

## MAINTAINING A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

Relationships are made on stronger connect and bonds however their foundations are laid on three important virtues that hold the most prevalence in a relationship –communication, compromise and commitment. Healthy relationships don't look the same for everyone since people have different needs. Your specific needs around communication, sex, affection,space, shared hobbies or values, and so on may change throughout life.

So, a relationship that works in your 20s may be nothing like the relationship you want in your 30s, 40s, 50's. Healthy relationship is a broad term because what makes a relationship thrive depends on the needs of the people in it. A few key signs do stand out in flourishing relationships. What it looks like One thing healthy relationship largely share is adaptability. They adapt to circumstances and the fact we're always changing and going through different phases in life.

**Here's a look at some tools for healthy relationships.**

### Open communication

Partners in healthy relationships typically talk about the things going on in their lives: successes, failures, and everything in between. You should be comfortable talking about any issues that come up, from things that happen in everyday life, such work or friend stress, to more serious issues, such as mental health symptoms or financial concerns. Even if they have a different opinion, they listen without judgment and then share their perspective. Communication goes both ways. It's important you also feel that they'll voice their own concerns or thoughts as they come up.

### Trust

Trust involves honesty and integrity. You don't keep secrets from each other. When you're apart, you don't worry about them pursuing other people. But trust goes beyond believing they won't cheat or lie to you. It also means you feel safe and comfortable with them and know they won't hurt you physically or emotionally. You know they have your best interests in mind but also respect you enough to encourage you to make your own choices.

## **A sense of yourself as a separate person**

Healthy relationships are best described as interdependent. Interdependence means you rely on each other for mutual support but still maintain your identity as a unique individual. In other words, your relationship is balanced. You know you have their approval and love, but your self-esteem doesn't depend on them. Although you're there for each other, you don't depend on each other to get all of your needs met. You still have friends and connections outside the relationship and spend time pursuing your own interests and hobbies.

## **Curiosity**

One key characteristic of healthy, long-term love is curiosity. This means you're interested in their thoughts, goals, and daily life. You want to watch them grow into their best self. You're not fixated on who they used to be or who you think they should be. Curiosity also means you're willing to consider or talk over changes to your relationship structure if aspects of your existing relationship become less fulfilling. It also involves realism. You see them for who they truly are and care about that person, not an idealized version of them.

## **Time apart**

Most people in healthy relationships prioritize spending time together, though the amount of time you spend together can vary based on personal needs, work and other commitments, living arrangements, and so on. But you also recognize the need for personal space and time on your own. Maybe you spend this time relaxing solo, pursuing a hobby, or seeing friends or family. Whatever you do, you don't need to spend every moment together or believe your relationship suffers when you spend some time apart.

## **Playfulness or lightheartedness**

It's important to make time for fun and spontaneity when the mood is right. If you can joke and laugh together, that's a good sign. Sometimes life challenges or distress might affect one or both of you. This can temporarily change the tone of your relationship and make it hard to relate to each other in your usual ways.

But being able to share lighter moments that help relieve tension, even briefly, strengthens your relationship even in tough times.

### Physical intimacy

Intimacy often refers to sex, but not always. Not everyone enjoys or wants sex. Your relationship can still be healthy without it — as long as you're both on the same page about getting your needs met. If neither of you have interest in sex, physical intimacy might involve kissing, hugging, cuddling, and sleeping together. Whatever type of intimacy you share, physically connecting and bonding is important.

If you both enjoy sex, your physical relationship is most likely healthy when you:

- feel comfortable initiating and talking about sex
- can positively handle rejection.
- can discuss desires.
- feel safe expressing your interest in more or less sex

Healthy intimacy also involves respecting sexual boundaries.

This includes:

- not pressuring partners about sex or specific sex acts when they say “No”
- sharing information about other partners
- discussing sexual risk factors

### Teamwork

A strong relationship can be considered a team. You work together and support each other, even when you don't see eye to eye on something or have goals that aren't exactly the same. In short, you have each other's back. You know you can turn to them when you're struggling. And you're always ready to offer support when they need you.

## Conflict resolution

Even in a healthy relationship, you'll have occasional disagreements and feel frustrated or angry with each other from time to time. That's completely normal. It doesn't mean your relationship is unhealthy. What matters is how you address conflict. If you can talk about your differences politely, honestly, and with respect, you're on the right track. Partners who address conflict without judgment or contempt can often find a compromise or solution.

## RELATIONSHIP RED FLAGS

Your relationship should contribute to a sense of fulfillment, happiness, and connection. If you tend to feel more anxious, distressed, or unhappy around your partner, your relationship may be struggling. Signs of unhealthy relationships can vary widely, so this list isn't all-inclusive.

