

## **Group questions for use with *Authentic: Relationships from the Inside Out* by Sarah Abell**

The following questions are intended as a guide for anyone wanting to go through the book with a group.

If you have the time, we would recommend covering a section of the book at each meeting. You would then need six meetings in total.

We would suggest that each person reads the relevant section themselves before you get together. You may want to choose one person to give a brief re-cap of the three chapters before you start the discussion (or you could have three people doing one chapter each).

We may well have included more questions than you have time for. Whoever is leading the group may want to decide in advance which ones to cover and which to leave out. They are just there as a guide. You may have your own questions you want to add.

If you find some of the questions quite personal to answer, you may decide it is a good idea to agree as a group that any answers given are treated in confidence and won't be repeated outside the group. This can help people to feel safer opening up.

If you are running the group for Christians, there is a separate set of questions available with biblical references. Please check the document: *Authentic – Christian Group Questions*.

We would love to hear how you get on with using the book for your discussions. If you have any helpful feedback, comments or questions for the author please email her at [relationships@btinternet.com](mailto:relationships@btinternet.com) putting GROUP FEEDBACK in the subject line.

We hope you find the discussions helpful.

Sarah Abell and the team at Hodder.

## **Section one – taking stock**

### **Chapters 1-3**

1. How would you measure how well you are doing in your relationships at the moment? Do you think this is the same measurement society uses? Why do you think so many people (97.5%) think their relationships could be improved? What do you think would help them most?
2. What does it mean to relate 'authentically'? When (if at all) have you seen this working in relationships (yours or anyone else's)? If you haven't seen it, why do you think that is?
3. How well do you think the 'Hedgehog's Dilemma' explains human behaviour? Can you think of examples of when you (or others) have tried to get close to others but have got hurt in the process? Or can you think of examples when you (or someone else) deliberately protected yourself from the risk of being hurt?
4. Why could it be advantageous for people to have 'real' and 'unprotected' relationships? What are the risks? How can people be encouraged to be more authentic?
5. How do you feel our 24/7 culture has affected the amount of time we have for our closest relationships? What do you think is behind 'anchor' or 'engine' behaviour? What do you think could help the anchors or engines to find a better balance?
6. How easy or difficult is it to prioritise time for your most important relationships? What do you think could help you carve out the necessary time (or what does help if you are already doing it)? How can we make sure that we are making good choices about how we spend our time?

## **Section two – tuning into others**

### **Chapters 4-6**

1. What are the key differences between a good and bad listener? What bad listening habits would you admit to and how do these affect how you relate to others?
2. How can reflective listening help someone struggling with an issue? Have you ever experienced the benefits of this and if so how did it help?
3. Why might some people find it hard to talk about feelings and emotions? How might this affect their relationships? What do you think would help them to become more emotionally expressive?
4. What examples can you give of when it might not be advisable to say everything on your mind? What do you find helps you to know when to speak up and when to stay quiet? Why do you think that we can sometimes misinterpret what others are saying to us and why can they sometimes misunderstand us?
5. In your opinion, have the advances of technology (Facebook, mobiles, email etc.) helped or hindered our ability to build deep connections with others? What do you think makes someone approachable and friendly? What is it about some people that would make you think twice about building a deep connection with them?
6. Do you believe that it's true that we can only have between 10-15 close relationships at one time? Why is that? How easy or difficult is it to prioritise your energy and time for those closest relationships? What happens to them when you don't?

## **Section three – understanding the ‘you’ factor**

### **Chapters 7-9**

1. What trends have you noticed in the way people parent today compared to the time when you were parented? What do you think is the effect of this? How much do you think that the first seven years of a child’s life shape their behaviour and character as an adult?
2. What key things do you think children learn from watching their parents? What did you learn from yours and how did this impact your own relationships? How can parents who are not together or divorced help children to learn about positive adult relationships?
3. How easy or difficult is it to recognise your own sensitive buttons? How do these affect your relationships with other people? How does it help to understand the sensitive buttons of those around us? Can you think of an example of where this has helped a relationship?
4. How possible do you think it is for someone to turn away from their past (either positively or negatively)? How easy is it for people to rewire their sensitive buttons and what do you think can help? Have you any examples of where someone has managed to do that?
5. How obvious is it to spot flat or sharp behaviour in others and ourselves? What can help us to see it? What do you think are the most effective methods of retuning and becoming more harmonious?
6. How can our relationships with others help us to change and grow? How can changing our thoughts – change our emotions and behaviour? Have you examples of this working in practice?

