

# Healthy Relationships

Healthy dating relationships should start with the same ingredients that healthy friendships have, such as effective communication, honesty, and respect. Dating relationships are a little different than other relationships, however, because they may include expressions of physical affection that may range from hugging, kissing, or holding hands to sexual intercourse.

All healthy relationships between two partners are characterized by communication, respect, sharing, and trust. They are based on the belief that both partners are equal and that decision making in the relationship is shared equally.

In healthy relationships, we must maintain the freedom to be ourselves. It is important to maintain an individual identity, regardless of the type of relationship being pursued.

Maintaining our identity in a romantic relationship also means nurturing the other relationships we already have with family and friends. At first, dating couples may want to spend all their time with each other, but it is equally important for couples to spend time apart so that they can maintain healthy relationships with other people. These relationships provide perspective, and can be a valuable source of support when a couple experiences difficult or stressful times in a romantic relationship or when the relationship ends.

A healthy relationship should be satisfying and promote individual growth. Establishing mutually acceptable boundaries based on personal values is important in any relationship. Romantic partners should never pressure each other to do things they have agreed not to do. Mutual respect means not only giving respect to a partner, but also showing respect for oneself.

## RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS\*

Some important characteristics of a healthy relationship are identified below.

### **Closeness**

- You are caring and loyal.
- You trust your partner.
- You share your feelings.
- You support your partner during illness or during stressful times.

### **Shared Goals and Beliefs**

- You share beliefs and values.
- You recognize and respect differences in each other.

### **Shared Experiences**

- You share common interests and friends/acquaintances.
- You talk about your experiences and accept and respect each other's individual interests.

### **Communication**

- You are honest with each other.
- You listen to each other.

### **Respect**

- You use respectful language and do not act in ways that demean your partner.
- You understand your partner's wishes and feelings.
- You are ready to compromise—to meet your partner halfway.

### **Humour**

- You and your partner enjoy being with each other and can laugh together.

### **Affection**

- You show your partner you care.
- You show each other affection in many ways.

\* Source: Sexuality Education Resource Centre Manitoba, 2006. Adapted with permission.

## **Characteristics of an Unhealthy Relationship**

Relationships generally start out with good intentions. As relationships develop, disagreements and conflicts will arise. Conflict is not necessarily negative if we deal with it appropriately. How we deal with conflict is based on a given situation, as well as on previously learned behaviours.

In some conflict situations, people may use behaviours that are considered unhealthy or abusive, and may include the following:

- a. **Emotional:** making degrading comments, ignoring, isolating, controlling friendships and/or activities, threatening
- b. **Physical:** slapping, pushing, punching
- c. **Sexual:** unwanted touching, forced or coerced sex
- d. **Financial:** taking or withholding money, controlling spending

## **Communication: The Cornerstone to Healthy Relationships**

- a. A relationship does not exist without communication. A *healthy relationship* does not exist without effective communication. Through effective communication we create the characteristics of healthy relationships, such as trust, openness, and intimacy. We need effective communication to resolve conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions that contribute to the strength of a relationship. While patterns of communication may vary according to our personal style and family and cultural background, being able to express our values, opinions, feelings, and dreams is important in any meaningful relationship.
- b. Everything we know about ourselves and others can only be processed through some form of communication. Effective communication is a shared responsibility that involves both sending and receiving messages. Strategies for effective communication involve verbal skills, active listening, and the ability to resolve problems or issues.
- c. Communication in relationships is one of the most complex and strategic activities of human beings. It often takes place at an emotional level as we disclose our likes and dislikes, our opinions and suggestions, and our wants and needs. This intimate form of communication is best done face to face when each person is able to use the full range of verbal and non-verbal nuances of communication so that a message is delivered clearly and received without misunderstandings.
- d. We traditionally establish our communication skills by observing and imitating others around us. It is, therefore, important to provide students with many opportunities to practise effective communication strategies.

## **ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION**

A message is constructed of the following elements (Meade):

- **Words** (what you say) account for 7% of the message.
- **Voice and tone** (e.g., pitch, volume) account for 38% of the message.
- **Body language** (e.g., posture, facial expression, proximity) accounts for 55% of the message.

## Styles of Communication

1. **Passive-passive communication** is viewed as non-participatory. There is very little interaction. Passive communicators are seen as shy and withdrawn. They would much rather “go with the flow” than face a confrontation.
2. **Passive-aggressive communication** is viewed as manipulative. Passive-aggressive communicators may seem to agree to avoid confrontation (passive) but will manipulate others to say things for them or say things behind someone’s back (aggressive).
3. **Aggressive-aggressive communication** is viewed as controlling. Aggressive communicators will take control and dominate conversations. In order to “win,” aggressive communicators feel they need to put others down to protect themselves.
4. **Assertive-assertive communication** is viewed as open and honest. Assertive communicators are respectful and turn potential win-lose situations into win-win or win-learn situations. Assertive communicators will be direct, use “I” statements, and be sensitive to others. Assertive communication is seen as the most effective style of communication.

