

Twelve Commandments for a Healthy Relationship

Everyone takes a car to a mechanic, a sick body to a doctor, and home repairs to a contractor... That makes sense, right?

But when a relationship starts to fray, becomes tense and painful, we think we should fix that on our own. And when it does not happen, we go from sad to mad to numb. And often we suffer, or we leave.

Nobody is ever trained on how to create a healthy relationship. So, here are some guidelines for relationships that enrich, bring out the best in one another, and give us what we all want and deserve.

Communication is Direct

- You express your wants, needs, and opinions.
- You don't expect your partner to read your mind.
- You don't assume you can read your partner's mind.
- You don't jump to conclusions about your partner's actions.
- You avoid the following toxic communication:
 - Don't start sentences with "You always" or "You never".
 - Don't bring up past problems while discussing something else.
 - Don't justify your point of view by stating "everybody thinks this about you too".

Feelings are a Part of your Vocabulary

- You can identify your own feelings: mad, sad, glad, hurt, joyous, lonely, embarrassed, nervous, passionate, frustrated, frightened, rejected, abandoned, or confused.
- You are willing to take a risk, be vulnerable and express them by saying "I feel _____".

Listening is Frequently Practiced

- Listening is done with your ears. When you listen you don't interrupt; you don't tell someone he/she shouldn't feel that way or immediately try to give solutions... you just listen.
- You show that you are listening by giving your full attention; you maintain eye contact and you are not doing anything else, but listening.
You validate what the person is saying with comments that indicate you understand and

support what he/she experienced. For example, “It really seems that you were frustrated by what happened today”. “I can understand why you feel excited about what happened at work”.

Responsibility

- You take ownership of your own feelings and behaviors.
- You start sentences with “I feel, want, think, or behaved” as opposed to “You made me feel, do, want, think or behave”.
- If you said or did it, you own the behavior.
- There is follow through on promises and commitments.
- You agree upon how responsibility for all things will be divided between you.

Build Bridges Not walls

Bridges bring people closer; walls keep people out. Bridges are built by being committed to working things through together, no matter what it takes.

Walls are built when you keep feelings to yourself and try to endure or suffer quietly, find a solution on your own, keep secrets, and/or run away from the problem and your partner.

Bridges are built by actively working together to listen, compromise, and work out a solution that works for both of you and is healthy for the relationship!

Trust

- You feel safe and believe that your partner is trustworthy, has your best interests in mind, and would not want to intentionally hurt you.
- You hit your pause button as opposed to your react button and wait and discuss things calmly with your partner.
- You know that what you say in confidence is kept safe and will not be used against you or told to someone else.

Freedom

- You are able to disagree openly and honestly; you are not afraid that you will be rejected if you express yourself.
- You have the right to have interests, hobbies, and friends.

- You can continue to learn, grow, and enhance yourself while in the relationship.
- Each of you encourages one another to be the best that you can be.
- Each of you has the freedom to be yourself and not expected to be exactly like one another.

Commitment

- Neither of you keep threatening to leave; you are committed to making the relationship all that it can be.
- You practice forgiveness again and again; of yourselves and each other. Each day is a new opportunity to strengthen your relationship. Each resolved conflict is an opportunity to grow closer.
- You do not let work, other relationships, or activities put your relationship in jeopardy by making other things more important than each another.

Closeness

- You feel close, safe, and accepted in this relationship, most of all.
- You can depend on one another.
- You feel respected and respect your partner.
- You know one another's likes and dislikes; you often could predict what each other will say!
- You nurture common interests and enjoy setting aside time to spend with one another.

Conflict is Resolved in a Fair, Healthy Way

- Anger is acceptable; rage is not.
- Anger is a feeling that is expressed directly; it does not involve hitting, throwing or breaking things - that is rage.
- If you feel yourself escalating, take a time out. Do not express yourself when you are going to say or do things you will regret. Know your trigger points.
- Do not hold someone captive by your feelings - that is bullying.
- Talk about things that have hurt or frustrated you when you are most able to.
- Find a solution, listen to each other, and put it to rest. Abide by your solutions; do not keep bringing issues up again and again.
- Do not expect your partner to solely solve the problem; own your part in your frustration and the way that you handle it.

Affection, Intimacy, and Passion

- Talk openly about how you would like to be nurtured; practice it often.
- Talk about how and what pleases you sexually; remember communication is always needed - especially in the bedroom!
- Continue to keep your love alive by touching, loving, and finding new ways to be passionate with one another.

Get Professional Help When you Need it

Relationships are eroded when a partner has a condition such as alcoholism, addiction, depression, anxiety, rage, sexual dysfunction, or ADHD, and it is not professionally treated. The support of a partner is no substitute for professional help.

Love is what brings people together; good skills are what keep them together. Do not let your relationship go up in flames and wind up just an ember because you don't have the necessary skills. Couples counseling can help you nurture the love so that it grows and endures. If you cannot talk to each other or resolve problems, if you are hurt and then angry; get counseling before it turns into numbness, and the relationship gets stressed to the breaking point.