

RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy relationships and support systems can significantly increase our wellbeing. Studies show that people with healthy relationships have more happiness and less stress. The good news is we have the power to increase our relationship skills which increases our chances of developing healthier, more satisfying relationships. When it comes to relationships, many students are aware that learning how to communicate well and knowing the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships are good skills to have. If these are skills you need to work on, there are several links below to help with these and other relationship skills.

There are basic ways to make relationships healthy. The following tips apply to all kinds of relationships: friendships, work and family relationships, and romantic relationships.

1. Keep expectations realistic. No one can be everything to everyone. Healthy relationships mean accepting people for who they are not what we want them to be.
2. Talk with each other. It can't be said enough: communication is key to a healthy relationship.
 - Take the time. Be present for one another.
 - Genuinely listen. Do not interrupt or plan what you are going to say next. Try to fully understand the other person's perspective.
 - Ask questions. Show you are interested by asking about the other person's experiences, feelings, opinions, and interests.
 - Share information. Studies show that sharing information helps relationships begin. Share with others who you are, but don't overwhelm them with too much personal information too quickly.
3. Be flexible. Healthy relationships allow for growth and change.
4. Take care of yourself as well. Healthy relationships are mutual. There is room for both people's needs to be met.
5. Be dependable. If you make plans with someone, follow through. If you take on a responsibility, complete it. Healthy relationships are trustworthy.
6. Fight fair. All relationships have conflict from time to time. It only means you disagree about something. It doesn't have to mean the relationship is over.

- Cool down before talking. The conversation will be more productive if you have it when emotions are under control. This helps prevent us from saying something we might regret.
 - Use “I statements.” Share how you feel and what you want without assigning blame or motives to the other person. For example, “When you don’t text me, I start to feel like you don’t care about me” vs. “You never text me when you’re away I guess I’m the only one who cares about this relationship.”
 - Keep your language clear and specific. Try to factually describe behavior that you are upset with and avoid criticism and judgements. Attack the problem, not the person.
 - Focus on the current issue. The conversation is likely to get bogged down if you pile on everything that bothers you. Avoid using “always” and “never” and address one issue at a time.
 - Take responsibility for mistakes. Apologize if you’ve done something wrong. It goes a long way toward making things right again.
 - Recognize some problems are not easily solved. Not all differences or difficulties can be resolved. You are different people and your values, beliefs, and personality may not always be in alignment. Communication goes a long way toward helping you understand each other’s perspectives. However, some things are deeply rooted and may not change significantly. It is important to figure out for yourself what you can accept, or when a relationship is no longer working for you.
7. Be affirming. According to relationship expert John Gottman, happy couples have a ratio of 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative one. Express warmth and affection.
 8. Keep your life balanced. Other people help make our lives satisfying but they cannot meet all of our needs. Find what interests you and become involved. Healthy relationships have room for outside interests.
 9. It’s a process. It might look like everyone on campus is confident and connected, but most people have similar concerns about fitting in. It takes time to meet people and get to know them. Healthy relationships can be learned and practiced, and keep getting better in time.

10. Be yourself! It's much easier and more fun to be authentic than to pretend to be someone you are not.

Handouts/Websites

Making Good Friends

Conflict Resolution Skills

The Lonely College Student

Dealing with a Breakup or Divorce

Love is Respect.org

Healthy Relationships Pamphlet

Podcasts/Videos

Podcast: Dates & Mates with Damona Hoffman

Podcast: Breakup BOOST

Podcast: The Art of Friendship with Kim Wier

TED Talk: Katie Hood, "The Difference Between Healthy and Unhealthy Love."

TED Talk: William Young & Christopher Sweeney, "Friendships Are Your Lifeline."

TED Talk: Tasha Jackson, "Can We Not Let Our Breakups Break Us."

Books

5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts, by Gary Chapman

All My Friends Have Issues: Building Remarkable Relationships with Imperfect People (Like Me), by Amanda Anderson

Getting Over a Breakup: 75 Easy Steps to Get Over a Breakup, by Kate Anderson