this question with a resounding “yes” just yet. You can work through this chapter and develop your DNA-V friendship skills. Because humans need connection, relationships are often the most common value we hold, so we will start with the center—value. What makes you valuable to others? What makes others valuable to you?
WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRIEND?

Have you ever wondered what makes a friend for you? Each friend can be different, but real friends make you feel good about yourself, safe, and supported. Look at the list below and check which friendship characteristics are most important to you. Select your top five, and write them in the space below.

You can do this by yourself or share it with a friend. If you’re completing this with a friend, select the characteristics you see and admire in them. Have fun and focus on each other instead of yourself.

**Characteristics of a Good Friend**

- Trustworthy
- Talks about interesting things
- Fun
- Popular
- Likes sport
- Listens to me
- Makes me laugh or smile
- Loyal
- Good at telling stories
- Is forgiving/doesn’t hold a grudge
- Is upbeat (often in a good mood)

- Shares my interests
- Smart
- Attractive
- Lets me know how they’re feeling
- Doesn’t judge me
- Helps me feel better about myself
- Shows kindness
- Supports me
- Puts me in a good mood
- Is creative
- Is good at planning things out

Other characteristics:
Now review the friendship characteristics again. Which of them do you have?

What makes you a good friend? When you try to answer this question, notice what your advisor does. Does it get critical of you when you try to think of your positive characteristics? If so, that’s normal. Remember your advisor’s job is to keep you safe and prevent you from making social mistakes. It will search for problems inside you and find reasons you acted like a bad friend. It might say you’re not attractive enough, smart enough, interesting enough, or funny enough.

Everybody’s advisor finds problems to worry about when being with others. If only we could all see what others are thinking, we’d realize everybody worries and maybe we’d worry less. But we can’t. Instead, we have to learn how to tune in to our advisor only when it’s useful—that is, when it helps us build our connections.

So just ignore your critical advisor for now, and write five things that make you a good friend. You can use the list on the previous page to inspire you with ideas, or you can write things that aren’t on the list.

________________________

________________________

________________________

________________________

________________________
Now that you’ve identified what makes a good friend, we will turn to your broader circle of relationships. In the diagram below, write the initials of your connections according to how close they are to you in your current social life. You can include friends, family, teachers, even pets. Put those that you trust and like closest to you. Put those you sometimes hang with, or occasionally come into contact with, further away.

Do you see anybody with whom you would like to improve your relationship? Maybe you want to spend more time with them, have more fun with them, or argue less. Underline anybody you would like to be closer to.

Would you like to add new people to your social network? Maybe you’d like to change your social group, or build a new one. If you’ve decided you want to improve your social networks, the next two sections can help you think about how to do this.

» USE YOUR DNA-V SKILLS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Pick someone from the previous exercise that you want to be closer to. Do you ever argue with that person, or struggle to get along sometimes? If you are a human, rather than a robot, then the answer is yes. We would like you to think about this person, and the struggles you get into, as you shift through the DNA-V viewpoints below.

First, ground yourself with your noticer. Take a few slow, deep breaths. In any difficult social situation, pause and breathe. This will set you up to make the best choices.

Think of someone you want to be closer to. It might be a friend or parent or someone else. Think about a time this person upset you. Write what made you upset in the space below.

Now take a walk around the DNA-V disk by answering the questions in each section. You can download a blank disk at: http://dnav.international. Or you can make a copy of the blank disk at the end of the book.

You can start anywhere in the DNA-V disk, but we find it’s often best to complete the noticer (N) and advisor (A) questions first. Then complete the discoverer (D) and value (V) sections. Once you know your feelings (N) and thoughts (A), and make space for them, you may be more willing to try new things (D) to build value (V).
When you finish answering the questions in the DNA-V disk, you hopefully will be open to trying something new in the relationship, to build value. You might try having an honest conversation, asking how the other person feels, offering support, asserting yourself, or withdrawing from the relationship if it's too difficult right now. We don't know what's best in your particular situation, but if you engage in switching DNA-V skills, you'll discover what's best for you.
BUILD SOCIAL VIEW: YOUR RELATIONSHIP SUPERPOWER

Relationships are confusing. One minute you’re best friends with someone, the next minute they’re angry with you and talking behind your back, and you don’t understand what you did. People grow apart. Sometimes you find the friendship is a bad fit; perhaps the friend turns out to be immature or a bully. What can you do? A lot.

