

Spotlighting Teen Issues

for
Teens

Teen Relationships

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Relationships bring a variety of feelings into your life. Healthy relationships make you feel good about yourself. These relationships may be with family members, friends or dating partners. Healthy relationships improve mental and emotional health and help you find yourself so that you can live a fuller life. Good communication skills and respect for self and others are keys to building healthy relationships.

Communication

One of the most important skills you can develop is the ability to communicate. Good communication skills will help you in all the relationships you have. Being able to put your feelings into words may sound frightening to some people; however, it is the key to having people understand you and your feelings. If a friend or parent asks, "What's going on with you?" and you respond with a shrug of the shoulders, you have not given the inquirer much information to work with.

Responses that would send a message might be, "I'm okay," "I'm a little tired," "I just need some space right now," or "I would like to talk about (whatever is bothering you), but not right now." These are examples of "I" statements."

When they are used to communicate a problem that you are going through, you may add the second part of the phrase: "I feel _____ when you _____." Statements of this sort help you put your feelings into perspective without putting the person you are talking to on the defensive or putting up walls that hinder communication. This is a valuable tool to use in dealing with friends, teachers, and parents.

Respect

Respect is another important component of healthy relationships. In healthy relationships, people respect each other for who they are — not how they look or how they dress. You must realize that every individual has rights.

These include expressing yourself, having time alone, not being pressured to do things that are unhealthy, having the



emotional support of family and friends, and living in safe environments at home and school.

In healthy relationships, working through disagreements often makes relationships stronger. You will find that you learn to understand the experiences and feelings of others as well as having them understand your experiences and feelings.

Respect is a two way street.

- As teens, you can have respect for those around you. When being respectful to others, you would never be a bully or pressure friends to do things they really do not want to do. Treating adults with respect will make them easier to deal with — you may earn their respect for you as a person.
- Another aspect of respect is to have self-respect. This means developing the attitude that you are going to take care of yourself. You will make many decisions during your teen years that will have life-changing effects. These decisions may deal with drug use, sex, tattoos, body piercing or alcohol use.
- When you have respect for yourself, others will recognize that characteristic. People will know that you will take a stand for yourself and what you believe is right. You will earn respect for that. Only you can develop this characteristic. You have to be able to recognize your strengths and weaknesses. (When you like yourself, others will like to be around you.)



Building Strong Relationships With Parents

Be honest and open with your parents. This is the only way you will earn their trust. Tell your parents the truth — not what you think they want to hear. If you think they will use your honesty against you, then explain that as well so they can see your point of view.

Maintaining Friendships

When you are dealing with relationships, you can control only your own behavior. You cannot control other people's behavior. You can however, be selective in who you choose as friends or dating partners. You can recognize qualities that would make you want to be friends with another person. You can see whether a person appears to be kind and caring. You can recognize trustworthy characteristics in others. You can remember the Golden Rule and treat others as you would like to be treated.

When you encounter people with very negative characteristics, you can choose to step away from them. Being around negative people all the time will lead to an unhealthy attitude, which defeats everything you are working toward in maintaining positive, healthy relationships.

For More Information

Am I in a Healthy Relationship? TeensHealth.
http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/question/emotions/healthy_relationship.html

Healthy Relationships: A Guide for Teens. The Center for Young Women's Health.
http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/healthy_relat.html

Healthy Relationships — Health and Well-Being. Advocates for Youth.
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/health/relationships/index.htm>

Communication is Key — Healthy Teen Relationships. Centra Health.
<http://www.centrahealth.com/news/digest/may05/article5.aspx>

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