

*Maryland State Bar Association
Lawyer Assistance Program
Wellness Tip Sheet*

Am I in a Healthy Relationship?

In order to have a healthy relationship you have to feel safe emotionally and physically. For a relationship to feel safe, it takes two people, and it must be built on honesty, respect, trust and open communication. Relationships are give and take and – each person should feel comfortable expressing their feelings and listening to their partner’s concerns. Maintaining a healthy, strong relationship takes commitment and work by both people. Being in a relationship can be difficult at times, but should never feel like a chore.

It is normal in a healthy relationship to disagree and argue at times. How you argue, what you say, and how you say it is critically important. The wrong words can be very damaging, may never be forgotten, and can’t be taken back. Each person needs to feel comfortable expressing how they feel, happy with what they are putting into the relationship, as well as what they are getting out of it.

How to have a healthy relationship:

- Being on the same page – Make sure you want and expect the same things
- Respect each other’s feelings and wishes
- Work together to solve your conflicts - Learn to compromise
- Develop healthy communication skills – Learn to use “I statements” to express how you feel rather than blaming your partner. For example, “I feel angry when...” verses “You make me so angry when...”
- Respect each other’s space and privacy. Being in a healthy relationship doesn’t mean you have to always do everything together and share everything with your partner.
- Don’t take each other for granted. Remember to be thoughtful. It’s the little things that make a difference.

Recognizing an unhealthy relationship

Women as well as men can be abusive and find themselves in an abusive relationship. Many men are reluctant and embarrassed to admit that they are in an abusive relationship, even if the abusive relationship is becoming life-threatening for them.

Abuse can be verbal, emotional or physical. Although every relationship is different, abuse typically happens more than once and occurs in a cycle called the Cycle of Abuse. The cycle has three different phases, and each phase can vary in length from minutes to years. The phases are: Honeymoon, Explosion, and Tension Building. Typically, over time the honeymoon phase becomes shorter while the explosion phase becomes longer and more violent. Relationships usually start in the honeymoon phase which makes it very confusing as well as scary when the explosion phase happens for the first time.

Explosion Phase:

- Abuse occurs – physical, verbal and/or emotional
 - Abuse is anything that the abuser says or does that causes you to be afraid, lowers your self-esteem, or manipulates or controls your feelings or behavior. For example:
 - Throwing something at you
 - Verbally attacking you
 - Threatening to hurt you
 - Trying to control you

Honeymoon Phase:

- Abuser tries to make you forget what happened in the explosive phase.
- He/she promises that it will never happen again.
- He/she buys you gifts or does nice things for you.
- He/she may say you did something to cause the abuse, like making them angry, behaving in a certain way, drinking too much, etc.

Tension Building Phase:

- Things begin to get tense.
- You feel like you need to walk on egg shells so your partner does not get mad.
- Your partner may try to start arguments.
- You feel you can't do anything right and you're getting blamed for things.

How does an Abusive Relationship Start?

If your partner exhibits any of the behaviors listed below, it is a warning that you may be in the early stages of an abusive relationship.

- Being very demanding.
- Asking a lot of questions about your whereabouts.
- Texting/Calling you constantly when you are out.
- Frequently getting extremely upset and emotional.
- Being way too jealous and possessive, possibly drifting you away from family and friends.
- Blaming you for his/her worries and troubles.
- Getting extremely upset when you cannot meet his/her demands.
- Regularly shouting, banging stuff around or slamming doors.
- Trying to dominate you all the time.
- Making decisions for you without talking to you.
- Slapping or hitting you – note that a slap or a hit is **not** normal!

If you are seeing these signs in your relationship seek help. This is not behavior from someone who cares about you. If you think that you are in an abusive relationship you probably are. Listen to your gut feeling and ask for help.

*If you or someone you know are in an abusive relationship please call the Lawyer Assistance Program for **free, confidential** counseling at 410.685.7878 x3041 or 800.492.1964.*