Respectful Relationships

Edited by Justin Healey
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Respectful Relationships is Volume 336 in the ‘Issues in Society’ series of educational resource books. The aim of this series is to offer current, diverse information about important issues in our world, from an Australian perspective.

KEY ISSUES IN THIS TOPIC
We all have our own needs at different times within relationships, and it is important to give and take in terms of these needs and to show each other respect. Everyone has the right to feel safe, to be treated fairly, and to be valued and accepted for who they are.

This book presents advice for young people on how to develop skills to negotiate relationship needs respectfully and safely in partner relationships, friendships and family relationships. Issues addressed include peer pressure and teen friendships; dating pressures and expectations; domestic violence and abusive relationships; and managing anger and conflict.

How do young people identify unacceptable and abusive behaviours in their relationships and how can they learn to behave in positive and respectful ways?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION
Titles in the ‘Issues in Society’ series are individual resource books which provide an overview on a specific subject comprised of facts and opinions.

The information in this resource book is not from any single author, publication or organisation. The unique value of the ‘Issues in Society’ series lies in its diversity of content and perspectives.

The content comes from a wide variety of sources and includes:
➤ Newspaper reports and opinion pieces
➤ Website fact sheets
➤ Magazine and journal articles
➤ Statistics and surveys
➤ Government reports
➤ Literature from special interest groups

CRITICAL EVALUATION
As the information reproduced in this book is from a number of different sources, readers should always be aware of the origin of the text and whether or not the source is likely to be expressing a particular bias or agenda.

It is hoped that, as you read about the many aspects of the issues explored in this book, you will critically evaluate the information presented. In some cases, it is important that you decide whether you are being presented with facts or opinions. Does the writer give a biased or an unbiased report? If an opinion is being expressed, do you agree with the writer?

EXPLORING ISSUES
The ‘Exploring issues’ section at the back of this book features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book. The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

FURTHER RESEARCH
This title offers a useful starting point for those who need convenient access to information about the issues involved. However, it is only a starting point. The ‘Web links’ section at the back of this book contains a list of useful websites which you can access for more reading on the topic.
Respectful Relationships

Everyone has the right to feel safe, valued and accepted for who they are within relationships, advises Kids Helpline

WHAT IS RESPECT?

Respect is about valuing people, including people who are like you and those who are different. There are a couple of ways to look at respect:

➤ When you have respect for someone, you feel positive about them and admire or appreciate their actions or behaviour
➤ You can also treat anyone with respect regardless of how you feel about them. This is when you regard someone with consideration and treat them in the way you like to be treated.

Respectful relationships and why they are important

Everyone has the right to feel safe, to be treated with fairness, to be valued and feel accepted for who they are.

Respectful relationships are important because:

➤ They contribute to your growth, maturity and sense of self-confidence
➤ They promote healthy self-expression and awareness of yourself and others
➤ They enable you to feel accepted, positive and free to be yourself.

Respectful relationships also help you feel:

➤ Safe
➤ Encouraged
➤ Trusted
➤ Comfortable
➤ That you matter
➤ OK to be honest and open
➤ Listened to
➤ Equal and treated fairly
➤ Valued
➤ Understood
➤ Accepted.

Can you think of someone who you have a healthy, respectful relationship with? This could be a family member, friend, partner or peer. How is this person important in your life and how do you feel about yourself when you are with them? What is it about them and how they behave towards you that helps you feel respected?

Dealing with differences respectfully

Being in a respectful relationship doesn’t mean that you won’t have differences of opinion or disagreements sometimes. However, in respectful relationships when differences occur they are dealt with in ways that lead to a resolution or understanding.

For example, people might disagree with each other but they can accept and appreciate that it’s OK to have different ideas, even when they feel tense or unhappy about things.

Conflict or differences occurring in respectful relationships can be worked out and do not have to damage the relationship. Such difficulties may even create opportunities to understand each other more deeply and result in a stronger bond.

Maybe you can think of a time you sorted out a difference with someone close to you. How did you go about it and how has working things out changed your relationship for the better?

Some ways that people in respectful relationships might manage differences include:

➤ Taking responsibility for their own feelings and dealing with them
➤ Managing their anger without harming others
Expressions their feelings in a non-blaming way

Taking time to listen to and understand the other’s points of view

Communicating their concerns or needs clearly

Allowing the other person space if they need it

Understanding that people do have differences and that this is OK

Appreciating and valuing diversity

Being culturally sensitive and open to learning about others and what respect means for them

Avoiding pressuring the other person in any way

Recognising and owning things they might have done that have contributed to a misunderstanding.

In some cases, cultural differences also can mean our ideas about respect may be different to others and it is important to be sensitive and not too quick to judge. For example, eye contact may represent respect in one culture and disrespect in another, yet this difference may lead to misunderstanding between people. You cannot always know about all the different cultural practices. Respectful people will avoid quick judgments and stereotyping. They keep an open mind and are open to learning about diversity.

**Negotiating needs in respectful relationships**

We all have different needs at different times and, in relationships, it helps to give and take in terms of each other’s needs. This is the case in all relationships, including friendships, family relationships and partner relationships.

So, how are these needs and differences negotiated in a respectful relationship?

Respectful relationships:

- Acknowledge and consider everyone’s needs
- Are flexible about individual choice or participation
- Will acknowledge differences and strive to accommodate them.

Imagine you really wanted to go somewhere with a friend, but they didn’t want to go. In a respectful relationship you wouldn’t force your friend to go with you or get angry or try to get them to change their mind or feel bad. You might feel disappointed that they don’t want to go but you understand that you have different needs sometimes and your friend needs to be true to themself. You might let your friend know how you feel so they can understand but you won’t force them to change their mind.

A few things about being respectful:

- It doesn’t mean expecting one person to put their needs aside for the other person
- It may mean communicating how you feel and being flexible at times, but it also means being true to yourself
- It is not about trying to change someone but rather striving to understand things from their perspective even if yours is different.

**Creating respectful relationships**

Respect in relationships happens when you respect yourself and others. Self-respect takes self-awareness, acceptance and sometimes courage. It is about understanding your strengths and limits, and knowing what is important to you. It is also about being aware of your needs, understanding your ‘bottom line’ on certain things and making positive choices.

Can you remember a time when you felt it was important to take a stand on something that you didn’t think was fair or OK? You may have noticed yourself reacting to an injustice. Can you remember why it was important to you? This can tell you something about your values and your ‘bottom line’ on things.

For example, you might want to hang out with the ‘cool group’, but find that they get a kick out of putting people down. If you really don’t agree that this is OK, then to be true to yourself you might decide to speak up or leave.

Sometimes you may have to work on how you view and feel about yourself. Counselling or talking to someone you trust can help with this.

The next step is respecting others. This doesn’t mean you have to admire or like everybody, it’s more about treating others with consideration and fairness. They may not always reciprocate and treat you with the same respect, however, you leading the way is a good start.

**Dealing with disrespectful relationships and being realistic**

While respect can be earned, sometimes people can treat us disrespectfully no matter what we do. There are times that, despite our best efforts, it is not possible to influence how others behave towards us.

When you observe others being disrespectful it’s good to keep in mind there can be many reasons why people don’t treat others with consideration. Often, it is because they have not learned how to respect themselves or have not previously been treated with respect.

If you feel you are being treated disrespectfully, where possible communicate your needs to that person in case they aren’t aware of their impact on you. If this doesn’t help you can try to remove yourself from them. If you cannot move away from someone that is hurting or disrespecting you, make sure you get help or talk to someone you trust. By doing these things, you are showing respect for yourself.

**Talking things through and getting help with relationships**

Relationships are one of the biggest reasons young people call Kids Helpline. They can sometimes be complicated and talking to someone that is objective is often a helpful way to work out your concerns, understand more about yourself and find ideas to deal with situations.

Remember you can call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or use our web or email counselling services, if you want to talk about relationships or respect. No problem or concern is too big or too small to talk to our counsellors about.
Issues and concerns for Australian relationships today

The Relationships Indicators Survey provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of relationships in Australia—intimate relationships, family relationships and connection with community. Following is the executive summary from the latest survey report, produced by Relationships Australia.

The overall objective of the research was to provide a statistically sound representative sample of feelings, attitudes and opinions about relationships within the Australian population.

The research focussed on a number of key areas, including:

- Connection with significant people in our lives
- Partnering and marriage
- Sexual relationships
- Finances and their impact on partner relationships
- Social networking and relationships
- Community involvement
- Loneliness, and
- Accessing help.

The results were compared with data collected in the 2008 Relationships Indicators Survey. This report highlights where there were statistically significant changes in responses or where new trends emerged.

This report has an additional section on loneliness—one of the significant trends identified in the results. An interesting correlation between use of social networking technology and loneliness became apparent, with those frequently feeling lonely more likely to use social networking.

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Similar proportions of respondents said they were sexually active to those in the 2008 survey, although there has been a significant jump in the numbers of people aged 70 and above who are now sexually active. Those with a household income of $80,000 and above were also more sexually active than those in other income brackets.

The impact of finances on couple relationships was explored, with 71 per cent of respondents indicating that financial problems were more likely to push couples apart and 11 per cent indicating they would keep couples together. Reasons for these responses were probed, as were the respondents’ sense of optimism and pessimism about the likelihood of future improvement in their financial situations. Age had a significant influence on how responses were given, with those in the younger age brackets being more optimistic about their prospects.

The use of social networking to communicate was considered, with 27 per cent saying it had a positive impact on their relationships and 16 per cent saying it had a negative impact. More people in the younger age brackets believed there had been a positive impact, with 54 per cent of those aged 18–24 believing it contributed to communication with friends and family.

Respondents were asked to identify community groups with which they were associated. Those aged 40–49 and those with school aged children were most actively engaged. A large proportion of those aged over 70 felt they had sufficient support from others in their lives.

Finally, respondents were asked about how they access help at low points in their relationships. Many spoke with friends, talked things over with their partners and spoke with other family members. More females than males were likely to speak with friends. Age also impacted on the likelihood of speaking with friends. 22 per cent said they had sought professional help with relationship issues.

Overall, the Relationships Indicators Survey revealed a sense of optimism about relationships, support available to individuals and the communities in which we live. The following report examines the findings in greater depth.

Executive summary from Issues and concerns for Australian relationships today: Relationships Indicators Survey 2011 © Relationships Australia www.relationships.org.au
Among teenagers, negative relationships are sometimes called 'toxic friendships'. You might hear the people in them talked about as 'frenemies'. If you're worried about the impact of toxic friendships on your child, here are some things you can do to help, from the Raising Children Network

**What you need to know**

Teenage friendships can sometimes turn 'toxic', or 'toxic friendships' can develop if your child gets in with the 'wrong crowd'. Instead of making your child feel good – like he belongs and is accepted – toxic friendships can lead to your child having more negative feelings about himself or others. They're often characterised by subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) put-downs, manipulation, exclusion and other hurtful behaviour.

**Helping your child avoid toxic friendships**

To help your child avoid toxic friendships, you can try talking with your child about what 'good' friends are like – they're the ones who look out for her, care about her, include her in activities and treat her with respect. This will help her work out which peers might be suitable friends.

If there are particular friends you think might be good for your child, try to make the most of his opportunities to socialise with them. For example, you might encourage him to take part in the same hobbies, sports or activities they do.

Encourage your child to have a wide range of friends from a variety of places (such as school, sports or social clubs, family friends and neighbours). This means she’ll have other people to turn to if something goes wrong with a friendship.

When you get to know your child’s friends, you get the chance to quietly observe your child’s social interactions and pick up on any issues. You could encourage your child to have friends over and allow them to have a space in your home.

Talking with your child can also give you the chance to start a conversation about how he’s going with his friends. Listen to him and use open-ended questions. When you keep the lines of communication open, your child’s more likely to talk to you about any problems that come up.

As part of your talks, you could let your child know about your own friendship history. This might help her see other options and help her feel understood.

Finally, you can be a role model for forming and maintaining positive relationships – with your own friends, partner and colleagues. Your child will learn from observing relationships where there’s respect, empathy and positive ways of resolving conflict. When your child feels confident and comfortable with himself, he’s less likely to accept bad treatment from frenemies. Help your child identify his strengths and find opportunities to praise them. Try to promote activities that build his self-esteem.

**Helping your child deal with toxic friendships**

It’s a good idea to give your child the chance to sort out friendship issues herself before you step in. This can help her learn valuable life skills such as conflict resolution, assertiveness and problem-solving.

But when you feel you need to step in, here are some ideas:

➤ If your child really wants to keep the friendship, help him find ways to change it. Can he identify what’s causing the problems? For example, a friend who’s making a lot of negative comments about your child’s appearance might be getting away with it because your child isn’t clearly saying he doesn’t like it. Encourage your child to tell his friend to stop. Sometimes a bit of assertiveness is all that’s needed to stop unwanted behaviour.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Girls tend to have one or two best friends. The focus is on empathy, self-disclosure, support and nurturing.
- Boys tend to have larger friendship groups that give them companionship and competition.
- These differences mean boys and girls can have different concerns. For example, boys can be more likely to have conflict in their friendships based on competition.

raisingchildren.net.au
the australian parenting website

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Sometimes frenemies act in negative ways because they get good reactions. Use our problem-solving steps with your child to work out what the frenemy is getting out the behaviour. Then you might be able to work out a solution. Using a witty comeback, being assertive, or walking away without comment can change the dynamic.

If your child is prepared to end the friendship, he needs to decide how to tell the frenemy. Your child might need to say something like, “I don’t like the way you gossip about me behind my back. Unless that changes, I can’t be your friend anymore”.

Be prepared for the fall-out from the end of a toxic friendship. The frenemy might try to make life difficult for your child. Watch out for any bullying or harassment – both face to face and online. If this happens, contact your child’s school to work on a solution and talk with your child about this. Support your child by listening to what’s going on, trying to find solutions, and linking her in with support services such as guidance counsellors, if needed.

Your child might need to find new friends. This can be a daunting task. Encourage your child to list all the other peers he could link up with. For example, does he sit with other students in other classes? Does he have one or two friends in another friendship circle, sporting club or activity outside school? Encourage your child to find ways to hang around with them. This could be sitting together at lunch, working on assignments, or doing some social or sporting activities.

Find out about clubs at school (drama club, sporting group, chess club and so on) that your child could join. She might be able to find others with shared interests.

If you can, help encourage new friendships by organising lifts to school, making friends welcome at home, or driving your child to extracurricular activities.

It might help your child to know that many teenage friendships don’t last. They’re a way for him to work out what values and friendship characteristics are important to him, and help him develop appropriate social behaviour and social skills. But they’re not all going to last forever.

Dealing with bad behaviour from toxic friendships

You might feel that your child’s behaviour is being influenced negatively by toxic friendships. If you feel you need to address this, it’s important to focus on the way your child is acting, not on his personality, or the personalities of his friends.

For example, you could say, “Whenever you spend time with Josh, you come home angry and upset”. A statement like that focuses on what needs to change in the friendship. It’s better than saying, “I don’t want you hanging around with Josh anymore”.

There are also ‘positive’ toxic friendships. Your child’s friend treats her well and they have a strong bond, but her friend might be leading your child into antisocial behaviour such as stealing or drinking.

To address this, you could say, “When you hang around with Janine, you get into a lot of trouble. If you keep stealing, you could get arrested”. This statement picks up on the consequences of the behaviour, and gives your child the chance to change it. It’s better than saying, “I don’t want you hanging around with Janine”.

Things to avoid

It’s best not to confront the other young people involved in bad behaviour, or to call their parents. This might only make things worse for your child. But in some cases – for example, if drugs are involved – you might need to tell the parents or another adult.

Avoid banning or criticising your child’s friends. This might have the opposite effect and make your child feel even more closely attached to those friends.

If you’re worried about the influence of friends on your child’s behaviour, it might help to know that you influence your child’s long-term decisions, such as career choices, values and morals, while your child’s friends are more likely to influence short-term choices, such as appearance and interests.

Friendship problems and break-ups can sometimes lead to bullying. You can read more in our articles on teenagers and bullying.

FURTHER HELP

If your child is having ongoing friendship difficulties that are causing significant distress, and aren’t changing despite your child’s best efforts, consider seeking professional advice.

Teenagers sometimes find it helpful to have someone other than a parent to talk to.

You could try:

➤ A school counsellor or other counsellor
➤ Your GP
➤ A confidential telephone counselling service for young people such as Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article was developed in collaboration with Emma Little, RMIT University.

Peer relationships – adolescents

Friends and peers are an essential part of life from childhood to old age, but in adolescence (around 13 to 18 years) they take on a special significance, according to this information sheet from Parent Line

Friends play an important role in the psychological development of adolescents. They are part of a bridge that supports a teenager in their journey to adulthood.

WHY ARE PEERS SO IMPORTANT TO ADOLESCENTS?

In the adolescent years, peers provide an environment to help in the development of many skills and understandings that we need to become happy and productive adults.

Adolescence is a time when a large part of the development of a teenager’s understanding, of who they are and what sort of adult they are to become is happening. It is a time when they search for a personal identity, distinct from their identity as a child or a part of the family.

The peer group provides an opportunity for adolescents to:
➤ Understand who they are
➤ Learn how to interact with and relate to others
➤ Share feelings
➤ Develop intimacy
➤ Find acceptance
➤ Have a sense of belonging
➤ Learn different ways of problem solving
➤ Feel understood
➤ Have a safe place to try out new beliefs, roles and behaviours
➤ Developing a satisfying relationship with oneself and others
➤ Increase feelings of self-worth
➤ Have fun and excitement
➤ Practice communication skills.

Sadly there can also be downsides to peer relationships. Rejection by peers can make an adolescent feel lonely, depressed and anxious.

Peer pressure may influence a teenager to engage in risk-taking or antisocial behaviour. Some peer relationships can also be exploitive and destructive, and leave a young person feeling used or abused.

Parents can be a model of what it is to be a mature and responsible adult. You can continue to demonstrate how to communicate and negotiate.

Teenagers are often careful observers of their parents. By modelling, by listening, and by talking with them we can help them develop their own value system that they can use to guide them with important decisions in their life.

It is important to know that adolescents generally tend to select peer groups that have values and behaviours that are similar to their own. Parents help young people to develop their values and behaviours.

You can have an indirect but very real influence on not only your son or daughter but also their peers.

WHAT HAPPENS TO A PARENT’S ROLE?

It could be easy to jump to the conclusion that parents are not important in adolescence. But the truth is, if we continue to try to maintain a positive relationship with teenagers we are still able to provide a real influence on their development.

