

# What is a healthy relationship?

## How can I tell if my relationship is healthy, unhealthy or abusive?

Maintaining a healthy relationship takes time, energy and care. Healthy relationships make everyone feel respected, happy and safe. The chart will help you compare healthy relationships to unhealthy or abusive ones.

	<b>HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP</b>	<b>UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP</b>	<b>ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP</b>
<b>Sharing Feelings</b>	You feel safe and strong enough to tell your partner how you really feel.	You feel awkward telling your partner how you really feel.	You are afraid to tell your partner how you really feel because you fear getting put down or threatened.
<b>Communicating</b>	You respect and listen to each other even when you have differing opinions on a topic.	Your partner ignores you and does not respect your opinions when there is a difference of opinion.	Your partner treats you with disrespect and ignores or makes fun of your ideas and feelings.
<b>Disagreements</b>	You can have disagreements and still talk respectfully to each other. You resolve your disagreements.	Your disagreements often turn into fights.	You are afraid to disagree because you do not want to unleash your partner's anger and violence. The disagreement is an excuse for abuse.
<b>Intimacy and Sex</b>	Both of you can be honest about your feelings about physical affection and sex. Neither of you feels pressured to do anything you do not want to do.	You are embarrassed to say how you feel because you think your partner may not listen or care. You "go along" with some things.	Your partner ignores your needs and wants. Your partner pushes you into situations that make you uncomfortable, frighten or degrade you.
<b>Trust</b>	You trust each other. You are comfortable with your partner spending time with other people.	Your partner feels jealous when you talk to other people. You feel jealous when your partner talks to other people.	Your partner accuses you of flirting or having an affair, and orders you not to talk to others.
<b>Time Alone</b>	You can each spend time alone and consider this a healthy part of your relationship.	You think there may be something wrong if you want to do things without your partner. Your partner tries to keep you to himself/herself.	Your partner does not allow you to spend time doing things on your own. Your partner sees this as a challenge or threat to your relationship.
<b>Violence</b>	You and your partner take care not to speak harsh words or make mean comments. There is no physical violence in your relationship.	There have been a few incidents of emotional abuse or controlling behaviour in your relationship. There is no pattern of abuse or violence.	There is a pattern of increasing, ongoing abuse in your relationship: emotional, physical, sexual and/or intimidation.

# Steps to find help

## If you are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, you can:

- **Make sure you and your children are physically safe.**
  - If you are in immediate danger, call 911.
  - Make a safety plan. Visit [endfamilyviolence.alberta.ca](http://endfamilyviolence.alberta.ca) for information on safety planning or call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** for assistance.
- **Know you are not responsible** for the abuse. The abuse is the responsibility of the person who is abusive. Know that you did not cause the abuse even if your partner would like you to think so.
- **Understand that the abuse and violence will likely continue without intervention.** In fact, abuse and violence usually become more frequent and more severe over time. When you are thinking about your choices, be as realistic as you can be in determining what the risks are in your situation.
- **Tell someone** you trust about the abuse. Secrecy gives abuse more power. When you tell another person, you are already gaining some power to make the situation better. If the person you tell does not seem to take you seriously, find someone else to talk to. Do not give up.
- **Find out more about abuse in relationships.** You are not alone. Others have had this experience and lived through it. They were eventually able to create new and healthy lives for themselves. Once you start looking for sources of help, you will meet people who understand your situation.
- **Get professional help** from a qualified counsellor that understands abuse and violence in intimate relationships. If the first counsellor is not a good fit for you, try someone else. People who work in the area of family violence may be able to help you find an appropriate counsellor.
- **Care for yourself.** You are in a difficult situation. You need energy and strength to change it. Make time to do some things that make you feel good. Anything you do to uplift your body, emotions, mind or spirit will help you to get through this situation and create the life you want for yourself. Be kind to yourself, care for yourself and do things that uplift you so you have the energy to get past this situation.
- **Spend time with healthy people.** Even if they cannot help you directly, being with healthy people will remind you that most people are kind to one another and many people have healthy and rewarding relationships. You can too.
- **Find out what help is available** in or near your community. You do not have to do this alone.

Emergency shelters have information about services for people to stay when they are fleeing a family violence situation. Even if you do not plan to stay at a shelter, you can call your local shelter to find out what help is available in your community.

Visit [endfamilyviolence.alberta.ca](http://endfamilyviolence.alberta.ca) or call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818**.