

# Respectful Relationships



**Many positive outcomes flow from having respectful relationships: with our families and loved ones, our friends, in our workplace and in our communities. Research tells us that respectful relationships – those in which there is open, honest communication and mutual support – can be beneficial for both our mental health and our physical health.**

**When we enjoy positive, respectful relationships with those around us, we are more resilient in tough times, and are likely to feel a greater sense of belonging.**

**For these reasons, supporting people to create and maintain respectful relationships is part of Relationships Australia's efforts to end loneliness across Australia. This tip sheet will support you in understanding how to build and maintain respectful relationships and provide you with information on where to seek appropriate support should you need it.**

## **Building and maintaining respectful relationships**

We all want to enjoy respectful relationships — to feel happy, loved, supported, and part of a team. While every relationship is different, many of us have similar relationship goals. We aspire for intimacy, respect, open communication, shared responsibility and a sense of fun and adventure.

At the same time, it's normal for relationships to change over time. As a result, they require ongoing work and attention. But no matter how long we've known someone, a few simple steps can make sure our relationships are built on respect and mutual support – whether through communication, changes to thinking and behaviour, and if needed, some outside help.

We have set out some of the most important tips for building and maintaining respectful relationships below.

## **Shared experiences create lasting memories**

No matter who your relationship is with, it is true that lasting connections can be built over shared interests and experiences. A little bit of work on your part can make this a focus of any relationship.

Look for interests you have in common with the other person, and opportunities to take part in events or activities together. Invite the other person to join you. The shared memories will become a solid foundation for lasting connection between you.

## **Be a good listener**

It is well understood that respectful relationships thrive when communication is open

and honest. A critical component of all communication is the ability to listen, without judgement, to what others have to say. In long relationships, people can lose curiosity and start to jump to conclusions about what their partner says or means. Resist doing this.

Good listening skills demonstrate a willingness to engage in respectful communication and help build a sense of connection and belonging. Listening doesn't always mean agreeing with the other person – rather it requires us to acknowledge what they have said, and how they feel.

## **Honest and open communication**

Good communication is an important part of all relationships. All relationships have ups and downs, but a healthy communication style can make it easier to deal with conflict and ensure that your relationship is built on respect.

Keep these tips in mind whenever you are communicating with others:

- Be clear, and honest, in what and how you communicate
- Talk about what is happening, and how it affects you
- Accept responsibility for your own feelings
- Maintain open body language

## **Resolving conflict – early and effectively**

Some conflict is a normal part of any relationship. Misunderstandings and arguments happen, but they're not inherently bad for a

relationship. They can be a way to clear the air, and finally resolve issues that may have been lurking under the surface for a while – as long as you manage conflict effectively, and with respect.

However, there are a few things to keep in mind to ensure conflict doesn't become damaging:

- Express your feelings honestly and stick to the matter at hand. Use statements starting with “I” rather than “you” where possible, e.g. “I experience...” rather than “You never...”
- Don't be hurtful or diminishing of the other person or their feelings/perspective
- Listen and try to understand what the other person is saying without becoming defensive. Hear the other person out. Try and see it from their perspective. Think about what you might have done that contributed to the problem. By all means also give your perspective, but not as an immediate reactive position.
- Avoid ‘calling out’ behaviours and focus instead on ‘calling in’. ‘Calling out’ can lead people to feel criticised, creating a sense of shame and deflection. ‘Calling in’ invites a deeper discussion and creates a compassionate space for listening and understanding. Try statements describing how you feel rather than criticising what they may have done.
- Ensure you've come to a resolution to the conversation you're both comfortable with at the end. The issue might need more discussion, but stopping the

discussion at a good point for the time being has value.

Above all, remember to be honest and compassionate, and keep in mind that the things that matter to us most are not always easy to talk about.

### Take responsibility

While it is of course true that a relationship is a “two-way street”, it is important to focus on what you do and what you can control. Focusing your attention on your own behaviour first and foremost is one of the most important tips for building respectful relationships – and it's one that people often forget.

- Be open to other views – don't make snap judgments
- Ask for help when you can't cope with a situation, or the two of you get stuck
- Show appreciation when someone does something for you
- Make time specifically for yourself – keep up your own hobbies, and do things that feel good for you

### Seeking professional advice and support

If you are struggling to make and maintain a respectful relationship, or you think an existing relationship is under increasing pressure, it can be useful to consider consulting a professional for some advice and counselling.

Seeing a counsellor can help you to identify and learn new ways of relating, communicating and resolving conflicts. Whether you speak to someone individually or with your partner/family, a counsellor can help you make sense of your experiences, develop ways of managing conflict and difference, and help you make decisions about your relationships' future direction.

There are also relationship courses available that can help teach you new skills, improve your current situation and prevent problems from occurring. Meeting with others who share similar experiences can be very rich and rewarding. Find more information please see the training and courses section on our [website](#).

Those impacted by sexual assault, family and domestic violence can obtain advice and referrals from 1800RESPECT – phone 1800 737 732 or visit [1800RESPECT.org.au](#) Relationships Australia has a variety of resources for maintaining respectful relationships. If you would like more practical advice, please see below:

### Tip Sheets

- [Managing stress and anxiety](#)
- [Starting a new relationship](#)
- [Normal differences and warning signs of a relationship breakdown](#)
- [How can you improve your relationship?](#)
- [Communication](#)
- [Are children affecting your couple relationship?](#)
- [Marriage \(and other long-term relationship\) Tips](#)
- [When is a good time to seek professional relationship help?](#)

For a list of other support options, please see [here](#).

**For more information on our services and how they can support you, or to find your nearest centre:**

**Call 1300 364 277**

**Visit**  
<https://relationships.org.au/>