Parents help young people to develop their values and behaviours. You can have a very real influence on your son or daughter and their peers.

Parents can be a model of what it is to be a mature and responsible adult. You can continue to demonstrate how to communicate and negotiate.

Teenagers are often careful observers of their parents. By modelling, by listening, and by talking with them we can help them develop their own value system that they can use to guide them with important decisions in their life.

It is important to know that adolescents generally tend to select peer groups that have values and behaviours that are similar to their own. Parents help young people to develop their values and behaviours.

REMINDER:
➤ Friends are an important part of adolescents’ lives.
➤ Peer relationships provide many opportunities for adolescents to learn skills and develop their identity.
➤ Parents still have an important role and can continue to influence adolescents.
➤ Your relationship with your adolescent is the key means of influencing their growth and development.

When this happens it is important for parents to remain involved in a supportive way.

WHAT DO I MAXIMISE MY INFLUENCE AS A PARENT?

Parental influence is strongest in families where parents demonstrate a high level of warmth and engagement with their teenagers, while being consistent with boundary setting. We need to ensure that they feel accepted and have a sense of belonging in the home to ensure that the peer group is not the only place to find these things.

Be connected

A family where adolescents will feel comfortable and connected with, has adults who have:
➤ An interest and curiosity in the lives of the teenagers
➤ A willingness to express feelings of love and affection
➤ An interest and respect for the views that they express
➤ An acceptance of the feelings they may be having. These include both positive and negative feelings, and feelings that are openly expressed and those that may only be visible through careful observation of their behaviour
➤ A desire to be helpful if they need assistance
➤ A willingness to encourage shared family activities.

Create a teen-friendly home

It can be very helpful to examine how ‘teenager-friendly’ your house is. Ask yourself questions like:
➤ Do you make your son or daughter’s friends feel comfortable and welcome when they visit?
➤ Is there a relaxed atmosphere in your home or is it tense and unfriendly?
➤ How much fun and enjoyment is allowed?
➤ Is your home the sort of place that an adolescent would want to
spend time?

➤ Is your home focussed mainly on the needs and interests of the adults or younger children in the house, rather than the adolescents?

If your home is a place that is positive, friendly and fun then there is likely to be motivation for adolescents to spend more time there. If it is the opposite, then it may be making it more and more desirable for them to spend time with their peers.

**Keep them busy**

It is also true that adolescents who spend more time engaged in organised activities outside of school are less influenced by negative peer relationships. Sports, hobbies and interest groups provide a positive and active time together while still allowing peer interaction to take place.

It should not be a parent’s goal to keep adolescents from being with their friends. The aim should be to ensure home is a welcoming, warm and enjoyable place to be, so that young people do not feel that ‘anywhere but home’ is a better place to be.

Aim to help adolescents get involved in activities that provide a purpose and a sense of self-worth, and a positive environment to interact with others.

**WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?**

**Get to know their friends**

Invite your adolescent’s friends to your house. Get to know them and let them get to know you. Don’t be strangers. Refuse to believe your first impressions.

Adolescents who appear very different and perhaps undesirable on your first impression may in fact turn out to be a positive influence on your child. Similarly those who appear to be a good influence may not live up to their image once you know them a little better.

**Connect with other parents**

Make links with other parents and community members. Talk to each other about your sons and daughters. Get to know one another and communicate about activities.

Cross-check what you have been told about what your adolescent’s plans are with their friends (but be open with your adolescent when this occurs). Let them know that you are available to discuss their concerns and be willing to do so with them.

Support each other in your parenting. Be a community of parents and carers rather than isolated individuals or families. It can also be valuable to encourage community members to act as informal mentors to your teenager.

**Encourage mentors**

It can also be valuable to encourage community members to act as informal mentors to your teenager. They can be role models for an adolescent, provide support and demonstrate their belief in them.

**Do everything you can to encourage a healthy self-esteem in your adolescent by showing that you believe in them.**

These mentors can be any interested adult including family friends, relatives, teachers, coaches, and group leaders. A mentor is another ‘shelter’ in the life of an adolescent (in addition to the peer group), where they can feel cared about and encouraged.

**Talk**

Have casual conversations about topics like peer pressure. If you see an example while watching television programs or in a news report, try to get your adolescent to offer their opinion about the story, and how the peer pressure was dealt with. Focus on listening and eliciting their perspective, rather than talking and lecturing.

**Plan ahead**

Encourage some thinking about what your teenager might say in a situation with peers. For example, where they might feel uncomfortable about pressure they are getting from their friends.

Responses to an invitation might include “I don’t feel well today”, or “I’ve got a big day tomorrow, so I need to take it easy”. Encourage their creativity and allow them to come up with their own ideas.

**Support self-esteem**

Do everything you can to encourage a healthy self-esteem in your adolescent. Build in them a belief in themselves, by showing that you believe in them.

Celebrate their successes and help them learn something when they do not succeed. Help develop their own
value system and make sure they know that you will always care for and love them no matter what.

**Don’t take it personally**
Parents must always remember that the attraction of teenagers to their peers does not represent a rejection of them as parents. Transitioning away is simply a normal and essential part of moving from childhood to adulthood. If this does not happen it can be a barrier to adolescents becoming independent and happy adults.

**WHAT CAN I DO WHEN THINGS GO WRONG?**
Sometimes teenagers choose friends who concern us. These friends may be involved in risk-taking and antisocial behaviour. They may seem to have changed your son or daughter for the worse.

This may have happened for a variety of reasons, but the underlying drive is the desire to be with others where they feel accepted and that they belong.

A significant reason why this happens may be circumstances or luck. Your teen may have met a peer by chance who may appear to be a negative influence, but they may be a charming individual who has befriended them and made them feel special.

Perhaps your teenager was feeling down one day and this person came along and helped at the time. It could also be because they have the urge to get involved with someone they see as exciting and adventurous.

It could also be because they have a low sense of self-worth and have found someone who makes them feel good about themselves. They could feel like they cannot live up to the expectations that they have of themselves or others have of them, and they may seek out a peer group where they can feel valued for other reasons.

If parents attack adolescents’ friends they will most likely defend them, and the friendships can actually be strengthened in this way.

Whatever the reason, try to not criticise your teenager’s friends. To them this may seem like a personal attack on themselves or their judgement. If you need to discuss something that has happened, focus on behaviour, events, actions, and choices — not on their friends. If parents attack adolescents’ friends they will most likely defend them, and the friendships can actually be strengthened in this way.

When your son or daughter develops negative peer relationships, it often becomes a source of worry and stress for parents. Try not to let the stress interfere with your relationship. Stick together and support each other. If necessary get some outside counselling for yourself so that you do not become a victim of the situation.

If you feel that you have not been able to maintain a supportive and warm approach in your parenting, you may need professional support to improve the situation.

Parents may want to send their teenager for counselling, but this is rarely useful unless the young person sees the need for it themselves. They are unlikely to attend counselling, and if they do they may not cooperate. Often in these situations, the only person that parents have some control over is themselves.

Parents cannot lock up adolescents and will not have total control over who they spend their time with. Even when parents follow many of the suggestions for building strong relationships, there is no guarantee that problems won’t arise.

Sometimes a parent is very much in the background, but you can still be doing all you can do to show love and support. At these times it helps to keep a long term perspective. Hope and trust that your adolescent will get through this time unhurt, and having learnt something important about relationships (including yours), trust, and what they stand for.

While peer relationships can be concerning to parents, they are an essential and inevitable part of growing up. Parents’ influence does not disappear just because young people start to prioritise their friends. You can provide your adolescents with a positive direction: it is just different from the more direct influence you may have had when they were children.

Reassure yourself that most peer relationships are positive. When negative peer influences occur it helps to maintain a sense of hope and remember that there are lessons to be learnt. Never give up on the long-term goal of helping your adolescent become a happy and successful adult.
The internet is now a common place for people to meet, chat, hang out and make friends. The information below provides some sound guidance on things to be aware of when building online relationships.

**Getting real: relationships on the ‘net**

This is not another article about how everyone you meet on the net is an axe murderer. The internet can be a great way to communicate – that’s why this website is here, after all. Many people successfully find friends, girlfriends or boyfriends over the ‘net’.

Because it doesn’t involve going anywhere in person, and because it’s so easy to be anonymous or control how much personal information you give out, the internet can be a very safe way to explore and interact. But it’s easy to go to the opposite extreme and imagine that the internet is totally safe or that we don’t need to take the commonsense precautions that we would take for granted elsewhere.

**Hello world**

When you’re sitting in your own room looking at the computer screen, it’s all too easy to forget how public the internet is.

But if something is on a website or a bulletin board, anyone can read it. And that means anyone. One useful rule of thumb is that if you wouldn’t want to put a particular bit of information on a billboard at the end of your street, you shouldn’t post it on a website or announce it in a chatroom either.

In particular, that also means being very, very cautious about telling people your real name or phone number (let alone where you live), or where you go to school, or any other information that might be used to identify you or find you. Even posting your email address can get you deluged in spam and/or very weird messages from strangers who may come across it and decide to email you. I run a website, so every morning I have to clear out a virtual pile of emails offering me everything from penis enlargement to plans for an alien spacecraft. Sometimes it’s just ridiculous and annoying, but I’ve also been sent stuff which has revolted me. I’ve had an email in which someone offered me everything from penis enlargement plans to plans for an alien spacecraft. Sometimes it’s just ridiculous and annoying, but I’ve also been sent stuff which has revolted me.

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The scary stuff

Okay, you’ve probably heard this before. But some of the horror stories are true.

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how you behave in everyday life. They can’t talk to your friends or family or other people who know you. And you can spend hours re-writing an email to make just the impression you want.

Those aren’t always bad things. But it means it’s important to remember that if you only know someone from the ‘net’, you only know one limited aspect of them. You may know some very intimate things about an online friend, and still be totally surprised by what they’re like if you meet them in person. Sometimes you’ll meet up with someone and find you ‘click’ just as much as you do online. But sometimes, many times, you won’t. That’s just a fact of life, and it’s a reality you need to be prepared to accept.

In addition, when there are lots of things we don’t know about someone, our imagination usually fills in the gaps. And we tend to imagine people just the way we’d like them to be. That makes it very easy to convince ourselves that someone is ‘perfect’, especially when we’re all excited about a new relationship.

But, as the man said in Some Like It Hot, nobody’s perfect. Everyone has flaws: it’s part of being human. And no two people are going to agree about everything or like exactly the same things. Those flaws and differences may be no big deal, they may take some work and negotiation to live with, or they may be so major that you can’t get past them – or shouldn’t try to. But they’re going to be there, and having a relationship means dealing with that.

Does that mean you can’t get to know and like someone on the internet? Not at all. But if you convince yourself before you’ve even met in person that they’re the most perfect wonderful special person the world has ever known and undoubtedly your predestined soulmate well, you’re setting yourself up to take a big emotional fall.

One particularly important thing you can’t tell over the internet is whether or not you’ll have any physical chemistry with someone – even a photo can only give you a vague hint, since chemistry isn’t just about one person finding another visually attractive.

It’s easy to tell yourself that mere physical details don’t matter and you love someone for their mind. But it can be awkward and painful if you decide that someone is the love of your life and then meet them and find that they don’t turn you on at all. They may be a nice person, they may be very good-looking – but they don’t happen to ring your bell, or something about them grates on you. And you can’t force yourself to feel attracted to someone when you just don’t.

So it’s not a smart idea to commit yourself to a romantic or sexual relationship before you’ve actually met someone face-to-face and spent time together. It’s okay to discuss the possibilities but leave room for both of you to back off and decide to be ‘just friends’.

### Meeting safe and staying sane

Once you’ve got to know someone online, there are some ultra-simple safety rules you can follow if you decide to meet up in person. In fact, these are pretty smart moves when you’re meeting up with anyone you don’t know well a friend of a friend, a blind date, or a person you’ve only met briefly at a club or concert.

1. **Arrange to have your first meeting in a public place, like a coffee shop. Do NOT go to their house or invite them to yours.** This isn’t just a safety rule; it’s also a way to make your first meeting more comfortable. Meeting on ‘neutral turf’, with some sort of activity planned, even if it’s just having a latte together, takes some of the pressure off, and means you’ll have something to do in case you both go blank and just grin inanely at each other (which, believe me, can happen).

2. **Make sure that someone you trust knows where you’re going, the name and details of the person you’re meeting, and when you expect to be back.** Consider bringing a friend along with you. If you’re a minor, you need to let your parents know about your meeting in advance.

3. **Control your own transportation.** Whether it’s having a car of your own, or taking money for a bus or taxi, **make sure that you can leave whenever you want to.** Don’t make yourself dependent on the other person for a lift.

Hopefully, all these precautions will turn out to be unnecessary. But knowing that you’ve taken sensible precautions can make you more relaxed and sure of yourself. And in a worst-case scenario, they could save your life. If someone freaks out at these precautions and starts accusing you of not trusting them or being paranoid, that should be a big, flashing, neon warning sign. It doesn’t necessarily mean that their intentions are evil but it does mean that they’re not being realistic or mature, and not respecting your right to take care of yourself.

Not only should you not agree to skip precautions, you might also want to think about whether you want to get involved with someone who’s going to pressure you to put yourself at risk. In fact, if someone is smart and sensible, they’ll understand that these safety rules protect both of you. Even if it goes brilliantly, meeting someone for the first time in person after you’ve got to know them well online can be a major shock to the system. So give yourselves time to deal with it, and try to keep your first meeting low-pressure.

### Real life?

Often we talk about ‘real life’ or ‘the real world’ when we mean ‘not on the internet’ hence the popular acronym IRL (In Real Life). That implies that the internet is ‘unreal’. And it’s certainly true that online interaction can be different from everyday, face-to-face interaction in a number of important ways. But the internet is part of the real world too. It’s possible to make very real friendships online, but there are also real dangers and real risks, especially when the online and offline worlds collide.

And in real life – online or off – one of the quickest ways of getting into trouble is to forget that real people don’t always match the images of them in our heads.

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This is an extract from the article Getting Real: Relationships on the Net on the Scarleteen website. [www.scarleteen.com/article/gaydar/getting_real_relationships_on_the_net](http://www.scarleteen.com/article/gaydar/getting_real_relationships_on_the_net) © Centre Against Child Sexual Assault

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10  Respectful Relationships

Issues in Society | Volume 336
WHAT IS RESPECT?

Respect is a word that often gets used but is quite difficult to actually define. It is a word that can be used in several different ways. Respect is something that we give to others and to ourselves. For example, it can mean being treated with consideration and esteem, and treating other people in a similar way. To show respect also means to have regard for other people’s feelings and to treat them with dignity.

Parents and carers play an important role in assisting children and young people to develop the values and skills needed to express respect to others and themselves in their daily lives. The purpose of this hot topic is to provide information and strategies to parents and carers to help children and young people develop respectful relationships with others.

How to recognise a respectful relationship

Respect is an important part of healthy relationships, and everyone has the right to be respected.

A respectful relationship is characterised by the following:

➤ People make their own choices and form their own views consistent with their age and developmental level
➤ Feelings of self-worth are fostered
➤ People’s points of view and beliefs are valued
➤ The rights of a person to be safe, valued and cared for are understood
➤ People are accepted
➤ People can listen and be heard
➤ ‘No’ is accepted for an answer
➤ A person can make mistakes and still be accepted and respected
➤ It is never controlling, and encourages personal growth and fulfilment
➤ It nurtures a culture of trust, honesty and happiness.

As parents and carers there may be times when you find it difficult to show respect to young people – especially when their behaviour is really challenging. Remember, respect is an important ingredient in being a positive influence on the life of a young person.

What happens in the absence of respect in a relationship?

Respect is a key step in building strong relationships. When it is absent or lacking, conflict or relationship breakdown often occurs. Absence or lack of respect can lead to problems at an individual, family and/or community level.

The role of parents and carers

Parenting experts believe that young people look to the adults around them for guidance and role modelling. If adults develop these capacities within themselves and use them in their relationships they can become positive role models for children and young people and teach them about healthy relationships.

Following are some examples of skills and approaches that can help create respect in relationships. Please note, there may be some variation in what constitutes respectful behaviours from culture to culture. However, in any cultural context, respect is about behaviours that convey valuing and caring about another person.
Respectful Relationships

➤ Understanding and empathy
This is the ability to feel for others by trying to put ourselves in their shoes. As parents, empathy can be modelled by striving to understand a child’s point of view.

➤ Empathic listening
This is the ability to listen and convey understanding. Parents can practice this with their children by hearing and considering their ideas or problems. They can also show interest in what their children have to say and avoid rushing in with ideas or solutions.

➤ Anger management
Managing anger is about avoiding hurtful reactions. Some anger management skills include thinking first before speaking and using strategies to stay calm. You can model this behaviour to children by managing your own anger and assisting them with skills such as counting up to ten or taking deep breaths to help them calm down. Taking responsibility for managing your own anger helps to avoid impulsive acts that are potentially destructive to yourself or others.

➤ Conflict resolution
Disagreements are normal in any relationship and there are ways to respond to, minimise and resolve conflict. It is helpful to try to understand and consider the other person’s point of view. Winning an argument is not good if it makes the other person feel hurt or embarrassed. A win-win situation, where give and take on both sides is involved, is always preferred. Parents can model ways to have a difference of opinion with someone that is respectful, and how to accept ‘NO’ for an answer.

➤ Problem solving and decision-making skills
It is easy to fall into the trap of telling young people what you think they should do. Parents can help a young person to develop their own capacities and solve their own problems by holding back on these thoughts for a time, allowing the young person to generate their own solutions. This also helps show that you value and have confidence in their abilities. When helping your child with a problem, it can help to define the issue or concern, understand its impact and generate various options before making choices.

Parents can help young people learn these skills by:
- Assisting them to name the problem
- Encouraging them to express any feelings around the problem and
- Inviting them to consider available options and their possible impact.

This enables young people to effectively think through options and impacts before making decisions.

➤ Honesty
Honesty is encouraged in relationships where there is trust and acceptance. You can encourage honesty in your children by being honest with yourself and true to your own feelings. When young people are able to openly express themselves to others and feel accepted, they can learn honesty.

➤ Assertiveness
Assertiveness is about acknowledging another person’s request or need and being able to ‘own’ and speak up about your needs in a clear way. Being assertive also allows people to maintain healthy boundaries.

Learning to be assertive can be a great way to encourage your children to develop this skill in their own life. If you can effectively stand up for yourself and say ‘no’ without being aggressive, you will also show your child how to stick up for themselves while still respecting others.

Assertiveness skills can assist young people to deal with a range of life experiences where they may feel pressured to do things they don’t want to do or put out of their comfort zone. Assertiveness skills can be helpful for many people who may be either too aggressive or too passive when feeling threatened.

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?
If you have any concerns about your child and how to help them build respectful relationships, you can call Parentline on the phone numbers below.

➤ Parentline Queensland and Northern Territory – 1300 30 1300
➤ Parentline Victoria – 13 22 89
➤ Parent Helpline South Australia – 1300 364 100
➤ Parent Line New South Wales – 13 20 55
➤ Parent Help Centre Western Australia – (08) 9272 1466 or 1800 654 432
➤ ParentLink ACT – (02) 6205 8800.

REFERENCES

OTHER REFERENCES

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Parent Line | www.parentline.com.au
Teenagers need family love and support at a time when lots of other things in their lives are changing. You can keep family relationships with your child strong through ordinary, everyday activities. Advice from the Raising Children Network

The facts

Many people think that families become less important to children as they move into the teenage years. But research shows that your teenager needs family and the support it offers as much as she did when she was younger.

It’s true that family relationships change during adolescence. When your child was young, your role was to nurture and guide him. Now you might be finding that your relationship with your child is becoming more equal. Most young people and their families have some ups and downs during these years, but things usually improve by late adolescence as the children become more mature. And family relationships tend to stay strong right through.

For teenagers, families are a source of care and emotional support. Families give teenagers practical, financial and material help. And most teenagers still want to spend time with their families, sharing ideas and having fun.

Family is the most important thing to me. They’re my own support system. Everybody thinks friends are more important, but they’re not. Friends are great, but they’ll come and go. Family is always there.

— Brianna, teenager

Why your child needs you

Adolescence can be a difficult time – your child is going through rapid physical changes as well as emotional ups and downs. Young people aren’t always sure where they fit, and they’re still trying to work it out. Adolescence can also be a time when peer influences and relationships can cause stress for teenagers and their families, and family support can be vital to getting through these challenges.

During this time, your family can be a secure emotional base where your child feels loved and accepted, no matter what’s going on in the rest of her life. Your family can build and support your child’s self-belief, confidence and optimism. When your family sets rules, boundaries and standards of behaviour, you give your child a sense of consistency and predictability. And believe it or not, your life experiences and knowledge can be really useful to your child – she just might not always want you to know that!

Supportive and close family relationships can reduce risky teenage behaviour, such as alcohol and drug use, and problems such as depression. They can also boost your child’s feelings of being connected to school, and his desire to do well academically. Strong family relationships can go a long way towards helping your teenager grow into a well-adjusted, considerate and caring adult.

Building positive family relationships

The ordinary, everyday things that families do together can help build and sustain strong relationships with teenagers.

These tips might help you and your family:

➤ Regular family meals are a great chance for everyone to chat about their day, or about interesting stuff that’s going on or coming up. If you encourage everyone to have a say, no one will feel they’re being put on the spot to talk. Also, many families find that meals are more enjoyable when the TV’s not invited!

➤ Try setting aside time for fun family outings – you could all take turns choosing activities. A relaxing holiday or weekend away together as a family can also build togetherness. Our article on Teenagers and free time has more ideas for things you can do as a family.

➤ One-on-one time with your child gives you the chance to enjoy each other’s company. It can also be a chance to share thoughts and feelings. If you can, try to find opportunities for each parent to have this time with your child.

➤ Celebrate your child’s accomplishments, share his disappointments, and show interest in his hobbies. You don’t have to make a big deal of this – sometimes it’s just a matter of showing up to watch your child play sport or music, or giving him a lift to extracurricular activities.

➤ Family traditions, routines and rituals can help you and your child set aside regular dates and special times. For example, you might have a movie night together, a favourite meal or cooking session on a particular night, a family games afternoon or an evening walk together.

➤ Agreed household responsibilities give kids of all ages the sense that they’re making an important contribution to family life. These could be things like chores, shopping or helping older or younger members of the family.

➤ Limits and consequences give teenagers a sense of security, structure and predictability. Agreed-upon rules help your child know what standards apply in your family, and what will happen if she pushes the boundaries.

➤ Have family meetings to solve problems. These give everyone a chance to be heard and help work out a solution that everyone’s part of.

If you feel that your family really isn’t connecting, you might find a family counsellor or other support service helpful.

This article has been written with help from Diana Smart, a developmental psychologist with almost 40 years of experience, including 10 years with the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Sourced from the Raising Children Network’s comprehensive and quality-assured Australian parenting website | http://raisingchildren.net.au

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Building better relationships
A fact sheet for parents from The Line

THE ISSUE: COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR KIDS

We all have busy lives and taking small amounts of time to really be with and listen to our kids, can create stronger relationships. Each family is unique, so find a way that works for you. How you talk to your kids is important. Create an open environment where they feel safe to say what they feel. Be honest with them and make sure no topic is out of bounds. Kids need to talk about sex, relationships, drugs, death and everything else, with the people they trust. If they ask the question, they are ready for some information. Use everyday opportunities to talk, initiate conversations with your kids, communicate your values and be open to their views.

TALKING WITH TEENAGERS

Communication with teenagers can be challenging. Teens want privacy and independence and may find it embarrassing to talk to or hang with their parents. With teens you have to take the initiative. Here are seven ways to build trust with teens.

- Spend time with your teenager whatever way you can
- Respect their privacy
- Take an interest in their interests and share yours
- Have faith in them
- Even if they don’t seem to need it, be there for them
- Take care of yourself – you are a great role model
- Even if you don’t see eye to eye, let them know you care for them.

TIPS – 10 THINGS YOUR CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW

1. You love them, no matter what. Let your children know you love them unconditionally. Emphasise that they do not always need to be good, successful, or smart for you to love them. Love their successes and failures.

2. You respect them. Children deserve respect too! You will teach your children a lot about respecting other people’s values and boundaries, when you show them respect.

3. You support them. Be supportive in their decisions, as long as it is not something that will cause them harm. Help them towards their dreams and goals.

4. You listen to them. Listen without judgement or criticism or talking about yourself. You don’t need to understand, relate or like what they are saying. Just listen.

5. You are happy they are in your life. Let your child know how much joy they bring. Show them that you value them as they are.

6. You like them. Tell them what unique qualities you admire. Encourage them to share their skills and talents with you.

7. You are interested in them. Be inquisitive in a good way. Show enthusiasm when they are speaking. Be curious about what they are saying, but don’t interrupt.

8. You want to understand them. Let your child know when you do not understand what they are going through. Ask them to share, but don’t push. Let them come to you on their own free will.

9. You are thankful for what they do. Show gratitude for the little things, even if it is their responsibility. Thank them when they do something without you asking.

10. You want to help them. If your child needs help, be there.

HELP IS A PHONE CALL AWAY

If you feel you need some advice or support call the confidential 24 hour helpline 1800 737 732 to talk with experienced counsellors. For more information check out www.bullyingnoway.com.au

WHAT CAN I EXPECT WHEN I CALL THE HELPLINE?

Your call will be answered by a person, no answering machines, no recorded messages. The person who answers your call will be an experienced counsellor, not the police, not a government department.

You will not have to give your name, You can request a male or female counsellor.

They can also help connect you to other support services as needed.

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) Phone 13 14 50
Hearing Impaired or Deaf Callers phone the National Relay Service 13 36 77 and quote 1800 737 732.
A happy relationship can be a great way to have fun and create a special friendship, as well as learn a lot about yourself and others.

You might have a sense that a relationship is happy and going well when you:

➤ Can laugh and enjoy someone’s company
➤ Feel safe and supported
➤ Provide safety and support
➤ Share ideas and feelings
➤ Respect each other.

Even when a relationship is going well, it is important that you still put effort into it and don’t take the relationship for granted. Every relationship is unique, and you may have your own way of knowing that a relationship is right for you. Even when a relationship is going well, it is important that you still put effort into it and don’t take the relationship for granted. Be aware of what you need in a relationship as well as what other people need. This way, your relationships have the best chance of growing and continuing to be strong and healthy.

If you are in a situation where a relationship turns sour and you are being hurt or abused by someone it may be best to end or change the relationship. If you are unsure of how to go about this, talk to someone you trust, like a friend, your parents, a counsellor or youth worker. For more information about violence you may want to check out the Domestic violence fact sheet at http://au.reachout.com

Keep communicating

It is a good idea to keep the lines of communication open. This may mean talking regularly about what is happening in your life and how you feel about it. When people share their opinions and feelings they develop a greater understanding of each other’s likes and dislikes. It may also help to work out what each other are wanting from the relationship.

Talking about some things may be hard particularly if you are sad or angry about something or with someone. It may be helpful to write it down as a way of expressing yourself. You may want to check out the Telling someone big news fact sheet at http://au.reachout.com for more information.
Try to be accepting of differences

It is not uncommon to care about someone who has different ideas, interests, and opinions to your own. Sometimes it can be difficult managing differences. It may be helpful to calmly discuss those differences or it may also be appropriate to agree to disagree. Respecting someone else’s choices and opinions may help them to respect yours. You may want to check out the Differences and values fact sheet at http://au.reachout.com

It is a good idea to express your opinions, let the other person know that you are listening to them and try to reach an understanding between the two of you.

Respecting each other’s space

Hanging out together is important in getting to know each other and it can also be great fun. Giving each other space from time to time is also important. Enjoying the company of a number of people like your friends, and not just the person who you are having a relationship with, may help you to expand your interests and give you lots of new things to share. This may also help your relationships continue to grow and be fun and interesting.

Spending time with yourself

Spending time with yourself can be fun. It can also help you understand yourself and help you to understand your relationships with others. If possible, spend time getting to know yourself. This may feel a bit scary at first, but over time it can become less weird and more enjoyable. You may want to start by doing something you really enjoy. You can spend time with yourself doing lots of things like being active, listening to music or reading. Being by yourself doesn’t mean you are alone, you are with yourself. You may want to think about what and where you want to go in life and whom you might want to take with you.

Managing arguments or difference of opinions

It is natural that people sometimes have differences of opinion. When we disagree with each other we may feel angry or frustrated. Not letting someone know your opinion, not having your opinion heard or having to accept someone’s opinion without discussion may add to your frustrations and may make a relationship difficult. It is a good idea to express your opinions, let the other person know that you are listening to them and try to reach an understanding between the two of you.

You might choose to:
➤ Respect their right to an opinion but not accept their opinion
➤ Agree to disagree
➤ See the other persons point of view
➤ Accept that your opinion needs to change.

It may be good to remember that we are all different and the world could be really boring if we were all the same! Trying to accept differences, especially between the people we like and ourselves, can help make you and the relationship healthier and stronger. You may want to check out the fact sheet on Resolving an argument or Differences and values at http://au.reachout.com

Thanks to Family Planning NSW for preparing this fact sheet. The information provided here is based on ‘An Intergalactic Guide to Relationships’. A project initiated by Central Coast Health.
A ll people change over time. People sometimes say that their partner has changed. “They’re not the person I met all those years ago!” No – they’re not. Chances are both partners have changed in many ways – in their interests, confidence and attitudes.

Most couples go through a number of stages in their relationships:

**In love ...**
This is a time when couples wear rose-tinted glasses, and idealise each other. They can’t spend enough time together, and make light of any differences between them. Love will conquer all.

**Recognising differences ...**
Eventually couples move on to the next stage of their relationship. This can happen early in their relationship or sometimes not for a year or two. Couples begin to be aware of the differences between them, and become more realistic in their view of each other. Arguments that are more than lovers’ tiffs will often occur.

The earlier experience of being in love and the bonding together of the couple now come into play and serve to reassure couples that their relationship will survive.

**I want to be me ...**
Most couples in the third phase are learning how to be individuals and much of the energy of the two partners goes into establishing their own lifestyle – as parents, in their work and in their interests outside the home.

This is often a time when the relationship seems to coast along and the partners want less from each other. They know the relationship is there, and it is safe to be busy in the outside world.

**Together by choice ...**
The fourth phase is a process of finding each other again, of seeking greater intimacy and deepening the relationship. The partners now have a stronger sense of themselves as individuals. They are choosing to be together, to be dependent and intimate at times, rather than needing to be together.

A relationship is based on choice rather than dependency – two partners, who are not afraid to be independent, who choose to be together and to be intimate.

This phase represents the end of the journey from being ‘in love’ to ‘loving’. There is a growing balance between ‘I’ and ‘us’. The relationship is based on choice rather than dependency – two partners, who are not afraid to be independent, who choose to be together and to be intimate.

**Relationships can also change**
- If children arrive – and as the children go through various developmental stages and eventually leave home
- If there are financial pressures
- If work demands and responsibilities change
- When one or both partners retire from work.

**Some couples face unexpected changes like:**
- Illness
- Disability
- Unemployment
- Living apart caused by, for example, employment.

All changes present their own challenges to couples, but are easier to cope with if the relationship is solid.

**What does a good relationship need?**
- Respect
- Honesty
- Trust
- Love
- Companionship
- Mutual emotional support
- Intimate expression
- Economic security.

... are all important parts of an adult relationship.

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Are you living in a respectful relationship?

The relationship you have with your partner is an important part of your life; the stability that it provides contributes to your emotional and physical wellbeing. Advice from the Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research

Respectful relationships are based on trust, honesty, fairness, and equality. In a respectful relationship you can be honest with yourself and with your partner. You bring out the best in each other, trust each other’s decisions, and know that your partner accepts that the best person you can be is the person you are! Being in a respectful relationship is fun and makes you feel good about yourself.

In a respectful relationship:

➤ You don’t have to do everything together; it’s healthy to have different interests and opinions
➤ You’re prepared to compromise. Sharing decision-making is fair and equal
➤ You can be honest with each other while respecting your partner’s opinions and feelings
➤ You trust one another, going out with your own friends (male or female) is okay
➤ You have your own support team, working together and helping each other toward your individual and shared goals
➤ You accept that there are good times in a relationship and times when you need to be tolerant and accepting of your partner’s difference
➤ You are able to communicate your thoughts and feelings and talk about how you feel.

A relationship where:

➤ You are constantly trying to please your partner to avoid conflict
➤ Your partner’s disrespect of you is copied by your children
➤ You're made to feel that your opinions aren't as important as your partner’s
➤ Your partner blames their use of alcohol or drugs on your behaviour
➤ You feel that you are unsafe
➤ Your partner demands to know who you are with and where you are at all times
➤ Your partner is jealous and does not want you to talk to other men
➤ Your partner limits or prevents your contact with family or friends
➤ You are pressured to have sex or made to feel guilty if you don’t
➤ Your partner denies you the right to practice your spiritual beliefs or misuses spiritual traditions to justify abusive behaviour
➤ Your partner talks about your private intimate relationship publicly
➤ Your partner puts you down or humiliates you privately or publicly
➤ Your partner controls the money and only gives you what he thinks you need.

... is not a respectful relationship

“Research demonstrates that non-physical abuse can be just as devastating, if not more devastating than the long-term effects of physical abuse” (McKinnon, 2008).

Jealous, controlling behaviour that limits your social interaction is not an expression of love – it’s abuse.

What effects can a relationship that is not respectful have on your life:

➤ Poor sleep habits
➤ Nausea or headaches
➤ Depression or anxiety
➤ Low self-confidence or esteem
➤ Change in eating habits (over or under-eating)
➤ Neglect of general health needs (eyesight, teeth) due to partner restricting finances
➤ Lack of trust in friends and family
➤ Abuse of drugs and alcohol.

“Depression, anxiety, confusion, low self-esteem and chronic health problems may all be symptoms of emotional or psychological abuse” (McKinnon, 2008).

What you should know if you are in a relationship that is not respectful:

➤ You are not alone; there is a range of confidential services that you can contact to discuss your relationship
➤ Physical violence is one form of abuse that you may find in an unhealthy relationship, but psychological, financial, verbal, social, economic, sexual and spiritual abuse are equally harmful
➤ There is no excuse for any type of abuse
➤ Verbal and psychological abuse may change to physical abuse over time
➤ It takes courage to seek help.
Trust and respect are essential ingredients for a good relationship – with family, friends or in a romantic or sexual relationship. Sometimes these terms can be a bit ‘airy-fairy’ though and hard to identify in a relationship. We’ve put together a few examples of when you have trust, respect and choice. And when you don’t.

**TRUST**

What is it?
The ability to have confidence in someone that they will treat you in a certain way. It is a reliance on another person. In a relationship it is important to be able to trust a partner to treat us well, be supportive and respectful.

IS THERE TRUST IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

**YOU’VE GOT IT**

- My partner is cool with me having male and female friends.
- I am able to voice concerns about my relationship to my partner.
- My partner provides a shoulder to cry on – in good and bad times, without judgement.
- I always make sure that my partner and I have the time to spend with friends and family.
- We have different opinions on things but my partner and I agree to disagree.
- I feel safe and secure in my relationship.
- My partner is supportive of my choices around work or weekend activities.

**YOU DON’T**

- My partner gets really jealous if I hang out with certain people.
- I keep concerns to myself and just hope things will work out.
- I can’t rely on my partner to be unconditionally supportive.
- My partner tends to make the decisions.
- My partner only supports me when it suits them.
- I can tend to put on an act of who I think my partner wants me to be (e.g. not getting upset or disagreeing).
- My partner always likes to have their own way.
- My partner puts me down and sometimes calls me names.
- My partner tends to put pressure on me to do things I don’t really want to do.

**RESPECT**

What is it?
Respect is when you have a high regard for someone and who they are. This is a little easier to understand if we consider ways that people show their respect for someone else – by listening, by speaking well of them, by unconditionally supporting them, and by being honest. These are just a few ways to show respect – there are many others. There are also many actions which clearly demonstrate a lack of respect.

IS THERE RESPECT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

**YOU’VE GOT IT**

- My partner listens to me.
- There is an even amount of give and take in my relationship.
- My partner is supportive of my choices – even if it is not to their benefit.
- I feel I can be myself in my relationship.
- My partner and I both know it is important to compromise.
- I am able to say no or change my mind about issues in my relationship.
- If we are having a problem in our relationship we are able to talk about it and sort it out.
- My partner and I are both able to admit when we are wrong.
- My partner is respectful in the way they communicate with me.
- If I say no to something (e.g. sex) my partner understands.

