



Guide to Relationships

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This package was created by Healthy U: Peer Health & Wellness at the University of Manitoba. We are a group of trained, non-judgmental, and confidential student health and wellness leaders on campus.

We provide outreach activities, workshops, and one-on-one support for our fellow students on a variety of health and well-being topics. Feel free to drop in to chat or pick up more information packages.

If you would like to request or attend one of our workshops or events, check out our website for details.



Is your relationship Healthy or Unhealthy?

Signs that your relationship is **healthy**:

- You and your partner both feel safe, physically and emotionally.
- You feel respected, and you respect your partner.
- When dealing with problems, the two of you can talk it out and try to come up with a solution.
- You respect each other's space.
- You trust each other.
- Both of you work towards creating a healthier relationship, because no relationship is ever perfect.

Signs that your relationship is **unhealthy**:

- You or your partner feel unsafe, physically or emotionally.
- You or your partner feel disrespected or not taken seriously.
- When dealing with problems, the two of you aren't able to discuss them well.
- Your partner doesn't respect your space, even when you ask.
- You find yourself unable to give your partner space when they ask.
- You don't trust each other.
- Your partner insults or humiliates you, or you do these things to them.

If you notice an issue in your relationship, try to talk about it with the other person if this is an option for you. Remember that your safety is the most important thing, and that you can leave a relationship at any time.



Remember:



- Learn to solve the problems that can be solved, and have conversations to better manage the ones that can't.
- You are responsible for your own happiness.
- Never try to 'fix' or control each other.
- Make sure you both take care of yourselves instead of relying only on each other.

did you know?

Studies have shown that people who write love letters (expressing affection for their partner) physically **recover from stress faster**. These people have lower cholesterol, heart rates, and blood pressure.

It has also been suggested that **calling a loved one helps with stress** almost as much as receiving a hug from them in person! Why not give it a try next time you're stressed?

Sources: [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17668992](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17668992)
cnn.com/2010/HEALTH/05/12/stress.mother.voice.call/index.html

Steps to loving communication

Have reasonable expectations

Your partner is not a mind-reader! Let them know what you're thinking and offer explanations.

Know your own feelings

Take time to think about how you really feel and why, so you can do something about it.

Recognize and correct communication-blocking habits

For example, don't use generalizing words like 'you never' or 'you always'.

Listen to hear

Often while the other person is talking, we're simply waiting to speak. Make sure you're really listening to what they're saying instead of jumping to conclusions or ignoring their perspective.

Save their pride

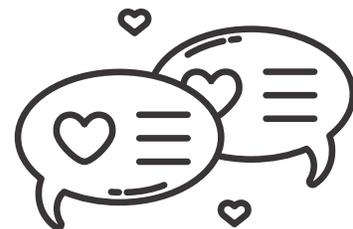
Wait til you're in private instead of calling them out in front of others.

Use "I" statements

This means focusing on your own experience, rather than assuming you know what the other person is feeling. "I feel hurt when you don't call me back," or " I'm hearing that you're stressed out, is this true?"

Give each other compliments and positive feedback

Make sure you're regularly telling the person good things you notice about them, instead of only giving feedback when something is wrong.



How to talk about your feelings without starting an argument:

Use sentences that begin with "I"

"You hurt my feelings. You know I wanted to come. You didn't have to go without me."



The speaker is blaming the other person for the feeling of anger, putting them on the defensive.



Argument

"I feel hurt that you didn't wait to go with me. I told you I wanted to come."



The speaker expressed what they felt and took responsibility for it.



Conversation

Listen actively

Instead of thinking of what you're going to say next, make sure you are actually listening to what the other person is saying. You can try summarizing what they're saying ("So I think you're saying I misunderstood you," "I hear you're upset too"). You can also check in with the other person by stopping to ask what they think or feel.

Set ground rules

Before you begin a difficult conversation, let the other person know what you need. Feeling safe allows your conversation to be more productive.



Express your views

The more often that you express how you think and feel, the easier it is for people to understand where you're coming from in a conversation. If this is difficult for you, practice with small things that may seem less personal.

Think about the other person's views

Once you understand the beliefs someone holds, it becomes easier to respectfully disagree.

Pay attention

By showing that you're paying attention, the other person may feel more respected. It also helps to focus your attention and allows you to pick up on their non-verbal cues. Make sure you aren't trying to multitask, and make sure you are actively listening to what they are saying.

Reflect, don't react

Instead of letting the conversation become rapid-fire back and forth, stop to think about what the other person is saying. Then summarize what they have said and repeat it back for clarification. This allows them to feel heard and understood, and misunderstandings are cleared up before they escalate to argument.

