

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Establishing and maintaining healthy relationships: Why bother?

Humans are social creatures... there's no doubt about that. In order to survive we need contact with others, especially in infancy and childhood when we are unable to properly meet all of our daily survival needs, such as obtaining food. Our reliance on others does not end in childhood, though. As adolescents and adults we depend on others for our physical survival as well as our psychological well-being. The number of people in our life is not as important as the quality of those relationships. Studies indicate that people with a strong social network have less illness, recuperate quicker if they do get ill, live longer and have a greater sense of well-being. Whether it be with a roommate, a romantic partner, a friend, a family member, a boss or a professor, building and maintaining healthy relationships is important for good health. There is no doubt that we function better when we relate effectively to others.

Some people believe that good relationships just "happen", or that some people have good "chemistry" with others. Although some relationships seem to grow with little effort, all worthwhile relationships require effort both to establish and to maintain.

Qualities of healthy relationships

How do you know if your relationships are healthy? The following are some of the qualities that help build strong human connections. These qualities can be found in all types of relationships, although some may be more relevant in intimate bonds (e.g. a lover) than in casual relationships (e.g. a bank teller). In the following list, the term partner refers to the person with whom you share a relationship and can include a lover, a friend, parent, teacher, supervisor, etc. Examine your individual relationships using these criteria to determine if they contribute to overall health and well-being.

- Both partners feel free to express their thoughts, feelings and needs** without being judged, criticized, or dismissed.
- Each partner maintains his or her own individuality and uniqueness.** It is common for people to be introduced to new ideas or activities after forming a relationship with another person. This can even help a person grow. However, if you find yourself changing your interests, activities or friends, or doing things you don't enjoy in order to become closer to someone, you may be in a relationship that is not conducive to health and well-being.
- Both partners use effective communication skills.** These include both verbal and non-verbal communication skills, along with listening skills. Some tips for effective communication are listed below, and more information can be found later in this chapter.
 - Always start a discussion in a positive way. For example, if you have identified a problem and wish to discuss it, you can start a conversation by saying "I value our relationship and I've been concerned about something that I would like to discuss."
 - Phrase problems as questions to invite solutions and cooperation. Instead of saying "You aren't doing your share of the housework", try "Do you find that we are equally sharing household responsibilities?" and go from there.
 - Speak from your perspective by using "I" statements and avoid accusatory "you" statements. Instead of saying "You never keep your word", try "I find that there is a discrepancy between what you say and what you do."
 - Stick to the point at hand and avoid going off on a tangent. Effective communication is focused, clear and concise.
 - Ask questions when you need clarification. Don't expect the other person to be a mind-reader and don't assume that they will "know" what you mean.
 - Aim for agreement on problems, not a victory. Look for solutions where both your needs are met.
 - Treat each other with respect and kindness at all times.
- Both partners share important values and beliefs.** This becomes more significant as bonds become closer and more intimate. Surely, friends can disagree on some important topics such as religion and politics. However, in healthy friendships, there would be more shared ideas than ideas that differ. In intimate relationships, sharing important values is the glue that keeps a couple together. What is the future of a couple where one partner values family and definitely wants children while the other partner doesn't?
Too often, partners don't discuss values and beliefs. Part of the reason for this may be because we, as individuals, may not be clear about what we value or believe. To build strong connections, examine your own values and beliefs and share them with others.

- In intimate relationships, each partner views the other as an equal.** One partner is not better (or worse) than the other. Both partners appreciate each other's differences rather than use them to separate and cause conflict.
- There is an ability to effectively resolve conflict and solve problems.** Conflict is an almost inevitable part of relationships. This is particularly true in relationships where the partners rely on each other and are very close. Some people think that conflict is an indication that a relationship is not healthy. In fact, conflict itself does not indicate that a relationship is not going well; instead, it is how the partners resolve conflict that determines if the relationship is healthy or not. Conflict resolution requires a planned approach. See the section on problem solving, conflict resolution and negotiation for more details.
- Play, humour and having fun together is commonplace.**
- There is a balance of giving and receiving.**
- Other meaningful relationships and interests exist.**
- Each partner's needs are met to his or her satisfaction.**

Building healthy relationships takes work, so don't be discouraged if your relationships don't have all the qualities outlined above. Instead, identify which qualities are lacking and take steps to work on them. Also, remember that as relationships grow closer and more intimate, the qualities become more relevant.

