



## Relationships

November 2023

As the skies begin to get darker earlier and falling behind is on its way, we often follow the seasons habits to stay in more, and rely more on our closest relationships. As the winter approaches, it might be a good time to talk about relationships, the essential ingredient in life, partnership, children, parents, siblings, friends, and co-workers that might also be friends.

### Boundary Styles

Boundaries define what is acceptable, and what is not, in a relationship. It is possible to have different boundary types in different relationships.

Common traits of rigid, porous, and healthy boundaries.		
Rigid Boundaries	Porous Boundaries	Healthy Boundaries
Avoids intimacy and close relationships.	Overshares personal information.	Values own opinions.
Unlikely to ask for help.	Difficulty saying "no" to the requests of others.	Doesn't compromise values for others.
Has few close relationships.	Overinvolved with other's problems.	Shares personal information in an appropriate way (does not over or under share).
Very protective of personal information.	Dependent on the opinions of others.	Knows personal wants and needs, and can communicate them.
May seem detached, even with romantic partners.	Accepting of abuse or disrespect.	Accepting when others say "no" to them.
Keeps others at a distance to avoid the possibility of rejection.	Fears rejection if they do not comply with others.	



### Qualities of a Healthy Relationship

Every relationship is unique. For example, the way one couple expresses appreciation may be very different from how another couple does so. However, healthy relationships tend to be alike in many ways.

*These relationship green flags are associated with physical and mental wellness.*

- Appreciation – You respect and value your partner, and express gratitude often.
- Commitment – You are invested in your partner and the relationship. You give the relationship adequate time and energy.
- Conflict Resolution – You take responsibility for your actions, and work as a team to solve problems.
- Empathy – You take your partners perspective and understand their feelings, even if you do not always agree.
- Independence – You have your own interests and goals separate from those of your partner.
- Safety – You respect your partner's boundaries. You feel safe, physically, intellectually (expressing thoughts), and emotionally (expressing feelings).

- Balance – You find happiness in time spent together and apart. Some needs are met outside the relationship (through friendships hobbies, etc)
- Commonality – You share important goals, beliefs, and values with our partner.
- Effective Communication – You communicate your own needs and wishes, while respecting those of your partner.
- Honesty – