

CILT's Peer Links

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Healthy versus Unhealthy Relationships

Healthy Relationships

Heady relationships are characterized by respect, sharing and trust. They are based on the belief that both partners are equal, that the power and control in the relationship are equally shared. Some of the characteristics of a healthy relationship are:

Respect - listening to one another, valuing each other's opinions, and listening in a non-judgmental manner. Respect also involves attempting to understand and affirm the other's emotions.

Trust and support - supporting each other's goals in life, and respecting each other's right to his/her own feelings, opinions, friends, activities and interest. It is valuing one's partner as an individual.

Honesty and accountability - communicating openly and truthfully, admitting mistakes or being wrong, acknowledging past use of violence, and accepting responsibility for one's self.

Shared responsibility - making family/relationship decisions together, mutually agreeing on a distribution of work which is fair to both partners. If parents, the couple shares parental responsibilities and acts as positive, non-violent role models for the children.

Economic partnership - in marriage or cohabitation, making financial decisions together, and making sure both partners benefit from financial arrangements.

Negotiation and fairness - being willing to compromise, accepting change, and seeking mutually satisfying solutions to conflict.

Non-threatening behavior - talking and acting in a way that promotes both partners' feelings of safety in the relationship. Both should feel comfortable and safe in expressing him/herself and in engaging in activities.

Basic Rights in a Relationship

Adapted from Patricia Evans, 1992, The Verbally Abusive Relationship

- The right to emotional support.
- The right to be heard by the other person and to be responded to with courtesy.
- The right to have your own point of view, even if it differs from your partner's.
- The right to have your feelings and experiences acknowledged as real.
- The right to live free from accusation and blame.
- The right to live free from criticism and judgment.
- The right to live free from emotional and physical threat.
- The right to live free from angry outbursts and rage
- The right to be respectfully asked, rather than ordered.

Boundaries

Boundaries are important in determining the health of a relationship. Boundaries clarify where you stop and where I begin, which problems belong to you and which problems belong to me. What are boundaries? "Just as homeowners set physical property lines around their land, we need to set mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual boundaries for our lives to help us distinguish what is our responsibility and what is not. . . ." (Dr. Henry Cloud)

Each of us has boundaries, some of which go unspoken, in many areas of our lives. We set boundaries in regard to physical proximity and touch, the words that are acceptable when we are spoken to, honesty, emotional intimacy (such as how much we self-disclose to others). When one or both people in a relationship have difficulty with boundaries, the relationship suffers. The following guidelines indicate a problem in setting and enforcing boundaries.

Signs of Unhealthy Boundaries

- Telling all.
- Talking at an intimate level at the first meeting.
- Falling in love with anyone who reaches out.
- Ignoring your own needs just to please others.
- Going against personal values or rights to please others.
- Not noticing when someone invades your boundaries.
- Not noticing when someone else displays inappropriate boundaries.
- Touching a person without asking.
- Allowing someone to take as much as they can from you.
- Letting others define you and/or describe your reality.

"Co-dependent" Relationships

Co-dependence is a term that has been widely used in the last 10 years to describe relationships without clear boundaries. The concept of co-dependence provides a useful framework for examining how we interact in relationships with others. Our culture portrays romantic love, in songs, television, and movies, as being a relationship in which the partners are inseparable, are nothing without each other, and one in which each partner derives her/his very sense of self from the other. While portrayed as the ideal, this is actually a description of a very unhealthy relationship.

What is Co-dependency?

- My good feelings about who I am stem from being liked by you.
- My good feelings about who I am stem from receiving approval from you.
- My mental attention focuses on solving your problems or relieving your pain.
- My mental attention is focused on pleasing and protecting you.
- My self esteem is heightened by solving your problems and/or by relieving your pain.
- My own hobbies and interests are put aside. My time is spent sharing your interests and hobbies.
- My social circle diminishes as I involve myself with you.
- I put my values aside in order to connect with you.
- I value your opinion and way of doing things more than my own.
- The quality of my life is in relation to the quality of yours.

If this describes you, in your relationships, this is an area for potential growth. Becoming aware of it is the first, and most important step. After awareness comes the opportunity for change. By observing your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relationships, you can identify changes you would like to make. You can start practicing new behaviors. Friends and family members may resist or sabotage your attempts to change. It may be helpful to seek counseling to assist you in making changes in your style of interacting in relationships.

