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Healthy or Unhealthy Relationship?

Helping Teens Recognize the Difference

By Kara Witthuhn, School-Based Counselor, [Christian Family Solutions Counseling Care & Services](http://ChristianFamilySolutions.org)

Healthy dating relationships provide social and emotional growth and can help adolescents develop into well-functioning adults with healthy adult relationships. Unhealthy relationships, however, risk detrimental impact on a teen's physical health, happiness, and overall well-being.

Healthy relationships are energizing, inspire growth, and demonstrate mutual respect and caring. A healthy relationship allows you to be yourself, bringing all your flaws and strengths to the table, while accepting the other person for who they are as well. *This is the way our Creator sees us. He loves us for who we are and he reminds us to focus on the strengths of others: "Above all, love each other constantly, because love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8).

Unhealthy relationships are stressful and draining. Common characteristics of unhealthy relationships include mistrust, guilt, drama, disrespect, poor communication, and controlling behaviors. Unhealthy relationships often feel imbalanced or one-sided, where one partner invests more effort, energy, and emotion in maintaining the relationship. *The root cause of all these unhealthy behaviors is sin in us and in the world.*

While no relationship is perfect this side of heaven, and all relationships have difficult moments and missteps, it is important to know the characteristics of a safe and healthy relationship and the warning signs of a relationship that is unhealthy and even potentially abusive.

Here is a checklist you can use in conversation with your teen:

Healthy Relationship Traits

- You feel valued and loved after hanging out with your dating partner.
- You trust your partner and don't get jealous easily.
- Your partner respects and supports your decisions.
- Your friends and family support your relationship.
- Your relationship does not impede your studies. You enable each other to be better students.
- You have interests and hobbies that are outside of your relationship.

- You and your dating partner are able to communicate in an open and honest manner. You are not afraid of respectful disagreements.
- Your relationship is friendship-based (not passion-based). You enjoy spending time together that doesn't involve intimacy.
- You and your dating partner share the same morals and values and have discussed appropriate boundaries and expectations for intimacy.
- Your relationship has stood the test of time. You have known each other long enough to weather the highs and lows of life with grace. Your partner has demonstrated strong character, integrity, and commitment to biblical values.

Warning Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship

- You feel insecure after hanging out with your dating partner.
- You get jealous when your dating partner talks to others of the opposite sex.
- Your dating partner tells you to change the way you dress.
- Your dating partner doesn't like your friends and asks you to stop hanging out with them.
- You find yourself constantly defending and making excuses for your dating partner to your family and friends.
- Your grades have declined and/or you've given up extracurriculars or hobbies.
- You "walk on eggshells" to avoid sparking a conflict.
- Your dating partner lies or omits information.
- Commitment to the relationship is inconsistent. You frequently threaten break up, or are often *on again, off again*.
- You fear that conflict or a break up will contribute to a mental health crisis or suicidal concern.
- Your partner pressures you to levels of intimacy (sharing "secrets" or saying "I love you") beyond your comfort level or forces you into sexual activity against your will or without consent.
- Your dating partner has used physical force to get his or her way (such as hitting, slapping, grabbing, or shoving).

How teens navigate romantic relationships early in life makes a lifelong impact. Adult guidance is important! If your teen has questions or concerns about a relationship, encourage her or him to connect with a trusted adult—a parent, teacher, pastor or school counselor.

Christian Family Solutions has a team of professional counselors deployed to schools, partnering with school staff to offer clinical level services to youth.

- Clinical assessment to uncover the source of the hurt and create a treatment plan
- Sessions with an experienced clinician on site or through telehealth
- Access to higher levels of care if needed to address more serious concerns
- The unconditional love of Christ to build trust and offer hope beyond healing

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