## Steps to Loving Communication\*

The following steps are ways to ensure healthy communication that is open, trusting, and reciprocal:

1. **Have reasonable expectations.** Keep in mind that partners are not mind readers. Tell each other what you mean. There will be times when you disagree.
2. **Know your own feelings.** If you feel unhappy or uncomfortable, take time to think about how you really feel and why, so you can do something about it.
3. **Recognize and correct communication-blocking habits.** Try not to generalize with “Never” or “Always” statements. Work at not belittling someone who disagrees with you.
4. **Think before you speak.** Take a deep breath so you have time to think about what you want to say and can say it with care. Focus on the behaviour or issue and not the person. Use respectful language.
5. **Allow the other person to save face.** Don’t embarrass your partner in public by arguing or putting him or her on the defensive in front of friends.
6. **Use assertive communication.** Use assertive language, such as “I” statements (e.g., I feel frustrated when you are late).
7. **Decide what is negotiable and what is not.** Know where and when to compromise and when to let well enough alone.
8. **Make time for communication.** Your relationship deserves time, so make time to be together and just talk to each other.
9. **Learn to listen.** Don’t jump to conclusions.
10. **Give each other compliments and positive comments.** It’s sometimes harder to say something to show you care than to argue.

# **Biblical Verses for Healthy Relationships**

## Communication

### **Psalm 19:14**

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

### **Proverbs 17:27**

A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered.

### **Proverbs 12:18**

Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

### **Matthew 7:3**

And why worry about a speck in the eye of a brother when you have a board in your own?

### **Proverbs 20:19**

A gossip tells secrets, so don't hang around with someone who talks too much.

### **James 1:19**

My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry.

### **Proverbs 18:13**

What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!

## Conflict Resolution

### **Colossians 3:19**

And you husbands must love your wives and never treat them harshly.

### **Ephesians 4:26**

And "don't sin by letting anger gain control over you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry.

### **Proverbs 14:29**

Those who control their anger have great understanding; those with a hasty temper will make mistakes.

### **Proverbs 17:14**

Beginning a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

### **Ecclesiastes 7:8-9**

Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. Don't be quick-tempered, for anger is the friend of fools.

### **Romans 12:19**

Don't quarrel with anyone. Be at peace with everyone, just as much as possible.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:11**

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

**Romans 12:17**

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

## Divorce

**Matthew 19:4-6**

"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And he said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."

**Malachi 2:16**

"For I hate divorce!" says the LORD, the God of Israel. "It is as cruel as putting on a victim's bloodstained coat," says the LORD Almighty. "So guard yourself; always remain loyal to your wife."

## Family & Friends

**Proverbs 27:9**

The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.

**1 Corinthians 15:33**

Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."

**Proverbs 13:20**

Whoever walks with the wise will become wise; whoever walks with fools will suffer harm.

**Proverbs 14:7**

Stay away from fools, for you won't find knowledge there.

**Proverbs 27:6**

Wounds from a friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

## Loving Your Spouse

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

**Matthew 7:12**

Do for others what you would like them to do for you. This is a summary of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

**1 Peter 4:8**

Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

**John 13:14,15**

And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

**Galatians 6:9**

So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.

**John 13:34**

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

**Romans 12:9,10**

Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

**Romans 12:20,21**

Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good.

## Marriage

**Genesis 2:18,24**

And the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who will help him. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one."

**Matthew 19:4-6**

"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.' And Jesus said, 'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' Since they are no longer two but one, let no one separate them, for God has joined them together."

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-11**

Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. And on a cold night, two under the same blanket can gain warmth from each other. But how can one be warm alone?

**Proverbs 31:10,11**

Who can find a virtuous and capable wife? She is worth more than precious rubies. Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life.

**Ephesians 5:25**

And you husbands must love your wives with the same love Christ showed the church. He gave up his life for her.

**Ephesians 5:31-33**

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and she must respect her husband.

**1 Peter 3:7**

In the same way, you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard.

**Genesis 2:23-24**

"At last!" Adam exclaimed. "She is part of my own flesh and bone! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of a man. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

**Matthew 18:19**

"I also tell you this- if two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask for, my Father in heaven will do it for you.

**Amos 3:3**

Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?

**Parenting****Psalm 127:3**

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him.

**Proverbs 22:6**

Teach your children to choose the right path, and when they are older, they will remain upon it.

**Proverbs 13:24**

If you refuse to discipline your children, it proves you don't love them; if you love your children, you will be prompt to discipline them.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-7**

And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again.

**Ephesians 6:1-2**

Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first of the Ten Commandments that ends with a promise.

**Colossians 3:21**

Fathers, don't aggravate your children. If you do, they will become discouraged and quit trying.

**Exodus 20:12**

"Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God will give you."

**Leviticus 19:32**

"Show your fear of God by standing up in the presence of elderly people and showing respect for the aged. I am the LORD."

**Matthew 19:13-15**

Some children were brought to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. The disciples told them not to bother him. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." And he put his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.