Effective communication strategies

At the heart of healthy relationships is the ability to communicate effectively. After all, what is a relationship without communication? Effective communication contributes positively to the relationship by increasing trust, openness, closeness, and the ability to solve problems and to resolve conflict. When each partner uses effective communication strategies, the relationship grows and feelings are overwhelmingly positive. Conversely, when ineffective communication strategies are used, the relationship deteriorates and negative feelings become the norm. See the next page for more information on possible roadblocks to communication.

Communication is not just about talking, it's also about listening. Therefore, effective communication strategies involve active listening, good verbal skills (particularly assertive communication) and the ability to effectively solve problems.

Improve your active listening skills

Good listeners are often individuals who are perceived to be charismatic, insightful, and even enlightened. These people make others feel special. Some people feel that good listeners are born, but as it is with most worthwhile activities, listening is a skill that can be learned, practised and perfected. It begins by educating oneself on the techniques, and practising these in day to day interactions. The following exercises are the beginnings to becoming an expert listener:

- 1. The first skill is attending.** While the other person is speaking, don't plan what your response will be. Instead, focus on what he or she is saying. Let the person know that you are focusing on what is being said. This includes making eye contact, leaning toward the individual who is talking, and gently nodding your head to indicate that you understand. These behaviours suggest that you are following what is being said, and are receptive to the information.
- 2. The second step is empathic responses.** These responses are meant to identify the underlying feelings of the words that the speaker is uttering. When people are talking, what they really want other people to hear is how a given situation makes them feel. Using this technique lets the other

ARE YOU A GOOD LISTENER?

Find out with this quiz

If you want to find out what prevents you from being a good listener, be honest when answering the following questions. You might also find it useful to ask others to evaluate your listening skills. Indicate how often you do each of the following by marking:

"R" for rarely or never

"S" for sometimes

"O" for often, or

"F" for frequently or always

- ___ Does your mind wander when listening?
- ___ Do you fake attention to pretend to listen?
- ___ Do you find yourself thinking of personal or other matters during a conversation?
- ___ Do you focus only on words and ignore the feelings being expressed?
- ___ Do you interrupt others while they are speaking?
- ___ Do you complete sentences for others?
- ___ Do you focus only on what you want to hear, or what interests you, and ignore the rest?
- ___ Are you easily distracted by noise, the speaker's mannerisms, etc.?
- ___ Do you plan what you are going to say next when the other person is still speaking?

Scoring: If you answered "rarely or never" or "sometimes" to most questions, then your listening skills are probably quite strong. If you answered "often" or "frequently or always" to most questions, you should consider working at improving your listening skills. In either case, working towards making changes in the areas where you indicated "often" or "frequently or always" will help you improve your ability to listen effectively.

