

Healthy relationships

Couple holding hands



When we talk about relationships we often picture a married couple who have been together for a long time. While this is common, there are many other types of relationships.

What does a relationship look like?

The truth is, there are no set rules. Perhaps you are in an open relationship or you have chosen not to have intercourse at the moment? So long as you are both committed to - and happy with - these choices, they can form the basis of a great relationship.

The people in a relationship can differ a lot too. It could involve people from different sexes (heterosexual), the same sex ([homosexual](#)) or a mixture of both ([bisexual](#)). Some relationships involve more than two people while others may include people from different ages or backgrounds.

What is a good relationship?

While relationships often look different on the outside, they should always be built on similar foundations. Look closely at any good relationship and you'll find it's based on respect, honesty, trust and communication.

This may sound complicated, but if you both treat each other as you'd like to be treated yourself, it will come easily.

Should we have sex?

Deciding whether to have sex is a very personal decision and needs to feel right for you both. This is known as '[sexual consent](#)', and it applies every time you have sex and to any type of sexual activity.

If you're feeling under any kind of [sexual pressure](#), then it's a sign that you probably aren't ready.

In a strong relationship, you should be able to talk about your feelings and respect one another's decisions about sex, whatever stage you are at.

“On my 17th birthday my boyfriend asked me if I wanted to have sex. I said no, I wasn't ready. He told me he understood and I really respected him for that because I knew he really wanted to have sex.” - Ash

You may choose not to have sex for religious reasons or just because you don't want to. Many people are happy in relationships and not having sex.

Safer sex

If the time comes to start a sexual relationship, knowing how to protect yourself from unwanted pregnancy and [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) including [HIV](#), will help to put your mind at ease.

Remember that part of being [ready to have sex](#) is feeling comfortable talking about which contraception to use, and being prepared to use [condoms](#) to help protect yourself against STIs.

Dealing with arguments

Finding the right type of relationship – and the right people to have it with – often takes time and exploration. All relationships have ups and downs, and learning to negotiate the downs together is often what drives a partnership to become stronger.

Follow these steps to help you talk through issues:

- good communication is about talking *and* listening so give the other person space to speak
- use questions when you respond to show them that you're considering their view
- when it's your turn to talk, be honest without throwing accusations
- start with “I” rather than “you”. For example: “I find it difficult when you don't include me in social situations” rather than “You always leave me out of conversations when we go out”.

Is it time to break up?

It can be hard to know when it's time to end a relationship. When it feels like you're experiencing more downs than ups, however, it may be time to consider breaking up.

Ultimately, only the people involved can decide when it's time to break up, but if you've tried to make it work and still feel unhappy the majority of the time it could be a sign that things aren't working as they should be.

What a bad relationship looks like

There are some things that should never be present in any relationship – these include dishonesty, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. The following signs will help you identify an unhealthy relationship.

Your partner is constantly:

- putting you down and making you feel worthless
- pressuring you to do things you don't want to
- being unnecessarily jealous
- trying to control different aspects of your life (such as who you see and what you wear).

“If only I could reverse the time and support my girlfriend, and respect her decision, things may be different now. I really regret ever forcing her into something she wasn't

prepared to do. I can't ever forgive myself because I played her." - **Kenneth**

Getting help in an abusive relationship

Talking about abuse is never easy, but admitting it to yourself is often the hardest step. The next thing is to tell someone else – you don't have to go through this alone, and they can help you get support. Think about a relative, friend or teacher who will be supportive and have the maturity to help you.

There's also lots of professional help available. Look online to find a national helpline, which can advise you about further help and may also offer emotional support. Talking to a healthcare professional or counsellor can also be a good starting point – they can offer confidential advice on what to do next.

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Sources:

Brook 'Relationships' [accessed January 2016]

The Site 'How to talk to your boyfriend/girlfriend' [accessed January 2016]

The Site 'Dealing with arguments' [accessed January 2016]

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Brook 'Abuse: getting help' [accessed January 2016]

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