Talking about neutral or relatively impersonal subjects is relatively easy – such as the weather, the price of milk, or a company’s vacation policies – but it’s a lot more challenging to talk about our feelings, wants, or issues with other people. Are you able to speak openly and skillfully about things like anger, hurt, money, sexuality, longings for love, or sharing housework? As appropriate, can you be authentic, vulnerable, undefended?

You can explore these topics by reflecting on and answering the questions below. Of course, a brief quiz like this one can’t cover all aspects of this topic, and feel free to adapt these questions to your own situation and needs, ignore some if you like, and even add new ones for yourself to answer.

For each question, try to find a response in one of these five categories:

1 - strongly disagree | 2 - disagree | 3 - neither agree nor disagree | 4 - agree | 5 - strongly agree

A person’s responses to questions like these are often more complex and nuanced than a single number can indicate. But for scoring purposes, for each question please choose the number above that is most accurate (or least inaccurate!).

QUESTIONS

____ I am very aware of my own deeper feelings, desires, and psychological processes – so that if something significant inside me is not being expressed, I am quite aware of this.

____ I am receptive and compassionate toward the parts of me that are hurting, insecure, envious, anxious, wounded, vulnerable, and young in effect, I really listen to them.

____ In my important relationships at home, at work, and with friends, I am very clear about what would be appropriate and possible for me to communicate, even if I am not yet comfortable doing so.

____ I have strong internal skills at speaking openly and authentically (e.g., able to find words for deeper feelings, comfortable with vulnerability, able to manage myself so as not to overwhelm the other person).

____ I have strong external skills at speaking openly and authentically (e.g., able to communicate my experience distinct from my beliefs, able to assert myself without harsh tone, able to anticipate the hot buttons of others).

____ To the extent appropriate in my important relationships, I have fully (or close to it) expressed what I think and want.

____ To the extent appropriate in my important relationships, I have fully (or close to it) expressed any ways in which I have felt hurt or let down.

____ To the extent appropriate in my important relationships, I have fully (or close to it) expressed my appreciation, liking, or love for the other people.

____ If another person is challenging to speak with openly, I have strong skills at creating the realistically best conditions for us to talk (e.g., talking about talking, creating groundrules, disengaging as needed).

____ If I am very comfortable expressing myself fully, still, I exercise good judgment about what I actually communicate; just because I think it or feel it doesn’t mean I say it.
SCORING

Your responses to particular questions can be taken at face value, in their own right, as opportunities for seeing useful things about yourself, for investigating further – perhaps talking about them with others – and for identifying inner resources that would be good to develop further in yourself.

Additionally, it can be helpful to get an overall sense of where you stand. Add up your responses to each question to get your total score. See where your score fits in just below; please hold these descriptions lightly, but in a general sense it could well be true that:

40 - 50 You are an open, authentic, skillful communicator. You can “speak it while you feel it” without getting overwhelmed yourself or overwhelming others. You can be strong without being harsh, vulnerable while also feeling good about yourself. You probably have solid and satisfying relationships, on a foundation of appropriately open communication.

21 - 39 You are probably more self-disclosed than many people, and more comfortable being vulnerable and heartfelt. Still, take a look at the questions here that you answered with a 4 or less, and ask yourself whether there truly are opportunities in your important relationships for you to be more direct, tender, or revealed. Of course, be prudent and make sure your emotional and physical safety needs are protected. This said, are there things you could say that would feel risky . . . but are worth trying, perhaps because the risks are actually less than you think?

10 - 20 You have described yourself as quite constricted in communicating with others, and perhaps internally constricted as well. Perhaps there are painfully good reasons for this, such as living in a hostile and dangerous environment. But if your environment is actually not overwhelmingly punishing of self-expression and assertiveness, then there are likely to be opportunities for you. Paradoxically, a good place to start is by strengthening your capacities to regulate (control) your internal world – especially feelings, wants, and bodily states – as well as your external one (e.g., setting boundaries with others that are respected). On this basis, you can judiciously relax your controls in well-chosen relationships and situations, being one step at a time more open and vulnerable, and then grow from the results.

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