POSSIBLE ROADBLOCKS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

| POSSIBLE ROADBLOCKS | EXAMPLES | CONSEQUENCES |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| Ordering, Commanding | <p>"You must..."</p> <p>"You have to..."</p> <p>"You will..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can produce fear or active resistance. • Invites 'testing' of orders or commands. • Promotes rebellious behaviour or retaliation. |
| Warning, Threatening | <p>"If you don't, then..."</p> <p>"You'd better, or..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can produce fear or submissiveness. • Invites 'testing' of threatened consequences. • Can cause resentment, anger or rebellion. |
| Moralizing, Preaching | <p>"You should..."</p> <p>"You ought to..."</p> <p>"It is your responsibility"</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates 'obligation' or guilt feelings. • Can cause a person to 'dig in' and defend his/her position even more. • Communicates lack of trust in a person's sense of responsibility. |
| Advising, Giving Solutions: | <p>"What I would do is..."</p> <p>"Why don't you..."</p> <p>"Let me suggest..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can imply that the person is not able to solve his/her own problems. • Can prevent a person from thinking through a problem, considering alternative solutions, and trying them out in reality. • Can cause dependency or resistance. |
| Persuading with Logic, Arguing | <p>"Here is why you are wrong..."</p> <p>"The facts are..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provokes a defensive position and counter-arguments. • Often causes a person to turn off speaker, to quit listening. • Can cause the person to feel inferior or inadequate. |
| Judging, Criticizing, Blaming | <p>"You are not thinking maturely..."</p> <p>"You are lazy..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implies incompetence, stupidity or poor judgement. • Cuts off communication from a person over fear of negative judgement or "bawling out". • Person often accepts judgement as true ("I am bad"); or retaliates ("You're not so great yourself!") |
| Praising, Agreeing | <p>"Well, I think you're doing a great job!"</p> <p>"You're right, that teacher sounds awful!"</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can imply high speaker expectations as well as surveillance of person's 'toeing the mark'. • Can be seen as patronizing or as a manipulative effort to encourage desired behavior. • Can cause anxiety when the person's perception of self doesn't match speaker's praise. |
| Name-calling, Ridiculing | <p>"Crybaby!"</p> <p>"OK Mr. Smarty Pants..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can cause a person to feel unworthy or unloved. • Can have devastating effect on self image of person. • Often provokes verbal/physical retaliation. |
| Analyzing, Diagnosing | <p>"What's wrong with you is..."</p> <p>"You're just tired..."</p> <p>"You don't really mean that..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be threatening and frustrating. • Person can feel either trapped, exposed, or not believed. • Stops person from communicating for fear of distortion or exposure. |
| Reassuring, Sympathizing | <p>"Don't worry"</p> <p>"You'll feel better"</p> <p>"Oh, cheer up"</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can cause person to feel misunderstood. • Evokes strong feelings of hostility ("That's easy for you to say!") • Person often picks up speaker's message as: "It's not all right for you to feel bad" |
| Probing, Questioning | <p>"Why..."</p> <p>"Who..."</p> <p>"What did you..."</p> <p>"How..."</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since answering questions can result in getting subsequent criticisms or solutions, people often learn to reply with non-answers, avoidance, half-truths, or lies. • Since questions often keep the person in the dark as to what the speaker is driving at, the person may become anxious and fearful. • Person can lose sight of his/her problem while answering questions spawned by the speaker's concerns. |
| Diverting, Sarcasm, Withdrawal | <p>"Let's talk about pleasant things..."</p> <p>"Why don't you try running the world!"</p> <p>Remaining silent, turning away</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implies that life's difficulties are to be avoided rather than dealt with. • Can infer that a person's problems are unimportant, petty or invalid. • Stops openness from person when he/she is experiencing a difficulty. |

person know that you are listening to what he or she is really feeling. Empathic responses begin with empathy starters:

"It sounds like you were.....(angry, sad, frustrated, excited, etc.)"

"You were feeling(down, upset, thrilled, etc.)"

"What I am hearing is that you.....(weren't appreciated, were letdown, wanted someone to care.....)"

"You felt.....(lonely, excluded, frightened, relieved, etc.)"

These are just a few examples of ways to identify the feelings of the speaker. Each of these statements can be used to clarify many different feelings. Use them often in a conversation but be sure not to interrupt the other person. They are open ended and encourage the speaker to explore his or her own understanding of the feelings that are involved.

3. Paraphrase the content of what is being shared. Paraphrasing is telling the speaker what you have heard him or her say in your own words. For example, you can say "It seems to me that you feel disappointed when...." Often a speaker will get so involved in talking, he or she will lose track of what he or she says. Paraphrasing in a concise manner can clarify for both the speaker and the listener. Paraphrasing is useful when it is not easy to decipher what the feelings are behind the words. This technique can help the person talking expand, and reveal, what he or she really wants to express.

4. Ask questions. This technique is valuable, but it can also be dangerous. If the wrong question is asked, it can lead the conversation in a dead end direction. Often the speaker does not want to be asked, "Why?" Questions that begin with 'Why' generally offer some type of blame or judgment. Good questions might be:

"How did that make you feel?"

"What did that mean to you?"

"Where do you think you will go from here?"

All these examples encourage further exploration, and do not suggest judgment of any kind.

5. The last, and perhaps the most important technique, is silence. Silence makes people uncomfortable. It is laden with thought, and sometimes pain. Too often people are afraid to wait out the silence and jump in to fill it up with words. A good listener is comfortable with silence, and knows that it bears much emotional fruit. Sometimes waiting out several minutes of silence will give the speaker a chance to dig deep for a much needed insight. The listener needs to sit through the silence and let the speaker sort through the feelings. Mastering the silence is an important achievement.

Practising these techniques does not mean that you will never get an opportunity to share. There is a time to listen and a time to talk. Making a conscious effort to listen will enhance your ability to gain insight into problems, and it will help build your overall conversation skills and relationships.

Building assertiveness skills

The communication style we use can greatly affect a relationship. Three main communication styles have been identified, each of which leads to different results. The three styles are: passive, aggressive and assertive.

In passive communication, a person presents him/herself in a timid, submissive, sacrificing and self-denying way. Passive communicators tend to avoid conflict, are apologetic and appear intimidated by others. The goal of this style is to please, to be nice and to get the other person's approval while avoiding any confrontation. Passive communicators often don't like to make decisions so they let others choose ("Whatever you want is OK with me.") Although they may come off as content, people who use this communication style often feel hurt, used, disappointed, frustrated and inferior. They often don't get what they want, since they never express their needs, and this can lead to a deterioration of the relationship.

The characteristics of an aggressive communicator are almost opposite to that of the passive communicator. The aggressive communicator can be sarcastic, blaming, insensitive, intimidating and unfair. They appear to welcome and even invite conflict. They might use put-downs, issue threats, and shout, all with the goal of dominating, humiliating and getting their own way. Although this style can help a person get what they want (usually at the expense of others), they tend to alienate others and relationships deteriorate.

Assertive communication does not lead to a deterioration of the relationship because the goal is to communicate, to give and get respect and to have control over oneself. Assertive communication is open, honest, direct, calm, flexible and appropriate. A person using this style is willing to compromise, is respectful to others and to him/herself, is objective, considers others and is responsible for his or her own feelings. It is important to stress that although assertive communication helps build relationships and avoid the escalation of conflict, it will not automatically make your life a utopia.

Components of assertive behaviour

Assertiveness is the ability to express yourself and your rights without violating the rights of others. So how do you go about adopting assertive communication and behaviour? The main element behind this communication style is to feel good about yourself. However, even if you aren't 100% content with the way you are, assertive communication can help you get there. The following are some ways to move towards assertive communication:

- Use appropriate facial expressions, a firm tone and volume of voice, and appropriate hand gestures. Avoid a weak voice, body stiffness and nervous smiles.
- Look at the other person and maintain direct eye contact. Avoid looking down or looking away.
- Express your needs while respecting others. One great way to do this is to use “I” statements .
- State your point of view without being apologetic or hesitant.
- Be direct, open, and honest about your feelings. Avoid “beating around the bush” or using an excessive amount of words to express a simple statement.
- Express your own feelings and take responsibility for them. Avoid blaming others for what you feel.
- Acknowledge what the other person has said or feels before responding.
- Be honest when giving and receiving compliments. Never put down a compliment and don’t feel you must return one.
- Learn to say no. Use the word “no” or “no, thank you” followed by an explanation if you wish. Do not apologize or make up excuses.

Problem solving, conflict resolution and negotiation

Conflicts are disagreements that arise between two or more people or groups of people. The problem solving process can be used to address conflicts or to solve any situation that needs to be addressed.

The problem solving process

The following are general steps in resolving conflict and solving problems:

1. **Accept that there is a situation that needs resolving** and commit yourself to dedicating sufficient energy to address it.
2. **Define the problem** in concrete and specific terms. This includes identifying the people (or groups) involved and the needs of each person (or group). This is a very important step. If the problem is not defined properly, the rest of the problem solving process may not be effective. Often, searching for a discrepancy in values or beliefs helps define the problem.
3. **Gather information.** This includes facts as well as feelings.
4. **Brainstorm potential solutions.** Think laterally and be creative to come up with as many solutions as possible. Don’t discard any solutions right away.
5. **Evaluate the potential solutions.** Examine each idea to see how well it meets the needs of everyone involved. Negotiation may be necessary in this step. See the following section on effective negotiation for more information.
6. **Select the best solution.** This is a win-win situation, where both party’s needs are best met.
7. **Implement the solution.** Be specific as to who will do what, when, and how.
8. **Evaluate.** Take another look at the situation to see if a problem still exists. If there is still a problem, try the process again. If no solution is satisfactory, consider getting someone else involved as a mediator.

Some ideas on effective negotiation

- **Be the active one**, and keep your eyes open. Try to look ahead to the possible problems you will face and come up with a plan to address them.
- **Focus objectively on the problem and not subjectively on the people.** Remember that in negotiation, you are dealing with people. If the person comes off as angry, let him/her vent his/her anger and then calmly start talking about the issues. Try and sit next to the person. It is not an “us” versus “them” situation, but a “we” situation. Work on building relationships.
- **Do not present a bottom line.** Rather, discuss your concerns and desires surrounding the issue. Do not compare the weight of the other person’s concerns with the weight of yours.
- **Collaborate** with the people involved to search for mutually beneficial solutions.
- **Decide on objective criteria** by which a decision may be judged. After you discuss all of your concerns, talk in terms of what a good solution would look like.
- **Brainstorm different possibilities.** Put as many solutions as possible out on the table, even if they might seem ludicrous. Creative ideas may spring out of the ludicrous ones.

Using “I” statements

An excellent way to improve communication

One of the best ways to improve communication is to express your feelings and ideas using “I” statements. These statements express your own feelings, opinions or ideas without blaming or judging others. Through “I” statements we take responsibility for our ideas, rather than make broad statements which may not be true for everyone. Compare the difference in meaning between “Classical music is great” and “I think classical music is great”. The first statement is a broad generalization that can be debated. The second is a personal view that nobody can challenge.

Examples of “I” statements:

“I think.....What do you think?”
 “I feel...”
 “This is how I feel...”
 “This is the way I see it.....”
 “In my opinion.....”
 “This is what it means to me...”
 “I would like....What would you like?”
 “I need....”

Avoid using demanding and blaming statements such as:

“You make me...”
 “You think...”
 “You should/shouldn’t...”
 “It’s your fault”
 “Don’t you think...?”
 “If only you would...”

HOW TO ARGUE FAIRLY

Disagreements and conflicts are inevitable in close relationships and they often lead to arguments where each person tries to get the other to conform to his or her point of view. There are two ways to approach arguing: The unfair way (unhealthy) and the fair way (healthy).

When conflicts are approached in an unfair way, shouting and screaming occur, tempers flare, and insults are exchanged. This often results in bitterness, distrust, and a desire for revenge. Although the conflict may temporarily be settled, both people can harbour resentment, feel angry, or feel hurt. This can lead to a breakdown of the relationship.

On the other hand, when conflicts are approached fairly, problems can be resolved by mutual agreement and the relationship can become stronger because each person understands the other more. Rather than feeling hurt, both individuals can feel relieved, refreshed and satisfied.

The following are some guidelines for effective arguing. Although they are worded to apply to intimate relationships, they can also be applied to other relationships.

Step 1- Get ready

Do:

- Deal with small but significant issues when they happen
- Learn to let go of anger generated by trivial issues
- Pick a good time to argue, when both people are ready
- Deal with big issues as soon as possible
- Be clear and specific as to what you are arguing about

Don't:

- Avoid or ignore an issue that your partner feels is important
- Give "the silent treatment"
- Leave
- Save up little hurts and hostilities and dump them on your partner all at once

Step 2: State your position

Do:

- Report your anger appropriately using "I" statements such as "I am furious about..."
- Be specific and concise
- Say what you really mean
- Stay in the present and use current examples
- Deal with your partner's behaviour ("When you eat ice cream with a fork...") not their personality ("You're such a slob...")