But it may help point out some possible issues.

- One of you tries to control or change the other. We are never in control of changing another person.
- If you're concerned about a specific behaviour, you should feel comfortable enough to bring it up. It's OK to express your feelings and ask them to consider making changes. But it's not OK to tell them what to do or attempt to control their behaviour.
- If they do something that really bothers you and you can't accept it, the relationship may not have long-term potential.
- Your partner doesn't respect your boundaries.

Boundaries can come into play across your relationship, from respectful communication to privacy needs. If you set a boundary and they push against it or pressure you to change it, that's a serious red flag. Maybe you've said, "I need

personal space when I get home from work. I'm happy to see you, but I need to de-stress before any physical affection." You don't spend much time together.

Relationships often develop when people enjoy each other's company and want to spend even more time together. Life events can sometimes get in the way of your time together, but these changes are usually temporary. Your relationship might be struggling if you consistently see less of each other without a clear reason, such as family difficulties or more responsibilities at work.

Other warning signs include feeling distant with each other or relieved when you aren't together. You might even try to find excuses to avoid spending time together. The relationship feels unequal. Periods of inequality can happen from time to time. One of you might temporarily lose your income, struggle to help with chores because of illness, or feel less affectionate due to stress or other emotional turmoil. But if your relationship regularly feels unbalanced in any way, this can become problematic.

### **They say negative or hurtful things about you or others**

It's not healthy to constantly criticize each other or say intentionally hurtful things, especially about personal choices, such as food, clothing, or favourite TV shows. Criticism that makes you feel ashamed or bad about yourself is generally unproductive. Also note how they talk about others. Your relationship with each other could seem perfectly healthy, but if they use hate speech, slurs, or make discriminatory remarks about others, consider what this behaviour says about them as a person.

### **You don't feel heard in the relationship**

Maybe you don't feel heard because they seem disinterested when you bring up a problem or share something that's been on your mind. Or you might have a hard time sharing your opinion or talking about serious issues because you worry, they'll just brush you off. Miscommunications can happen, of course. But if you do talk through an issue and they seem receptive but don't make any changes or seem to have completely forgotten what you talked about by the next day, that's also a warning sign.

### **You're afraid of expressing disagreement**

Partners should always feel safe to have their own opinions, even when this means they disagree. If your partner responds to your (different) viewpoint with dismissal, contempt, or other rudeness, this often suggests they don't respect you or your ideas. If you find yourself censoring everything you say because you worry about their reaction or feel like you're "walking on eggshells" every day, it may be time to seek professional help.

If you fear physical or verbal abuse, talk to a therapist as soon as you can. Don't hesitate to reach out to friends and family for additional support, too.

### **Disagreements or discussions don't go anywhere**

It's generally not a good sign when you find yourself talking in circles or about the same issues all the time. Maybe there's never any improvement, no matter how much you discuss something. Maybe they eventually just shut you out. It's difficult to apply the same standards to every relationship. However, if you're looking for guidance on whether yours is healthy, there are a few things you can ask yourself as a sort of self-test.

### **TIPS FOR BUILDING A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP.**

If some (or several) of the relationship red flags struck home, couples counselling might be a good step. Couples therapy is about two people arriving to work on themselves. Getting help doesn't mean you've failed. It means you want to work at improving, for yourselves and for each other. But even the healthiest of relationships can sometimes use a little extra work.

### **Here are some tips to make sure things stay on the right track.**

Embrace each other's differences - They might be ambitious, while you're more of a homebody, but this is a good dynamic, since one of you can initiate activity or go out and adventure, while one of you enjoys quiet time and keeps the home fire burning.

Consider their perspective - Be curious about the way they do and see things instead of trying to get them to see things your way

Solve problems as a team- Work together to solve problems, instead of making each other the problem.

Ask for what you want and be equally ready to listen to their desires -You may not always agree, but that's all right. You're two different people, after all. Being able to find a compromise is key.

Try something new together -If your relationship seems stale or like it's going nowhere, try taking it somewhere to see what happens. A change of scenery can sometimes change your perspective.

Talk about your goals and dreams. This can help you reconnect and make sure you still share similar hopes and values.

The bottom line is, at the end of the day, you should trust each other and feel safe together. You should believe in your ability to learn and grow together. If you're worried about your relationship or believe it's not as strong as it used to be, trust your instincts and explore what these feelings mean. A therapist can help offer guidance on when more effort might help and when it's time to move on.