

Healthy Relationships



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Heather Torbett, MPH
Kris S. Calderon, PhD, CHES
Patricia Bell, LMC

Relationship Health

Many relationships are not as healthy as they should be or may even be considered dysfunctional. It takes commitment, understanding, and compromise for a good supportive relationship. Healthy relationships should allow for the maintenance of individuality, accent the best qualities in both people and influence personal growth. This informational packet is dedicated to building and maintaining healthy relationships. Whether we need to improve relationships with significant others, family members or friends, relationship health, as with our own physical health, may require making changes, forming healthy habits, and even following the advice of a professional.

Forming Relationships

Many of us have experienced or witnessed unhealthy relationships. Unrealistic expectations and demands tend to be placed on relationships, which can place a strain on one or both individuals in the relationship. These bad experiences and/or observations may cause one to shy away from or be fearful of ever getting close to another person. In order to establish and maintain a healthy relationship, it is important to first define why it is we may fear getting close to someone else. Below are some explanations of this fear (Counseling Services, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire).

Challenges of Becoming Close to Someone Else

1. *Fear of disappointment and/or pain* which can come from a relationship. Some fear that once they disclose so much of who they are to a person that the significant other will leave them – taking with them your inner most thoughts, dreams, etc. and leaving you alone.
2. *Fear of losing independence*. It is common to fear losing individuality in a relationship. People fear giving up their time and their goals to make time for someone else in their life. There is a fear that the other person will take all of your time that you hold precious for yourself.
3. *Fear of receiving* as well as giving. People are naturally givers and find it difficult to receive from others. However, we need to give others the satisfaction of giving. The act of receiving will make you feel good to see how others can care for you. They may see something you really need and did not realize you were lacking.
4. *Fear of being judged*. Some are afraid of opening up to others and sharing who we really are as people. We fear seeing a bad reaction by the other person. There are thoughts of not being good enough, or not measuring up to the standards of the other person.
5. *Fear of appearing weak for showing love and affection*. One may fear appearing weak as a person if they show how much they can love and care for another individual deeply.

Benefits of Forming Healthy Relationships

The most obvious benefit to establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship with another person is gaining a very special relationship in your life. You will have someone to comfort and care about you during times of discouragement or frustration and vice versa. Relationships teach you to have faith in others as well as faith in yourself. You can gain the ability to be faithful to others which will benefit you in all aspects of your life. Relationships can train you to be in tune with your emotions and feelings as far as when and how to express one self. Sharing yourself with someone else does involve risk but the benefits way out number these risks and bring about many positive outcomes in all aspects of one's life. Here is a list of some benefits of having healthy relationships and characteristics associated with them:

- Increased self-esteem
- Emotionally healthier
- Physically healthier
- Increased sensitivity to one's own and other's emotions/feelings
- Increased ability to be more assertive
- Learn to be more cooperative with others
- Learn to be interdependent rather than totally independent or dependent of others
- Less likely to attempt or commit suicide
- Decreased risk of drug and alcohol abuse
- Increase in the stability of employment

Tips for Establishing/Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Whether you have just entered a new relationship or have been in one for many years, it is important to continually work on establishing and maintaining a healthy relationship. Below are some tips for establishing and maintaining healthy relationships (Kansas State University's Counseling Services). These healthy relationship tips are applicable to all stages of relationships.

- ***Keep expectations realistic.*** No one is going to be as perfect as we expect them to be; we can not make lists of every thing we want a significant other to have and wish for them to lack and then expect that person to meet every single requirement. No one is perfect! We definitely cannot change any one to fit our mold, we must accept each person as they are and not attempt to change him/her.
- ***Communicate with your partner.*** Communication is the most essential ingredient to any successful relationship. Communication involves expressing ourselves and responding to others. Below are some tips for both methods of communication:

Expressing ourselves:

1. *Talk in positive terms* by using “I-statements.” These “I-statements” are important when stating an opinion, making an observation, or expressing a feeling; they help us to express ourselves in an honest and direct manner. These statements help us to take responsibility for what we think and feel, while avoiding blaming and/or accusing others. Use statements such as:
 - “I feel/think/want (express the feeling/thought/desire)... When (state the behavior causing it)... Because (identify the reason)...”
2. *Take time for one another* to enjoy each others company. Remember, we have relationships so that we can share our lives with someone else; why have relationships if we do not make time for one another?

