

Common questions about...

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



Friendships and other relationships are part of our everyday lives. They range from casual friendships that you have with classmates and neighbours, to deep, heart-breaking romantic relationships.

Positive, healthy relationships are important and help us to feel good about ourselves. Friends can help us to overcome any problems we may have, and are the people who are there for us for both the magical and miserable times. However, not all relationships are healthy.

A relationship that involves someone trying to blame, shame, control or hurt you in any way can make you feel bad about yourself, affect your self-confidence and sometimes your physical and mental health too. You should never feel unsafe in any relationship or face violence or abuse of any kind – physical, sexual or emotional. Sometimes young people can experience relationships where someone has a great deal of power over you and they may try to persuade you to do certain things or exploit you.



Knowing what makes a healthy relationship, and recognising some of the 'warning signs' of an unhealthy relationship, can help you look after yourself and your friends, and to feel respected, happy and safe.



All the questions in this Q&A are based on frequent examples received from young people through UNICEF digital platforms, social listening reports and IoT analytics. The answers were developed in collaboration with a reference group of young people from the ESAR region and reviewed by technical staff from UNICEF, UNFPA and UNAIDS.

1

Everyone talks about 'healthy' relationships, but what does this really mean?



We all need healthy relationships in our lives as they make us feel good about ourselves and provide us with people we can rely on and trust. Healthy relationships are where we can share our successes, joys, hopes, worries and challenges with other people – including partners, family and friends – and receive good advice and positive support.

The word relationship can seem overwhelming, but it just means the connections you make with different people and how you interact with them. Some relationships can be light and fun, while others can be intimate and intense. What matters is that you enjoy your relationships, and that they bring you positive energy and good feelings.

Healthy relationships:

- ✓ Make you feel **happy** most of the time, not sad or stressed.
- ✓ Make you feel **safe** and **confident** to be yourself, they don't involve a person trying to control or frighten you.
- ✓ Are **equal**. One person doesn't have lots more power in the relationship than the other.
- ✓ Are based on **respect**. You can talk about how you feel and have different views without resorting to abuse, insults or violence.
- ✓ Give you **freedom to be yourself**. You can decide what you want to do, who to see, where to go, and make your own decisions about your future, your money, and your body. In a healthy relationship you should feel able to say no to sex.
- ✓ Allow you to disagree and even argue but know you can **resolve things together**.

2

What are 'warning signs' to look out for in a relationship?



Most relationships go through ups and downs, and most people argue or disagree at some point. Sometimes it's hard to know what's normal and what isn't. But you should **never have to feel unsafe** in a relationship or face violence or abuse of any kind – physical, sexual or emotional.



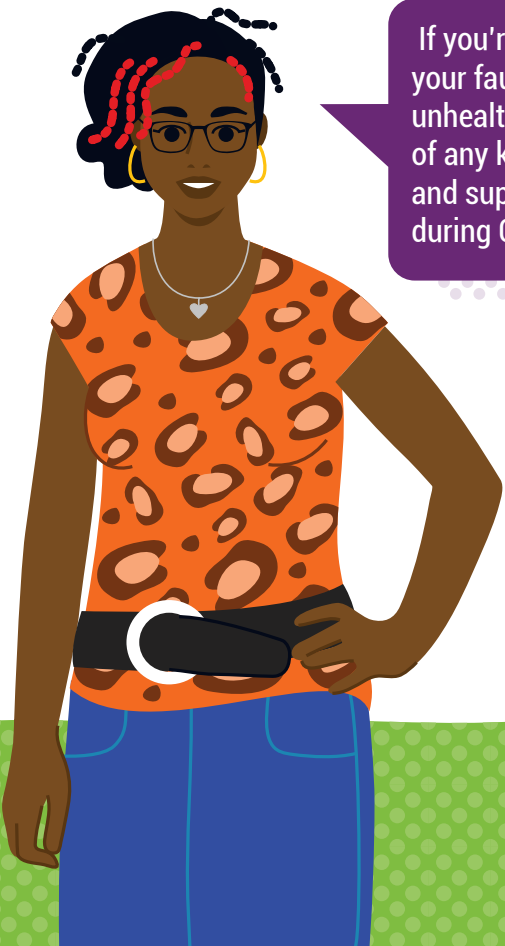
Remember that both men and women can act this way and both can be vulnerable to coercive, exploitative and violent relationships.