Be specific

Make a plan for what you will do to address the problem, and make it specific. Instead of saying something like "I'll give you more space," try "I'll knock on your door before I come in." This will make your commitment easier to manage. Make sure you ask the other person what they need, so that you can develop a way to address the issue that meets the needs of both of you as much as possible.



Sex-positive communication

Talking can be hard, but it's super important! Here are some topics you should try to cover, and examples of things you could say so you don't feel as uncomfortable.

Be clear about what you are or aren't okay with.

Make sure you and your partner have a conversation early on about what you're looking for. This can save you a lot of trouble later - you can avoid pressuring or frustrating each other if you know from the start where each other is at.

You: "Hey, I'd just like to know how far you're ready to take this?"

Them: "I'm ready to go all the way."

You: "I'm not quite there yet - I'd like to keep some of my clothes on tonight."

Talk about what you like and don't like

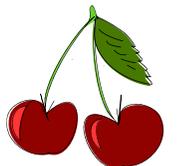
If you trust and respect each other, both of you should be able to tell the other what they like and also what they don't like. Try to check in with your partner and ask if they like something, and don't take it personally if they aren't a fan. Remember: everybody is different, therefore a new partner isn't going to know what you like unless you communicate (no matter how much experience they have). You can show your partner what you like, you can tell them, or you can guide them. Also, remember that what feels good can change over time, so keep communicating!

"Do you like it better like this... or like this?"

"Are you comfortable?"

"Could we try a different angle? This one hurts a little."

"I feel better when you aren't over top of me, at least for now."



Talk about STI testing

Protect yourself! Before engaging in sexual activity with someone, ask about the last time they've been tested. Remember that even if you both have tested negative, it is still safest to use condoms anyway. Ask about previous unprotected sex, as well as sharing needles (for drugs, tattoos, or piercings), as STIs can be transmitted this way as well.

You: "Before we do anything, can I ask when the last time you got tested was?"

Them: "I don't have any STI's, I promise. I think I would know!"

You: "Most STI's don't actually have any symptoms - I'm not going to be comfortable doing anything unless we know for sure. We could go together if you want?"

Talk about birth control

Discuss birth control methods with your partner, including what type works best for you and your partner and if any doses have been missed. Be open about your birth control decisions, and consider discussing how costs will be covered.

You: "What have you done for birth control in the past? Are you on anything now?"

Them: "We always just pulled out or used condoms. It's worked so far!"

You: "That's not the most reliable method - I'm good to use condoms every time, but would you consider using a second method, like the pill or an IUS? I could split the cost with you."



Asking for Consent

when:

Before you act! Whoever is initiating the sexual act needs to gain consent before they continue. Keep checking in, because consenting to one thing doesn't mean consenting to whatever may follow.

how?

"How far do you want to go?"

"Are you comfortable with this?"

"Does this feel good?"

"Is this okay?"

"Are you still liking this?"

what else to watch for:

Sometimes people have a hard time saying no, or they are worried about how their partner will react if they don't consent. Whatever the case, sometimes there are non-verbal signs that the other person isn't consenting anymore. For example:

Going suddenly quiet
Freezing or shutting down
Moving your hands away
Not reciprocating your actions.

"I'm dating someone."
"Slow down."
"I just want to go to sleep."
"Let's just cuddle."



Healthy relationship resources

On Campus

Student Counselling Centre (SCC)*

Groups and workshops. Free counselling for University of Manitoba students.

474 UMSU University Centre

204-474-8592

<https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/counselling-resources-students>

Health & Wellness*

The Health & Wellness Educator is a Registered Nurse and available to talk about health and wellness topics.

469 UMSU University Centre (within the SCC)

204-295-9032

healthandwellness@umanitoba.ca

<http://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/health-wellness>

Healthy U*

Talk to a peer health and wellness volunteer about your relationship.

474 UMSU University Centre

<https://www.healthyuofm.com/>

Online

loveisrespect.org

gottman.com/blog/

*There are no in-person services at the University of Manitoba currently. Check the relevant websites for remote services and updates.