You can use social view to get some wise distance from the situation and discover what’s the best next step. Social view involves you seeing how you’re interacting with another person and also guessing what the other person is likely to feel, think, and do.

Let’s start, as we often do in DNA-V, by grounding yourself in the noticer. You can do the following exercise any time, and it can take under 10 or 20 seconds (but remember, with noticer skill, there’s no rush).

**Outside-Inside Noticer**

1. **Breathe:** Take a few slow, deep breaths.

2. **Notice outside:** Become aware of what is outside you. What sounds do you hear? Notice them, even the small ones. What five things do you see?

3. **Notice inside:** Scan your body from head to toe. Do you notice any sensations? Describe how you’re feeling right now.

When you step into noticer space in this way, you don’t overreact to your feelings or thoughts. You could feel angry with a friend but not seek to hurt them. You can feel afraid of what someone will say to you but not seek to avoid them. Your noticer gives you a strong foundation to stand on. **Remember this simple way to ground yourself with these three steps:** breathe, notice outside, notice inside. That’s it.
Inside-Outside Vision

Now that you’ve grounded yourself inside and outside, you’re ready to use your social view. This exercise involves viewing yourself in the relationship from the inside and outside. You also view the other person in this way. The table below captures the key steps. (If you want to do this exercise again, you can download the chart at http://dnav.international.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View</th>
<th>You</th>
<th>Them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside</td>
<td>1. How did I think and feel?</td>
<td>2. If I were the other person, how would I think and feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>3. How did I look on the outside?</td>
<td>4. How did the other person look on the outside?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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1. When you think about the time you had a problem with your relationship, how did you feel? Were there feelings other than anger? Write them in the “Inside + You” quadrant.

2. Imagine you could step into your friend’s body and think and feel what they think and feel. How might they have felt in the situation? Remember you’re guessing here. You could be wrong. People cannot mind read as well as they think they can. The key is to imagine the situation from your friend’s eyes and not just your own. So, take your best guess and write it in the “Inside + Them” quadrant.

3. Now, pause and consider how you might have looked to your friend on the outside. What would they have seen? Did you show anger? Or did you try to hide it and look cool, or unbothered, or even bored? Fill in the “Outside + You” quadrant.

4. Finally, how did the other person look on the outside? Did they look angry, cool, like they didn’t care, or what? Fill in the “Outside + Them” quadrant.

Look at your answers. What did you learn from using social view for that problem situation?
You probably discovered that your view of things from the outside is often not the same as your view from the inside. Often, what we see on the outside is not necessarily what’s happening on the inside. Everybody hides what they’re feeling. And usually we try to hide our insecurity and fear—and this means that just about everybody is looking more confident and unafraid than they’re feeling on the inside.

To build strong relationships, we need to go beyond appearances; we need to understand what’s going on inside ourselves and inside other people. But remember, when you try to understand what’s going on inside someone else, it’s just a guess. You shouldn’t assume that you’re right. Talk to them. You might have to change what you first assumed when you discover how they really feel. But odds are, if you try to understand what your friends are feeling on the inside—especially in a tough situation, like if you’re having a fight—you’ll be able to understand them better and respond to them better than if you were just going by what you see on the outside.
FRIENDSHIP RULES OF THUMB

We call these “rules of thumb,” because no friendship rule works every time. These rules often work, but not always. Remember to use your discoverer to test what’s working for you. Here are some ideas that often help build strong relationships.

1. **Giving to others builds friendships.**
   Help others and support them. Do nice things without expecting anything.

2. **Good relationships are two-way streets.**
   Giving to others doesn’t mean you should be a doormat—someone who lets other people use them. Remember, good relationships mean that the other person also gives to you sometimes and doesn’t just talk about themselves all the time or use you.

3. **Wet blankets have fewer friends.**
   Look for ways to build your friendships. It’s okay to be negative sometimes, but try to look for genuine ways to be positive in your relationships when you can. Your friends want to feel good about themselves and have fun. Look for genuine ways to build your relationships (coming up with fun things to do; paying someone a compliment when they deserve it; not complaining about every activity you do with a friend).