**YOU DON’T**

- My partner’s not a great listener – they like to talk and give directions rather than listen.
- My partner tends to make the decisions.
- My partner only supports me when it suits them.
- I can tend to put on an act of who I think my partner wants me to be (e.g. not getting upset or disagreeing).
- My partner always likes to have their own way.
- My partner tends to become upset or angry when I change my mind so generally I don’t. I just go along with things.
- My partner blames me or says ‘it’s my problem’ if I raise concerns about our relationship.
- My partner is never wrong.
- My partner puts me down and sometimes calls me names.
- My partner tends to put pressure on me to do things I don’t really want to do.
A NUMBER OF RULES CAN HELP YOU FEEL RESPECTED, SAFE AND SECURE ADVISES THIS **BY CHOICE NOT CHANCE** FACT SHEET

**Rule no.1  No violence or abuse**

Every person has the right to be free from violence and/or abuse. Any person who inflicts violence on another (verbal, physical or sexual) is committing a crime.

**Rule no.2  Be yourself**

Each partner in a relationship has the right to express their own individuality and opinions, even if they are different to their partner’s. Also, each partner has the responsibility to respect difference and negotiate to find balance where opinions are different.

**Rule no.3  Communicate openly and honestly**

Open and honest communication is essential to building a healthy relationship. Being able to tell your partner anything from ‘No, I’m not ready for sex’ to ‘I really want to see that movie’ is important. This applies to all relationship matters and good negotiation is key.

**Rule no.4  Respect and trust each other**

Everyone should expect respect and trust in a relationship. This relates to everything from trusting that your partner will not breach your confidence, to you respecting their choice not to have sex until they are ready. Listening and understanding are essential to building respect and trust.

**Rule no.5  Treat each other with equality**

Each partner in a relationship should have equal ability to make choices and decisions about matters that affect the relationship.

**Rule no.6  Don’t criticise, humiliate or use put-downs**

No person should be subject to criticisms, humiliation or put-downs.

**Rule no.7  Spend time with family and friends**

Relationships with family and friends outside the immediate partnership need to be nurtured and respected by each partner, and space created to continue these relationships.

**Rule no.8  Ensure each person has choice**

In a relationship each partner needs to maintain their ability to choose what is good for them. Whilst this needs to be done with respect for their partner, the relationship should not mean that individual choice is lost (e.g. if you always wanted to go to university – you go!)

**Rule no.9  Foster safety and security**

Everyone in a relationship should feel safe and secure, and free from fear of their partner.

**Rule no.10  Be consistent**

Each partner should be able to expect consistency from their partner in regards to their relationship and interactions. This means that each partner should know where they stand.
The good, the bad and the ugly

Lowdown on the good, bad and ugly sides of relationships, from the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Good relationships – signs that things are working
➤ You like each other for who you are. You want each other to feel good and you support each other’s goals in life
➤ You are independent and have your own interests
➤ You see your own family and friends whenever you want – alone and with your boyfriend or girlfriend
➤ You are good at listening and talking to each other
➤ You have different opinions and sometimes fight but you listen to each other and compromise
➤ You make decisions together and you can both make compromises. For example, you take turns deciding what movie to watch!
➤ You can tell each other truthfully what you think and what you want without being afraid of being hurt or put down. You trust the other person to be honest with you
➤ Sexual contact is what you both want – no one is pressured into it. You can be honest with each other about what you like/don’t like
➤ If there is jealousy, you listen to each other, talk about it, and try to work things out together (instead of making threats or demands that restrict the other person’s freedom)
➤ You both respect the other person’s right to have their own private communication with their friends and family
➤ You agree about whether you are seeing other people or only each other
➤ You accept each other the way you are.

Bad relationships – signs that things aren’t working
➤ Trying to change the other person rather than accepting them for who they are
➤ Not trusting each other or lying to each other sometimes
➤ You (or your partner) don’t talk much or open up about your feelings
➤ Fighting a lot. Things don’t seem to get worked out
➤ There is a lot of tension when you are together
➤ Constantly worrying that relationship is going to end or that the other person is interested in someone else
➤ One of you or both of you give up your friends or other interests for the sake of the relationship
➤ You have to see each other all the time
➤ Secretly reading the other person’s Facebook or texts to see what they are up to
➤ Feeling overwhelmed by the other person’s demands or needs
➤ Feeling like you don’t know who you are or what you want anymore
➤ Friends or family say they are worried about you or your relationship
➤ There’s lots of criticisms or jokes about your partner
➤ You don’t look forward to spending time together
➤ Some of these things can mean you need to sit down with your BF/GF and have a serious talk
➤ Some are early warning signs that things are not okay. Some might mean you want to call it quits.

Abusive relationships – the signs of control
➤ One person’s needs and decisions always come first. The other person feels they must go along with it
➤ One of you wants to know where the other person is all the time
➤ One of you checks up on the other person too much – texting to see where you are and who you’re with
➤ One of you stops the other from seeing family or friends. They say stuff like, ‘You don’t need to see them’ or ‘we only need each other’ or ‘you’re friends are boring’
➤ One of you is a snooper and disrespects the right to privacy – reading texts, a private diary or journal, phone messages, Facebook stalking, or installing software programs that record what websites are visited
➤ One of you feels pressured, tricked or forced to do sexual things they don’t want to do
➤ One person feels scared to end the relationship because they are worried their BF or GF will hurt them, or will commit suicide
➤ Emotional manipulation like ‘If you really loved me, you would ... (have sex/stop talking to your ex-boyfriend/spend every night with me ...)’
➤ One person often humiliates the other and makes them feel bad (e.g. ‘you’re stupid/embarrassing/fat/clumsy’, ‘no one else would want you’, ‘you can’t do anything right’)
➤ One person scares the other through threats, pushing, hitting, locking them in, smashing things or aggression – the other person feels so afraid of upsetting them that they just go along with the demands of their BF/GF
➤ Jealousy is used as an excuse to demand that the other person has to stop talking to other guys/girls, ex-partners, friends or family
➤ Sending nude or humiliating pictures around of your BF or GF without their consent.

If any of these sound familiar, see ‘If things get ugly’ for information and advice at http://lovegoodbadugly.com

Love: the good, the bad, the ugly is part of the work of the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria
http://lovegoodbadugly.com

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RELATIONSHIP MYTHS AND FACTS

There are a whole bundle of myths floating around about relationships, what to expect and what your ‘obligations’ are. The website By Choice Not Chance bursts just a few of these mythical bubbles.

**MYTH** People who love each other should communicate well

**FACT** Wrong! Good communication is a skill and gets easier with practice and as you get to know someone too. There are certain skills required for good communication including listening, understanding the other person’s perspective, having the ability to negotiate a compromise or being able to agree to disagree.

**MYTH** Once you have been in a relationship for a while you should be having sex

**FACT** Sex is a personal choice and a choice everyone should make when they are ready. There are no obligations to have sex with a partner – no timeframes within which you have to have sex. It is up to you and your partner should respect that.

**MYTH** It’s okay if my partner always wants to know where I am

**FACT** If your partner always needs to know where you are (e.g. texts you all the time, double checks where you are, or turns up at places you are at uninvited) they are showing a lack of trust and respect. This type of behaviour can be an early warning sign of domestic violence.

**MYTH** ‘If you really loved me you would have sex with me’

**FACT** Love and sex are two entirely different things. Just because you have one of them, doesn’t mean you have the other. This is a line often used to pressure someone into doing something they don’t want to do.

**MYTH** My partner should know what I want by now

**FACT** No matter how long you have been with someone they should never be expected to read your mind. Communication is an ongoing requirement in a relationship and it isn’t safe to assume your partner will know what you want if you haven’t said anything.

**MYTH** My partner should be my best friend

**FACT** It is important to have closeness and intimacy but expecting your partner to be everything in your life puts a lot of pressure on them, your relationship and you.

**MYTH** When my partner is jealous and possessive it shows they love me

**FACT** Jealousy and possessiveness are two of the most common early signs of abuse in a relationship. These traits demonstrate that your partner sees you as a possession and is trying to control what you do and who you see which can be very isolating.

**MYTH** In a good relationship people never disagree

**FACT** Ha! People, being people, will always disagree. It is actually a good thing to have different opinions and perspectives as it enables both of you to learn and see things from other perspectives. The key to a good relationship is being able to disagree on some things and finding a way to accommodate the disagreement – agreeing to disagree.

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Respectful Relationships

Issues in Society | Volume 336
10 ways to be a better partner
A self-help tip sheet from Mensline Australia

Relationships are at the core of our lives. Relating and engaging with others can result in a mixed bag of emotions, such as excitement, fear, anticipation, elation, struggle, closeness, dread, intimacy and loneliness. In a positive relationship, both partners feel valued, loved and nurtured.

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING TIPS:
1. Develop a sense of trust – that is feeling that you can both be seen, heard, understood and accepted.
2. Recognise that physical closeness is only one expression of intimacy. Intimacy can be verbal (e.g. telling your partner why you love them or things that you love about them), and it can also be expressed by doing special things for your partner or generally helping out with daily living tasks.
3. Acknowledge each other’s need to be autonomous and to make your own decisions sometimes.
4. Create a safe and open place, where you can both express problems, doubts, fears and weaknesses without fear of rejection or punishment.
5. Be willing to communicate. This often includes sharing feelings, needs and wants. Note: Listening to your partner’s problems does not necessarily mean you are responsible for solving them.
6. Be open to negotiate around your differences with respect and generosity. You are not going to get your own way all the time.
7. Aim to be aware of personal issues you bring to the relationship (sometimes called ‘baggage’), and take responsibility for these. Also be aware of the expectations you may place on others and assess how realistic they are.
8. Regular time alone gives you space to recharge and rebalance. This will allow you to give more in your relationship in the long run.
9. Maintain and build a supportive network of friends outside the relationship. No single relationship will meet every need.
10. Develop the capacity to not take yourself and everything else too seriously.

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Ph: 1300 78 99 78
In 95% of abusive relationships, men abuse women. However, young women can be violent, and young men can also be victims. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual teenagers can be abused in their relationships too.

But the truth is, there is no excuse for being abusive and finding excuses is wrong.

**Dating violence is a form of family and domestic violence. It is wrong and no one deserves to be abused.**

Sometimes, the person who is experiencing physical violence may fight back as a means to stop further abuse from occurring. It is important to recognise that the person who starts using physical harm or threats of violence to gain control over the other partner is the perpetrator of the abuse. This can happen in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

**Types of Abuse**

**Verbal and Emotional Abuse includes:**

➤ Calling you names and using foul language to make you feel bad
➤ Turning around every argument/disagreement so that it’s always your fault, never theirs
➤ Threatening to hurt you or someone close to you – or threatening to hurt themselves if you don’t do what they want you to
➤ Being jealous and envious of your friends and family, and always criticising them.

**Physical Abuse can be:**

➤ Direct personal contact such as hitting, slapping, punching, biting, pulling your hair, kicking, burning (e.g. using cigarettes or an iron)
➤ Indirect contact such as deliberately placing dangerous objects in the way so that they hurt you
➤ Breaking/smashing your things.

Unfortunately for lots of girls, they feel trapped in abusive relationships, even experiencing severe physical...
**NATALIE’S STORY**

“I have been going out with Pete for about 3 months now and I really care about him. Things seemed OK at the beginning but lately he treats me like he owns me and I hate it. He tells me that I don’t need to spend as much time with my friends now we are together and gets aggro when I go out with them. He goes on about me having to make a choice ... either my friends or him ... why can’t I just have both?

Last night, we went for a drive so that we could be alone. We parked and started mucking around, kissing and feeling and stuff. He started to get too carried away. I told him to stop but he just ignored me. I yelled at him to stop and he turned real aggro. He said that I was playing games with him.

I tried to explain I just didn’t feel like it but he wouldn’t listen. He told me to stop playing games and leading him on by making him want to have sex with me, otherwise he would leave me and find someone else who wasn’t so uptight. I let him have sex because I didn’t want to break up with him but now I feel used and I’m beginning to feel too scared to question him in case he leaves me, or hurts me. He gets so aggro lately.”

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**If you are being abused remember it is not your fault. Nothing you say, wear, or do gives anyone else the right to treat you this way. You are a worthwhile person and deserve to be happy, safe and respected. No one deserves to be abused.**

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**Sexual abuse can be when someone:**

- Touches or kisses you when you don’t want them to
- Forces you to have sex with them when you don’t want to
- Makes you do other sexual stuff when you don’t want to.

**Controlling behaviour includes:**

- Not allowing you to hang out with friends and/or family
- Checking on you all the time to find out where you are, what you’re doing and who you’re with
- SMS, instant messaging, phoning and contacting your friends all the time to find out where you are
- Forcing you to do things against your will (e.g. telling you what clothes you should wear)
- Invading your privacy (e.g. reading your diary, emails, phone messages)
- Controlling what you eat/drink.

**DATE RAPE AND STALKING**

**Date rape**

Date rape happens when someone

- you are going out with forces you or tricks you into having sex when you don’t want to. It doesn’t have to involve sexual intercourse, it can include things like penetration using an object or finger or forcing you to have oral sex.

The person may use threats, get you very drunk, drug you, or trick you to get you to have sex when you don’t want to. This is not acceptable behaviour.

Regardless of the relationship, sex without consent is RAPE. Any unwanted sexual contact or behaviour is against the law.

Check out these websites for more information on date rape and the law:

- www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au
- www.lawstuff.org.au

**SUSAN’S STORY**

“Dave and I have been having fun together, and sometimes we hang out in the city and check out the shops. The other day when we were in town, he started looking at this awful neon green shirt, and wanted to try it on. I told him not to be an idiot, and threatened to not hang around him if he bought the shirt and wore it, because I would be so embarrassed! He got upset, and told me that he could wear what he wanted to, bought the shirt, and went home. I hung around for a bit longer, still fuming at how dumb Dave was being. After a while, I started to calm down, and realised I probably sounded like Dave’s mum by telling him what to wear. And it was a bit mean to call him an idiot.

I called him on my mobile and told him I was sorry for being bossy and calling him an idiot, and that I definitely wouldn’t stop hanging out with him just because of a shirt. Dave said that was cool, then actually admitted he really didn’t like the shirt — he had only bought it to show me he didn’t like being bossed around. He asked me if I wanted to come with him to return it tomorrow.”

---

**WARNING SIGNS**

**You are in an abusive relationship when your partner:**

- Tells you who you can have as friends and controls when you can see them
- Wants to know where you have been and who you have been with
- Gets jealous when you talk to someone else, including family members
- Constantly puts you down and insults you so you feel worthless
- Forces you to have sex
- Physically and emotionally hurts you
- Threatens and frightens you
- Tells you what you should and shouldn’t wear and/or eat
- Pressures or forces you into using illegal drugs, alcohol and/or cigarettes.

**HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

A healthy relationship is built on a foundation of trust, respect, compromise, and understanding for one another and being comfortable in each other’s company.
An abusive relationship occurs when one person dominates, bullies and controls the other on almost everything. Obsessive jealousy can often be mistaken for love, but it is an underlying form of control and possessiveness. If you respect and trust each other it shouldn’t matter who you talk to or hang out with.

A healthy relationship includes:
- Respecting each other’s feelings, opinions, and friendships
- Having fun together
- Feeling comfortable and at ease with one another
- Being free to be yourself
- Being able to disagree without feeling intimidated
- Being able to spend time away from your relationship without negative consequences
- Being able to say no when you don’t want to do things, including sex.

Do you:
- Restrict his/her contact with other people?
- Restrict his/her time away from you?
- Get aggro if he/she doesn’t agree with you and do as you say?
- Physically harm your partner (e.g. hit, slap, push)?
- Damage your partner’s personal belongings?
- Deliberately hurt your partner’s pets?
- Tell her/him what to wear?
- Belittle and say nasty, derogatory things including put-downs about her/him in front of others?

If you answered ‘yes’ to any of these questions, you could do with some options to turn your relationship into a healthier and happier one.

Help and support is available. Take the first step and pick up the phone and call one of the useful contact numbers on this website.

AM I BEING ABUSIVE?
See below to find out if you behave this way toward your girl/boyfriend.

About Tom’s story
Tom’s behaviour is not OK – he is being abusive. No one has the right to bully anyone else into doing things they don’t want to do. This is not a healthy relationship and Karen did the right thing by leaving. Karen wasn’t prepared to be bullied or controlled and was lucky enough to pick up on the signs that something was wrong and did something about it.

Unfortunately, for lots of girls this doesn’t happen and they feel trapped in abusive relationships, even experiencing severe physical abuse at the hands of their boyfriends.

THIS IS NOT OK.
Intimacy in a relationship means being able to share the whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences we have as human beings. It involves being open and talking through your thoughts and emotions, letting your guard down, and showing someone else how you feel and what your hopes and dreams are. Discovering intimacy with someone you love can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a relationship.

**INTIMACY IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Intimacy is achieved when we become close to someone else and are reassured that we are loved and accepted for who we are. Children usually develop intimacy with parents and peers. As adults, we seek intimacy in close relationships with other adults, friends, family and with a partner.

**INTIMACY AND SEX**

For many couples, ‘making love’ involves a sense of intimacy and emotional closeness. An intimate sexual relationship involves trust and being vulnerable and potent with each other. Closeness during sex is also linked to other forms of intimacy.

It is important to share a whole range of emotions with a partner, otherwise some people begin to feel lonely and isolated regardless of how good their sexual experiences may be. Explore ways to share love and affection without sex. Often, the more a couple is intimate with each other in ways other than sex, the more fulfilling their sex life becomes.

**DIFFICULTIES IN ACHIEVING INTIMACY**

There are many reasons why some people find it difficult to achieve intimacy in their relationship.

This is commonly the result of problems such as:

➤ Lack of communication
➤ Financial problems
➤ Work or family pressures
➤ Negative childhood experiences
➤ Past and current traumas.

We all have some barriers to intimacy. It is normal for couples to work together to overcome these barriers.

**INTIMACY IS BUILT UP OVER TIME**

Building and maintaining intimacy in a relationship takes time, and it takes some people longer than others. Often, the harder you work at developing intimacy in your relationship, the more rewarding it is.

Some suggestions for developing intimacy in your relationship include:

➤ Celebrate the good things in your relationship. Tell your partner (in words and actions) how much you love and appreciate them
➤ Talk openly about your feelings and what you need from the relationship
➤ Create opportunities for intimacy. Take time out to be together as a couple
➤ Accept that your relationship will have highs and lows. Continue to explore new ways of finding a deeper level of intimacy
➤ Intimacy is damaged when one partner uses power inappropriately over the other. Abuse or violence in a relationship destroys trust and signals that the relationship is in trouble.