Some of the warning signs to look out for are if someone:

- X** Tries to **control you**, for example telling you what you can and can't do and say.
- X** Tries to **stop you from seeing your family and friends**.
- X** **Doesn't respect your privacy**, for example checking your phone messages.
- X** Makes you **feel bad about yourself**, for example putting you down or blaming you for everything.

Some of the warning signs to look out for are if someone:

- X** Is **violent or threatens** you with violence, for example hitting, kicking or pushing you.
- X** Tries to **persuade you to do things you don't want to do**.
- X** Is **possessive and very jealous** if you talk to other people.
- X** Tries to say sorry and **excuse violent behaviour or promises never to do it again**. If someone has done this once, they're very likely to do it again.



If you're in a violent relationship, it's not your fault. If you are worried about an unhealthy, abusive or violent relationship of any kind, talk to someone and get help and support. This is still available even during COVID-19.



Check local links for services.

3

Why am I finding it so hard to leave an abusive relationship?



Lots of people find it hard to leave an unhealthy relationship, even though they may want to. Making the decision to leave someone is very hard, especially if you've been together for a while.

Abusive relationships are based upon power and control; it can feel hard for you to take control and make the decision to leave.

You may still love the person, and believe that their behaviour will change.

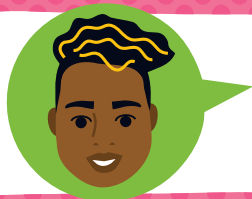
You might be worried about how your partner will react, or be concerned about your safety.

You might feel embarrassed or ashamed to tell other people about the relationship ending.

You may be worried about money and having nowhere else to go

You may believe that the problems in the relationship are your fault – especially if your partner keeps telling you this.

Talking things through with someone you trust can help you. It can be useful to get other people's point of view and to think about the practical steps for leaving, to arrange where you will go and consider how you will deal with your partner's reaction to you leaving. This can help you feel more confident about leaving the relationship. If you're concerned about your safety, you should get help and support immediately. Even during COVID-19 there are people who are ready to help. Check local links for services.



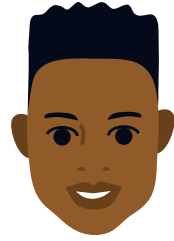
In spite of what anyone can tell you and of all the “rules”, you’re the one who can best assess your own safety, and make decisions about the best time to leave, whether or not you should tell your partner, or if you should let your family know.

Please put your safety first:
If your partner has been violent in the past, it's possible that you ending the relationship may trigger more anger and aggression and you should leave and put as much space between you and them as possible.



4

My partner is really possessive. They get angry and upset if I go out with my friends and says that I don't love them.



We all have different kinds of relationships because we have different needs, that only some people can fulfil. We need guiding love from parents and guardians, we need kindness and carefree fun from friends, we need unconditional love from our siblings and best friends and we need the sense of protection and companionship from a partner.



They are all forms of love, but they are different. If someone wants to keep all of these forms of love for themselves, it's often because they feel insecure and jealous that others may get more of it than them. This is controlling behaviour and their insecurity is their problem, not yours.

However strong our relationship with a partner is, we all need other people in our lives and to have close relationships with our friends and families that are separate.



Some of the 'warning signs' of unhealthy relationships include a partner who gets jealous or possessive, or tries to control you and to prevent you from meeting friends. Sometimes when someone is feeling insecure or worried about their partner's feelings, they can want to keep them all to themselves.

Tell them honestly how you feel, but be clear with them that you also need to be free to see your friends and family, and that this doesn't mean that you don't love them. Talking openly and honestly about your feelings with one another can be helpful and might even bring you closer together.



Ask them about their worries and find ways to reassure them – but remember a healthy relationship is one when you feel respected, safe and happy.



5

My partner and I have been together for 6 months but now they won't return my calls; what have I done wrong?



It is hard when someone you like suddenly goes quiet or shows they are not interested by ignoring your messages. It does not necessarily mean that you did anything wrong.

Some relationships don't last long. In the first few months it is all about getting to know each other, and the more time you spend together, the more you learn whether or not the relationship is right.

You might want to ask why they have stopped contacting you:



You could send them a message and tell them that you would like to hear from them, but then you should wait until they get in touch. Don't pressurise or harass them.

