

WHAT IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?

Healthy Relationships involve a shared exchange between two people with no one having more power or control than the other.

Elements of a Healthy Relationship:

1. Do we have mutual respect for one another?
 - Mutual respect means that you each care about the other person while also caring about yourself.
 - Respect the other person's decisions or choices
 - Recognize that you cannot force another person to be someone they do not want to be
 - You should, however let the other person know who you are, what your needs are, and what you would like from the relationship.
2. Do we trust each other?
 - Healthy relationships build on trust (this takes time).
 - There is a sense of companionship and caring.
 - In a healthy relationship you find you want to share your feelings.
 - Jealousy does not get out of control.
 - As your relationship grows, trust grows, based on your experiences together.
3. Are we supportive of each other?
 - Healthy partners provide comfort and empathy to one another.
 - Because they care, each listens to what the other is saying, and often to what they are NOT saying.
 - Partners realize that nobody's perfect and accept "quirks" in the other's personality (non-abusive quirks).
 - Support means you are there for the other person during times of joy and times of pain.
 - Not a one-way affair, you are mutually supportive and concerned for each other.
4. Are we relaxed with each other?
 - You can laugh at yourself without putting each other down.
 - You are confident that if you talk about your feelings the relationship will still be easy going.
 - In a healthy relationship you feel just as relaxed when you are together as when you are apart.

5. Do we fight fair?

Arguments, disagreements, and issues surface in every relationship. It does not mean the relationship is no longer healthy! But certain rules of fair fighting can allow each person to come out of the argument intact.

Indicators of a Healthy Relationship:

1. BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are the physical and emotional limits a person establishes in his/her relationships. We all have personal preferences about our boundaries.

In healthy relationships, each individual respects the other's physical and emotional boundaries and does not cross them. In bad relationships, boundaries are ignored and people are made to feel uncomfortable – physically and emotionally.

2. EQUALITY

Equality refers to the balance of the relationship. Is one person dominant and the other submissive? Does one person make all the decisions and the other is expected to always go along? If the answer to these questions is “yes” then something is wrong.

In a healthy relationship, each individual has equal input into decisions made. This can be accomplished in several ways: a) taking turns on who gets to decide, b) deferring when it is agreed that one person is more knowledgeable than another in a particular situation, c) flipping a coin, d) compromising – each person gets to do some part of what they want to do, e) talking things out so that each person gets a chance to present his/her opinion.

In an unhealthy relationship, one person tells the other what to do and expects full cooperation.

3. COMMUNICATION

In good relationships, people do not hesitate to talk about things and feel confident that their friend or partner will listen. *It is okay to disagree.* What is important that each person listens to the opinion of the other and tries to understand that person's perspective.

In bad relationships, communication is blocked in many ways. Here are some examples:

People pretend to listen but really do not pay attention.

People are afraid to speak up so they do not express their opinion

People begin to argue or cry before they have even heard the entire story presented by the other

People are automatically defensive or apologetic without hearing the whole story

People cut off the other person and do not allow the speaker to finish

People literally walk away or hang up the phone

Good communications requires a person to speak up for themselves in a way that clearly expresses his/her opinion in an appropriate and non-threatening manner.

4. SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is a term used to define how a person feels about him/herself. Positive self-esteem would indicate that a person feels worthwhile and valuable. Bad self-esteem would imply the opposite.

In a good relationship, your self-esteem remains intact. In other words, you feel good about who you are, and feel comfortable in the relationship.

In a bad relationship, you find your feeling of self-worth being compromised. If you are with someone and find yourself doing things that make you feel bad or uncomfortable, this would indicate an unhealthy relationship. If your principles are being compromised or if you find yourself being “talked into” things, there is something wrong with this association. If you find yourself justifying why you and your friends did something, or telling yourself that you really did not mind doing something, then you are probably involved in a bad relationship.

Your self-esteem will remain positive if your *boundaries* are not violated, you *communicate* your thoughts and desires clearly, and you feel an *equal* member of the group or partnership.

Equality is:

NON-THREATENING BEHAVIOUR:

Talking and acting so that you feel comfortable expressing yourself and doing things.

RESPECT:

Listening to each other non-judgmentally, being emotionally affirming and understanding and valuing opinions.

TRUST AND SUPPORT:

Supporting each other's goals in life, respecting each other's rights to your feelings, friends, activities, and opinions.

HONESTY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Accepting responsibility for yourself, admitting being wrong, communicating openly and truthfully.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY:

Mutually agreeing on a fair distribution of work, making family decisions together.

RESPONSIBLE PARENTING:

Sharing parental responsibilities, being a positive role model for the children.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP:

Making money decisions together, making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements.

NEGOTIATION AND FAIRNESS:

Seeking mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict, accepting change, being willing to compromise.