Don't:

- Generalize: "You never", "I always" etc.
- Label or name call: "You idiot!"
- Mind-read
- Dwell on past grievances
- Accuse your partner for your problem
- Hit below the belt by purposefully calling attention to known weaknesses or areas of sensitivity
- Threaten, exaggerate or overreact

Step 3: Responding to the other person

Do:

- Count to 10 if you feel really attacked
- Try not to take your partner's anger personally
- Try to understand where the anger is coming from, which can be done by understanding their feelings, values, perceptions, attitudes or beliefs

- Listen actively. Express back to your partner what you have heard to check if you are hearing exactly what they wanted to convey

Don't:

- Respond to a complaint about you by complaining about your partner ("Oh yeah, well you.....")
- Ignore or belittle your partner
- Assume your partner should know what you are thinking or feeling
- Sulk

Step 4: Negotiate

Do:

- Try to find out what your partner wishes the outcome to be once you understand your partner's feelings
- Express your interest in coming to a solution that is satisfactory to both of you...a position in which you can both "win"
- Discuss and consider several options in which you can both win
- Be prepared to make changes or allowances
- Try to resolve one issue before moving on to another

Don't:

- Present non-negotiable demands
- Think that you will lose if your partner wins (or otherwise)

Step 5: Terminate

Do:

- Have a healthy way to release emotions (exercise, music etc.)
- Make a plan to resolve the argument, if it isn't totally resolved
- Finish with a positive feeling such as a smile, a hug, a kiss, etc.

Don't:

- Pretend to go along or agree when you really don't
- Withhold affection
- Break previous agreements
- Continue with repeated, stale arguments with no progress being made toward resolution

Adapted from Tom Miller (Ph.D.) and Joan Matthews (Ph.D.), University of Texas Counselling-Psychological Services

A few strategies for making new friends

Friendships are some of our most important relationships. They provide us with joy, memories, support, and each good friendship helps us grow and develop as a human being. Making new friends can be easy, and sometimes it can be difficult. When we find ourselves in groups of people with similar interests, experiences or backgrounds, friendships inevitably occur. On the other hand, sometimes we are faced with situations where making friends can be difficult, for whatever reason.

For those times when making friends is difficult, here are some suggestions to make it a easier:

- **Be where people are.** It is very difficult to make friends when you aren't around people. Therefore, join a club or spend time in coffee shops or other places where people gather. Go to places where you are sure to meet people who share your interests. For example, if you enjoy reading, a bookstore would be a great place to visit. Alternatively, you could join a book club or volunteer for a book drive.
- **Make eye contact.** You won't meet new people unless you can establish eye contact. Wherever you are, keep your head up, look around and make eye contact with those around you.
- **Smile, smile, smile.** Don't underestimate the impression that a smile makes. As an experiment, go out today with a genuine smile on your face and see how others respond. You'll be amazed to see that many people will return your smile. They will also probably think you are friendly.
- **Don't be afraid to make the first move.** Go up to someone and talk to them. Think of a reason to talk to the other person, approach him or her, and strike up a conversation. For example, the person may be wearing a T-shirt with a logo of somewhere you have visited (the Bahamas, for example), so you can start a conversation by asking if he or she has been to the Bahamas. Or the person may be reading a book you have read, or would like to read, so you can ask them what they think of the book. One caution though: if the person looks like they wish to be left alone, don't approach them. Some signs of this include: sitting apart from others, avoiding eye contact, surrounding him- or herself with possessions (e.g. placing his or her bag on the adjacent seat) and using closed body posture, which includes crossed arms and legs.
- **Don't come on too strong.** Pleasant relaxed conversation is best when initially meeting people. Keep the conversation positive and general. Avoid disclosing too much about yourself too soon. If you sense the other person is not responding, say "Nice to meet you" and leave him or her alone.
- When talking with someone, continue to smile and **maintain eye contact.** These convey to the other person that you are interested in what he or she is talking about.
- Nod to **let the other person know that you are listening** and interested.
- **Keep an open posture:** hands at your side or behind your back, feet shoulder width apart. Crossed arms or legs indicate distance and coldness.
- **Move closer** when someone is talking; lean towards the person.
- **Don't monopolize a conversation** or talk about yourself too much. Ask questions about the other person and listen to their responses.
- **Be yourself.**
- **Be positive.** A negative person is a real turn off.

