



Chapter Eight: Different Strokes for Different Folks: When partners want incompatible models of open relationship

There are an infinite variety of open relationship models, as every person can “customize” their relationship style to suit their needs. While this is one of the strengths of polyamory, it can lead to a break-up if you pick partners who want a different model than you do. Each of the

three most common poly models are mutually exclusive, so picking partners who want the same model is essential.

The Primary/Secondary Model

This is by far the most commonly practiced form of open relationship, where you are married or living with someone in a primary relationship, and any other relationships are considered secondary. That doesn't mean you don't love or care about your other partners, it just means that you will prioritize the primary couple relationship over all others

The Multiple Primary Partners Model

There are many variations on this second model, from "group marriages" living together as a family, to "triads" where one person has primary relationships with two separate people, to "relationship anarchy" where any partner can develop any type of relationships with any number of partners. Instead of a couple having priority and control in the relationship, each partner has equal power to negotiate for what they want in the relationship, in terms of time, commitment, living situation, financial arrangements, sex, and other issues.

The Multiple Non-Primary Partners Model

Some people not looking for a committed relationship. They prefer to remain single, but participate in more than one relationship, without the constraints of a primary relationship. This model works best for people who have a serious, all-consuming commitment to something other than relationships. They may be very busy with their careers, or devoting themselves to creating art or music, or are single parents raising children alone, or are on a spiritual path, or are full-time political activists.

Identifying your ideal poly model can require some trial and error

Most poly people seem to go through a few disastrous relationships with people who want an incompatible model of polyamory, before they figure out which model works best for them. And to complicate matters further, some people find different model of polyamory satisfying at different developmental stages of their lives. So the model you need may change over the years, and you may no longer be compatible with one or all of your partners.

You may prefer a different model when you are focused on building careers and having children than when you are younger and have fewer responsibilities, and yet another model when you are older and your kids are grown and/or you may have retired.