**SEEKING HELP**

Sometimes you may need help or guidance to sort through some of the issues, feelings and thoughts you have about your relationship. Consider talking to a relationship counsellor, or going to a course or workshop that will help you and your partner overcome some of your relationship problems.

**WHERE TO GET HELP**

➤ Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) National Register (Family and Relationship Therapy) Tel. (03) 9486 3077
➤ Relationships Australia Tel. 1300 364 277
➤ Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP), Australian Government Tel. 1800 050 321
➤ Australian Association of Relationship Counsellors Tel. 1800 806 054.

**THINGS TO REMEMBER**

➤ Sharing your deepest thoughts and emotions with someone you love can be one of the most rewarding aspects of a relationship
➤ Be aware of the need to explore ways to share intimacy without sex
➤ Intimacy in a relationship doesn’t just happen. It is built up over time
➤ Abuse or violence in a relationship destroys trust and intimacy and signals that the relationship is in trouble.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by, the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia.

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www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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The law makes it clear: you have the right to be safe and treated with respect. You also have the right to say no, especially to sexual activity. So if anyone abuses you, tries to control you or is violent, they're crossing the line. To find out what is and isn't OK in relationships, read on.

What is a healthy relationship?
In a healthy relationship, both partners should feel free to express themselves and respect each other's opinions, feelings and friends. This doesn't mean you'll never get angry or upset, but you should solve problems together without any abuse or violence.

Your rights in a relationship
When someone loves you, you feel valued, respected and free to be yourself. You shouldn't be made to feel intimidated or controlled.

If you are in a relationship, you must be treated with respect, which means your boyfriend or girlfriend:
- Is willing to compromise
- Is able to admit to being wrong
- Enables you to feel safe being with them
- Accepts you changing your mind
- Respects your wishes if you want to end the relationship
- Lets you feel comfortable being yourself
- Tries to resolve conflict by talking honestly
- Respects your feelings, your opinions and your friends
- Accepts you saying 'no' to things you don't want to do (like sex).

Think about your relationship – do you feel respected?

Whenever anyone does something to dominate and control their partner, it's abuse.

What is abusive behaviour?
Whenever anyone does something to dominate and control their partner, it's abuse. They might hit, push, or threaten. But abuse isn't only physical; constant put-downs, pressuring for sex, controlling money, and limiting a partner's social contacts are also forms of abuse. So is preventing cultural or religious practices.

Do you think you know when the line has been crossed? Have a go at our interactive animation on the website (Where would you draw the line?) to find out where you would draw the line.

Anger and abuse – what's the difference?
Anger is an emotion. Abuse or violence is behaviour to control a situation or a person. People can get angry without getting abusive. In a healthy relationship, you can disagree, argue and raise your voices, but a level of respect and equality between partners remains.

While there may be a whole range of things that people disagree about, differences must be resolved without violence or abuse and without either partner feeling unsafe or fearful.
TRUE STORIES

Case study 1 – Kelly, 26

“Pat and I had been together for about three months before the violence and abuse began. In the beginning Pat would criticise the way I dressed, how I wore my hair, and even how I spoke. I didn’t recognise this as abuse, I thought Pat was just trying to help me. However things gradually got worse. Pat was criticising my family and friends and did things to make it hard for me to see them.”

People who experience this type of abuse or violence can feel very confused and ashamed about their experiences and sometimes blame themselves. The person who is being abusive or violent towards you is to blame for their behaviour, not you. They must want to take responsibility for their own behaviour and stop being abusive or violent.

Case study 2 – Casey, 34

“I realised that there was a problem when I was asked by Yoshan’s teacher at school if everything was okay at home. The teacher was concerned as Yoshan had not been listening in class and had noticed that Yoshan was very aggressive towards her and the other students.

“I didn’t think Yoshan had heard the way his grandfather, who lives with us, was treating me.”

The abusive or violent person’s behaviour is also teaching children inappropriate ways about how to treat people, including relatives with a disability, illness or impairment who are in need of care.

Case study 3 – Ric, 28

“My friend Sam would come around a couple of times a week to help me with my housework and sometimes do my shopping. I’ve been unwell for the past six months and found it hard to cope. At first Sam’s help was great, however Sam started to demand that I hand over money, yelled at me and had on one occasion pushed me over. My brother John spoke to a worker who told him that I could apply for a protection order. John helped me with the forms and going to court. I got a protection order and Sam can’t come around any more and hurt me.”

People in a range of domestic relationships can seek protection under the law.

Case study 4 – Ash, 16

“I’ve been going out with Tram for four months now, and everything is pretty good, except for when she flirts with the older guys in Year 11. She reckons she doesn’t say anything, but I’ve seen the way they look at her. I’ve told her heaps of times not to speak to other guys. I get really jealous and just snap, calling her names and yelling all the time. I have even shoved her against the wall a couple of times. I know she is scared of me, I can see it in her eyes.”

Threatening someone is abusive. Intimidating someone by damaging property is abusive. Forcing someone to do something they don’t want to or physically hurting someone is abusive. There is no excuse for domestic and family violence.

Want to hear other people’s stories?

Advice from others who have been there, from Don’t Cross the Line

Types of abuse

Abuse isn’t just physical and sexual. Putting someone down and making hurtful comments about them around others; using threatening language; keeping someone financially depend-ent and making them ask for money; pressuring someone into doing things they don’t want to do; not allowing them to follow their own religious beliefs; and controlling what they do, who they talk to and see, are all types of abuse.

So is isolating someone by not allowing them to have contact with family and friends and checking up on them all the time to see what they are doing and who they are with. Pets can also be harmed as a way of intimidating and threatening someone.

Who gets abused?

There’s no single type of person who uses violence or abuse to dominate a relationship. Unfortunately, violence and abuse occurs in every country, culture and age group. And it happens in same-sex relationships as well as heterosexual relationships. So basically, anyone could be a victim of abuse.
WHAT IS A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?

When you are in a healthy relationship, both individuals support each other, sharing the good times and helping each other through the tough ones. When someone matters deeply to you, and those feelings of trust and respect are returned, it enables us to face the world with confidence.

Building and maintaining a healthy relationship needs the commitment from both of sides in order to work at it. But it is worth it, because in a good relationship, you feel good about your boyfriend or girlfriend, and good about yourself.

Not all relationships work that way no matter how much we might want them to. When there is violence the relationship can become really destructive which can make it both physically and emotionally dangerous.

KEY SIGNS OF AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

While everyone’s experience of an unhealthy or abusive relationship will be different, there are some common patterns of controlling behaviour and abuse, which can happen before the relationship becomes physically violent. These include:

POSSESSIVENESS

➤ Checking on you all the time to see where you are, what you’re doing and who you’re with
➤ Trying to control where you can go and who they can see.

JEALOUSY

➤ Accusing you without good reason of being unfaithful or flirting
➤ Isolating you from family and friends, often by rude behaviour.

PUT-DOWNS

➤ Putting you down, either publicly or privately by attacking how smart you are, your looks or capabilities
➤ Constantly comparing you unfavourably with others
➤ Blaming you for all the problems in the relationship.

MENACE AND THREATS

➤ Yelling, sulking and deliberately breaking things that you value
➤ Threatening to use violence against you, your family, friends or even a pet
➤ Saying things like ‘no one else will want you’.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE BEING ABUSED

➤ It’s not OK to be physically threatened or scared into things that make you uncomfortable or unhappy just because you are in a relationship
➤ It’s not OK to be put down and pushed around – shoved, hit, slapped, kicked, or punched. No one deserves to be treated this way. No one should use violence – or the threat of violence – to make you do what you don’t want to do
➤ It’s not OK for someone to use the excuse that they are tired, stressed, overworked or under financial pressure as a reason for their violent behaviour.

If you are living with your boyfriend or girlfriend and are feeling unsafe, find other accommodation with friends, family or, if that’s not possible, an emergency accommodation service.
HOW YOU MIGHT FEEL
IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

“"My boyfriend/girlfriend is not violent all the time – he/she loves me”

A violent relationship may not be violent all the time. Some of the time, violent people treat their boyfriend or girlfriend very well. They can be very loving and sorry for their violent behaviour. This can make it hard to see what’s really happening. There is a strong chance that the violence will get worse over time and the relationship more abusive.

“Things will get better – he/she didn’t mean it”

After a violent event, it’s common for both of you to try and make it OK by making excuses, apologising, or promising to change. But there is no excuse for this behaviour, and just saying sorry is not good enough. Sometimes the violent person will blame the victim – “it wouldn’t happen if you did what I said”.

Things might settle down for a while – the abuser may feel guilty, and you might try to go along with whatever they want. Usually it’s only a matter of time before the build-up to violence starts again.

“It’s so confusing – I’m sure it’s a one-off”

If you are experiencing violence in a relationship, things can feel very confusing, especially if it’s your first relationship. You might try to make excuses, think of it as a one-off incident or something that only happened because your boyfriend or girlfriend was drunk or stressed. You might not be sure what behaviour to expect from them.

“Maybe it’s my fault”

You might begin to think that the violence is your fault. You might start to try to fit in with whatever they want, even if it makes you uncomfortable.

“I’m scared of what he/she will do if I leave them”

You might also feel scared that they will hurt you if you try to leave.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Breaking up any kind of relationship is hard to do, but it can be particularly hard to leave a violent relationship. When you are frightened and your self-esteem is low, it can be hard to find the strength to leave or break-up. It’s sometimes easier to hope that things will change for the better. Too often they don’t.

But the first step in changing things is to understand what’s been happening is wrong. Even if they say they care about you and you care about them, it’s not OK to be treated like this.

WHERE TO GET HELP

Talk to someone – Call the confidential 24-hour helpline that has been especially set up to help you with this situation 1800 200 526. You will be able to talk with experienced counsellors. You can also call the 24-hour Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 (it’s also free from a landline) or try Lifeline on 13 11 14 (the cost of a local call from a landline).

Listen to your feelings and trust them – if something doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t. Talk to someone who cares about you.

Talk to your parents or other family members, a family member, a friend, or someone in your community like your doctor, your teacher, your local religious leader. Talk to someone you trust.

Don’t feel ashamed or embarrassed. You are not responsible for somebody else’s violent behaviour. Your first responsibility is to yourself – get safe and stay safe. If you want to talk to someone about your relationship, or you want help to get safe, the contact points provided below will help you find the right person to give you support.

When you call the helpline

➤ Your call will be answered by a person – no answering machines, no recorded messages. The person who answers your call will be an experienced counsellor – not the police, not a government department
➤ You will not have to give your name. Anyone who is concerned can call the helpline
➤ You can request a male or female counsellor. After talking with you about your concerns, the counsellor may offer to put you in touch with another organisation that can provide ongoing help or support.

For emergency situations that require immediate and urgent assistance call 000. Callers who are deaf or have a hearing impairment can call through the National Relay Service on 1800 555 677 and quote 1800 200 526.
MORE INFORMATION

National services

Police or Ambulance or Fire – 000 (Australia only).
Violence Against Women, Australian Says No (specialises in domestic violence and sexual assault counselling and referrals) – 1800 200 526.
Relationships Australia – 1300 384 277.
Mensline Australia – 1300 78 99 78.

VIC

Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre (Telephone counselling, information and referral to local services). Address: 139 Sydney Rd, Brunswick. Ph: (03) 9486 9866 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) or TTY (03) 9417 2155. Email: dvirc@dvirc.org.au

WIRE – Women's Information and Referral Exchange (Information, support and referral for women). Ph: 9654 6844 (Mon-Fri 9am-7pm) or 1800 136 570 (country callers).

Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service of Victoria (24-hr crisis support, information, referral to safe accommodation (refuge) for women experiencing abuse in their relationships). Ph: (03) 9373 0123 or 1800 015 188 (toll free for country users).

Centre Against Sexual Assault Crisis (support, counselling, information for people who have been sexually assaulted). Ph: (03) 9344 2000 (daytime) or (03) 9349 1766 (After-hours telephone service) or 1800 806 292 (country).

Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service (for immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence). Ph: (03) 9898 3145 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm).

NSW

Domestic Violence Line (24-hr telephone support). Ph: 1800 656 463 or 1800 671 442 (TTY).

Rape Crisis Centre – (02) 9819 6565 or 1800 424 017 (country toll free).

Immigrant Women's Speakout Association (for migrant and refugee women who are victims of violence, counselling, bilingual workers). Ph: (02) 9635 8022 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm).

Victims of Crime Support Line (24-hr telephone information, support and referral for victims of crime). Ph: (02) 9374 3000 (metro) or 1800 633 063 (toll free) or (02) 9374 3175 (TTY).

ACT

Domestic Violence Crisis Service (24-hr telephone counselling, referral). Ph: (02) 6280 0900 or (02) 6228 1852 (TTY).

Canberra Rape Centre (24-hr) – 6247 2525.

NT

Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Darwin.
Ph: (08) 8945 6200 (9-5 Mon-Fri).

Crisis Line (general crisis counselling – 24-hr service) – 1800 019 116.

Sexual Assault Referral Centre Counselling (support, information, and 24-hr crisis care for recent sexual assault). Darwin – (08) 8922 7156. Alice Springs – (08) 8951 5880.

Qld

Brisbane Rape & Incest Crisis Centre – (07) 3391 0004.

Immigrant Women's Support Service (support for immigrant or refugee women victims of domestic violence, bilingual workers – Mon-Fri 9am-5pm). Domestic Violence (07) 3846 3490. Sexual Assault (07) 3846 5400.

SA

Domestic Violence Outreach Service (telephone and face-to-face counselling, referral to safe accommodation – 24 hr service 7 days a week) – 1300 782 200.

Crisis Care (after-hours crisis support for violence and abuse, suicide, child protection etc, 4pm-9am plus weekends and public holidays) – (08) 8124 4424.

Women's Information Service of South Australia – (08) 8303 0590 or 1800 188 158 or 0401 989 860 (SMS).

Tas

Domestic Violence Crisis Service (Mon-Fri 9am-Midnight, weekends 4pm-midnight) – (03) 6233 2529 or 1800 633 937 or 1800 608 122 (statewide).

Sexual Assault Support Services (telephone and face-to-face counselling) – (03) 6231 1811.

WA

Women's Refuge Group Telephone (support, referral to safe accommodation, Mon-Fri 9am-5pm) – (08) 9420 7264.

Crisis Care Unit (24-hr crisis support for violence, child protection, suicide, etc) – (08) 9325 1111 or 1800 199 008 or (08) 9325 1232 (TTY).

Sexual Assault and Referral Centre (24-hr telephone and face-to-face counselling, female doctors) – (08) 9340 1828 or 9340 1820 or 1800 199 888 (country callers).

Women's Refuge & Multicultural Service (outreach support for immigrant women who are victims/survivors of domestic violence) – (08) 9325 7716.
Are you worried about how you are being treated by your partner or husband, boyfriend or girlfriend, a family member or a carer? It can be difficult to recognise the signs of abuse.

Abuse in relationships, which is also called ‘domestic violence’, is any behaviour that causes physical, sexual or emotional damage, or causes you to live in fear. Non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging as physical violence.

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE**
When someone:
- Constantly puts you down or criticises you
- Threatens to stop you from seeing your children, or
- Threatens to commit suicide if you leave the relationship.

Social abuse may include:
- Preventing you from seeing your friends and family
- Making you feel guilty about going to work or socialising
- Constantly checking up on your whereabouts.

**Financial abuse** is when your partner or another family member takes control of your financial affairs when you don’t want them to, or prevents you from having access to money.

**Sexual abuse** is making you do sexual things that you don’t want to do. Forcing you to have sex is a criminal offence, even if you are married.

**Stalking** is when a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you’ve said you don’t want this.

**Physical abuse** includes pushing, hitting, throwing objects, driving dangerously to frighten you, or threatening to physically harm you, other people, or pets.

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**CAN THIS BE HAPPENING TO ME?**

‘I kept pretending to myself that it wasn’t that bad. It took a long time for me to admit I was being abused.’

Abuse can be difficult to identify, because an abusive person doesn’t always act this way. Sometimes they may be loving and kind. But if you often feel afraid of upsetting the other person, and you change what you do to avoid their anger, then this is a sign that you are being abused. See also Quiz: Are you being abused? on page 35.

**HOW MIGHT THIS BE AFFECTING ME?**

All forms of abuse have damaging consequences. Your confidence can become worn down by abuse.

If you have been in an abusive relationship you may feel:
- Afraid to tell anyone
- Worried that it’s your fault
- Depressed and alone
- Confused
- Scared of coping on your own
- Scared it will get worse if you leave
- Worried about what others will think
- Afraid that no one will believe you
- Frustrated and sad because you’ve tried everything.

Children are also affected if they live in a home where there is abuse. Remember, you’re not to blame for the abuse. You have a right to feel safe and to live a life free from intimidation.

**COMMON IDEAS ABOUT WHY VIOLENCE OCCURS**

- ‘They had a sad or difficult upbringing’
- ‘They drink too much’
- ‘They have a stressful job’
- ‘They can’t control their anger’
- ‘Something about you causes them to abuse you’.

At times, we all experience stress, trauma, anger and fear. An abusive person may use these things as excuses.
for their behaviour, but really they behave this way to try to control what you do.

HOW HAVE YOU COPED UNTIL NOW?
You may have:
➤ ‘Tiptoed’ around their moods
➤ Seen less of your friends and family
➤ Changed your behaviour according to what they says they want
➤ Tried hard to protect the kids from seeing or hearing the abuse
➤ Attempted to talk to them about their behaviour
➤ Tried to fight back against the abuse.

Give yourself credit for everything you tried. But in the end, only the abusive person can change their own behaviour and treat you with respect.

WHAT CAN I DO?
No one likes, asks for or wants to live with abuse or violence, but working out what to do, or whether to stay or leave can be hard.

Maybe you love the person who is treating you like this. Maybe you feel trapped or scared of what they might do if you leave or what might happen to you if you are on your own.

Remember that abuse can, and usually does, get worse.

Do you feel happy, safe, respected or cared for? If you don’t always feel like this, there’s something wrong. Trust your instincts.

SOME OF THE THINGS YOU CAN DO
The first thing is to understand that the way you are being treated is not okay. The quiz (on the next page) can tell you if there are warning signs that you are being abused. The most important warning sign is how you feel – do you feel happy, safe, respected or cared for? If you don’t always feel like this, there’s something wrong. Trust your instincts.

Remember, abuse is not your fault. Don’t blame yourself.

Read these stories and advice from people who have experienced abuse (www.dvrcv.org.au/stories). You can learn from their experiences – how they coped, what they did, and their advice for others.