Relationship Worksheet

Name	Name*
Situation or Concern	Situation or Concern
Emotion <i>Sad, hurt, angry, anxious, scared, irritable, frustrated etc. Rate intensity 0 – 100%</i>	Emotion <i>Sad, hurt, angry, anxious, scared, irritable, frustrated etc. Rate intensity 0 – 100%</i>
Physical sensations <i>What did I feel in my body, where?</i>	Physical sensations <i>What did I feel in my body, where?</i>
Thoughts / Images <i>What went through my mind? What did that mean or say about me or them? What's the worst thing about that?</i>	Thoughts / Images <i>What went through my mind? What did that mean or say about me or them? What's the worst thing about that?</i>
What I did, and/or what I'd like to do	What I did, and/or what I'd like to do
What I noticed about them <i>(how they looked, posture, facial expression, voice, eyes, movement etc)</i>	What I noticed about them <i>(how they looked, posture, facial expression, voice, eyes, movement etc)</i>
Agreement / Compromise / Action Plan	

Relationship Worksheet

Instructions for use

- The first person folds the sheet down the middle of the two columns, and completes all boxes in the first column except for last one.
- The second person*, without looking at what the first person has written, completes all boxes in the second column except for the last one.
- When you are both feeling calm and are agreeable to talking things through: Set aside a half an hour or so to discuss what you've both written
 - What actually happened?
 - Look at both columns together
 - What were or are we really reacting to?
 - What meaning have we given this situation or concern?
 - What's really pressing our buttons about this?
 - Observe and discuss each other's different perspectives at the time
 - Is there another way of looking at this?
 - If we take the helicopter view: an independent observer watching this situation, with no emotional involvement – what would they make of this?
 - What advice would we give to someone else in this situation?
- Reach an agreement and make an action plan: complete the bottom box or use a separate sheet
 - Consider how you both could have thought differently at the time
 - Was one or both of us:
 - Getting things out of proportion?
 - Confusing facts with opinion?
 - Expecting something different?
 - Mind-reading what the other might have been thinking or meaning?
 - Misinterpreting the situation?
 - Jumping to conclusions?
 - Thinking negatively about where this might lead?
 - Worrying about how this would affect other people, or other situations? (eg. Children, work, study)
 - Bringing outside influences into the situation? (other current stress, past experiences etc)
 - Have different priorities or sense of importance of this situation or concern?
 - Consider how one or both of you could have done things differently
 - Agree on what each of you will do next time in a similar situation or concern
 - What would help most? What would be most effective?
 - What would be best for one person, both of us, for others involved, for our relationship?
 - Was or is this situation or concern within our control? Are there other factors that we are unable to influence?
 - How can we handle things differently?
 - What has helped in the past? What did we do differently?
 - Is there a way of avoiding this happening again? If so, what can one or both of us do?
 - Agree a signal that you can both use, and what that signal would mean (eg. time out; take a break; I'm feeling, let's fill in the worksheet, etc)

**If preferred, this worksheet can be used by an individual, about a relationship, using the second person column to imagine how things might be for that person – what their thoughts might be or might have been, what the situation meant to them, what they might have felt, their reactions etc. With that understanding, the action plan should include changes that (first person) individual could make that might be helpful.*

Relationship Gratitude Tips

As a relationship ages, we sometimes take the things we love about our partners for granted. Practicing gratitude is a great way to show your partner appreciation, while improving the quality of your relationship. Practice at least one of the following gratitude tips every day.

Show interest in their life.

Ask for the specifics about your partner's day. Use *active listening* by making eye contact, showing that you're listening (e.g. saying "mhh-hm" or nodding), and paraphrasing what your partner says. Try to understand what a day is like in their shoes.

Give compliments.

Remember to compliment your partner, just like when you first met. It doesn't matter if you've complimented them 1,000 times. It still matters.

Surprise them.

Who doesn't love a surprise? Plan a date, give a small gift, pack their lunch with a loving note, or complete a chore that your partner usually does. Even a small gesture can show your appreciation.

Help them relax.

If your partner is stressed, give them a relaxing evening. Draw a warm bath with candles and Epsom salts, and offer a back rub without the expectation of anything in return.

Go above-and-beyond with chores.

Don't just do the dishes—clean the kitchen. Fill your partner's gas tank, and wash their car. Do something you don't have to, just to show you care.

Mind your manners.

"Thank you" and "please" are important, even when someone has been doing your laundry for 10 years. Try to catch your partner being helpful, just so you can express your gratitude.

Give an evening off.

Many people cherish alone time, although it can be hard to come by. Surprise your partner with a personalized evening off. Get their favorite meal and some treats, rent a movie they love (or get something for a hobby they enjoy), and leave them be.

Be mindful of body language.

Our bodies can say more than we realize. Even if you don't mean it, your partner will notice if you're always scowling. Make a point to smile, laugh, and touch your partner.