

# SEXUAL HEALTH IN PLAIN ENGLISH

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

### What is a relationship?

A relationship is a connection between two or more people. Relationships can be between family members, friends, people from school or work, pets and neighbours, as well as romantic and sexual partners.

A healthy relationship has a balance of:

- respect
- consent
- positive communication and
- equality.

Respect, consent, communication and equality should be in all relationships, it doesn't matter if it is with family members, friends or a sexual partner.

Keeping relationships healthy takes time and effort. Relationships can change over time. Some relationships will be close. Others will not. Some relationships will last a long time. Others will be shorter.

### Qualities people may look for in a relationship.

Within relationships, there will be qualities that people look for in others. The qualities that people might look for in friendship can often be the same qualities that people look for in romantic relationships. Examples might include people who are trustworthy, funny, honest, kind, friendly, caring, loyal, talkative, and people who treat us well.

Everyone likes, looks for and appreciates different qualities in different people. Overall, the most important things to look for in relationships are people who:

- treat each other with respect
- make each other feel important, valued and loved.

### Romantic relationships

As people mature, they might find they are attracted to other people in new ways. This could mean they spend time thinking about a person or imagining themselves spending time with them. Romantic or sexual thoughts about the person may start to happen. This can be exciting and sometimes a little bit confusing.

Over time, some relationships may grow stronger, deeper and closer. This is called intimacy. Intimacy is how close that we feel to someone else. We can be close and intimate with people in many ways. This can involve being intimate with our feelings, thoughts and bodies (touch and sex).

### How do you start a romantic relationship?

Starting a romantic relationship is a little like beginning a new friendship. A person might spend more time with the person they like. Find out about what they are interested in, what they have in common and their values, beliefs and ideas.

- People often begin romantic relationships by flirting. Flirting can involve smiling at each other, listening very carefully to what each other has to say and laughing a lot at the other person's jokes. Flirting can be done in person, on the phone, messaging/texts or on social media. Flirting should be fun, and everyone involved should feel happy and **want** it to continue.
- Flirting doesn't always mean a relationship will begin. If the other person does not like or **not want** the flirting, it **must stop**.

Before starting a romantic relationship, it's important to remember that:

- not everyone wants, or is in, a relationship
- not everyone you like will like you back
- you **can't make** someone be your boyfriend/girlfriend
- some relationships break up and this often hurts our feelings
- there are lots of ways to feel close and intimate with someone that don't include sex
- it's possible to love many people over a lifetime.

### Sexual relationships

In a sexual relationship, people may want to be physically close to one another and do sexy things together.

Before having a sexual relationship with another person, people need to think about what they want to do and how comfortable or ready they are. It is up to the people in the relationship to decide what sexual contact they would or would not like to have.

Whenever doing anything sexy, there must be consent ([see Consent and the Law factsheet](#)).

Consent means that you have permission. Sometimes people will agree or disagree to the sexual activity. This is **O.K.** It is important that the people in the relationship feel safe. Remember to ask for consent every time and wait for the answer.

### Maintaining Relationships

This If people decide that they would like to be in a relationship with each other, this is great news!

To make sure that all people feel safe, valued and important, it is important to have consent, positive communication, respect and equality.

It is also important to check with each other often to see if the relationship is O.K. to keep going.

Some guiding questions include:

- Is there respect for both people in the relationship?
- Is there respect given by both people in the relationship?
- Is there consent, with no pressure, force or guilt?
- Are both people feeling good, having positive experiences and getting equal pleasure?
- Is there positive communication? Can both people express their beliefs, opinions, questions and concerns?

Checking with each other allows everyone to clearly talk about their needs, wants and desires. It also helps with understanding what is **NOT O.K.**, so people can try to change any behaviours or get help.

Be aware of any warning signs in a relationship. Abuse in a relationship is when one person is made to feel afraid, powerless or unsafe. If something doesn't feel right in a relationship, it's important to listen to the body's early warning signs ([see Protective Behaviours factsheet](#)).

### Some behaviours in relationships are NOT O.K.

These are:

- Physical abuse
  - self/physical harm, threats of self/physical harm, smashing things, hurting pets
- Verbal abuse
  - name calling, yelling
- Emotional/psychological abuse
  - humiliation, put downs and blaming
- Social abuse
  - controlling where you go and who you see
- Financial abuse
  - strict or unfair control of money
- Technological abuse
  - sending abusive texts or emails, monitoring someone using tracking systems, abusing someone on social media, sharing intimate photos without the person's consent
- Spiritual/cultural abuse
  - controlling practices or choices
- Stalking
  - following, making excessive phone calls, texts or emails
- Sexual abuse
  - rape, sexual assault
- Reproductive coercion
  - manipulating and controlling by someone by not letting them have a say over their fertility and reproductive health and choices

People can call or text **1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)** or visit [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au) to talk to someone about their relationship.

### Ending relationships

Sometimes people's feelings about being in a relationship change. People might decide that they don't want to be in a relationship anymore. They might choose to end the relationship and just be friends. This is **O.K.** It is important to try to end relationships in safe and healthy ways.

Some people will feel sad and upset when a relationship ends. Other people will feel happy and relieved when a relationship ends. It is normal to feel lots of emotions.

Dealing with a break-up is much easier when people have a strong support team and interests and activities to do when a relationship ends. During a relationship, people should keep a sense of who they are, continue to socialise with family and friends, and keep up with work, study and hobbies.

**Key Messages:**

- A relationship is between two or more people. They can be between family members, friends, people at school or work, neighbours or romantic and/or sexual partners.
- A healthy relationship is based on respect, consent, positive communication and equality.
- Having relationships is great for our health and happiness.
- Romantic relationships are a natural part of life.
- Some romantic relationships will end. Breaking up can be hard. It is important to always treat the other person with respect and kindness.
- Always maintain a balanced lifestyle, whether in a romantic relationship or not.