Responding to others:

1. *Genuinely listen.* Do not interrupt the other person as they are talking with you. Do not think of other things such as how to answer their problems or things you have going on as you should be listening to him/her.
2. *Listen with your ears and heart.* This way you can genuinely feel the emotions of the other person- this will really put you in tune with what the other person is dealing with at the time.
3. *Non-Verbal Signals.* Pay attention to the other person’s voice tone, rhythm and volume as well as his/her body language with facial expressions, eye contact, and posture. These non-verbal signals can relay a message to you that their words do not express.
4. *Delay your reaction.* Give yourself time to process what this person has said to you before you jump to conclusions.

5. *Ask Questions.* Asking questions pertaining to his/her emotions, issues, etc. will help you to gain a better understanding of his/her situation and how they are feeling emotionally or physically.
 6. *Use Reflection.* After intently listening to the other person, repeat back, in your own words/understanding, what the content and/or feelings of the statements the other person just expressed. Reflection does not mean questioning, challenging, arguing with, approving of, or disapproving of the other persons' thoughts and/or feelings. Use statements such as:
 - "Sounds like you're feeling/thinking/wanting (express the emotion, thought, desire you hear)... Because (state the reason you heard for it)..."
 7. *Share Information.* It is important to have a reciprocated relationship. Let your partner give a little information about him/her and then you share a little of yourself with them- this will show that you are open and willing to let them get to know you. Be careful not to share too much of yourself too soon.
- ***Be Flexible.*** Every relationship needs change in order for the relationship to grow and for the individuals to learn more about each other. It is important to let your significant other try new things in his/her life or they may resent you later for holding him/her back.
 - ***Remember to take care of you.*** You must try to please yourself as well as the other person. If you are not happy, it is not fair to you or your significant other. In order to keep the relationship happy and healthy you and your partner must be satisfied as individuals first.
 - ***Be Dependable.*** Make sure you keep plans, complete tasks, and follow through on your word. It is very important to have a trustworthy relationship!
 - ***Show your warmth.*** Emotional warmth is a key ingredient to keeping a relationship healthy.
 - ***Keep your life balanced.*** Someone else cannot totally satisfy your every need or complete you and make you happy. You must be happy and satisfied on your own before getting involved with someone else. It is not healthy to depend on the other person for your happiness, not to mention this can place much stress on your significant other.
 - ***It's a process.*** Remember, meeting a good match for you will take time. You must be patient and try not to settle on someone to help cure loneliness. After meeting someone, take things slow and get to know them and enjoy them.

- **Be yourself.** Do not pretend to be someone you are not. You want your significant other to love/like you for whom you are, otherwise you will be living a lie and he/she will resent you for it later.
- **Fight Fair.** Arguing with someone does not mean you do not like him/her, you just disagree with his/her viewpoint.

