

## romantic relationships

### What makes a healthy relationship?

1. Respect
2. Honesty
3. Communication
4. Acceptance
5. Equal decision-making
6. Support
7. Shared goals, beliefs, and values

### What makes a destructive relationship?

1. Pressure to change
2. Distrust
3. Fear
4. Lack of support
5. Restrictions
6. Criticism
7. Anger and jealousy

## how to enjoy a healthy relationship

### assume responsibility for your happiness

Trying to achieve happiness solely through your relationship can leave you disappointed. Healthy relationships can enhance your happiness, but you don't want to depend on your relationship for your well-being.

It's important to balance your relationship with other pursuits that bring you individual worth and happiness, such as a job, hobby, or sport.

### speak assertively

Conflict in relationships is inevitable, but it's important to share your feelings and needs respectfully and assertively. This helps establish boundaries and heighten mutual respect.

#### **Avoid:**

- being critical
- sulking
- showing anger
- giving someone the "silent treatment"

#### **Instead:**

- talk about your feelings, needs and beliefs
- be open and honest
- respect the other person

### make time

Relationships are a commitment and it's important to enjoy quality time together. For many, that means sharing hobbies and enjoying fun activities together. It also means taking the time to talk with your partner about:

- your day-to-day lives
- jobs
- fears, goals, and dreams
- relationship issues
- triumphs
- emotions
- anything you find meaningful

### laugh together

It's often said that humour is the best medicine, and that can prove especially true in relationships. Shared laughter and playful teasing can deepen a relationship between partners and balance out negativity.

Remember to be mindful of your partner's limits around humour and teasing. Jokes can sometimes cross boundaries and be hurtful.

## allow for space

Spending time apart from your partner is important in developing separate identities and interests.

The balance between being alone and time together differs for every couple and should be discussed and negotiated.

The more individual time you both take can often make your time together more valuable and give you more things to talk about.

## foster a healthy and respectful sexual connection

Sex can help foster a loving connection in an intimate relationship, but it requires trust, honesty, and respect. A healthy sexual relationship is always consensual. Couples should openly talk about each other's sexual needs and establish which activities fall outside their comfort zone.

## dealing with conflict

Even the best relationships have their ups and downs. Conflict, in fact, is a normal and healthy part of an intimate relationship. What's key is learning how to resolve the conflict.

In a healthy relationship, you should be able to openly share your feelings and respect each other's perspective. Whenever possible, you should find solutions and compromises.

## no perfect partner

Perfection is rarely acquired and that's true in relationships. It's important to learn to accept some of your partner's shortcomings, since we all have them.

The hard part is deciding which shortcomings to accept and which ones constitute "deal breakers." Try making a list of your partner's positive and negative qualities, and determine which of the negatives, if any, are too tough to bear.

## forgive

Forgiveness is a decision you make to let go so that the relationship can move on and be healthy. Without forgiveness, you risk accumulating issues over time and building resentment and anger towards your partner.

That doesn't mean you must forgive everything. Some choices, such as cheating, habitual lying, or abuse, may be too tough to move beyond.

## instill trust

Trust is the basis for any close relationship — it's essential not to break your partner's trust. That means avoiding behaviours that might arouse doubt or suspicion in your relationship. Communicate truthfully, keep your promises, and act responsibly.

## avoid assumptions

We often mistakenly assume we know what our partner is thinking or feeling without even asking. Research shows that assumptions tend to be wrong and are based on habitual ways of seeing the world.

When in doubt, ask your partner questions in a way that doesn't raise defenses. Ask for clarifications, rather than making accusations.

## choose your battles

If you feel like you can't let anything go, then conflict will inevitably overwhelm your relationship. Healthy couples learn to decide whether the issue is important enough to bring up, and if so, communicate it in a respectful and open manner.

Learn to prioritize your concerns, so that love, rather than conflict, remains at the heart of your relationship.

## practice time-outs

Although anger is a normal human emotion, it can sometimes be too intense to express in a healthy way. In these moments, it's best to use some form of time-out where you physically leave the situation temporarily so as not to say something you would later regret.

Talk to your partner ahead of time about the intention of a time-out and the length of it, so that neither of you feel like you're being ignored. A simple non-verbal cue, such as making a T with your hands, can let them know you need a time-out.

While on your time-out, do something distracting (like taking a walk) to let yourself calm down. Then, come back and finish the conversation at a pre-arranged time.

## use "I" statements

To avoid your partner getting overly defensive when discussing ideas, use "I" statements, such as "I think...", "I feel...", "I prefer....", which avoid potential blaming.

It's always difficult to argue with how someone feels. "I" statements help to create understanding rather than conflict.

## coping with abuse

Abuse has no place in a healthy relationship. It comes in all forms, including verbal, emotional, physical and sexual. Abuse of any kind can have a big impact on your self-esteem, and the longer you wait to deal with, the more it will impact your well-being.

Remember that abusive behaviour is never your fault and is the sole responsibility of the abuser.

Consider all options as soon as the abuse occurs, including giving direct feedback, encouraging your partner to go for counselling, or leaving the relationship if change isn't possible.

