

A Guide to Healthy Relationships

A relationship can be similar to a roller coaster, where the couple experiences many ups and downs, as well as twists and turns. They may start off and move at a slow and steady pace or a rapid and fluctuating pace. However, throughout all the excitement come a variety of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that arise within each individual and among the relationship. Some may be shared by both partners, while others are uniquely experienced.

Contrary to popular belief, men and women are not from different planets. However, gender differences do exist in the manner that men and women relate to and communicate with one another and the world they live in. Some differences between men and women include:

- How they connect with one another...Men connect through mutual activities, while women connect through talking to one another.
- How they express their comfort in a relationship...Men enjoy the freedom to remain silent when comfortable in a relationship, while women enjoy the freedom to be able to speak without judgment when comfortable in a relationship.
- What their needs are when upset and/or bothered...Men need space, while women need support and understanding.
- How they prefer to approach problems and/or conflict...Men think silently and prefer to internally figure things out, while women think out loud and prefer to share the process of thoughts.

These differences are normal and to be expected, however, it is important to be aware of, understand, and appreciate gender differences when developing and maintaining a relationship.

Aside from the consideration of gender differences, when involved in a relationship, it is necessary to determine whether a relationship is in fact a healthy one. Many share the idea that relationships are expected to be perfect, similar to what may be found in movies, television programs, and song lyrics. However, this notion is not based in reality and would be next to impossible to find and maintain, because most relationships will have times of disagreement, frustration, and disappointment.

There are several qualities that help determine whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy. In healthy relationships, partners:

- Treat each other with trust and respect
- Feel secure and comfortable
- Can safely and adequately resolve conflicts
- Do not control one another or resort to violence
- Share in decision-making and compromise
- Take interest in, be supportive of, and encourage each other
- Allow time for one's own interests and friends/family
- Are sexual with one another by choice
- Communicate clearly, openly, and honestly

- Enjoy the time spent with each other

On the other hand, in unhealthy relationships, one or both partners:

- Attempt to control and/or manipulate one another
- Ridicule, name call, and/or make each other feel bad for himself/herself
- Do not make time for one another and/or the relationship
- Are afraid of one another's temper
- Threatens to harm each other and/or objects of personal value
- Is physically, sexually, and/or mentally aggressive
- Ignores or disregards one another when speaking
- Are overly possessive and/or jealous about ordinary behavior
- Criticizes one another's friends and/or family
- Discourages friendships/relationships with friends and/or family

Thus, in healthy relationships, individuals seek enjoyment, enrichment, and a sense of personal growth, which paves a pathway for happiness and minimal stress. However, in unhealthy relationships, individuals may be left feeling uncomfortable, hurt, and angry, which paves a pathway for unhappiness and undesirable distress.

In order to have a healthy and satisfying relationship, it takes care, commitment, and compromise. Also, both partners have to be aware and accepting of individual differences, as well as one another's thoughts, feelings, and needs. Further, in times of conflict, it is important to have a willingness to work together, so problems can be resolved adequately. However, over time, relationships change. This may be due to the progression or regression of a relationship or due to changes in other areas outside of the relationship that affect the relationship. Regardless of the reason, with change comes stress, which can have a major impact on the relationship. Therefore, when a relationship seems to be "rocky," one should consider the following:

- How does each partner make one another feel?
- Has the relationship been different in the past?
- Is there a current stressor that may be impacting the relationship, such as a recent move, job change, financial burden, or personal/family crisis?
- Have there been past problems that were left unresolved and are now resurfacing?
- What specifically seems to be bothersome?
- What actions would help promote change and resolution that would offer greater comfort in the relationship?
- Can each partner discuss his/her feelings, fears, and concerns in a calm and rational manner?

A key factor in determining if a relationship will last through tough times is knowing oneself and one's own personal, as well as relationship needs. This involves flexibility, compromise, and the willingness to change, to allow for adequate give-and-take in the relationship. Inflexibility is unhealthy and will lead to one or both partners feeling unsatisfied with the relationship. Thus, clear, careful, and respectful communication about one's own wants and needs are important, as well as adequate compromise and problem resolution, so both partners can satisfy their own needs and the needs of the partner. Remember, healthy relationships allow for individuality, personal growth, and are mutually beneficial.

Please note that if a partner is being physically, sexually, and/or emotionally abusive, or is engaging in and/or encouraging of unsafe or harmful behaviors, then this is a “red flag” for the relationship. One and/or both partners may need to seek professional help. Everyone deserves to be treated fairly and respectfully, and to feel safe and comfortable within a relationship. And remember, everyone has a choice to leave a relationship.

Some relationships just do not work for whatever reason, and it may be difficult to overcome the sense of loss. It is natural to grieve and go through a healing process, because most relationships carry feelings of love, care, and trust. The following are some ways to help cope with the loss:

- Take time to experience and express emotions like sadness, anger, or hurt, because denying the feelings will only prolong them.
- Do not use guilt, self-blame, and/or bargaining to end the relationship, as one cannot control another person’s thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors.
- Recognize and accept the reasons why the relationship ended.
- Allow for time to be without high pressure or demands, and mobilize an effective support system.
- Take care of oneself during the process through self-renewal and/or various self-help practices.

If the feelings of loss become too overwhelming or interfere with multiple aspects of functioning, professional help may be necessary. Florida Tech’s Counseling and Psychological Services is available to assist you during such difficult times at 674-8050.

- 15 Quick Tips For Relationships To Work:
 1. Be yourself and take care of yourself.
 2. Communicate in an open and honest manner.
 3. Be actively concerned about your partner’s growth and happiness.
 4. Give equal importance to each other’s thoughts, feelings, needs, and interests.
 5. Do not attempt to control and/or manipulate your partner.
 6. Treat one another as equals in the relationship.
 7. Keep your life balanced.
 8. Be honest, dependable, and trustworthy.
 9. Express support, appreciation, and emotional warmth for your partner regularly.
 10. Keep wants, needs, and expectations realistic
 11. Accept each other’s individual differences.
 12. Fight fair and resolve conflict through negotiation and compromise.
 13. Learn to agree to disagree and not hold grudges.
 14. Be flexible of change.
 15. Enjoy each other and spend quality time together.