Addressing Relationship Problems

1. *Negotiate a time to talk about the problem.* Do not try to have an intense conversation while angry or tired. Make sure you are clear minded to give the other your best; also respect the other's time.
2. *Use a spirit of good will.* You care about this person, it is not that you dislike him/her; you are upset with a behavior or thought they may have towards an issue.
3. *Avoid attacking one another.* Discuss behaviors, not personalities. It is important to stay focused on the issue/problem and not to attack the person! Use "I" statements such as "I struggle with this problem because..." Do not use "you" statements because the use of the word "you" places blame on the other person.
4. *Request reasonable change.* Determine if what you want from the person is realistic or not. Give the person time to make changes once you have discussed the issue.
5. *Share your feelings.* Reflect on why you are feeling the way you are and discuss this feeling with the other person.
6. *Do not assume certain feelings or motives.* Let him/her explain for themselves his/her feelings or reasoning regarding the issue.
7. *Be accepting.* Be open and respectful of the other person's thoughts/feelings; do not be judgmental.
8. *One topic at a time.* Do not bring up past issues to strengthen your argument. It is always best to leave the past in the past. Each argument/issue has its own situation separate from those in the past.
9. *Say, "I'm sorry" when you're wrong.* Admitting your mistakes is very respectable and appreciated by others.
10. *Do not assume anything.* Never assume you know what the other person feels or thinks. It is impossible to truly know what another individual thinks or feels in any situation.

11. *Write feelings down.* For those who have difficulty expressing his/her feelings or thoughts allowed, write them down in a note or letter for the other person to read.
12. *Ask and receive help when needed.* It is good to get an outside opinion- someone with a clearer head on the issue- someone who can look at both sides of the issue. One can see a counselor, unbiased family member, and/or friend.
13. *Be ready to compromise.* On some issues you and your relationship counterpart with not see eye to eye. Find a solution that is agreeable to you both.
14. *Do not hold grudges.* You are not always going to agree with everything your significant other thinks or does, do not hold this against them. They are not going to agree with you all of the time either. Look at the best in others and leave past situations in the past.
15. *Reach the Win/Win status.* A relationship with a winner and a loser will not last. It is important for both individuals to be winners. It is give and take not give and give or take and take. Try to seek answers to problems together, communication must be reciprocated.
16. *Show Appreciation.* Once the argument is over, tell the other person how much you appreciate them listening to you and taking the time to try and work things out.
17. *You CAN leave a relationship.* You want to have a healthy relationship NOW- not just hope to have one later.

REMEMBER...Relationships can be rewarding yet challenging to develop and maintain. It is important to remember the overall physical and mental health benefits of developing and maintaining healthy relationships as well as ways that you can overcome problems and issues within those relationships. It is always okay to seek outside help if needed in maintaining positive relationships and to end unhealthy or negative relationships that cannot be mended. Please see the "Resources" section for further information.

Resources

Web Resources

Department of Health and Human Services
Administration of Children and Family
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/benefits>

Kansas State University Counseling Services
"Healthy Relationships"
<http://www.ksu.edu/counseling/csweb/topics/relationships/relatn.html>

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
"Building Healthy Relationships"
<http://www.uwec.edu/counsel/pubs/bhr.htm>

Relationship Institute of Arizona
"Communicating With Your Partner"
www.imagopartners.com

Local Resources

Patricia Bell, Employee Assistance Program Counselor
Kennedy Space Center – Occupational Health Facility
321-867-7398

Community Psychological Services of Florida Tech
150 W. University Blvd., Melbourne
321-727-9956.

Serves Brevard and north Indian River counties, provides psychological help for children, adolescents, adults and the elderly in individual, couple and family therapy; Assessments available include learning disability, psychological and neuropsychological, as well as career counseling. The organization participates in National Depression and Anxiety and Eating Disorder screening days.

Family Counseling Centers of Brevard
220 Coral Sands Drive, Rockledge
321-632-5792

By appointment only (call Rockledge center)

725 DeLeon Ave., Titusville

507 N. Harbor City Blvd., Melbourne

Centers provide alcohol and drug services, mental-health counseling, case management and consumer credit counseling

Episcopal Counseling Centers

414 Pine St., Titusville

321-267-1019

50 W. Strawbridge Ave., Melbourne,

321-952-5482

Centers provide counseling, group therapy and testing

Family Advocacy Office at Patrick Air Force Base

1381 South Patrick Drive

321-494-8171

Provides family treatment services for military families