Talk to someone you trust. You don’t have to go through this alone. Finding the strength to talk to someone else can be hard, but many people who have experienced abuse say that the most helpful thing was getting support from someone else. Talking about the abuse and how you feel can help you decide what to do. Talk to a friend, a family member or a counsellor. Whoever you talk to shouldn’t judge you. See our services page for more information. The counsellors at these services are experienced in helping people to deal with abuse. They won’t pressure you to leave, or to take any action unless you are ready.

Understand that abuse and family violence affects children. If abuse or violence is happening to you, your children will most likely be aware of it, even if they don’t witness it directly. There are things you can do to help your children. For information on how to help protect children, see Family Violence Hurts Kids Too on the website. Teenagers can read the Bursting the Bubble website.

Protect yourself. Everyone, regardless of their age, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, religion or culture, has the right to live free from abuse, fear and threat. It’s against the law for someone to physically hurt you, threaten you, or to coerce or force you into sexual contact. You also have the right to equal treatment before the law.

YOUR SAFETY IS IMPORTANT
It’s important to think carefully about your safety and prepare yourself in case you or your children are placed in physical danger.

It’s against the law for someone to physically hurt you, threaten you, or to coerce or force you into sexual contact.

If you are in immediate danger, or if you have been physically or sexually assaulted, threatened or stalked, you can call the police on 000. If there’s sufficient evidence, they should lay criminal charges.

If you need to stay somewhere safe, contact the Women’s Domestic Violence Crisis Service (see Support & Services on the website) to find
QUIZ: ARE YOU BEING ABUSED?

Our relationships and families should provide us with the things we all need: like love, being cared for, support and safety. But sometimes this is not our experience, says the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Does your partner, your boyfriend or girlfriend, your friend, your carer, or a family member:

❍ Make you feel uncomfortable or afraid?
❍ Often put you down, humiliate you, or make you feel worthless?
❍ Constantly check up on what you’re doing or where you are going?
❍ Try to stop you from seeing your own friends or family?
❍ Make you feel afraid to disagree or say ‘no’ to them?
❍ Constantly accuse you of flirting with others when this isn’t true?
❍ Tell you how the household finances should be spent, or stop you having any money for yourself?
❍ Stop you from having medical assistance?
❍ Scare or hurt you by being violent (like hitting, choking, smashing things, locking you in, driving dangerously to frighten you)?
❍ Pressure or force you to do sexual things that you don’t want to do?
❍ Threaten to hurt you, or to kill themselves if you say you want to end the relationship?
❍ Have your children heard or seen these things or been hurt themselves?

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of these, then there are signs that you are not being treated right, or that you are being abused.

If you don’t feel safe, respected and cared for, then something isn’t right.

* Abuse happens when one person tries to control or hurt another.
* Abuse may be physical, such as hitting, pushing or choking.
* Abuse can also be other things, like putting you down and making you feel worthless, or being possessive and jealous to stop you from speaking to friends or family. Forcing or tricking someone into doing sexual things is also abuse.
* These things can be just as hurtful as physical violence.

RELATED LINKS

* Stories from people who have experienced abuse – www.dvrcv.org.au/stories

© Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

out about women’s refuges. Refuges provide free and safe accommodation services.

If you need legal protection from further violence, you can apply for an Intervention Order (in Victoria). This is a court order that can say the abuser is not allowed to hurt or threaten you, or is not allowed to come near you. If the abuser disobeys the Intervention Order, he can be charged with a criminal offence. Contact the services listed for more information on your legal rights.

See Legal Protection and Safety Ideas on the website.

WHO CAN I TALK TO?

Family and friends can be supportive, but sometimes they don’t understand the seriousness of abuse.

If you have any concerns about being abused, you can contact a counselling or outreach service to talk, or just to get information on what you can do.

They won’t judge you, and they’ll take all forms of abuse seriously. They’ll respect your choices, including whether you leave or stay with your partner.

RELATED LINKS

* Many people who have experienced domestic violence have sent us their stories and advice. See Stories
* Family violence hurts kids too – a guide to helping children
* Abuse in lesbian relationships
* Guide for women with disabilities

– getting free from abuse

* Love: the good, the bad and the ugly – a guide for young people on relationships. It has safety plans, helpful ideas, a relationship quiz and other advice
* Bursting the Bubble – a guide for young people on abuse in families
* Men who have been abused by female partners can read stories and advice from other men who have been abused
* To order a pamphlet on domestic violence, see Publications for an order form.
A healthy relationship can mean different things to different people. We all have things that influence the way we look at the world: culture, age, disability, experience, geography to name just a few. However, we believe there are a few universal characteristics to relationships or things that every relationship should have.

**FEATURES OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**

**RESPECT**
Respect is when you have a high regard for someone and who they are. This is a little easier to understand if we consider ways that people show their respect for someone else – by listening, by speaking well of them, by unconditionally supporting them, and by being honest.

**TRUST**
Trust is the ability to have confidence in your partner that they will treat you in a certain way. It is a reliance on another person. In a relationship it is important to be able to trust a partner to treat us well, be supportive and respectful.

**FUN AND FRIENDSHIP**
A healthy relationship definitely has fun too! Finding a partner should also be finding a good friend who you can have a fun time with and enjoy their company.

**COMPROMISE**
Everyone has disagreements and differences of opinion. That’s what keeps life interesting and helps us build skills around empathy and negotiation. People’s opinions are often based on values or beliefs which may not change so it is essential to be able to compromise, find a middle ground and agree to disagree.

**SUPPORT**
Having a supportive partner means that you feel you have a shoulder to lean on in good times and bad. Support should not depend on their mood but rather should be unconditional and reliable.

**HONESTY**
Honesty is an absolute requirement of any relationship and should relate to every aspect of your relationship. It is important that you feel you can be truthful and open with your partner about everything, even things that can be difficult to discuss such as sex and intimacy.

**COMMUNICATION**
Open and honest communication about everything is part of having a healthy relationship. Being able to be open and express things easily with a partner is something that you get better at the more practice you have. This requires both partners to be understanding, non-judgemental and not overly critical.

**BALANCE**
To have a healthy relationship with your partner means also maintaining good relationships with friends, families and interests outside you and your partner. You can offer more to your partner if you continue to develop as, and be, an individual.

**FEATURES OF AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**
Just as there are things a relationship must have, there are also characteristics which should not feature in a relationship:
- Intimidation
- Fear
- Jealousy and possessiveness
- Put-downs and name-calling
- Isolation from family and friends
- Lack of safety
- Violence
- Verbal abuse.

**THE ABUSIVE PARTNER CHECKLIST**
This checklist is designed to help you identify whether your partner is possibly acting in an abusive way.
- My partner is very jealous, gets jealous easily
- My partner follows me around, checks up on me a lot
- My partner tries to control how I dress or who I spend time with
- My partner yells, calls me names, puts me down
- I hide things that I think would upset or anger my partner (phone numbers, letters, photos)
- I am afraid to say ‘no’ to sex
- My partner threatens me, or has threatened me
- My partner hits, throws or breaks things when angry
- I am afraid to disagree with my partner
- My partner has pushed, slapped, punched or otherwise hurt me
- I feel like my partner’s anger is my fault.

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of these questions please read the section on the website called *What is Domestic Violence?* We would also recommend that you talk to a trusted family member or friend, or contact the Domestic Violence Helpline on 1800 656 463 or the Kids Helpline on 1800 531 800.

*The ‘Abusive Partner Checklist’ is an extract from the Scarleteen website, www.scarleteen.com*
There’s an easy way to answer this question: if you’ve been hurt or you’re afraid you will be hurt, someone has crossed the line and you need to get help immediately. A safety guide from Don’t Cross the Line

**HOW CAN I KEEP SAFE?**

Create a safety plan

It helps to have a safety plan for when you feel unsafe or at risk of being hurt. The following safety plan is an example of what you can do to prepare to leave quickly.

- Decide who you’ll call if you feel threatened or in danger. This may be the police but could also be a neighbour, relative or friend
- Decide where you’ll go if you need a safe place. You may need to leave the house in a hurry if you think you may be hurt. If you have children, develop a safety plan for them such as working out where they can go that is safe if you are unable to get away. This could be a neighbour or another person who lives close by who may be able to offer protection
- Decide what arrangements you might need to make for your pets if they will be at risk of being harmed
- If possible, save some money for a taxi, bus or train for emergency transportation to a safe place
- Keep extra keys to your house and car in a safe place
- Make a list of emergency phone numbers
- Consider keeping some clothing, medications, prescriptions, important papers, keys and some money with someone you can trust
- If possible, practice travelling to the location you’ve chosen as a safe place
- If you’re going on a date with someone, make sure you carry emergency cash, have a phone card or mobile phone, consider using your own transport and meet the other person at the venue, and tell someone else who you’re going out with, where, and an expected time you will be back.

**Internet safety**

If your abuser uses the same computer as you, they may be able to find out what web pages you’ve been looking at.

The easiest solution is to use a different computer – perhaps at a friend’s place, work, an internet cafe or a public library. To keep emails secret, create a new email account and only use this account at a computer that your abuser can’t use.

Learn how to protect your internet privacy by reading our page, *Hide My Visit*.

**Restraining order**

A restraining order is a court order that forbids a person from harassing, threatening, or abusing you or behaving violently. They may also be ordered not to do various things, such as coming to your home or your children’s school, following or watching you, or sending you messages. An order is made specifically for you and your situation.

Going to the police is usually the easiest way to apply for a restraining order. It helps to go prepared. Take with you any evidence or information you think will help to support what you are saying.

If the person does any of the things the order prohibits, it’s an offence and you should tell the police immediately.

**Who can help?**

If you’re experiencing domestic or family violence, there’s a range of services to help support you. These include: accommodation, counselling and support, court assistance, and referrals to local services.

To find an organisation that offers the type of help you need, visit our page *Where Can I Go To to Get Help?*

**Men can be abused too**

Men can be abused too and we...
know how hard it can be to seek help. You may be worried that no one will believe you or perhaps that you will be thought of as ‘less of a man’. Speaking out about your experiences is difficult but it is the most important step towards a life without abuse.

To find an organisation that offers the type of help you need, visit our page Where Can I Go To to Get Help?

Impacts on children

Children are affected by domestic and family violence even if they have not seen the abuse or violence. Children react in a variety of ways; they may show signs that they are affected by the domestic and family violence, or they may keep these signs and their feelings inside. It is important to listen to children and watch for warning signs of effects on a child’s physical or emotional health.

Some of the ways children may react include:
➤ Copying the abusive or violent behaviour
➤ Sleeping difficulties, such as nightmares
➤ Trying to intervene to stop the abuse. This is how some children become injured during domestic and family violence
➤ Being stunned into a terrified silence by what they see
➤ Blaming themselves
➤ Being frustrated, angry and depressed
➤ Bullying others or being bullied by others
➤ Being cruel to animals
➤ Regressive behaviours like bed-wetting and thumb sucking
➤ Being nervous and withdrawn
➤ Changes in behaviour and/or academic performance at school
➤ Displaying psychosomatic illnesses including unexplained headaches, asthma and stuttering
➤ Running away from home
➤ Attempting suicide or self-harm
➤ Abusing alcohol and substances (in older children).

Violent behavioural also gives children inappropriate messages about the way to treat people in their family, those they care for, or people with a disability, illness or impairment. Children may learn that the only way to cope with stress and pressure is through the use of abuse and violence. Some may see that using violence is an appropriate way to solve problems or to get what you want.

How to help your children

Parents and guardians of a child growing up in an abusive household can help by:
➤ Being aware that domestic and family violence harms children too
➤ Educating children that there is never any excuse for abuse and violence
➤ Providing reassurance that the abuse and violence is not the child’s fault
➤ Telling the child that he or she is loved
➤ Organising support at school by talking to a teacher, principal or guidance officer
➤ Encouraging the child to talk about how he or she is feeling and of any worries he or she may have
➤ Seeking support from a counsellor
➤ Ensuring the child knows how to call for help including phoning ‘000’ and stating the address of the home
➤ Taking action against the violence by seeking support from a domestic violence organisation and, where appropriate, taking the child to a safe place.

Children are affected by domestic and family violence even if they have not seen the abuse or violence.
What to do if someone you know is in an abusive relationship

Advice on supporting family or friends experiencing relationship violence from the website, Be the Hero!

It can be a difficult step to make for someone who is experiencing family violence to tell someone about it and seek help. There are several ways that you can support a family member or friend who is experiencing family violence. It is important to remember that family violence is not always obvious and there are some key signs to look out for.

SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR
➤ The person is often put down or humiliated in front of others
➤ The person seems very uncomfortable or afraid around their family member or partner
➤ The person is stopped from seeing their family and friends
➤ The person is being forced or pressured to do sexual things
➤ The person is physically hurt or scared of being hurt by their family member or partner.

(Above from Office of Women’s Policy NSW and ReachOut website)

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Listen, believe, support and don’t blame

As part of its ‘Stop Violence in the Home’ program, the Body Shop has also published a booklet ‘Let’s Air it Out – Break the silence on relationship abuse’. The booklet contains a list of Do’s and Don’t’s on how to support someone in an abusive relationship:

DO
➤ Approach them about the abuse in a sensitive way. For example, ‘I’m worried about you because …’
➤ Believe what they tell you. It will have taken a lot for them to talk to you and trust you
➤ Take the abuse seriously. Abuse can be damaging both physically and emotionally, and is very destructive to someone’s self-confidence. Their partner could be placing them in real physical danger
➤ Focus on their safety. Talk to them about their safety and how they could protect themselves
➤ Help them to recognise the abuse and understand how it may be affecting them. Recognise and support their strength and courage
➤ Help them to understand that the abuse is not their fault and that no one deserves to be abused, no matter what they do
➤ Listen to them and help them think about their relationship, whether they want to break up or stay, and how they can protect themselves from any more abuse
➤ Offer to help protect them but only if you are not putting your own safety at risk. For example, you could offer to be around when the abuser is there, or give them lifts home, take phone messages from the abuser
➤ Encourage them to talk to a counsellor, or talk to a counsellor yourself about what you could do to support them

DON’T
➤ Don’t blame them for the abuse or ask judgemental questions like ‘what did you do to make them treat you like that?’ or ‘why don’t you just break up with them?’. Don’t focus on trying to work out the abuser’s reasons for the abuse. Concentrate on supporting them and on what they can do to protect themselves
➤ Try not to be impatient or critical, if they are confused about what to do, or if they say they still love their partner. It’s difficult for anyone to break up a relationship, and especially hard if they are being abused.

For more information about how you can help someone who is experiencing family violence, visit the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria website, www.dvrcv.org.au.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Get the help you need

If it is an emergency in Australia call 000 for the police or for an ambulance.

Talking to someone can be helpful.
➤ You can get support from an adult you trust and together you can work out the best way to improve your situation
➤ This could be a parent, another relative, a teacher, a school counsellor, a friend’s parent
➤ It is best not to discuss your own situation in a school class setting; it is better to speak privately with the right person.

You can call Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800 to speak with a counsellor.

There are excellent websites with good practical information:
➤ Bursting the Bubble is helpful if there is abuse within the family
➤ The Good, the Bad and the Ugly is helpful if there is abuse in your relationship
➤ Kids Helpline is helpful for many types of abuse including cyber abuse and sexting
➤ The Australian Government Child Support Agency has a guide for teenagers who are experiencing family separation.

(Ideas adapted from Domestic Violence Resources Centre Victoria)

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Be the Hero! | www.bethehero.com.au

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Family violence is any type of abusive behaviour in a family or relationship where one person attempts to gain and maintain control over the other. It can take many forms including physical violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse or social or financial control. Abuse does not have to be physical or sexual to be considered family violence.

MensLine Australia believes the use of physical, emotional, sexual, psychological or economic abuse in family and intimate relationships is always unacceptable and in some cases is against the law. We believe that any person using violence is solely responsible for their behaviour and we will work with people to accept that responsibility and connect with services in the community to facilitate behaviour change. In our work with callers we will take the appropriate steps to ensure the safety of the person experiencing abuse and will encourage them to seek suitable supports.

You do have a problem with family violence when:

➤ The relationship between you and your partner and/or other family members can be described as a ‘power OVER relationship’, rather than a ‘power WITH relationship’. In other words you want and are in control
➤ You use and/or have used any of the following behaviours:
  - Engaging in physical and/or sexual assault – grabbing, pushing, slapping, punching, forced sex
  - Making threats to harm – yelling, screaming, punching walls, standing over, preventing the other from leaving, making threats
  - Engaging in emotional and psychological abuse – name-calling, belittling remarks, put-downs, continuous criticisms, making fun of the other, threatening to harm oneself
  - Putting limits on what the other can do – going everywhere with them, quizzing them on where they go and what they do, ringing up all the time, stalking, isolating them from family and friends
  - Preventing the other from making choices – making most of the decisions, expecting the other to ask permission, controlling the money in the household.
➤ There are consequences for those on the receiving end of your actions, such as:
  - Being physically or psychologically hurt
  - Feeling unsafe around you
  - Unable to express themselves freely and openly
  - Being withdrawn and guarded when you are around
  - Feeling and acting unsure of themselves
  - Deferring to you and/or allowing you to make all the decisions
  - Being depressed and anxious
  - Loss of affection and intimacy in the relationship.
➤ You are unwilling to accept responsibility for what you do. You may:
  - Deny you acted that way – “I wasn’t violent or abusive or controlling”
  - Minimise what you do – “I only pushed her”
  - Justify and excuse what you have done – “If she stopped nagging me, I wouldn’t have hit her”; “I am the head of the house”
  - Blame others for your behaviour – “It’s my parents’ fault I’m like this”; “I am under a lot of pressure at the moment”.

If you can say ‘yes’ to any of the above, you have a problem with family violence.

Although you may believe there are short-term gains, there are long-term consequences:

➤ Someone may get hurt
➤ Those you love will be afraid of you
➤ You will lose your relationship and your family
➤ Your access to your children will be restricted
➤ Assault charges and legal intervention orders can be taken against you
➤ You will lose face and be shamed.

It is unlikely you will be able to solve it on your own. Many men have tried and failed. Talk to someone about it now.

There are programs, groups and telephone services that specifically deal with family violence issues. Check our service database or call MensLine Australia for further information.