## **Section four – dealing with tricky issues**

### **Chapters 10-12**

1. How do you respond to people who are different from you and to those who are similar? In what ways have you seen differences work for you not against you in your relationships?

*N.B. You may want to go through the colour game in Chapter 10 as a group and work through the questions in the book. Try designing a hotel, school or church with people of the same colour. Then compare notes with the others.*

2. What did you discover about yourself from the colour game? How do you tend to react to people the same colour as you and to those who aren't? What benefits and challenges have you seen in your own life of relating to people with different approaches to you? What helped?
3. From your experiences what do you think are the main reasons why people have conflict in relationships? How often do you find conflict isn't really about the surface issue in front of you? How easy or hard is it to get to the root of the problem?
4. Which – if any – of the seven unhealthy responses to conflict do you recognise in yourself or others? Why do none of these help to resolve the issue? Why do so many people find it hard to deal with 'the right problem with the right person at the right time in the right way'?
5. Have you got an example of where having a difficult conversation helped to resolve conflict and restore the relationship? How often have you discovered things that you hadn't realised about a situation – just by listening to someone else's point of view? Why can it be hard for some of us to truly hear the other side of the story?
6. Why do many people find it hard to say 'sorry'? In what instances do you think it is right for someone to impose a boundary in a relationship? Have you an example of how this worked and why you think it was so effective?

## **Section five – having an impact**

### **Chapters 13-15**

1. What worries you most about relationships in society today? What do you think could help improve the situation? Have you an example of where you have had to work at a relationship and have seen it improve as a result?
2. Why do you think that it is so difficult for some people to forgive or ask for forgiveness? Have you an example of where forgiveness improved a relationship? Are there times when you find it hard to say 'no'? Why do you think that is?
3. How much would you agree with the statement; 'Most human problems stem from the fact that we treat people as things and things as people.' What do you think could help people to see strangers as people of value?
4. What have you learnt about how you give and receive love from Gary Chapman's concept of Love Languages? Have you an example of where you have had to learn to love in a way that doesn't come naturally? What was the impact of this? How do you think understanding people's love languages could help with relationships with family, friends and work colleagues?
5. What do you think makes people 'happy'? How well do you think most of us do at focusing on what is truly important to us? Have you any examples of where living in the present, being grateful, giving your soul a look-in or de-cluttering have helped you to focus on the important?
6. Do you believe that people can learn and grow by going through a challenging time? What things have helped you to hold onto hope and deal with difficult situations? What do you think stops people living in colour? Is there anything you think could help them?

## **Section six – authentic in action**

### **Chapters 16-18**

1. What do you think makes a good leader? How much do you think a leader's character affects the impact that they have on others? Why do you think so many people don't respect their leaders today? What needs to change in our society for us to produce leaders worth following?
2. From your experience of leadership (yours or other people's) what do you think it takes to be a 'leader worth following'? Have you an example of where you have had to work on a certain behaviour or character trait because you realised the negative impact it was having on others? What was the result? What do you think are the most important factors in building a successful team, family, group or organisation?
3. How do you think the way people date today helps or hinders their chances of having a successful lifelong relationship? How do you think single people can best prepare themselves for finding a suitable partner? What do you think would help people who are worried that they are getting older and haven't found anyone yet?
4. What kind of deal breakers do you think people should look out for in a dating relationship? What do you think a couple needs to know about each other before they commit to marriage or a lifelong partnership? What is the best advice you have ever been given (or wish you'd been given) about dating?
5. How important do you think it is that married couples see themselves as an 'us'? Why do you think some people struggle with this concept? What do you think are the greatest threats to a marriage? How do you think couples could protect themselves from these?
6. If you are married, what helps you to keep investing in your relationship? What impact do you hope your relationship has on those around you? If you are not married, whose relationship do you most admire? What is it about them as a couple that has such a positive impact on you? Do you think

marriages should be given more support by society and if so, how?

### **Final questions**

Having read the book – what does ‘authentic relating’ now mean to you? What was the one thing you found most helpful? What one area of your relationships or which one relationship would you now like to change or improve? How will you go about doing this?