

# GENEQ **healthy relationships**

## What is a Healthy Relationship?

A healthy relationship is a partnership between two **individuals** who enjoy each other's company, trust each other, and communicate effectively without harming one another. Healthy relationships are most distinct from abusive relationships because they are **not** violent or abusive (this includes emotional and verbal abuse in addition to physical abuse. \*Please see *dating violence* info sheet for a detailed description of violence.

However, relationships do not just fit into two categories of healthy or abusive, it is more a spectrum where individuals can take steps to have a healthier relationship. Healthier relationships are **supportive**, based in **respect**, built on **trust** and have clear **communication**. If you are in an intimate relationship that you would like to be healthier don't worry there are ways to make improvements and have fun while your doing it!

## What are the characteristics of a healthy relationship?

We can describe what a healthy relationship might look like but every relationship takes time and patience to figure out **what works for both you and your partner**. If any of these statements are not true for your relationship, it may be an area you have addressed in an alternative way or this may be something you want to take some time to think about and discuss with your partner.

- Both partners make time for each other as well as alone time
- Both partners care about each other and have fun together
- Both partners feel comfortable being themselves while together
- Both partners express and listen to each other's emotions and needs
- Both partners taking care of personal issues (i.e. family, health, and school)
- Both partners support each other and show appreciation for one another
- Both partners respect each other's differences interests and opinions
- Both partners set boundaries and respect other partner's boundaries
- Both partners are open with sexual history and sexual health
- Both partners work towards compromise, can say sorry and talk through arguments peacefully
- Both partners are honest with self and partner

*No relationship is perfect* so it is important to distinguish between unhealthy aspects of your relationship and things that are minor annoyances such as being forgetful or changing plans often. Take some time and define a healthy relationship for yourself using this info sheet to guide you.

## What is effective communication?

While people may have different standards of what an ideal relationship is, one thing that is important across these differences is the need to communicate effectively. Be aware of differences in **communication styles** (especially *cultural* differences) can clear up a lot of hurt feelings about misunderstandings. See the website at the end to find out your communication style!

Effective communication means your **intent** closely matches the **impact** on the other person. Communication is the exchange of information between individuals and it can be both verbal and non-

verbal. Verbal communication is expressed through speaking and non-verbal communication is expressed visually through things like posture and facial expression. Be aware that 93% of communication is non-verbal so show what you mean. Relationships are a two way street so expressing oneself is only half the battle, attempting to understand your partner is the second half.

## **Communication Tips Understanding & Expressing**

- **Listen** to your partner for facts, meaning, feelings and intention
- Ask questions to **clarify** meaning and intention
- Own your statements by using **“I” statements**
- Avoid assuming, and making absolute statements
- blaming, accusing,

## **Arguments and Disagreements**

Every relationship has arguments

Disagreements can lead to people feeling angry or hurt, and for many people feeling hurt is a position of vulnerability. Vulnerability can cause some to feel less in control.

## **Personal Boundaries**

### **Setting Boundaries**

Personal boundaries are limits to how people may act and speak to you. To set personal boundaries (or limits) you must first have an **awareness** of your own comfort level. Pay attention to what situations make you uneasy, hurt or angry to identify where you want to set boundaries. Before you set your boundaries to others, you must believe that your boundaries are necessary for self preservation. You may want to try some of the communication tips above to set your boundaries (for example: I don't want to spend everyday together.) Setting boundaries is a process that happens over time and it may take patience if your partner is having a hard time understanding.

### **Respecting Boundaries**

Everyone has their limitations so the other half of boundaries is respecting your partner's boundaries. You may not have the same boundaries as they do but their boundaries deserve the same respect as yours do. If you are finding it hard to understand or be considerate of your partner's boundaries try asking about it gently. For example you might not understand why your partner gets so upset when you sneak up and tickle them but that may relate to something traumatic from their past. Again using the listening communication tips above may be useful.

## **How might gender influence healthy relationships?**

As children we learn about our gender roles in relationships. Boys may be taught to “be a man” which can be translated to violence, denial of emotions, and aggression. Girls may be taught to “act like a lady” which can be translated into being submissive, dependent, or emotional. Sometimes trying to fit into gender roles or expectations can create barriers to healthy relationships. For example if a man tries to express his feeling and his partner doesn't want to take him serious it could be

It is important to be yourself regardless of what others have told you you should be!

## **What are some steps to improving a relationship?**

- Set a time to talk about what you appreciate about one another
- Choose a time to discuss problem areas when you won't be rushed or distracted
- Deal with one issue at a time
- Use a timer to give equal amounts of time for each partner to talk