

love me tender

# Healthy Relationships in College



UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

## What Makes a Relationship Healthy?

Equality is key. People in healthy relationships respect each other; they talk honestly and freely, and share decisions. They trust and support each other and respect the other's independence. There is a balance of equality between the two people so that no one person is "in charge" or "in control" of the other person.

An unhealthy relationship is unbalanced. One person may try to control or manipulate the other person to get his/her way. They do this by using verbal insults, mean language, nasty putdowns, or even resort to physical or sexual violence.

Dating violence isn't an argument every once in a while, or a bad mood after a bad day. That happens in even the healthiest of relationships. Dating violence is a pattern of controlling behavior that someone uses against a significant other.

Dating violence can include physical or sexual violence, but it isn't limited to just that. It can include verbal and emotional abuse, like constant insults, isolation from family and friends, intimidation or threats, name calling, controlling what someone wears or does.

+ Adapted from the Center for Disease Control: Choose Respect program.

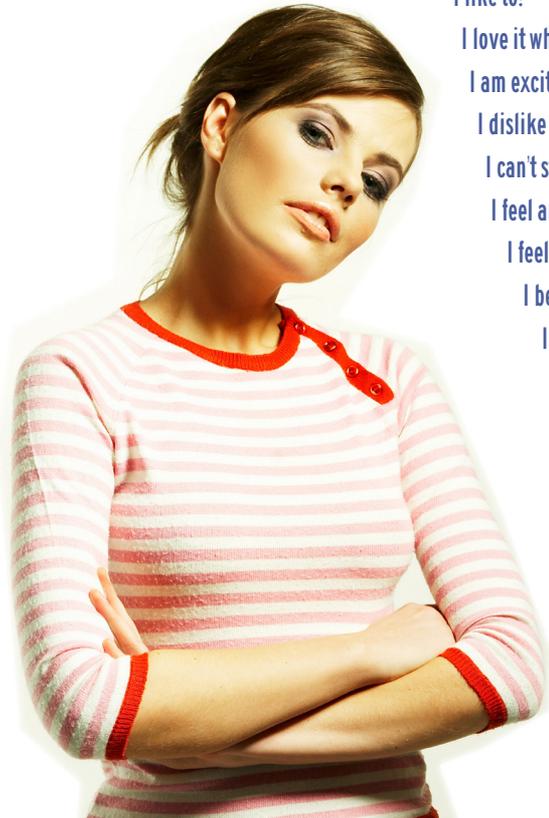
## Defining Boundaries

There are three primary types of boundaries you may encounter in a relationship: physical, emotional, and sexual. Let's take a look at the definition of each of these and what it might look like if they're crossed.

- ▷ **Physical Boundaries** are how much you like to be physically close to or in contact with another person. For example, you may like to hold hands, but aren't a big fan of other public displays of affection. This boundary could be crossed if your partner continually tries to kiss or fondle you in public places, even though you resist and pull back.
- ▷ **Emotional Boundaries** are how you are feeling emotionally at any point in the relationship and whether you are willing to become more or less emotionally invested. For example, if you want to date a person for a while before the relationship becomes serious or "Facebook official," then your emotional boundary is drawn until you feel you know your partner enough to enter into a serious relationship. This boundary could be crossed if your partner wants to be serious right away and wants you to spend all your free time with them.
- ▷ **Sexual Boundaries** are how far you are willing to go sexually. For example, you and your partner have engaged in oral sex, but you do not want to have intercourse yet, that is your sexual boundary. This boundary could be crossed if your partner pressures, guilts, or coerces you into having sexual intercourse before you're ready. This is also sexual assault.

## Know Your Boundaries

Before you can communicate your boundaries with your partner, you need to know them yourself! The list below leads you on a path of self-awareness. It will help to give you a better understanding of who you are and what you want.



**I like to:**

**I love it when:**

**I am excited when:**

**I dislike it when people:**

**I can't stand it when:**

**I feel angry when:**

**I feel happy when:**

**I believe in:**

**I feel loved when:**

**I feel disrespected when:**

**I desire:**

+ Adapted from William  
and Mary Sexual Assault  
Resources and Education.

## Communication for Health Relationships

Sometimes it's hard to start a conversation with your partner to establish your boundaries. You don't want to offend them or make them think you're too easy, too frigid, too emotional, too stoic. Talking about what you want and need in the relationship is risky - but one that will definitely be worth it when both you and your partner are happy and comfortable in the relationship.

There are four basic steps you can take to make sure that you are communicated effectively with your partner. They are: set the stage for healthy communication, use "I" messages, use active listening, and stay on one subject at a time.

### 1. Set the Stage for Healthy Communication

Sometimes it's hard to set the stage for good communication. Oftentimes, we want to argue or run away and avoid the situation altogether. If you are feeling too agitated to communicate without yelling or running away, step back and cool down. The time and place has to be right in order to really communicate with one another.

So, if you or your partner is too upset to communicate effectively, you should:

- ▷ Stop and cool down; leave the situation if necessary for a while.
- ▷ Set a specific time and place to talk again
- ▷ Don't interrupt your partner; let them express their feelings
- ▷ Acknowledge your partner's concerns

## 2. Use “I” Messages

When couples fight, a lot of blame goes around. For example, “You always...” or “You never...” These statements immediately make your partner defensive, which only moves to escalate the fight. But if you use “I” messages, such as “I feel...” or “I think...” then you are taking responsibility for your feelings and are communicating them with your partner in a constructive and non-accusatory way.

Here’s some ways to use “I” messages:

- ▷ Discuss your feelings in a responsible way
- ▷ If you discuss your partner’s behavior, do so in terms of your feelings
- ▷ Let your partner know your feelings when they engage in the behavior
- ▷ Tell your partner the consequences of their behavior to you

## 3. Use Active Listening

Sometimes when couples fight, they don’t really listen to what the other person is saying. This is frustrating and often prolongs the fight because no one is communicating effectively and no one is really being heard. Active listening is a tool that couples can use to help prevent this from happening. When you are an active listener, your only job is to listen, without interruption or adding anything to what the speaker has said.

Active listening means that you:

- ▷ Listen to understand, even if you don’t agree with what your partner is saying. You need to pay attention and listen to their point of view.
- ▷ Summarize what your partner says. After you’ve heard them, paraphrase and repeat back what you heard. “So what I heard you say was...” or “It seems like you’re feeling...”
- ▷ Verify when you are done summarizing by asking “Did I hear you correctly?” Let them give you feedback. Maybe you missed an important element of what they said. This isn’t about you being right or wrong; it’s about understanding what your partner has said.
- ▷ Be open and receptive for more input. Make sure that your partner has said everything they need to say before you tell your story. Ask, “Is there anything else you want to say?” Let them know they have the floor until they say everything they need to say.

## 4. Stay on One Subject at a Time

If you have something that you need to discuss with your partner, you don’t want to complicate it by bringing in other things you need to discuss. It’s better to talk about one issue at a time. That way, you can get that issue resolved and discussed without confusing the situation and causing frustrations to escalate.

Staying on topic means that:

- ▷ It may take several sessions to hear what your partner has to say. Sometimes, it takes time to sort through an issue before you can move on to another one.
- ▷ Be patient and keep talking. It can be frustrating to have a discussion with your partner about a problem or issue you are having, but it’s important to stay patient and make sure that both you and your partner are being heard.



**S.T.O.P.  
VIOLENCE  
PROGRAM**

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