



Building a healthy relationship

Love is wonderful, but no one ever said relationships are easy. Any partnership can have bad times. It may help to think about relationships as a work in progress or a long-term commitment through the ups and downs.

Signs of a healthy relationship

Couples go through hard times in their relationship, but there are qualities couples can work on to help strengthen the relationship. Shared goals, values and dreams can help keep a relationship alive. Here are some strengths to aim for and build on:

- Flexibility and learning to compromise
- Openness to sharing opinions and disagreeing with each other
- The desire to improve communication skills
- Shared decision-making and recognizing and respecting important parts of each other's lives
- Ability to lighten up and let go
- Having different interests and friends, yet still coming together and sharing experiences

Rethinking old patterns

Many of the ways in which people interact in relationships are based on patterns of behavior learned from our family members and upbringing. But these days, many people live in different circumstances. So couples need to define their shared goals, values and what will work for them.

Here are some ideas that might help create and care for healthy relationships:

- **Give each other some space.** Pursue interests, hobbies, and friends outside of the relationship. Outside influences can help enrich the relationship.
- **Talk openly and often.** Focus on listening and understanding instead of speaking. Over time, people change. Relationships evolve as wishes and goals change. Open communication will continue to be important over the years.
- **Spend one-on-one time together.** Consider trying a new class or hobby together, or regularly participating in a group activity. While digital communication can be helpful, it cannot replace face-to-face time.

Tips for conflict

While conflict might not be pleasant, it's important that both partners are able to work through disagreements without hurting each other. Don't be afraid of conflict, as disagreements may come up when two people work together. Working through conflict can help strengthen a relationship. Here are some ways to help a couple work through a conflict successfully:

- **Stick with the issue.** Don't turn an argument into a laundry list of past conflicts and grudges.
- **Be direct.** If you need a hug, say "I need a hug." Don't make your partner guess your needs or wishes.
- **Forgive each other.** Work together to make sure that the mistake is not repeated.
- **Listen to each other.** Repeat the other partner's concern – "What you're saying is that when I need more space, you feel I don't love you." That gives each person the ability to clarify and confirm the communication.

Sources

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loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships

Improving family relations

Every family is its own unique combination of people and personalities. Even though they come in all shapes and sizes, healthy families have some commonalities. A healthy family is comprised of people who love each other and are able to respect each other's similarities and differences. Healthy families also know how to compromise, and they are fiercely resilient; they bounce back after crisis and periods of prolonged stress.

Negative coping strategies

Obviously, not all families have healthy relationships. Some members incorporate negative strategies for coping with stress, including distancing, overdoing/underdoing, focusing on a child or jumping into conflict. These negative ways of managing stress harm the family dynamic:

- **Distancing** — This unhealthy strategy occurs when family members avoid conversations because they are concerned about potential conflict. They stop sharing their thoughts and feelings and fail to spend real time together.
- **Overdoing/underdoing** — With this negative coping method, one or more family members begin to assume the responsibilities of others. When this happens, the remaining members decrease their efforts. Family members can easily become stuck in this imbalance of responsibility.
- **Focusing on a child** — When severe stress or fighting begins, children are usually the most vulnerable in the household. Therefore, parents will focus their attention solely on that child to calm things down. Their intentions might be good, but often the child reacts to this intense pressure and increased attention. These children will typically begin to act out or develop physical or emotional symptoms.
- **Conflict** — A final negative coping mechanism is conflict itself. Some families will start an all-out war when they're stressed, engaging in yelling and emotional abuse. The smallest disagreement could set someone off, creating a hostile environment.

