

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

Relationships are a necessary part of healthy living, but there is no such thing as a perfect relationship.

Relationships, from acquaintances to romances, have the potential to enrich our lives and add to our enjoyment of life. However, these same relationships can cause discomfort, and sometimes even cause harm. Take a few minutes to learn more to protect yourself from developing unhealthy relationships.

What makes a healthy relationship?

A healthy relationship is when two people develop a connection based on:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Support
- Fairness/equality
- Separate identities
- Good communication
- A sense of playfulness/fondness

All of these things take work. Each relationship is most likely a combination of both healthy and unhealthy characteristics. Relationships need to be maintained and healthy relationships take work. This applies to all relationships; work relationships, friendships, family, and romantic relationships.

What are signs of a healthy relationship?

A healthy relationship should bring more happiness than stress into your life. Every relationship will have stress at times, but you want to prevent prolonged mental stress on either member of the relationship.

Below are some characteristic that maybe present in your healthy relationships.

While in a healthy relationship you:

- Take care of yourself and have good self-esteem independent of your relationship
- Maintain and respect each other's individuality
- Maintain relationships with friends and family
- Have activities apart from one another
- Are able to express yourselves to one another without fear of consequences
- Are able to feel secure and comfortable
- Allow and encourage other relationships
- Take interest in one another's activities
- Do not worry about violence in the relationship
- Trust each other and be honest with each other
- Have the option of privacy
- Have respect for sexual boundaries
- Are honest about sexual activity if it is a sexual relationship
- Accept influence. Relationships are give and take; allowing your partner to influence you is important; this can be especially difficult for some men.
- Resolve conflict fairly: Fighting is part of even healthy relationships. The difference is how the conflict is handled. Fighting fairly is an important skill you help you have healthier relationships.

What are the signs of an unhealthy relationship?

At times all relationships will have some of the below characteristics. However, unhealthy relationships will exhibit these characteristics more frequently and cause you stress and pressure that is hard to avoid. This tension is unhealthy for both members and may lead to problems in other areas of your life.

While in an unhealthy relationship you:

- Put one person before the other by neglecting yourself or your partner
- Feel pressure to change who you are for the other person
- Feel worried when you disagree with the other person
- Feel pressure to quit activities you usually/used to enjoy
- Pressure the other person into agreeing with you or changing to suit you better
- Notice one of you has to justify your actions (e.g. where you go, who you see)
- Notice one partner feels obligated to have sex or has been forced
- Have a lack of privacy, and may be forced to share everything with the other person
- You or your partner refuse to use safer sex methods
- Notice arguments are not settled fairly
- Experience yelling or physical violence during an argument
- Attempt to control or manipulate each other
- Notice your partner attempts to control how you dress and criticizes your behaviors
- Do not make time to spend with one another
- Have no common friends, or have a lack of respect for each others' friends and family
- Notice an unequal control of resources (food, money, home, car, etc.)
- Experience a lack of fairness and equality

If some of your relationships have some of these characteristics it does not necessarily mean the end of that relationship. By recognizing how these characteristics affect you, you can begin to work on improving the negative aspect of your relationships to benefit both of you.

When should I seek professional help for my relationship?

If a partner ever tries to harm you physically or force you to do something sexually that should be a clear sign for you that it is an unhealthy relationship. In that situation, you should consider getting help, or ending the relationship. Even if you believe the person loves you it does not make up for the harm they are putting you through.

Other circumstances include:

- When you are unhappy in a relationship, but cannot decide if you should accept it, try to improve the relationship, or end the relationship.
- When you have decided to leave a relationship, but find yourself still in the relationship.
- When you think you are staying in the relationship for the wrong reasons, such as fear of being alone or guilt.
- If you have a history of staying in unhealthy relationships.

Having a counselor or mental health provider to talk to can help you work out challenges in your relationships and find a solution that is healthy for both partners.

This article was adapted from material originally found on the UW-Seattle Hall Health Center website,
<http://www.hallhealthcenter.com>.

