Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How healthy is your relationship with your partner?



Do people in long-term, committed relationships live longer? According to research they do, experiencing lower levels of heart disease, certain cancers, depression and stress – but only if they feel their relationships are happy and healthy. Being in love usually makes us happy, but is that enough? How do we know if our relationship is also healthy?

Defining a healthy relationship
A healthy relationship is one in which two people are partners in life, able to endure the challenges of parenting, financial ups and down, changes in family dynamics, evolving personal mutual and personal goals, tragedies and triumphs. It is when both parties:

- Are able to speak honestly and openly without fear of consequences.
- Take care of themselves and have good self-esteem independent of their relationship.
- Trust each other.
- Respect each other.
- Maintain relationships with friends and family.
- Have activities apart from one another.
- Feel safe, secure and comfortable.
- Compromise.
- Resolve conflict fairly.

Defining an unhealthy relationship
How do you know if your relationship with your partner is unhealthy? Try answering the following questions.

- Do you feel pressure to change?
- Do you worry about disagreeing with your partner?
- Are you being pressured to quit activities you enjoy?
- Do you have to justify your actions (where you go, who you see)?
- Do you feel obligated or forced to have sex?
- Do you feel controlled or manipulated or feel the need to control and manipulate?
- Do you experience yelling or physical violence during an argument?
- Does your partner constantly criticize you?
- Do you spend little or no time with one another?
- Do you have no common friends or have a lack of respect for each other's friends?
- Does one partner have more control over resources (food, money, home, car, etc.)?

The more times you answered yes, the more your relationship may need attention.

Communicating clearly
When you hear someone complain that their partner "doesn't understand me" or "doesn't hear a word I say," they're signs that both parties need to improve their communication skills – the foundation for any

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healthy relationship at home, at work or socially. Consider the following strategies to improve communication in your relationships:

- **Speak up.** Your partner may know you well but he or she is not a mind reader. Let your other half know what's on your mind.
- **Actively listen**. Maintain eye contact, repeat back what you've heard and give 100 percent of your attention – and don't interrupt when your partner is speaking.
- **Stay calm and be respectful.** Staying calm and speaking quietly is the best way to diffuse an emotional situation.
- **Pay attention to body language**. Be aware of the non-verbal messages you're sending through your facial expressions, gestures and posture. Also, pay attention to the body language of your partner – it may help you determine how he or she is feeling or what they're trying to say.
- **Rely on face-to-face conversation – especially when trying to resolve a conflict.** Texts, phone calls and emails don't transmit tone of voice, facial expressions or body language and that can lead to misunderstandings.
- **Fight fair.** This means avoiding using accusatory such as "you always…", manipulative such as *"If you loved me, you would…."*, or demeaning such as *"you're a slob!"* language. Instead, expect to compromise in resolving problems. Also, never involve others in any conflict. Don't complain to friends or family members or draw them into taking sides.

It's normal for any relationship to hit bumps in the road. There will be times when both you and your partner will demonstrate negative behaviors and even the most compatible couples may at times need help and support. Building a healthy relationship takes time and effort. If you want more information about how to improve your relationship or resources and counseling services in your area, contact your Employee Assistance Program.