Tips to improve family relations

There are many positive ways to manage stress and handle conflict. The following strategies for communication skills, relational values, and personal and family responsibilities provide simple solutions for improving family dynamics:

Communication skills

- **Communicate openly** — Unlike the negative strategy of distancing, family members feel comfortable asking for help if needed. They're able to speak up when they disagree. If they see a different solution to a problem, they voice it. Because conflict is unavoidable in a family, open communication is essential.
- **Think before you speak** — Responsible family members think first and then speak. Too often, we automatically react to a situation based purely on emotion. If we are able to create some space and consider the other's perspective and thoughts, we can focus on responding instead of reacting. Problem-solving and compromise are much easier when they come from a non-reactive place.

Relational values

- **Explore values** — Family members won't agree on everything. There will be preferences for different hobbies, tastes, or even political or religious views. However, there are common values that family members may choose to share and uphold. For example, a shared value might be showing mutual respect for all family members. Another might be to demonstrate appreciation for one another with acts of kindness. Shared values become the mortar for a strong family foundation.
- **Develop one-to-one relationships** — In a healthy family unit, every individual has a solid relationship with every other person. No one teams up, complains or gossips in a family member's absence.

Personal and family responsibilities

- **Take personal responsibility** — Schedules today are often very full. Families can easily fall out of sync and become unclear about who is doing what. Certain family members may take on more than what is required of them. Others might be all too willing to allow that to occur, so they can have fewer responsibilities. Conflict arises when one assumes another will handle a situation, and they don't. In a healthy family, individuals own their personal responsibilities and accept any consequences for failing to do so. Family members encourage one another and hold each other accountable.
- **Ask for help** — Stress happens to every family. A strong, healthy family focuses on the positive in challenging times. Family members are able to pull together, share responsibilities and problem solve. If the family needs additional help, strong families don't hesitate to ask for it. Friends, neighbors, religious communities or helping professionals all serve as excellent resources for families.

The success of a healthy family largely comes down to being together. When you make time for one another, you communicate that you care beyond your words. Make time to have fun and celebrate each other's victories. Listen to one another's stories, thoughts and feelings. Make memories and laugh together. When working toward the common goal of a healthy family, everyone has a shared interest in success.

Source

Child Welfare Information Gateway.
childwelfare.gov/

Help others during a crisis

COVID-19 has changed lives for people around the world. People in just about every community need help right now. If you personally need support, it's important that you reach out and find the help you need.

But you might also want to consider helping others who might be impacted more directly. Helping others may help you maintain positive mental health. It can help you have a greater sense of purpose, and can make a difference for people in your community.

While you don't want to put yourself at risk, there are things you can do to help. Below are some examples of the ways you may be able to help others:

- **Make homemade masks.** Many organizations are still happy to accept donations of homemade masks. If you are able to make homemade masks, check with local organizations to offer your services. As businesses continue to open in some countries and at larger capacity, masks continue to remain a need that is likely to not stop any time soon.
- **Check in on seniors.** Seniors are the population most at risk from COVID-19. Some seniors with health problems may be in self-isolation or not have anyone to speak to. If you know seniors in your neighborhood who might be isolated, touch base with them to ask how they are doing by phone. If you don't have a phone number, stop by and ask in person from a safe distance. You might be able to help with errands such as picking up medications, buying groceries or helping with other basics as long as you follow recommended safety guidelines. Even better, you might look into whether these items could be sent through a delivery service.
- **Donate blood.** Blood donation continues to be essential globally. As long as you follow local protocols, donating blood remains a safe, effective way to support your community.
- **Donate food.** Food donations are very helpful during this crisis as many people are out of work or otherwise impacted by the current crisis. You can donate to homeless shelters, people who are under quarantine, elderly who are no longer receiving day services or others in need. There are many populations who need this service. You may otherwise donate cash to food banks and shelters.
- **Cash donations.** Many nonprofits serving vulnerable communities are especially in need of help during this crisis. Whether they are serving the homeless population, people with mental health needs, domestic violence survivors or others, they are all experiencing a greater need for their services and will benefit from your help.

Helping other people during a crisis helps keep you busy and distracted so that you are not dwelling on negative feelings. Finding ways of both offering and receiving help may improve your mental health while building a sense of community.

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