

Characteristics of Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships

 youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence/characteristics

Respect for both oneself and others is a key characteristic of healthy relationships. In contrast, in unhealthy relationships, one partner tries to exert control and power over the other physically, sexually, and/or emotionally.

Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships share certain characteristics that teens should be taught to expect. They include:

- *Mutual respect.* Respect means that each person values who the other is and understands the other person's boundaries.
- *Trust.* Partners should place trust in each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt.
- *Honesty.* Honesty builds trust and strengthens the relationship.
- *Compromise.* In a dating relationship, each partner does not always get his or her way. Each should acknowledge different points of view and be willing to give and take.
- *Individuality.* Neither partner should have to compromise who he/she is, and his/her identity should not be based on a partner's. Each should continue seeing his or her friends and doing the things he/she loves. Each should be supportive of his/her partner wanting to pursue new hobbies or make new friends.
- *Good communication.* Each partner should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If one person needs to sort out his or her feelings first, the other partner should respect those wishes and wait until he or she is ready to talk.
- *Anger control.* We all get angry, but how we express it can affect our relationships with others. Anger can be handled in healthy ways such as taking a deep breath, counting to ten, or talking it out.
- *Fighting fair.* Everyone argues at some point, but those who are fair, stick to the subject, and avoid insults are more likely to come up with a possible solution. Partners should take a short break away from each other if the discussion gets too heated.
- *Problem solving.* Dating partners can learn to solve problems and identify new solutions by breaking a problem into small parts or by talking through the situation.
- *Understanding.* Each partner should take time to understand what the other might be feeling.
- *Self-confidence.* When dating partners have confidence in themselves, it can help their relationships with others. It shows that they are calm and comfortable enough to allow others to express their opinions without forcing their own opinions on them.
- *Being a role model.* By embodying what respect means, partners can inspire each other, friends, and family to also behave in a respectful way.
- *Healthy sexual relationship.* Dating partners engage in a sexual relationship that both are comfortable with, and neither partner feels pressured or forced to engage in sexual activity that is outside his or her comfort zone or without consent.

Unhealthy Relationships

Unhealthy relationships are marked by characteristics such as disrespect and control. It is important for youth to be able to recognize signs of unhealthy relationships before they escalate. Some characteristics of unhealthy relationships include:

- *Control.* One dating partner makes all the decisions and tells the other what to do, what to wear, or who to

spend time with. He or she is unreasonably jealous, and/or tries to isolate the other partner from his or her friends and family.

- *Hostility*. One dating partner picks a fight with or antagonizes the other dating partner. This may lead to one dating partner changing his or her behavior in order to avoid upsetting the other.
- *Dishonesty*. One dating partner lies to or keeps information from the other. One dating partner steals from the other.
- *Disrespect*. One dating partner makes fun of the opinions and interests of the other partner or destroys something that belongs to the partner.
- *Dependence*. One dating partner feels that he or she “cannot live without” the other. He or she may threaten to do something drastic if the relationship ends.
- *Intimidation*. One dating partner tries to control aspects of the other's life by making the other partner fearful or timid. One dating partner may attempt to keep his or her partner from friends and family or threaten violence or a break-up.
- *Physical violence*. One partner uses force to get his or her way (such as hitting, slapping, grabbing, or shoving).
- *Sexual violence*. One dating partner pressures or forces the other into sexual activity against his or her will or without consent.¹

It is important to educate youth about the value of respect and the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships before they start to date. Youth may not be equipped with the necessary skills to develop and maintain healthy relationships, and may not know how to break up in an appropriate way when necessary. Maintaining open lines of communication may help them form healthy relationships and recognize the signs of unhealthy relationships, thus preventing the violence before it starts.

¹ Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2005). *Choose respect community action kit: Helping preteens and teens build healthy relationships*. Retrieved from http://www.unajauladeoro.com/cd/manuales/choose_respect_action_kit.pdf (PDF, 60 pages)