



the portage path behavioral health reference guide to: **Relationships**

Relationships in general are important to all people regardless of age, culture, or socio-economic backgrounds; and can take many forms from familial, to romantic, to platonic. It is important to realize that no relationship is ever perfect and everyone experiences conflict and feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction at some time or another. No one enters a loving relationship expecting to someday feel at odds with their partner. Yet the prevalence of breakups and divorce is a testament that reality can fall short of expectations.

It is important to be able to recognize the differences between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship. A healthy relationship is characterized by respect, honesty, loyalty, intimacy, sharing, friendship, and trust. They are based on the belief that both partners equally share the power and control in the relationship.

Signs & Symptoms of a Healthy Relationship

- Affection
- Attentiveness
- Commitment
- Honesty
- Nonviolence
- Trust
- Respect
- Similar basic values
- Spending time apart
- Emotional closeness
- Enjoying your time together
- Safety not fearing each other
- Appreciating the other's qualities
- Belief that the other is responsible for his/her own life
- Common, as well as different interests
- Practicing safe sex (if you are sexually active)
- Taking responsibility for how you might contribute to relationship problems

Where as an unhealthy relationship commonly involves: lying, cheating, violence, excessive jealousy, controlling behavior, frequent criticisms, put downs, feelings of not being supported, non-mutual use of pornography, substance abuse and/or problem gambling. Overall unhealthy relationships can be emotionally and physically draining. In fact, studies show that when a person is emotionally upset their immune system is weakened by the stress and often leads to you becoming physically ill.

Dr. Kate M. Wachs, a psychologist at The Relationship Center in Chicago, offers the following questions to help you figure out if you are in a healthy relationship:

- HAS MY LIFE CHANGED FOR THE BETTER SINCE THIS PERSON ENTERED MY LIFE?
- HAVE I GROWN AND BECOME A BETTER PERSON?
- HAVE THE GOOD TIMES PRETTY MUCH OUTNUMBERED THE NOT-SO-GOOD TIMES?
- HAVE I EXPERIENCED MORE JOY IN LIVING AS A RESULT OF THIS PERSON BEING IN MY LIFE?
- HAS THIS PERSON ALLOWED ME TO BE MYSELF AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT MY UNIQUENESS?
- HAVE I ACCOMPLISHED MORE, EXPANDED MY HORIZONS MORE, OR IN SOME WAY BETTERED MY LIFE OR THAT OF OTHERS SINCE I'VE KNOWN THIS PERSON?

So what do you do if a relationship is healthy at one point in time and now is not? If both partners are committed to getting back on track, then couples therapy would be most effective. If only one partner is committed than individual counseling would be helpful to support that person in accepting the fact that their partner isn't committed to change and to discuss if they can accept the way things are or need to end the relationship.



Should You Seek Professional Help?

If you decide to talk to a counselor, you will get the assistance you need with the objectivity that neither family nor friends can offer. Therapists can help identify options for the future and set realistic goals that enable individuals to enhance their mental and emotional well-being. As a result, counseling can bring about a greater sense of empowerment and a more positive outlook to bring about the changes you desire for your life. Counseling can also help a person in an unhealthy relationship:

- *Identify their own needs and expectations of the relationship.*
- *Accept that they cannot control anyone but themselves.*
- *Understand that insecurity and trust issues almost always come from within and the work is to trust yourself enough to handle what is coming at you.*
- *Suggest couple's therapy only after both have been in individual therapy enough to work on 1,2, and 3.*



15 Traits of a Healthy Relationship

- by Nancy Wesson, Ph.D.

1. Partners can manage conflict and differences without despair or threats.
2. Both partners protect and nourish the relationship and make it a priority.
3. Both partners know how to be responsible for own needs also for the care of the relationship.
4. Both partners feel "special" to the other. Arguments/fights do not lead to abuse or threatened break-ups.
5. Both partners can communicate wants, needs, feelings, and emotional issues with little or no shame.
6. There is unconditional love if not unconditional agreement.
7. The relationship feels and is nurturing, comfortable, and fun.
8. The sexual relationship works well and is mutually satisfying.
9. Both partners can and do keep agreements (maturity).
10. Both partners are honest.
11. There is no abuse: physical, verbal, emotional (ignoring).
12. Both partners have boundaries:
13. Both partners attend to the needs of each other willingly and lovingly.
14. Each person can say "no" to requests from partner when necessary without feeling guilty and tell their partner when something feels not right or hurts them.
15. People pleasing is kept to a minimum and neither one feels they are making a "great sacrifice" to stay in the relationship.

If you have identified with the issues discussed in this flyer and you're ready to take the next step toward feeling better, visit our web site or call Portage Path and find out how we can help:

Web Site www.portagepath.org

Appointments 330-253-3100
800-828-4508

If you feel you're in emotional crisis and you need someone to talk to, call our free 24-hour, 7-day crisis hotline:

Support Hotline 330-434-9144
888-434-8878



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