

What is a healthy relationship like?

Start with yourself - The healthiest relationships start with two healthy people. Each person possesses:

- A sense of self-worth and high self-esteem, and motivation to continue to grow as a person
- The ability to find satisfaction in life both with the partner and independently
- The knowledge that physical health is important and takes care to eat right, exercise and get enough sleep
- Healthy coping skills
- A support system outside of each other in family and friends

The most important work you can do is to strengthen your self in the areas above, which leads to healthy relationship skills. You can find a link to more information on these at the end of this document, as well as other resources to strengthen yourself such as with healthy coping skills. Also, when you think about how the two of you relate to each other, try to focus more on your own part and improve that. You can't change another person, only yourself. But when you change how you respond to your partner, your partner will also change their responses.

Know each others' strengths - humans find it very easy to absorb the negatives in our world. We focus more easily on that in ourselves, our environment, and other people. One way to shift your focus and become more aware of your own and your partner's strengths is for both of you to take a questionnaire at the following site: <http://www.authentichappiness.com>. Get yourself a login for the site, and then search the page to find "VIA Survey of Character Strengths". You are looking for the one with 240 questions. Don't let that big number worry you, it doesn't take long to complete this. What you get out of it is a list of 24 character strengths in the order of importance for you. Then take each of your lists and talk about it, and why each of you feel these are important to yourself, and how these strengths can be used to strengthen your relationship.

Don't expect perfection - Neither of you will be perfect at communicating, resolving conflict, and more. But you can always strive to grow and improve in these areas. At the bottom of this page are several resources available on our website that can help you. You won't agree on everything. You will have to work hard. We all have stress, and stress erodes our ability to be at our best in every way. Hurtful things will happen, that is inevitable but if you each strive to repair those to the best of your ability and trust that the other will do the same, your relationship will remain and grow stronger.

Compassion and taking care of each other - In a healthy relationship, the foundation for relating to each other contains:

- Compassion - you give each other a break when things don't go quite right, you understand where the weaknesses are in your partner and help them with that instead of criticizing.
- Loving kindness - you use kind words and know that your tone of voice and body language are important too
- Protection - you protect each other in your own way as well as the ways your partner needs from you - financially, physically, emotionally
- Honor - you take care to accommodate the other person's needs because they are important to you, you appreciate their unique gifts as a person
- Unconditional love - your love for your partner is not dependent on what he or she does for you, that he or she acts a certain way; you love this person just as they are
- Trust - you are trustworthy and you place trust in your partner not only in terms of being faithful to each other but also that you will always act in each others' best interests; you feel emotionally "safe" with each other
- Respect - you may have things you don't agree on, but you accept each others' thoughts, feelings and needs
- Forgiveness - You work together through difficult or hurtful incidents and offer forgiveness for yourself and your partner; you do not let past hurts come between you
- Gratitude - you each feel gratitude for the gift of having the other person in your life
- encouraging words - you offer each other credit, praise, positive reinforcement - not judgment, criticism, guilt or shame
- Honest expression - you each express feelings for and with your partner, even when it is hard
- Request and ask for what you need - you do not make demands of each other and have healthy boundaries
- Understand partner's needs - You are each able to adjust to meet each others' needs
- Intimacy - Emotional intimacy comes from the mutual feelings above and is a strong - even necessary - part of sexual intimacy

Resources:

I've read a lot of relationship books and have listed what I think are some of the best here. As with all the information in my handouts and on my website, take what works for you and leave the rest.

What Makes Love Last, John Gottman, Ph.D. and Nan Silver

Rescue Your Love Life, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend (there is a book AND a workbook)

How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It, Patricia Love Ed.D. and Stephen Stosny Ph.D.

The 5 Love Languages, Gary Chapman

If The Buddha Married, Charlotte Kasl (she has two other books that are good too, *If the Buddha Dated*, and *If The Buddha Got Stuck*)

Choosing Me Before We, Christine Arylo

There are several related resources on our website, on the following subjects:

Conflict Resolution - <https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/mentalhealth/Conflict-Resolution.pdf>

Communication - <https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/mentalhealth/Relationship-Communication.pdf>

Boundaries - <https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/mentalhealth/Boundaries.pdf>

Coping Skills/Self Care - <https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/mentalhealth/Self-Care.pdf>

Self Esteem - <https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/mentalhealth/Self-Esteem.pdf>

Couples Counseling - <https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/couples-counseling/>