

What's in a Relationship?

All relationships go through cycles. People who feel love and affection for each other can also experience irritation or even dislike. Every relationship has both constructive and destructive elements.

So what makes a relationship healthy or unhealthy?

- ✘ **In a healthy relationship**, constructive elements are always there in some way—even when people disagree or are annoyed with each another.
- ✘ **In a unhealthy relationship**, destructive elements take over, making both people unhappy.

The good news is that unhealthy relationships can be improved if people are motivated and willing to change. Some relationships may be too unhealthy to improve and can even become dangerous.

Constructive elements in relationships:

- **Self-esteem**, or a feeling of personal worth, is the most important factor an individual brings to a relationship. Having high self-esteem allows people to feel good about the interest another person shows in them.
- **Responsibility for self** means each person works to reach his or her full potential. No matter how close two people are, they remain responsible for their own thoughts, feelings and actions.
- **Flexibility** means people allow for and expect change within the relationship, including changes in roles and feelings. Accepting and accommodating growth and change keeps a relationship satisfying and worthwhile.
- **Trust** includes having confidence in the other person's motives and believing in his or her honesty and reliability.
- **Honesty** means people reveal who and what they are, both strengths and weaknesses, as well as their feelings. Pretending or hiding won't lead to a fulfilling relationship.
- **Communication** means people exchange information, thoughts and feelings. Communication is necessary to create intimacy.

What's in a Relationship? *(continued)*

Destructive elements in relationships and ways to overcome them:

■ **Jealousy** is the fear of losing someone's affection to another. Jealousy is a sign of low self-esteem, dependency or insecurity.

Some ways to overcome jealousy:

- ✘ Try to find out exactly what's causing the jealous feelings.
- ✘ Put the feelings into perspective.
- ✘ Maintain separate friends and interests.

■ **Overdependency** occurs when one person relies on the other to fulfill all of his or her needs. A partner's attempts to be independent are seen as a threat.

Some ways to overcome overdependency:

- ✘ Recognize the problem.
- ✘ Try to understand why the overdependency exists.
- ✘ Work at increasing independence.

■ **Selfishness** means a person has little or no concern for the other person in the relationship.

Some ways to overcome selfishness:

- ✘ Become aware of selfish behaviors.
- ✘ Develop genuine concern for the other person.

Fact

Communication skills are essential for healthy relationships.

(continued)

What's in a Relationship? *(continued)*

■ **Control** occurs when one person tries to have power over the other person's behavior or makes all of the decisions. Sometimes control turns into abuse.

Some ways to overcome control:

- ✗ Recognize the desire to control or the tendency to allow yourself to be controlled.
- ✗ Understand where the need to control or be controlled comes from.
- ✗ Break the pattern. Share the responsibility for decisions and activities.

■ **Emotional, physical or sexual abuse** is a widespread problem. It can involve both actual harm and/or the threat of harm. Attacking a person's feelings, personality, character, ability or dignity is also abusive.

Often it's difficult to end an abusive relationship because of depression, low self-esteem or fear.

Some ways to overcome abuse:

- ✗ Recognize the problem.
- ✗ Seek help from family members, counselors or community agencies.
- ✗ Leave the relationship, if necessary.

Fact

Almost 1 in 10 students has been hit, slapped or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend in the past year.

Fact

Healthy relationships take thought and hard work by both partners.

HOW'S MY *Relationship?*

Directions Think about a friend, or a boyfriend or girlfriend. Read each statement and circle the response that best describes your feelings or behaviors.

1. I feel my friend understands me.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
2. I can speak freely with my friend about things I like and things that bother me.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
3. I care about my friend's needs and concerns and my friend cares about mine.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
4. I maintain my own interests.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
5. I have other important friendships in my life.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
6. I believe I am a worthwhile person outside this relationship.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
7. Our relationship is physically safe. We don't physically hurt or threaten each other.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
8. Our relationship is emotionally healthy.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
9. Our relationship is supported by others.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
10. We support each other's friendships.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
11. I can be myself around my friend.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
12. I feel comfortable sharing my feelings with my friend.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
13. My friend does what is best for me and the relationship.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
14. I feel good about myself and the relationship.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
15. Most of the decisions in our relationship are made together.	Almost Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never

Scoring

Give yourself 3 points for each "almost always" response, 2 points for each "sometimes" response, 1 point for each "almost never" response and 0 points for each "never" response.

38-45: You have what it takes to continue a satisfying, successful relationship.

30-37: You have the basis for a good relationship. Focus on the positive elements and work to improve the destructive elements.

15-29: Indicates problems that may be solved through improving honesty and communication.

0-15: Indicates few constructive elements. You might want to look at your motives for continuing the relationship and perhaps work toward improving it.

What your score means:

Self-Check

- My work is complete and well organized.
- I was thoughtful in my work.

Roleplay Checklist

Directions

For each roleplay, write the relationship element that was demonstrated. Give evidence.

	Roleplay	Relationship element demonstrated	Evidence
✓	1.		
✓	2.		
✓	3.		
✓	4.		
✓	5.		
✓	6.		
✓	7.		
✓	8.		
✓	9.		
✓	10.		
✓	11.		
✓	12.		
✓	13.		
✓	14.		
✓	15.		

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Self-Check

- My work is complete and well organized.
- I was thoughtful in my work.

A New Look at My Relationship

Directions

Think again about your relationship with your friend, boyfriend or girlfriend. Using what you've learned in class and from completing the **How's My Relationship?** activity sheet, complete the following statements.

1. The **constructive** elements of my relationship:

2. The **destructive** elements of my relationship:

3. I am **most proud of** the way my friend and I:

4. My friend and I **can improve** our relationship by:

5. One thing **I learned** from this activity:

Self-Check

My work is complete and well organized.

I was thoughtful in my work.