And if you would like to meet a romantic partner...

All the strategies for meeting new friends applies to meeting a romantic partner. However, since the relationship with a romantic partner is more intimate, it is important to be more selective. Here are a few ideas that can help:

- **List the qualities you would like in a mate.** This means making a "shopping" list of qualities that you must have, those that you would like, and those that you do not want at all. This list should include values and attitudes, as well as factors such as age, geographical location and "physical" qualities.
- **List your own qualities.** These are the things that you have to offer in a relationship. Be honest. Show it to friends and see if they agree. Ask some close friends to make a list of your qualities and compare it with your list.
- **Be real.** This means you might have to change some of the "fantasies" you have about relationships. Do you believe in "love at first sight"? Do you think that your partner should also be your "soul" mate? Do you think that a relationship will solve all your problems? Do you think that there is one "perfect" person out there for you? These fantasies can interfere with establishing healthy romantic partnerships.
- **Tell others** that you are open to meeting a romantic partner. Tell them what you are looking for and what you have to offer.

Remember that the closest and longest lasting friendships occur between people who have a lot in common. If you find that you are changing who you are to please your friends, then it is a good indication that you are not making friends with the people that are best suited for you.



IN THE LENDING LIBRARY

The Verbally Abusive Relationship:
How to recognize it and how to respond

Getting to Yes:
Negotiating agreement without giving in

Love and survival:
8 pathways to intimacy and health

Chicken Soup for the Couple's Soul

Dealing with People You Can't Stand

WHEN RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT HEALTHY

It is important to work towards building healthy relationships. It is equally important to identify if a relationship is abusive. Abuse is not only limited to the physical; emotional abuse can be just as devastating. Below are some signs that one partner may be abusing the other. If you identify some of these qualities in your relationship, you should consider terminating it. Physical abuse is serious and is a valid reason to end a relationship. Your safety should always be paramount.

Using Intimidation

- Making your partner afraid by using looks, actions, gestures.
- Smashing or destroying things.
- Destroying or confiscating your partner's property.
- Abusing pets as a display of power and control.
- Silent or overt raging.
- Displaying weapons or threatening their use.
- Making physical threats.

Using Emotional Abuse

- Putting your partner down.
- Making your partner feel bad about himself or herself.
- Calling your partner names.
- Playing mind games.
- Interrogating your partner.
- Harassing or intimidating your partner.
- "Checking up on" your partner's activities or whereabouts.
- Humiliating your partner, whether through direct attacks or "jokes".
- Making your partner feel guilty.
- Shaming your partner.

Using Isolation

- Controlling what your partner does, who he or she sees and talks to, what he or she reads, where he or she goes.
- Limiting your partner's outside involvement.
- Demanding your partner to remain home when you are not with him or her.
- Cutting your partner off from friends, activities, and social interaction.
- Using jealousy to justify your actions. (Jealousy is a central concept in abusive relationships).

Minimizing, Denying and Blame Shifting

- Making light of the abuse and not taking your partner's concerns about it seriously.
- Saying the abuse did not happen, or wasn't that bad.
- Shifting responsibility for your abusive behaviour to your partner. (i.e: I did it because you _____.)
- Saying your partner caused it.

Using Children

- Making your partner feel guilty about the children.
- Using the children to relay messages.
- Using visitation to harass your partner.
- Threatening to take the children away.

Using Male Privilege

- Treating your partner like a servant.
- Making all the big decisions.
- Acting like the "master of the castle."
- Being the one to define the role of the male and the female.

Using Economic Abuse

- Preventing your partner from getting or keeping a job.
- Making your partner ask for money.
- Giving your partner an allowance.
- Taking your partner's money.
- Not letting your partner know about or have access to family income.