

Healthy Relationships

What does “healthy” mean in a relationship? A type of bond created between individuals that promotes overall positive (nourishing, beneficial, and otherwise life-giving) effects in *both* of the individuals. In short, you can ask yourself, “Overall, is this relationship life-giving?” “Can I be myself while also growing into a more mature version of myself?” “Do I *like* the person I am in this relationship?”

Green

Gentle start-up & respectful honesty: with sensitive topics or offenses, conversations have a “gentle start-up” where both people agree to have the conversation and feel mostly safe (emotions are mostly regulated). Feelings are talked about using “I” statements and clear positive need is expressed.

Culture of appreciation & fondness: compliments and positive affirmations with no strings attached are freely and regularly given and received. Both internally and externally, individuals feel grateful for the other as a person and not just what that person can do for them or how they make the other feel. The two people actually like each other and their motive for staying in the relationship is out of love; not fear. (Love can be a romantic-love, familial love, or social/general love, etc.)

Personal responsibility: accept the other person’s perspective (this is a form of respect) and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.

Self-Soothing: being able to take care of your own needs or get your own needs healthfully met without expecting others to “fill your needs cup”. Also being able to regulate and soothe yourself emotionally and physiologically without blaming the other, “*you made me feel this way!*”

Love Maps: depending on the level of trust, intimacy, and commitment the individuals know each other’s inner world: memories from the past, details of the present, hopes for the future, deepest fears and grandest dreams. As time and relationships progress Love Maps adjust and shift. This builds a sense of intimacy and closeness.

Security & Trust: a sense of security, peace, and trust is experienced more often than not in the relationship. When real or perceived stimuli threaten this sense of security and trust individuals honestly express their concern (“I” feelings statements without blaming/accusing).

Forgiveness & Grace: individuals practice forgiveness (being able to release the other from wanting to punish them for an offense). Forgiveness is not ignoring, forgetting, or feeling warm-fuzzies after an offense. Forgiveness is a process that takes intentionality. Forgiveness does not mean consequences or scars are not experienced. Forgiveness does not always end in reconciliation (restored relationship). Grace is unmerited favor, love, and forgiveness. This includes giving the other the “benefit of the doubt”.

Yellow

Loss of or Confusions with fondness: When one person begins to assess if *they* like or want to remain close to the other OR when one can't tell if the *other* likes them or wants to be close. In any relationship it's important to have a good read on if the other person respects/likes (depending on type of relationship) you and if you respect/like them. **Note:** Beware of projecting your own insecurities and fears onto another person.

Unable to Share Honestly: when one or both of the individuals in a relationship generally struggle to share honestly with the other this is a concerning sign; especially as time progresses. Sharing honestly is everything from, "I got sick last time at that restaurant, can we go here instead?" to "I'm concerned we may not be on the same page." And especially, "It hurt me when you did 'x,y,z'. I want to move on with you but I can't seem to get over it. Can we talk about it?"

Caretaking: there is a difference between loving acts of service and caretaking. If the other person is not a child, vulnerable/handicapped adult, or someone who is ill/sick there is minimal to no reason to caretake another adult (and most of these examples still require the other person asking or having a clear agreement/understanding that you'd be the caretaker). Caretaking is a dysfunctional, learned behavior that can be changed. If this is an issue, learn to respect another person's boundaries (and your own) while not treating others like helpless victims.

Negative influence: a popular quote says it all, "show me the five people who influence you the most, and I'll show you your future". If you start to realize the person you're in relationship with is rubbing off on you in ways you don't like, consider your options. Ultimately you have responsibility of how you behave; make sure you're not thinking like you're superior or entitled.

Orange

Criticism: instead of expressing a critique or complaint there is criticism, insults, accusations, put-downs, and name calling. This attacks the core of someone's character instead of addressing the impact of the behavior.

Complaint: "I was scared when you were running late and didn't call me. I thought we had agreed that we would do that for each other."

Criticism: "You never think about how your behavior is affecting other people. I don't believe you are that forgetful, you're just selfish. You never think of others! You never think of me!"

Defensiveness: typically a response to criticism. This is playing the victim and/or making up excuses.

Question: “Did you call Sam to let them know that we’re not coming tonight as you promised?”

Defensive response: “I was just too darn busy today. As a matter of fact, you know just how busy my schedule was. Why didn’t you just do it?”

Pressured to Perform/Coercion: at any time feeling pressured or threatened to do something you don’t want to do, especially involving sexual, high-risk, or illegal behaviors.

Time Together: if time spent together is determined by only one person (Ex: late night calls but not answering the phone during the day) or the other person shows controlling or jealous behavior when the other wants to spend time with someone else.

Unhealthy Relationships

Red

Breach of Trust: depending on the type of relationship and commitment when there is a break-down in trust (from gossip and telling a secret to lying about whereabouts to cheating/infidelity).

Unforgiveness: this leads to holding onto offenses within one’s self, reminding the other of their wrongdoings, and developing deep feelings of resentment and bitterness toward the other person, which eventually leads to contempt.

Contempt: this is being truly mean and disrespectful. Mocking with sarcasm, ridicule, name-calling, and mimicking or using body language such as eye-rolling or scoffing. The target is made to feel despised, small, and worthless.

Stonewalling: typically a response to contempt. Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner. Rather than confronting the issues with their partner, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

If you feel like you’re stonewalling during a conflict, stop the discussion and ask the other person to take a break:

“Alright, I’m feeling too angry to keep talking about this. Can we please take a break and come back to it in a bit? It’ll be easier to work through this after I’ve calmed down.”

Abuse/Power-Over: includes verbal, emotional, psychological (includes stalking & gas lighting), physical, sexual, financial, spiritual, and any combination of abuse. Some warning signs: feeling fear, terror, paranoia; obsessive over being perfect or not making the other person upset; feeling trapped, helpless, hopeless and dreading when the other person is near.

Interpersonal Violence

Whether two weeks or two years, violence can and does still occur. Below are warning signs that you or someone you know may be the victim of interpersonal violence:

1. Unreasonable jealousy
2. Isolating you from friends and family
3. Accusations of cheating and/or constant calling/texting when you are not with them
4. Humiliating or embarrassing you
5. Refusing to communicate
6. Ignoring or excluding you
7. Offering ultimatums, e.g. "If you don't _____, I will _____"
8. Withdrawal of affection and neglect
9. Guilt trips and/or making everything your fault
10. Threatening to commit suicide or harm others if you leave

IPV includes any act of violence or threatened act of violence that occurs between individuals who are/have been involved in a romantic or intimate relationship, is a spouse or partner, family member, or cohabitant/household member including roommate(s). IPV can occur between heterosexual or same-sex couples and does not require sexual intimacy. IPV encompasses sexual assault, stalking/cyber-stalking, and physical assault.

Retrieved from: <https://counseling.uconn.edu/interpersonal-violence/>

National Domestic Violence Hotline thehotline.org or espanol.thehotline.org 1-800-799-7233

Resources to Combat Domestic Violence (including how to get a restraining order, make a safety plan, shelters, and stalking resources) <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/60676>

Some content adapted from The Gottman Institute <https://www.gottman.com/blog/>