

## Tips for Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships bring happiness and health to our lives. Studies show that people with healthy relationships are happier and have less stress. You can use these tips to improve any relationship whether it is with girlfriends, boyfriends, parents, siblings, friends, roommates or co-workers.

- **Set realistic expectations.** No one can be everything we might want him or her to be. Sometimes people disappoint us. It's important to remember that it's not 'all or nothing'. Healthy relationships mean accepting people as they are and not trying to change them.
  
- **Talk with each other.** Clear and assertive communication is an important part of healthy relationships. Tips for effective communication:
  1. *Take the time.* Really be there. If you have a specific problem to discuss, set time aside at a convenient time for both people.
  2. *Genuinely Listen.* Don't interrupt, or lose yourself thinking about what you will say next. Reflect back to the person what you think they said to ensure you understand.
  3. *Ask Questions.* Ask friendly and appropriate questions that show you're interested. Ask or repeat back information if you think you may have missed the point.
  4. *Share Information.* Studies show that sharing information helps in the early stages of relationships. Feel free to share personal information, but don't overwhelm others with *too much too soon*.
  
- **Be Flexible.** Most people try to keep people and situations just the way we like them to be. When people or situations change it is natural to feel apprehensive, even sad or angry. It's important to remember that healthy relationships allow for and foster personal growth and change.
  
- **Be Dependable.** When you set plans, follow through. Assignment due? Meet the deadline. When you say you are going to do something, do it. Healthy relationships are based on trust and responsibility. If something does change, communicate and show your respect for the other person.
  
- **Fight Fair.** In most relationships there is some conflict. When arguing or negotiating with another, keep the following in mind:
  1. *Negotiate a time to talk.* Important conversations are best during times when you are rested and calm. Ask, "When is a good time to talk about something that is bothering me?"
  2. *Don't criticize.* When arguing it is often easy to play the blame game, avoid it. Don't use sentences that start with 'you', instead use 'I' statements and discuss how you are struggling with the problem.
  3. *"I'm sorry".* These two words go a long way when you make a mistake. Rather than trying to avoid the 'blame', own up to, and take responsibility. In the end, it goes

a long way to solving the problem and moving on.

4. *Don't hold grudges.* You don't have to accept anything and everything, but once something has been resolved, try to let go and move on.

5. *There may not be a resolved ending.* Not every issue has a clear solution, compromising or disagreeing on some issues is normal. Healthy relationships don't demand perfection; the goal is for partners to seek answers to problems together.

6. *Body language.* Make appropriate eye contact, stay at an interpersonal distance, maintain an 'open position' by keeping your arms unfolded and hands unclenched, and speak softly or reassuringly. These techniques enhance important communication, reduce anger and can assist in calming another individual.

- **Reciprocate.** Each person in the relationship deserves to have their feelings, interests and needs respected. Healthy relationships are based on each partner giving and receiving emotional support.
- **Be responsible for your own happiness.** Accept, respect and love yourself. Whether it is an activity, book, or music, there is always something that will make you happy. You are the only one in control of your life, so learn what you need to do to keep yourself happy. Too often one person becomes unhappy and blames it on the other partner. Remembering that you are good enough to live a happy life and be in a healthy relationship.
- **Express your wants and needs.** It is easy to assume that others know what you want, or need from your relationship—it's not that simple. No one can read minds, and assuming that someone can is unrealistic. Directly and assertively discussing your wishes and desires is a healthy approach to relationships.
- **Acknowledge differences in background.** It is always a good idea to discuss what you expect from a relationship. Even if you are from similar religious, cultural and economic backgrounds, it may surprise you that what seems normal and obvious to you isn't for your partner (and vice versa). If you are from different backgrounds, it may take more time and energy to build relationships. Taking the time to learn about another's culture or religion is an important part of a healthy relationship.
- **Maintenance.** Getting to know someone does not happen as quickly or smoothly as we like to think. Different relationships need different amounts of attention; some need occasional 'checking in' while others need daily care. Know in advance how much you are able and willing to invest into a relationship and set limits. Try to base your relationships on activities and things that are mutually enjoyed.
- **Be Yourself.** It's much easier and more fun to be yourself than pretending to be someone or something else. Besides, it always catches up to you in the end. Healthy relationships happen with real people, not images.

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