

## EVALUATING A RELATIONSHIP: Health or Unhealthy?

Starting, maintaining and ending relationships can all be stressful.

### BEING SINGLE

Although it is sometimes hard to recognize, there is a lot of social pressure to enter a relationship. Perhaps it's your mom asking why you aren't dating someone or a friend from high school who goes on and on about his/her boyfriend/girlfriend, then hesitates to ask about your romantic life because you're not dating anyone. Whether you have chosen to be single or you have found yourself in that situation, there are a lot of benefits from your current situation. You should take advantage of those that best meet your needs.

#### Being single can allow you to...

- date several people.
- spend money on things that you like.
- learn more about who you are.
- spend as much time with your friends as you want.
- flirt without worrying about the repercussions.
- not have to "check in" with someone.

Being single is a respectable and healthy choice. You can have more time to focus on a career, hobbies, travel, and hanging out, without feeling that you left someone out.

### EVALUATING A RELATIONSHIP

Is your relationship stressing you out? These are characteristics of a healthy relationship. If these don't describe your relationship, it may be a source of stress for you. In a healthy relationship you...

- Have fun and grow together
- Feel like you can be yourself
- Maintain honesty, trust and good communication
- Build friendship and respect
- Handle conflict
- Have accountability, partnership and dedication
- Share healthy sexuality

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN A RELATIONSHIP

At the core of any successful relationship is the **ability to communicate and resolve conflict**. Even though many of our associations with conflict are negative, conflict is normal and healthy. It is an opportunity for both personal growth and strengthening relationships.

Think about a conflict you recently had.

Since conflict is inevitable, what's important is how we respond to conflict. Some options are hurtful or destructive to us or others and some options are compassionate and productive.

#### There Are Many Options for Responding to Conflict

- Some options are passive, such as withdrawing, ignoring, avoiding, or giving in.
- Some are aggressive, such as threatening, intimidating, yelling, demanding, or pressuring.
- And others are assertive, such as negotiating, compromising, or seeking help/mediation (get an outside person to facilitate or help work it out).

Think about the same conflict.

Did you choose a **passive, aggressive, or assertive** response to this conflict? Why?

The assertive options are generally the hardest to master, but the most important if the goal is genuine problem solving and an improved relationship.

## **Being Assertive**

Being assertive can reduce stress. Being assertive means claiming and expressing your experiences, your feelings, your wants and your rights. Assertiveness is necessary if compromise is to occur. People who are assertive feel comfortable asking for help, saying "no" to others, stating a unique opinion, making requests, and expressing both positive and negative feelings.

What is a situation in which you want to be more effective?

Plan what you can say in this situation with these four short statements.

I think...(description of the problem)

I feel...(emotional reaction to problem)

I want...(specific behavioral request)

I will...(your contribution to the compromise)

## **TIPS FOR FIGHTING FAIRLY**

**Find a good time.** Don't have difficult conversations when you are very angry or tired. Ask, "When is a good time to talk about something that is bothering me?"

**Focus on the problem,** not the other person. Open sensitive conversations with "I" statements; talk about how you struggle with the problem. Don't open with "you" statements; avoid blaming the other person for your thoughts and feelings.

**Stay with the topic.** Don't use a current concern as a reason to jump into everything that bothers you.

**Let others speak for themselves.** Don't assume things. When we feel close to someone it's easy to think we know how he or she thinks and feels. Don't assign feelings or motives.

**Take responsibility.** Say, "I'm sorry" when you're wrong. It goes a long way in making things right again. Ask for help if you need it.

**Seek compromise.** There may not be a resolved ending. Be prepared to compromise or to disagree about some things. The goal is for everyone to be a winner.

## **ENDING AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**

### **MOVING ON**

It may be time to move on from a relationship when:

- Unhappiness with the relationship persists for a significant amount of time.
- There is unresolved conflict.
- You are staying in the relationship to avoid hurting your partner.
- It seems as though trust cannot be rebuilt.
- You are considering pursuing a relationship with someone else.

Some individuals stay in a relationship because they are "afraid" to be alone -- even when there are no feelings of love for the other person. Using a relationship as a security blanket to protect you from loneliness isn't fair to the other person and doesn't give you an opportunity to grow, learn about yourself and find out what you need. If you're in that type of situation, ending the relationship might be best for you and your partner.

### **ENDING A RELATIONSHIP**

Ending a relationship is a hard thing to do. There could be feelings of guilt, fear of emotionally hurting your partner, fear that your partner may take it the wrong way, or it could be that feeling of wondering if you did everything possible to save the relationship.

Although ending a relationship is easy for some, for others it can be a difficult thing. If you feel it is the best option for you, then you need to follow through no matter how difficult the process may be. In some instances you may find that your partner feels the same way, and in others your partner doesn't realize what's going on. Holding on to

a relationship that is over will only make the relationship worse and become more of a strain on you and your partner's life. If ending a relationship were the best thing for you, then it would be the best thing for your partner.

Some tips:

- Be honest -- with yourself and your partner.
- Be respectful -- end it clearly and compassionately.
- Be clear. Don't expect your partner to know what is going on. Explain the situation and your feelings fully.
- Explain how you want the relationship to end (friendship, no contact, etc.).

### **WHEN THE LOVE BUG STRIKES AGAIN**

Every relationship is a learning experience. If one does not work out, use what you have learned in the next relationship. It's also important to remember that every relationship is different—with various strengths and weaknesses. Avoiding comparisons between one relationship and your current situation will help you focus on the benefits you're experiencing today.

Relationships are a healthy part of life. Enjoy it when it is right for you and when it is not, don't worry. The best is next to come!

### **IF ABUSE IS INVOLVED**

With the term "abusive", many individuals think of being hit or punched, but abuse can come in many forms—from verbal abuse to preventing other friendships and activities. Sometimes it is difficult for the person in the relationship to realize that it is abusive. Some of the following questions may help you assess your relationship.

- Does your partner reduce your self-esteem?
- Do you feel threatened or afraid of your partner at any time?
- Does your partner try to control your decisions and your life?
- Have you lost all your friends because of this relationship?
- Has your partner ever hit you, pushed you, or forced you to have sex?

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, THIS RELATIONSHIP MAY BE UNHEALTHY AND/OR ABUSIVE! Please seek help!