Also see our tip sheet for men who are experiencing family violence.
Most people argue with other members of their family from time to time. Parents may argue about money, the children and household jobs; children fight about any number of things. Sometimes arguments in families get out of hand and people get hurt. When this happens between adults, this affects everyone, especially the children. Domestic violence happens in all sorts of families and plays a major part in the breakdown of families. Most people don’t want to think that what happens in their family is ‘domestic violence’. It is hard to talk about, and people may ignore or even deny it is happening. Many people find that talking about it, even to their closest friends, is something they cannot do, or feel they shouldn’t do. Unfortunately, domestic violence hardly ever goes away by itself. It usually gets worse over time unless real changes in attitude and behaviour are made.

WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

When most of us think of domestic violence, we think of hitting, and this is certainly part of it. Abuse or violence happens when people use their power to hurt, control or bully someone else. This can be with words or with actions. Domestic violence happens in relationships between couples going out together, living together, married, separated or divorced. It happens between men and women and in same-sex relationships.

Males and females and people of all ages can be abusive or violent. When people are abusive they tend to ‘play down’ what they do, while those on the receiving end tend to blame themselves or ‘play down’ the effect on themselves of what has happened.

Unfortunately some people accept violence and abuse as a part of relationships. Abuse and violence can be seen everyday on television programs, in films and newspapers. There are fewer examples around of how to value, respect and consider other people.

There is never any excuse for bullying, abuse or violence.

Arguing is not domestic violence. Arguing, or telling someone that you disagree with them, and even feeling and expressing your anger is a necessary part of relationships. Arguing can be done without anyone being hurt and is one of the ways people manage their differences and sort out problems. Children learn about relationships and how to manage a disagreement by watching how others do this, particularly their parents.

Domestic violence is what happens when one partner is hurt physically or emotionally and fears that it will happen again.

WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

It might be hard to understand why people could deliberately hurt others, especially those they say they love. Many different things can lead to domestic violence.

➤ Some people are stronger, bigger, louder and have more authority or control than others, and may think they have more right than others to get their own way

➤ Some people do not have the skills to deal with the stresses of life or know how to handle their feelings. They may get frustrated and angry and ‘take it out’ on others

➤ Some people may be jealous and believe they have the right to control the behaviour of their partner. Some people see their partner as someone they ‘own’ and believe they can treat them as they like

➤ Some people grow up in families where abuse and violence was learnt as a way for people to deal with their differences, or to get what they want. They may not know other ways of behaving.

HOW DOES IT START?

In some families disagreements and arguments can end in domestic violence. This happens when people believe they know best, have a right to try and make everyone do what they want, and insist on having their own way no matter what it takes. Sometimes drugs and alcohol can play a part, though they are never an excuse.

There is a common pattern to this abuse and violence – sometimes called the ‘cycle of violence’. This cycle often gets worse over time and occurs more often. It does not usually go away by itself.

Build-up

This is the time when a person begins to feel irritated and annoyed. Your partner may believe you are ‘pushing’
even though you may in fact be doing everything you can to ‘keep the peace’. As feelings become more intense your partner may get more verbally abusive and threatening. Build-up leads to an explosion sooner or later if nothing is done to deal with feelings. This build-up can take weeks, days or only minutes.

**Explosion**

This is the time when you can get hurt physically if your partner uses physical force. This can include pushing, shoving or beatings, which leave bruises or broken bones. There can be yelling, cruel language or threats made. Violence at this point can be life-threatening.

**Feeling sorry**

Sometimes afterwards your partner may show regret or say ‘sorry’ or may act helpless and guilty. There may be promises that it will never happen again. There may be talk about how much you are loved.

Some people do not see themselves as responsible for what has happened. They may blame their partner, alcohol or drugs, or brush it off as not being important. Some may deny that anything happened at all.

**False honeymoon**

Your partner may try to make up for the behaviour by buying gifts, doing extra things around the house and generally trying to please you. This may be a relief, as things between you both may seem better than they have for a long time.

However unless your partner follows through the promises with changes to the behaviour, it is likely that the pattern will start again.

**WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

**Effects on family life**

Domestic violence can result in:

➤ Family members not feeling safe, not trusting or feeling supported by others within the family

➤ A loss of confidence or low self-esteem in family members

➤ A separation or divorce.

**Effects on parents**

The partner who is abused may feel:

➤ Intimidated, stressed, anxious, ashamed, guilty, depressed and very alone

➤ Less able to cope with parenting

➤ Less able to cope with life.

The partner who abuses may feel:

➤ Frustrated

➤ Strong anger that is hard to control

➤ Not appreciated by the family

➤ Less able to parent well

➤ Very alone.

**Effects on children**

Children and young people are deeply affected by domestic violence, both as witnesses and as victims. Living with it can affect them physically and emotionally. How badly they are affected will depend on their age, sex, and how long it has been happening and what happens. It can be hard for children to cope with the seesawing feelings at home as the pattern continues. Children often live in a constant state of anticipation – waiting for it to happen again.

The effects on children can include:

➤ Feelings of fear, mistrust, shame, anger, helplessness, low self-esteem and depression

➤ Signs of stress such as headaches, stomach aches, sleeping problems, nightmares and bedwetting

➤ Believing that violence in families is normal

➤ Learning that the only way to get what you want is by using violence

➤ Learning that it’s okay for men and boys to be violent and for women and girls to be abused

➤ Missing school to stay near a parent who is hurt
Running away from home
Using drugs and alcohol
Aggressive language and behaviour
Poor school performance
Not having friends and withdrawing from family activities.

*Note: There may be other reasons for these behaviours in children.*

**WHAT PARENTS CAN DO**

If you think domestic violence is happening in your home then you need to get help.

**The partner who abuses**

- If you bully or abuse your partner, or find it hard to control your anger, you can learn ways other than using violence and abuse to deal with your feelings. Talk to someone who understands the problem of domestic violence or phone the Domestic Violence Helpline.
- If you think you could be a danger to your family, leave until you have calmed down. You can phone Crisis Care or the Domestic Violence Helpline (see phone numbers under Want more information?).

**The partner who is abused**

- You have a right to be safe. You are not responsible for your partner's violence and abuse.
- If you or your children are in immediate danger call the Police on 000.
- If you are scared or living in fear of your partner, then it's important to consider your safety and the safety of your children. Your children need to understand that violent behaviour is not acceptable.
- Some time away from your partner can help you to see things more clearly.
- Talking to someone who understands the problems in these situations can help you to sort out what to do.

**How to help your children**

Children need:
- Protection from physical, emotional and verbal abuse.
- To know that bullying, abuse and violence is not okay.
- Encouragement to talk about their feelings and worries.
- Reassurance that it is not their fault.
- Reassurance that they are loved.
- Extra support from a trusted adult.
- Support with schooling.
- Professional help if they show signs of behavioural or emotional problems.

- To know where they can get help in an emergency (Police, Crisis Care or Kids Helpline).
- To always feel safe in their own home.

One of the most important things you can do for your children (by what you do) is to show that you can disagree about things, not get violent and still respect and care for the other person.

**REMINDERS**

- Everyone has the right to be safe.
- There is never any excuse for bullying, abuse and violence.
- Abuse, bullying and violent behaviour often becomes a pattern of behaviour.
- Children suffer in an environment with domestic violence.
- People who are abusive and bully others can learn to behave differently.
- You can teach your children by your example how to handle arguments without using abuse and violence.
- If you are concerned about your behaviour on your family, or are frightened by your partner's behaviour, get professional help and advice. Don't wait hoping it will go away.

**WANT MORE INFORMATION?**

- Parenting SA – www.parenting.sa.gov.au
- Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Telephone 1300 782 200.
- Migrant Women's Emergency Support Service, Telephone (08) 8346 9417.
- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse – www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au
- Domestic Violence Helpline, 24 hours metropolitan and country, Telephone 1800 800 098.
- Crisis Care, Weekends and public holidays 24 hours, Monday to Friday 4pm – 9am, Telephone 13 16 11.
- Domestic Violence Crisis Service, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Telephone 1300 782 200.
- Police 000.
- Men's Information Support Centre, Telephone (08) 8212 0331.

*Parent Easy Guide 66, 'More than arguments – domestic violence'
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www.parenting.sa.gov.au
Most relationships experience conflict. It is normal to have disagreements and feelings of irritability or anger towards other family members from time to time. How you handle conflict and what it does to your relationships is what matters.

Remember conflict is different from violence. Conflict occurs when differences of opinion are brought into the open. Some parents, couples and families have high level conflict, arguing frequently and with great intensity but they are not violent.

Family violence involves harm or threatened harm by one person against another. This can occur with or without conflict – sometimes there is too much fear for conflict. Family violence can take many forms, it may involve physical injury, fear, intimidation or emotional deprivation.

If you or a member of your family is unsafe because of violence or the threat of violence go to www.frsa.org.au for more information and details of where to get help.

Conflict and healthy relationships
In the absence of violence, a certain amount of conflict is a sign of a mature and trusting relationship. Each person feels free to express differences of opinion and share negative as well as positive feelings while they work out better ways to live and work together.

Conflict may not always be expressed in a loud argument but by withdrawal, inability to speak or listen to each other, lack of understanding or empathy. This can still cause feelings of frustration, anger and isolation.

While an individual incident may pass, unresolved conflict can set up unhelpful patterns that stop you sorting the real problem. These patterns can become increasingly hard to change over time so it is good to develop healthy responses to conflict early in the relationship or get some help if conflict is becoming a problem.

Common sources of conflict within families
Some areas that commonly create conflict within relationships include:
- Money and finances
- Differences in goals and values
- Struggle for control (who's in charge)
- Differing communication patterns
- Disagreements over child rearing practices and beliefs
- Shared responsibilities – and who takes day-to-day responsibility for children and household tasks
- Relationships with in-laws and friends, including the relationships between children and the extended family
- Sex and intimacy
- Individual time versus shared time
- Alcohol or drug use
- Cultural and generational differences.

Conflict and parenting
Raising children is a challenging and long-term job. Parents need the skills of a diplomat, strategist, psychologist, coach and teacher.

The three key areas that seem to spark conflict between parents are:
- Child rearing beliefs and practices: Who knows best ...? The most effective parenting occurs where parents stop competing and start forming a partnership. Use each other’s skills, try to accommodate each other’s views and back each other up
- Sharing the load: Who does the most? Whose turn is it to ...? Both intact and separated families can get into conflict over who has day-to-day responsibility for activities and decisions from washing school clothes to making dental appointments
- Parent identity vs Couple identity: How much/how little sex? Conflict can occur when couples let their parenting role overtake their relationship. Combined with work pressure, tiredness and other priorities, the demands of parenting can reduce the intimate time couples spend together.

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You need to make more time for yourself and more time for your couple relationship.

Adapted from Michael Grose's 'What Parent Couples Fight Over'.

Resolving and managing conflict

The intensity and type of conflict will differ depending on the circumstances. Individuals also express conflict in different ways, so it’s important to find what works for you as a couple, to recognise the underlying issue and ‘fight fair’. But depending on your earlier experiences this might be harder than it sounds. Many people reach adulthood, form relationships and have children without ever learning how to ‘fight fair’.

➤ Think first: Be clear about what is upsetting you and whether there are any underlying issues that have lead to your anger. Ask yourself: is this issue worth it?
➤ Choose a time and place: Try to choose a low stress time and don’t leave it too long – within 24 hours of the trigger event is a good guide. Avoid arguing in front of the children. You can even ‘make an appointment’ to argue with the other person
➤ Respect: Absolutely no violence. Stick to words and stay calm. Take time out if things heat up and agree to reconvene later. Show respect for the other person and their point of view
➤ Be specific: State the problem and use ‘I’ statements not ‘You’ statements e.g. ‘I feel upset when …’ rather than ‘You are always …’. Stick to the topic and don’t bring up old events
➤ Listen: Use active listening to increase understanding. Make eye contact, verbally acknowledge the other’s feelings and comments. Ask questions to be sure you understand
➤ Agree to disagree: Try to see the other person’s point of view but accept that sometimes you will disagree
➤ Speak for yourself: Don’t put words in the other person’s mouth. Don’t use name-calling or become abusive

➤ Afterwards: Reflect on what has happened. What did you learn about your partner? Were you able to ‘fight fair’? Are you satisfied with the outcome? Do you think the other person is satisfied?


When and where to get help

Conflict may intensify when your relationship is under stress. Common stress triggers include facing a crisis, having a baby, making a significant decision, moving house or changing jobs. Sometimes conflict can start to develop into a pattern or become too hard to resolve. If conflict in any of your relationships is causing you concern or becoming worse, whether with your partner or ex-partner, children, stepchildren, parent, step-parent or stepsiblings – there are people you can talk to. Perhaps you have someone you trust such as a friend or relative who you can talk to. Another option is to contact a family relationship service for some advice on managing conflict and strengthening your relationship.

Family relationship services work with individuals, couples and families to help identify and resolve conflict. They can also provide very practical tips to improve day-to-day communication and decision-making.

Specific service types that might be useful include:

➤ Family Relationship Education and Skills Training
➤ Family Relationships Counselling (including Family Therapy)
➤ Family Dispute Resolution
➤ Parenting Orders Program
➤ Men and Family Relationship Services.

To find a service near you use the FRSA Service Directory or call the Family Relationships Advice Line on 1800 050 321 (8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat).

USEFUL LINKS

➤ Family Relationships Online provides all families (whether together or separated) with access to information about family relationship issues, ranging from building better relationships to dispute resolution
➤ Use the FRSA Resource Directory to find useful resources for strengthening relationships
➤ Mensline Australia has a range of tips sheets and information for dads
➤ Parenting advice lines operate in all States and Territories to provide telephone advice and counselling for parents
➤ Reachout is a service that helps young people get through tough times. It provides information and support on a range of issues including issues in friendships and family relationships, fact sheets cover topics such as effective communication and conflict resolution.
Conflict can occur when a disagreement can’t be easily resolved. Although conflict can be a normal part of our relationships and is ‘healthy’ if well-handled, it can sometimes escalate and become destructive.

We often feel strong emotions when a disagreement continues. It may be hard for you to keep a clear head while experiencing strong feelings. Listening to the other person’s point of view may also be much harder.

It’s normal for people to respond differently to conflict. Some people want to retreat and hide, physically or emotionally, when faced with conflict. Other people may become stubborn in their need to get their own way. To manage conflict in a healthy way, it’s important to be aware of how you respond to conflict and ask yourself if you could handle it differently.

How do you approach conflict?

➤ Do all people involved feel heard, including you?
➤ Is the conflict leading to compromise (‘win-win’) or a confrontation (‘win-lose’)?
➤ Is the communication respectful?
➤ Are you listening and thinking before responding; or just reacting?
➤ Does the communication have positive or negative outcomes?

When conflict escalates, it can become impossible to consider the other person’s perspective. This might be the time to bring in a third person, such as a counsellor or mediator. MensLine Australia can refer you to agencies that offer these services in your area.

Some issues to be aware of:

➤ No one has the right to abuse another person, and no one should accept it. Physical or emotionally controlling behaviour is never OK
➤ Physical violence against anyone is destructive and illegal
➤ The responsibility for your communication lies with you alone. No one can make you say or do anything. You always have a choice in how you can react
➤ Restricting or controlling another person’s life is never acceptable. If this is what you are doing, or if this is being done to you, it might be time to talk to someone about it
➤ If abuse, violence or controlling behaviours are a part of the conflict in your life, it’s important to seek help immediately. Call MensLine Australia to speak to someone.

Some useful tips for handling conflict:

➤ Listen to the other person’s point of view and make sure you understand it correctly
➤ Respect the other person’s point of view
➤ Work out where you can compromise – what is the most important and least important thing to you both in relation to this particular situation
➤ Try to keep your communication respectful. Don’t use sarcasm or insults
➤ Make ‘I’ statements such as: “When you say that, I feel ...” No one can argue with how you feel
➤ If things are heating up, ask for time out. Come back to the discussion at a later time when both of you are calmer
➤ If old patterns of communication aren’t working, try new ones
➤ Try to communicate through a different medium e.g. letters or email.
Managing differences and conflict

Differences of opinion are normal and can be enriching for a relationship. Some conflict in relationships is inevitable, but there are ways to handle conflict so that it is not destructive to you individually or as a couple, according to this guide from Relationships Australia Queensland.

People often get emotional and angry when they see their partner has different values, beliefs or expectations from them. We all need to understand and accept that between any two people there will be differences in ideas and expectations and, at times, conflict and strong expression of feelings.

Relationships usually become stronger if partners talk about these differences. Differences will be part of relationships, but they may be resolved through respectful communication.

All couples experience problems in one form or another – it’s part of sharing your life with another person. The difference between relationships that flourish and those that don’t is how well couples deal with the challenges and problems they face in their life together.

WHAT DOES CONFLICT IN A RELATIONSHIP INDICATE?

Conflict, most commonly expressed as anger, can indicate that all is not well for a couple, that some change is needed to keep their relationship healthy.

If conflict has a purpose, then instead of asking “how can we avoid conflict?” we should ask, “how can we manage not to hurt each other or our relationship when we have a row?” and “how can we learn from the conflict?”

Avoiding conflict could mean avoiding important issues which would be better faced and sorted out.

Conflict is a symptom – treating the symptom by patching things up without finding out its cause is unwise in the long term.

ANGER

Anger is, for many people, a negative feeling and one that can be frightening because of its intensity and possible consequences.

There are four ways of responding when we feel angry:

➤ Expressing our anger
➤ Denying our anger
➤ Acknowledging our anger
➤ Acting on our anger.

Expressing anger

Anger can be expressed by attacking the person we are angry with, doing a lot of shouting and screaming and perhaps using physical force by hitting, pushing or punching the other person. Other ways of expressing anger include withdrawing or using controlling behaviours.

It may feel as if anger is beyond our control, but in reality everyone can learn to control their response to anger.

Expressing anger in these ways will often leave a wound in the relationship that is harder to heal than the original cause of the anger. It may make you feel justified temporarily, but can also leave you feeling guilty (because of the effects of your behaviour) even if you are convinced you were in the right.

Those who deal with their anger by expressing it without restraint often claim that their anger takes over, and that they can’t help their actions.

It may feel as if anger is beyond our control, but in reality everyone can learn to control their response to anger.

Denying anger

A second way of dealing with anger is to bottle it up and deny it. Some people become so good at denying their anger that they even fool themselves and become unaware that they are angry, even if it is obvious to those around them.

Bottling up anger and refusing to deal with it may solve a problem for a while, but it will create worse problems in the future. Facing up to conflict, whilst sometimes painful and confronting, can improve a relationship.

Ignoring anger means ignoring the warning signals that all is not right in the relationship. It also leaves the other person in the conflict feeling frustrated because they sense that something is wrong, but cannot get things out into the open and sort them out.

