

Am I in a Healthy Relationship?

Everyone in a relationship wants it to be happy and healthy. But since all relationships go through good times and bad times, it's not always easy to tell when things are not healthy.

All good relationships are based on certain things, like respect, trust, and friendship. It's also important to be happy with who you are. You need to respect, trust, and love yourself before you can love someone else. Here's what to know about healthy relationships.

What Qualities Do Healthy Relationships Have?

When you're first dating someone, everything may seem perfect. But sometimes it's just the newness of the situation that makes you see things in a positive light.

So think about whether your relationship has these qualities:

Respect. Does your partner listen when you say you're not comfortable doing something and then back off right away? Respect in a relationship means that each person values the other. It also means understanding and not challenging the other person's boundaries.

Trust. Say you're talking with someone from class and your partner walks by. Do they get upset? It's OK to feel a little jealousy sometimes — it's a natural emotion. But how a person reacts when feeling jealous is what matters. You can't have a healthy relationship if you don't trust each other.

Honesty. This is closely tied to trust because it's tough to have trust if one of you isn't being honest. Have you ever caught your partner in a big lie? For example, if your partner said they have to work on Friday night but then you find out later they were at the movies with friends. The next time you hear a work excuse you might have trouble believing it.

Support. It's not just in bad times that your partner should support you. Some people are great when things are going poorly for you but aren't as interested in hearing about the good things in your life. In a healthy relationship, your partner is there with a shoulder to cry on when you find out your parents are getting divorced and to celebrate when you get the lead in a play.

Fairness. You need to have give-and-take in your relationship. Do you take turns choosing which movie to see? As a couple, do you hang out with your partner's friends as often as you hang out with yours? You can see if it isn't a fair balance. Things can get bad really fast when a relationship turns into a power struggle with both people fighting to get their way all the time.

Separate identities. When you started going out, you both had your own lives (families, friends, and interests) and that shouldn't change. Neither of you should have to pretend to like something you don't, give up seeing your friends, or drop out of activities you love. And you should both feel free to develop new talents or hobbies, make new friends, and move forward.

Good communication. Can you talk with each other about what's important to you? Don't keep feelings bottled up because you're afraid it's not what your partner wants to hear. And if you need some time to think something through before you're ready to talk about it, the right person will give you space to do that.

What Are Some Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship?

A relationship is unhealthy when a partner is mean, disrespectful, controlling, or abusive. (Abuse can be emotional, physical, or sexual.)

In an unhealthy relationship, a partner may do things like:

- get angry when you don't drop everything for them
- try to keep you away from family and friends
- say you'll never find anyone else who would date you
- want you to quit an activity, even though you love it
- raise a hand when angry, like they're about to hit you

Some people may have grown up with this behavior and think it's OK. It's not. They may need to talk with a therapist before they're ready for a relationship.

Even if you know that the person hurting you loves you, it's not healthy to stay in an abusive relationship.

What Else Should I Know?

If your relationship feels like a burden instead of a joy, it might be time to think about whether it's a healthy match for you. Someone who's not happy or secure may have trouble being a good partner. And don't worry if you're the one who's not ready for a relationship yet. You will be, and you can take all the time you need.

When you're with someone, make sure the relationship brings out the best in both of you.

Medically reviewed by: Amanda S. Lochrie, PhD, ABPP

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