4. **Share wisely.**
   Learn the differences between sharing, oversharing, and undersharing. Oversharing occurs when you talk so much about yourself that the other person wants to escape you. Undersharing occurs when you don’t let someone know anything about yourself; you remain hidden and distant. Both oversharing and undersharing are bad for friendships. It’s important to share parts of your life, but there’s a right amount. We can’t say what that amount is because it depends on each person in each situation. Use your discoverer skills to try different levels of sharing and see what works (go back to the discoverer section in chapter 2 if you need to check how to do this).

5. **Give friends your attention.**
   When others talk, do you make eye contact? Do you acknowledge what others are saying? People love when you make the effort to hear and see them. When someone is talking to you, put away electronic devices and give them your full attention. You’ll make them feel great.

6. ** Judgment and criticism are friendship poison.**
   People hate—and we mean hate—to feel judged. The quickest way to kill a friendship is to judge a person in a moral way when they may not deserve it (such as saying, “You’re a bad person. You lied. You’re untrustworthy”). Be careful about making these moral judgments. Are you using your social-view skills when you make them? If your judgment is too harsh or too fast, you’ll get your friend’s advisor going and they’ll argue back. Initially, your friend’s advisor might turn inward on themselves (for example, thinking, “I’m a bad person”), but it won’t take long before they turn the advisor on you. Then they will use the advisor to attack you (“It’s not me that’s the bad person; it’s you”). If something that a friend does upsets you, focus on their behavior (“I didn’t like when you did that”) rather than them as a person (“I think you’re disloyal”).

7. **Strengthen your willingness muscles.**
   Willingness means risking hurt sometimes in order to have a chance at connecting with other people. Willingness also means being able to walk away from a relationship when it has become too difficult.
8. **Be willing to apologize (but don't over apologize).** We all make mistakes in relationships. Are you willing to apologize in the service of building the relationship? A genuine apology can be one of the hardest things to do, but if you think you’ve hurt another person, we encourage you to apologize and see what happens next. You might be surprised. Your apology may release the tension in your relationship and make your friendship even stronger.

9. **Social view is your superpower.** Whenever you get stuck in a situation with a friend, or when you just want to be closer to someone, pause and practice taking a social view on the inside and outside of you and your friend. What do you guess they feel like? How do they appear on the outside? How do you feel on the inside and look on the outside?

10. **Social view isn't invincible.** People hide their feelings. Your friends are also likely to be struggling with things in life. Maybe they're experiencing a family breakdown, financial stress, a sibling who is sick, or a bully in their neighborhood. This is often invisible from the outside. You can always use your social-view skills to guess what’s going on inside your friend when you want to be close to them, or when you sense they might need your support—but remember to stay open to your guess being wrong.
LET YOUR HEART GUIDE YOUR JOURNEY

Return to your valued center often, reminding yourself what matters to you in relationships. When your advisor is being critical and making you want to lash out at your friend, pause and remember the list you made on what makes a good friend. Be that.

EMBRACE CHANGE

Relationships change. They come together, and they sometimes fall apart. Embrace the change happening to you and your loved ones. This will give you the best chance at having relationships that are genuine and supportive.

DEVELOP YOUR FLEXIBLE STRENGTH

For the next week, practice using your DNA-V skills when you want to build strong relationships:

» Discoverer: Discover new ways to strengthen your relationships. Maybe this could involve random acts of kindness, or just giving someone your full attention when you talk to them. Return to the exercises in this chapter and think of one or two things you’ll try. Make a commitment—for example, a new social action you’ll try.

» Noticer: Pause and decide whether you’re willing to experience some strong feelings, maybe even distress, to do something new in your relationship. If you’re willing, then try it.

» Advisor: The best way to commit to something new is to acknowledge both the potential benefits and the potential costs. This new action could be hard because... [try to think of the potential difficulties or costs for the behavior]. This new action could have benefits because... [try to think of how the behavior might improve your life and build value].

» Self-view: When you make a mistake in your relationships, practice showing yourself the same kindness that you would show a friend.

» Social view: Practice your inside-outside view. Remember that people often appear differently than they feel. Practice stepping into their shoes and seeing if you can connect by understanding them.