Healthy Love versus Addictive Love

From Jed Diamond, "Looking For Love in All the Wrong Places"

All of us have a healthy impulse to find love, but addictions take us away from genuine love. A summary of some of the differences between healthy love and addictive love can help us find the genuine love we all seek and desire.

Healthy love develops after we feel secure.

Addictive love tries to create love even though we feel frightened and insecure.

Healthy love is part of the human fabric. They cannot be separated.
Addictive love is highly distilled. We think we can separate "it" from people, whether "it" is sex or romantic intrigue.

Healthy love is unique. There is no "ideal lover."
Addictive love is stereotyped. There is always a certain type we are attracted to.

Healthy love is gentle and comfortable.
Addictive love is tense and combative.

Healthy love encourages us to be ourselves, to be honest from the beginning with who we are, including our faults.
Addictive love encourages secrets. We want to look good and put on an attractive mask.

Healthy love is satisfied with the partner we have.
Addictive love is always looking for more or better.

Healthy love is based on the belief that we want to be together.
Addictive love is based on the belief that we HAVE to be together.

Healthy love teaches that only we can make ourselves happy.
Addictive love expects that other person to make us happy and demands that we try to make them happy.
Healthy love creates life.
Addictive love creates melodrama.

Is Your Relationship a Healthy One?

by Michelle C. Stefanisko, Ph.D, NCC

All too often, people find themselves in adult relationships with friends, partners, or even adult family members that are not grounded in mutual trust or respect. Sometimes relationships become so entangled to the point that a person feels invisible, suffocated, or has lost the sense of where s/he ends and the other begins. Others may find themselves fearful, jealous, or confused about any form of separation from the other person. Members become so over-involved in each other's lives that time apart feels threatening to the security of the relationship. Healthy relationships are grounded in honesty and accountability, non-threatening behavior, negotiation and fairness, communication, shared responsibility, respect, trust and support, independence and autonomy. Healthy relationships reflect a mutual 'inter-dependency' rather than an unbalanced 'dependency.'

Consider the following questions as you examine the quality of the relationships that you count on. Reflect on your responses ("always," "usually," "rarely," or "never) with regard to the most visible and significant people in your life:

CONNECTION..."The recognition of symmetry between two lives"

1. Do you accept each other as you are and tolerate differences that may not change?
2. Do you generally like and dislike the same things?
3. Do you communicate easily and openly share your feelings in a non-threatening way?
4. Do you think you understand each other?
5. Do you feel understood?
6. Are you generally interested in one another's concerns?

TRUST..."The certainty that this is someone to rely on"

1. Are you honest with each other?
2. Can you safely reveal your weaknesses to one another?
3. Do you protect and honor one another's confidences?
4. Do you respect one another's values?
5. Do you recognize one another's fears and respond compassionately?

MUTUALITY..."A friendship shared in common, directed by each toward the other."

1. Is there a fair amount of give and take between you?
2. Do you consider yourselves equals?
3. Do you both conf. Can you ask one another to lend an ear or a hand?
4. Can you ask one another
5. Can you give attention and support when requested?
6. Do you jointly make decisions that affect you both?

SEPARATENESS..."Relationships benefit from both individual and combined efforts"

1. Do you spend time with other companions?
2. Do you enjoy time alone?
3. Are you comfortable with your friend's other relationships?
4. Can you listen to her/his advice and not feel compelled to take it?
5. Is your relationship enriched rather than threatened by outside interests?

If you answered most of these questions with "always" or "usually," you are fortunate to have someone you can count on. If your answers consistently were "rarely" or "never," you may wish to examine this relationship more closely. Remember that a healthy alliance gives one the freedom to be dependent some of the time, independent at other times and interdependent most of the time. We are enriched and revitalized through these connections that allow us to thrive.

Exploring Healthy Relationships: Finding Your Voice Through Self Esteem and Assertiveness

It is often difficult to express ourselves to people who play significant roles in our lives. With a positive self esteem and increased confidence, we are able to find our voice, and deal with relationship issues.

This small group workshop will be led by a facilitator. There will be discussion and time for questions. The workshop is being held Thursday June 21st 2007, 1:30-3:30pm at Birchmount Community Centre, 93 Birchmount Road (at Kingston Road).

This workshop is FREE and is sponsored by Scarborough Women's Centre and Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre.

Attendant services and free light refreshments will be provided. Please advise of any special needs related to attendant services or diet. Please RSVP to Judith by June 19th at 416 396-7606.