

The Road to Respectful Relationships:

A photograph of a young man and woman holding hands, looking down. The man is on the left, with his head bowed, and the woman is on the right, with her head bowed. They are holding hands in a supportive grip. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

A Young Adult's Handbook



As a young adult, you can start creating the life you want. An important part of this is choosing the right relationships, whether it is with friends or partners, as they help shape who you will become.

So, how can you ensure that you are building respectful relationships? This resource is your guide to making meaningful connections and gives you the tools to establish strong, respectful and supportive relationships.

What is a respectful relationship?

Respectful relationships are an essential part of our lives. They help you feel happy, respected, understood and loved. When you are loved, you feel like you belong.

The friendships and connections you build when you are young are important. They help you learn how to get along with others, talk things out and solve problems together, which are important skills for any relationship. The people you choose to surround yourself with will help you grow in these areas or might prevent you from enjoying happy, respectful, healthy and safe relationships.



Respectful Communication

Communication is an essential part of any respectful relationship. When you express and share your feelings, it allows others to do the same. Sharing your aspirations, emotions and concerns with others can often help you feel closer to them.

It is important to communicate how you are feeling. When emotions are not shared, they can bubble to the surface in unhealthy ways that can hurt others. Bottled emotions can also harm you, impacting your ability to form close relationships.

Remember, communication is a two-way street – listening to someone else's perspective is as important as sharing your own. Think about the other person's readiness to hear you out. You can do this by simply asking, "Hey, I am going through something. Do you have the time to listen to me right now?" If they are not available, they might suggest a better time, or if they are going through something themselves, it might be better to talk to someone else.

A respectful relationship is all about being considerate and understanding each other.





Caring for yourself?

Building strong connections with others is important, but you should never forget that the most important relationship you will ever have is with yourself. Self-care means regularly checking in with yourself and becoming self-aware about your mental, emotional and physical well-being.

How you feel inside can impact on how you relate to others, which is why it is essential to check in with yourself regularly.

What does self-care mean?

- Being aware of how your body and mind are doing and focusing on things like good nutrition, quality sleep and gentle exercise.
- Making sure you are okay physically and mentally, and making this your top priority.
- Taking time out to look after yourself, rebuilding the energy you need to function daily.
- Loving yourself and prioritising the things that are important for your well-being.

Why is self-care important?

- Ongoing stress can easily lead to burnout.
- It helps you continue to improve and motivates you to make better decisions.
- You will feel more like yourself.
- It gives you time to reflect on your own needs.
- It is like recharging your battery, giving yourself an energy boost.
- It helps you build resilience for when challenges arise.
- To be able to help others, you must first help yourself - you cannot pour from an empty cup.

Ideas for self-care

- Spend time with pets or animals.
- Explore nature and appreciate what you see and hear.
- Exercise – find something you enjoy, whether it is walking, going to the gym, sports or yoga.
- Try out a new hobby or skill.
- Connect with others when you need to. It is important to understand if you are an extrovert (energised by being with others), an introvert (recharging by being alone), or maybe a bit of both!
- Bake something delicious.
- Start a journal to express your thoughts and feelings.
- Ensure you are getting enough sleep.
- Take a break from screens with a digital detox or set limits on your device use.
- Get creative with painting, drawing or craft activities.

Remember, finding what works for you is vital. Your self-care routine might change and grow as you do over time.

The importance of respectful conflict

Just as you are one of a kind, everyone you will meet in life is unique too. You may not always agree with someone, and that is okay. Conflict in relationships is natural, but it is how you deal with it that is important. The key to conflict is reaching a healthy and respectful resolution for both of you. If you have supportive friends when you are young, you will be more likely to learn how to handle conflict positively, which can help you grow socially.



What does respectful conflict resolution look like?

- Facing the problem head-on.
- Sharing what is on your mind by using “I feel” statements and giving the other person a chance to express their feelings.
- Listening to the other person’s perspective without judging or criticising.
- Using open body language to show you are receptive. Rolling your eyes, crossing your arms or hunching your shoulders can send a signal that you are closed off or disinterested. Instead, leaning in slightly, maintaining eye contact, and having an open posture can convey receptiveness and interest in the conversation.
- Speaking honestly and confidently.
- Staying focused on the specific problem - do not add more issues to the conversation.
- Acknowledging your own mistakes and admitting when you are at fault.
- Being open to ALL solutions and willing to compromise.
- Being prepared to forgive - but make sure your boundaries are clear and respected, otherwise resentment can build.
- Avoid insults and blaming each other.
- If things get too heated, take a break. Make sure to agree on a time to come back and try again later.
- Remember, it is okay if you cannot agree on everything. Making an effort to hear and understand the other person’s point of view helps calm things down.

Conflict is an inevitable part of life, but we get to choose how we resolve it. Now that we have covered the importance of healthy, respectful relationships, including the one with yourself and constructive ways to resolve conflict, we are ready to delve into the world of relationships.

How do I find positive relationships?

When your friends do not meet your needs, you can feel alone, even when surrounded by others. One way to find positive relationships is to join clubs or groups that interest you and share your values. This can help you connect with like-minded people who have similar interests. Volunteering is another great way to meet people who care about the same things as you do. Many groups are run by young people for young people, and they can help you stay connected in person instead of only online.



The role of technology in relationships

Social media has become an integral part of our lives over the past decade, allowing us to connect with people more easily and quickly. However, constant access to digital platforms is not how we are naturally meant to interact as human beings. You may feel the need to take a break from technology from time to time.

Although the digital world is here to stay, it is crucial to regulate your usage and be mindful of how it affects your mental health and well-being. Just like any other relationship, setting healthy boundaries with technology is necessary. You should also be mindful of how you communicate with others online.



Here are some tips for effective communication:

- Set aside some time to talk without any distractions.
- Think ahead about what you want to say and keep it simple.
- Choose the right platform for your conversation. Face-to-face or phone calls are the best options for resolving conflict. Avoid sending heated texts, emails or messages.
- Be honest about what you are thinking and feeling.
- Use open body language and a friendly tone of voice.
- Stay calm, as it helps the other person listen to you better.
- Show that you are paying attention and genuinely interested in what they are saying.
- Check that you have correctly understood what the other person is telling you. After they have shared their perspective, ask clarifying questions.
- Avoid being judgmental. Keep an open mind and try to understand their perspective.



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