Denying anger can gradually destroy a relationship. For example, it is difficult for a couple to be intimate and trusting with each other if they keep denying or ignoring the anger between them.

Acknowledging anger and acting on our anger

The most constructive way of handling anger is to resolve conflict as quickly and as constructively as possible.

A verbal attack on your partner when you are angry is unhelpful, as is trying to score points by pointing out past failures.

When conflict arises and you feel angry with your partner, the following steps may be useful:

➤ Admit that you are angry. Try using 'I' statements such as, “I feel angry and let down that you are so late for dinner and didn’t call me” rather than “You make me angry because you’re always late”.

➤ Admitting your anger lets your partner know how you are feeling. It helps to get problems into the open so that both partners can do something about them.

➤ Ask for ‘time out’. This is essential if either you or your partner feels too angry to talk about the problem – “I’m too angry now; let’s talk about it later”. Ask for time out if you need it, but time out shouldn’t be used to avoid issues. It is important that you come back later and try to sort things out.

➤ Explore your feelings. There is nearly always another feeling underneath your anger like sadness, hurt, disappointment, or a sense of
being let down or taken for granted. Let your partner know how you feel. The underlying feeling will usually be a clue to the real issue that you and your partner need to face up to and talk about. For example, you may say that you’re angry with your partner for spending so much time with his/her friends, but underneath you feel hurt and want him/her to spend more time with you.

➤ Listen to your partner’s point of view. There may be an angle on the situation that you haven’t considered.

➤ Be prepared to acknowledge your part in the problem. Saying sorry does not mean that you are accepting all the responsibility.

➤ Ask what can be learnt from the conflict. This will improve your relationship and lessen the chances of a similar conflict happening again.

➤ Be prepared to forgive and make up. Do this when you are ready, but it’s best not to make your partner wait as a punishment. A row between two people who love each other is like a short separation. Reunion after separation can lead to a deepening of closeness and intimacy in the relationship.

When your partner is angry

When your partner expresses anger with you:
➤ Listen to their complaint
➤ Show genuine interest
➤ Acknowledge your partner’s anger
➤ Take time out if necessary – look after yourself
➤ Be prepared to change what you do
➤ Apologise if appropriate.

Physical violence in intimate and family relationships is a serious criminal offence and is never acceptable.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Physical violence in intimate and family relationships is a serious criminal offence and is never acceptable as a response to conflict or provocation.

Once physical violence occurs in a relationship, it can easily become a pattern. It often becomes more frequent, and usually becomes more serious the longer the relationship continues. It can ultimately lead to serious injury, or even death.

Violence in an intimate or family relationship is a sign that the relationship is in crisis. It should be taken seriously and assistance should be sought. If you feel unsafe or in danger you can contact a domestic violence support service in your state or territory, or the police.

Warning signs of a relationship breakdown

Noticing early warning signs of relationship breakdown can help a couple resolve conflicts.

Some early warning signs are:
➤ Abandonment of joint activities – just living parallel lives
➤ Recurring arguments that are never resolved
➤ Feelings of ongoing dissatisfaction and unhappiness
➤ Preoccupation with interests and activities outside the relationship by one partner leading to the other partner feeling neglected
➤ Complaints of loss of feeling – one or both partner/s speaking of no longer being in love
➤ An affair – becoming emotionally and/or sexually involved with a person outside the relationship
➤ Increased fatigue and reduced ability to meet responsibilities at work
➤ Arguments over parenting.

When is a good time to get professional help?

Professional guidance and extra skills can often assist. If your relationship has some of the above warning signs, it may be time to seek help. Counsellors can help you identify underlying problems and may be able to help you find ways to mend your relationship. Family dispute resolution practitioners (family mediators) can work with you to define practical issues and identify present and future needs.

The sooner that you act on issues, the easier they may be to resolve.

It is beneficial for couples to learn new ways of relating, communicating and resolving conflict.
ABOUT THIS SECTION

‘Exploring issues’ features a range of ready-to-use worksheets relating to the articles and issues raised in this book.

The activities and exercises in these worksheets are suitable for use by students at middle secondary school level and beyond.

As the information in this book is gathered from a number of different sources, readers are prompted to consider the origin of the text and to critically evaluate the questions presented.

Does the source have a particular bias or agenda? Are you being presented with facts or opinions? Do you agree with the writer?

The types of ‘Exploring issues’ questions posed in each Issues in Society title differ according to their relevance to the topic at hand.

‘Exploring issues’ sections in each Issues in Society title may include any combination of the following worksheets: Brainstorm, Research activities, Written activities, Discussion activities, Quotes of note, Ethical dilemmas, Cartoon comments, Pros and cons, Case studies, Design activities, Statistics and spin, and Multiple choice.

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WORKSHEETS AND ACTIVITIES
Brainstorm, individually or as a group, to find out what you know about respectful relationships.

1. What does respect mean to you?

2. Define what respect looks like in relationships.

3. What does a disrespectful relationship look like to you?
Complete the following activities on a separate sheet of paper if more space is required.

1. List 8 or more characteristics of a disrespectful relationship.

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. List 8 or more characteristics of a respectful relationship.

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
What help is available to people who want to stop experiencing disrespect and abuse in their partner relationship? Make a list of organisations which offer help and advice (to people being abused or who are themselves being abusive), summarise who they are and what they do, and include their contact details.

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DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Form small groups, and allocate one of the relationships (on the list below) to each group. Allow each group 15 minutes to prepare a role play involving two versions of these relationships – one demonstrating respect, and the other demonstrating disrespect. The groups must not reveal which type of relationship they are demonstrating.

After both performances are complete, ask the rest of the class/group to decide which role play scenario demonstrated the respectful and disrespectful relationship, and to discuss their reasons for identifying the differences.

1. Boyfriend/girlfriend
2. Friends
3. Siblings
4. Family
5. Schoolmates
6. Team mates
7. Neighbours

NOTES:
This exercise is designed to explore the challenges and strengths of friendships among young people. On large sheets of paper, write the following questions (each on a separate piece of paper):

1. What do you value most in good friendships?
2. What sorts of issues can challenge friendships?
3. What can you do if you have a difference of opinion or conflict with a friend?
4. If a friendship is not desirable for whatever reason, how would you end the friendship respectfully?

Then stick the large paper sheets up on a wall, and give each student 4 sticky notes on which to write their responses to each question, which are then to be stuck under the relevant question.

Once the sticky note responses have been posted onto the wall under the relevant questions, divide the class into 4 groups – one group for each question.

Each of the 4 groups must report back to the class about the issues they have identified in each friendship scenario, and offer their findings for class discussion.

NOTES:
Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of the next page.

1. Select which of the following statements are characteristics of a respectful relationship (circle 'R') or a disrespectful relationship (circle 'D'):

a. You accept that there are good times in a relationship and times when you need to be tolerant and accepting of your partner’s difference.  
   R / D

b. Your partner denies you the right to practise your spiritual beliefs or misuses spiritual traditions to justify abusive behaviour.  
   R / D

c. You are constantly trying to please your partner to avoid conflict.  
   R / D

d. Your partner’s disrespect of you is copied by your children.  
   R / D

e. You’re made to feel that your opinions aren’t as important as your partner’s.  
   R / D

f. Your partner blames their use of alcohol or drugs on your behaviour.  
   R / D

g. You feel that you are unsafe.  
   R / D

h. You don’t have to do everything together; it’s healthy to have different interests and opinions.  
   R / D

i. You are pressured to have sex or made to feel guilty if you don’t.  
   R / D

j. You have your own support team, working together and helping each other toward your individual and shared goals.  
   R / D

k. Your partner demands to know who you are with and where you are at all times.  
   R / D

l. Your partner is jealous and does not want you to talk to other men.  
   R / D

m. You trust one another, going out with your own friends (male or female) is okay.  
   R / D

n. Your partner limits or prevents your contact with family or friends.  
   R / D

o. You’re prepared to compromise. Sharing decision-making is fair and equal.  
   R / D

p. Your partner talks about your private intimate relationship publicly.  
   R / D

q. You are able to communicate your thoughts and feelings and talk about how you feel.  
   R / D

r. Your partner puts you down or humiliates you privately or publicly.  
   R / D

s. Your partner controls the money and only gives you what he thinks you need.  
   R / D

t. You can be honest with each other while respecting your partner’s opinions and feelings.  
   R / D
MULTIPLE CHOICE

Complete the following multiple choice questionnaire by circling or matching your preferred responses. The answers are at the end of this page.

2. Match the following terms to their corresponding definitions:

   a. Emotional abuse  
      1. Pushing, hitting, throwing objects, driving dangerously to frighten you, or threatening to physically harm you, other people, or pets.

   b. Social abuse  
      2. Making you do sexual things that you don’t want to do.

   c. Financial abuse  
      3. When your partner or another family member takes control of your financial affairs when you don’t want them to, or prevents you from having access to money.

   d. Sexual abuse  
      4. When a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you’ve said you don’t want this.

   e. Stalking  
      5. When someone constantly puts you down or criticises you, threatens to stop you from seeing your children, or threatens to commit suicide if you leave the relationship.

   f. Physical abuse  
      6. Preventing you from seeing your friends and family, making you feel guilty about going to work or socialising; constantly checking up on your whereabouts.

MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWERS

1 – a = R, b = D, c = D, d = D, e = D, f = D, g = D, h = R, i = D, j = R, k = D, l = D, m = R, n = D, o = R, p = D, q = R, r = D, s = D, t = R

2 – a = 5, b = 6, c = 3, d = 2, e = 4, f = 1.
Each partner in a relationship should have equal ability to

Open and honest communication is essential to building

Any person who inflicts violence on another (verbal, physical

Trust and respect are essential ingredients for a good

Enjoying the company of a number of people like your

When your family sets rules, boundaries and standards

Adolescence is a crucial period for young people to learn

Respect is a key step in building strong relationships. When

Parents and carers play an important role in assisting

Once a photo or a personal confidence leaves your computer

Peer pressure may influence a teenager to engage in risk-

★

Fast facts

Everyone has the right to feel safe, to be treated with fairness, to be valued and feel accepted for who they are. (p.1)

In a study, the impact of finances on couple relationships was explored, with 71% of respondents indicating that financial problems were more likely to push couples apart and 11% indicating they would keep couples together. (p.3)

Teenage girls tend to have one or two best friends – the focus is on empathy, self-disclosure, support and nurturing. (p.4)

Teenage boys tend to have larger friendship groups that give them companionship and competition. (p.4)

Toxic friendships can lead to your child having more negative feelings about himself or others. (p.4)

Friendship problems and break-ups can sometimes lead to bullying. (p.5)

Friends play an important role in the psychological development of adolescents. (p.6)

Peer pressure may influence a teenager to engage in risk-taking or anti-social behaviour. (p.6)

Once a photo or a personal confidence leaves your computer and goes to someone else's, you can't control where it goes next. (p.9)

Parents and carers play an important role in assisting children and young people to develop the values and skills needed to express respect to others and themselves in their daily lives. (p.11)

Respect is a key step in building strong relationships. When it is absent or lacking, conflict or relationship breakdown often occurs. (p.11)

Adolescence is a crucial period for young people to learn how to develop and maintain respectful relationships with others. (p.11)

Assertiveness skills can assist young people to deal with a range of life experiences where they may feel pressured to do things they don't want to do or put out of their comfort zone. (p.12)

When your family sets rules, boundaries and standards of behaviour, it gives a child a sense of consistency and predictability. (p.13)

Enjoying the company of a number of people like your friends, and not just the person who you are having a relationship with, may help you to expand your interests and give you lots of new things to share. (pp.16,36)

A relationship is based on choice rather than dependency – two partners, who are not afraid to be independent, who choose to be together and to be intimate. (p.17)

Trust and respect are essential ingredients for a good relationship – with family, friends or in a romantic or sexual relationship. (p.19)

Any person who inflicts violence on another (verbal, physical or sexual) is committing a crime. (pp.20,34,46,48)

Open and honest communication is essential to building a healthy relationship. (p.20)

Each partner in a relationship should have equal ability to make choices and decisions about matters that affect the relationship. (p.20)

Skills required for good communication include listening, understanding the other person's perspective, having the ability to negotiate a compromise or being able to agree to disagree. (p.22)

There are no obligations to have sex with a partner – no timeframes within which you have to have sex. It is up to you and your partner should respect that. (p.22)

Jealousy and possessiveness are two of the most common early signs of abuse in a relationship. (p.22)

In a positive relationship, both partners feel valued, loved and nurtured. (p.23)

Dating violence is a form of family and domestic violence. (p.24)

Regardless of the relationship, sex without consent is rape. (p.25)

Intimacy in a relationship means being able to share the whole range of thoughts, feelings and experiences we have as human beings. (p.27)

Abuse or violence in a relationship destroys trust and intimacy and signals that the relationship is in trouble. (p.27)

Whenever anyone does something to dominate and control their partner, it's abuse. (p.28)

Anger is an emotion. Abuse or violence is behaviour to control a situation or a person. People can get angry without getting abusive. (p.28)

It's not OK to be physically threatened or scared into things that make you uncomfortable or unhappy just because you are in a relationship. (p.30)

A violent relationship may not be violent all the time. Some of the time, violent people treat their boyfriend or girlfriend very well. (p.31)

Non-physical forms of abuse can be just as damaging as physical violence. (p.33)

Speaking out about your experiences is difficult but it is the most important step towards a life without abuse. (p.38)

Children are affected by domestic and family violence even if they have not seen the abuse or violence. (p.38)

Violent behaviour gives children inappropriate messages about the way to treat people in their family, those they care for, or people with a disability, illness or impairment. (p.38)

Some of the effects of domestic violence on children can include feelings of fear, mistrust, shame, anger, helplessness, low self-esteem and depression. (p.42)

While recognising that some women are violent, in the large majority of cases it is more likely men than women who are violent and abusive. (p.43)

Abuse, bullying and violent behaviour often becomes a pattern of behaviour. (p.43)

In the absence of violence, a certain amount of conflict is a sign of a mature and trusting relationship. (p.44)

Common stress triggers for conflict include facing a crisis, having a baby, making a significant decision, moving house or changing jobs. (p.45)

Noticing early warning signs of relationship breakdown can help a couple resolve conflicts. (p.48)
Abusive relationship
Common patterns in an abusive relationship are controlling behaviour and abuse, which can happen before the relationship becomes physically violent. These include possessiveness, jealousy, put-downs, menace and threats.

Assertiveness
Acknowledging another person’s request or need and being able to speak up about your needs in a clear way. When you can effectively stand up for yourself and say ‘no’ without being aggressive.

Conflict resolution
Methods of addressing conflict and of finding ways of resolving it or of continuing it in less hurtful or violent ways. Disagreements are normal in any relationship and there are ways to respond to, minimise and resolve conflict. It is helpful to try to understand and consider the other person’s point of view. Winning an argument is not good if it makes the other person feel hurt or embarrassed.

Date rape
Date rape is when someone you know socially (but not family) makes you have sex when you don’t want to. It could be someone you meet at a party, or someone you love and trust, like a boyfriend. They might use physical and verbal threats, emotional blackmail, or alcohol and drugs to force or trick you into having sexual intercourse. You may even agree to have sex with someone and then decide that you want to stop, but they force you to keep going. Date rape can happen to women of all ages but young women between 15 and 24 are at highest risk.

Domestic violence
A situation where one partner in a relationship is using violent and abusive behaviour in order to control and dominate the other partner.

Family violence
Any type of abusive behaviour in a family or relationship where one person attempts to gain and maintain control over the other. It can take many forms including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or social or financial control.

Financial abuse
When your partner or another family member takes control of your financial affairs when you don’t want them to, or prevents you from having access to money.

Intimacy
Intimacy can be verbal (e.g. telling your partner why you love them or things that you love about them), and it can also be expressed by doing special things for your partner or generally helping out with daily living tasks. Intimacy is achieved when we become close to someone else and are reassured that we are loved and accepted for who we are. Physical closeness is only one expression of intimacy.

Physical abuse
Includes both physical assault, which refers to the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten a person, and physical attempts or threats, which refers to the verbal, and/or physical intent to inflict harm which the victim believed was able and likely to be carried out.

Relationship violence
Sometimes in relationships dominance or control or jealousy can be mistaken for love and can involve hurt, power, control and feeling bad in a relationship. Most relationship violence happens to women and is done by men, however, relationship violence also happens in gay and lesbian relationships or is done by women to men.

Respect
Valuing people including people who are like you and those who are different. When you have respect for someone, you feel positive about them and admire or appreciate their actions or behaviour. You can also treat anyone with respect regardless of how you feel about them. This is when you regard someone with consideration and treat them in the way you like to be treated.

Restraining order
A restraining order is a court order that forbids a person from harassing, threatening, or abusing you or behaving violently. They may also be ordered not to do various things, such as coming to your home or your children’s school, following or watching you, or sending you messages. An order is made by a court specifically for you and your situation.

Sexual abuse
Includes any form of non-consensual or forced sexual activity or touching, including rape. It is carried out against your will using physical or threatened force, intimidation or coercion. Forcing you to have sex is against the law, even if you are married.

Stalking
Stalking is when a partner, ex-partner, or someone else follows you around, or repeatedly tries to contact you, even if you’ve said you don’t want this. Stalking is against the law and you should notify someone if this is occurring.

Trust
The ability to have confidence in someone that they will treat you in a certain way. It is a reliance on another person. In a relationship it is important to be able to trust a partner to treat you well, and be supportive and respectful.

Toxic friendship
A negative relationship in which certain behaviours by one person causes either physical or emotional damage (or both) to the other person. People who engage in these behaviours are sometimes referred to as ‘frenemies’.
Websites with further information on the topic

About Date Rape  www.aboutdaterape.nsw.gov.au
Be the Hero  www.bethehero.com.au
Better Health Channel  www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
By Choice Not Chance  www.bychoicenotchance.com.au
Domestic Violence Resource Centre  www.dvirc.org.au
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  www.fahcsia.gov.au
Don’t Cross the Line  www.dontcrosstheline.com.au
Family Relationships Online  www.familyrelationships.gov.au
Family Relationships Services Australia  www.frsa.org.au
Kids Helpline  www.kidshelp.com.au
Love: the good, the bad and the ugly  http://lovegoodbadugly.com
MensLine Australia  www.mensline.org.au
Raising Children Network  http://raisingchildren.net.au
Reach Out  www.reachout.com
Relationships Australia  www.relationships.com.au
The Line  www.theline.gov.au
White Ribbon Foundation  www.whiteribbonday.org.au
Youth Say No  www.youthsayno.wa.gov.au

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