Sometimes two people just don't click and perhaps they just don't feel able to be honest about that. **Don't blame yourself!**



6

Someone I really like asked me to send a naked selfie picture; they have now shown all my friends.



This is a very tough thing to deal with as it's a betrayal of your trust and you probably feel embarrassed at the thought of other people seeing the images. Remember none of this is your fault. The person should not have asked you to do this, or have shared the pictures, and this is something you should report to the authorities if you can.



In many places, it's a crime to share naked or sexual images of others – especially of people under the age of 18.

Try and talk to someone who can help you deal with this. It's important to find someone who can also speak to the person who shared the pictures so they know that what they did is wrong. This could be a trusted teacher at school, or a parent, friend or someone else you trust from your community. If you can talk to the person who shared the images, explain how it made you feel and ask them to delete the image and tell others to do the same. If they, or someone else, try to threaten you with it, do not respond.



Make sure you get some support as it is hard to cope with the emotions you are probably feeling. Remember, you should never feel pressured to share things you don't want to with people, no matter how hard they try to persuade you.

7

How do I break up with my partner?



There are many reasons why a relationship comes to an end. Some end suddenly, maybe after an argument. Others will just fizzle out, or one person might feel that they are not ready to commit. Sometimes the end of a relationship is mutual, where both people agree to 'finish', but often one person will be left feeling sad or rejected. Most people experience a relationship 'break up' at some point in their life and it can be a struggle to get over it.



If you're breaking up with someone, be kind about how you end the relationship. Always think about how you would want to be treated in the same situation.

✓ Try to end the relationship face-to-face, rather than by text or online.

✗ Don't do it publicly or when it could leave someone very vulnerable, such as late at night or in an unfamiliar place.

✓ Understand that the other person might be hurt and possibly angry about your decision.

✓ Try to help the person understand why you want to end the relationship.

✗ Don't blame or criticise them, and don't leave them with unanswered questions – be clear and honest.

8

How do I know if my friend fancies me or whether they just want to be friends? What are the signs?



The early days of relationships can be confusing, when a friend might start to feel more than a friend. There are no rules about how someone shows interest in another person, we all learn this over time. The best way to know is to ask the person! Talking is what makes a good relationship, so start as you mean to go on and ask them how they feel about you and tell them how you feel.

You can also think about how you would show someone you like them and see if you see similar signs. These signs may help you get a sense if someone is interested, but asking them is the only way to be sure.

Do they like spending lots of time with you?

Do they like to get close to you?

Do they seem relaxed and happy in your company?

Watch their body language, do they make eye contact a lot?



9

My partner broke up with me a month ago and I just can't get over it. I feel so low, where can I get help?



Break-ups can feel like the end of the world, and you can feel upset or down, even if you're the one who decided to end the relationship. These feelings usually get less over time but for some people they can lead to feelings of anxiety, isolation and depression.



If you are struggling with your feelings, the best thing you can do is to talk to someone. You can talk to a friend or family member, or, if these feelings are starting to affect your daily life, and stop you from doing the things you enjoy, you might need to talk to a counsellor.

[Check local links for services.](#)

Relationship ups and downs are part of life – we learn from them, and our experiences help us to grow and develop as people. And remember, there's nothing wrong with being single. Too often there is pressure to be going out with someone and to be a couple, but time with yourself is important and you should only be in relationships that are good for you and make you happy.



10

I want my partner to be faithful, but I think they are having sex with someone else, what can I do?



Good communication is key to strong, healthy relationships. It's really important to talk openly and honestly with one another about what you like and don't like, and to agree the 'rules' about your relationship together. Some people are happy to have a more 'open' relationship where you are both free to go out with – and sometimes have sex with – other people too. Others prefer to only see one person and only have sex with that one person.

Ask your partner what they are looking for from a relationship. Explain to them that, for you, being in a relationship means that you only have sex with each other and ask them how they feel about that. It's important that the 'rules' that you agree together apply to you both.

Remember that if either of you are having sex with other people, this increases your risk of contracting STIs, including HIV. Make sure you use a condom to prevent HIV and STI transmission and get tested at the health clinic regularly. [Read the Q&A on Sex and other stuff](#) for more information and [check local links](#) for services.



Further information and contact details

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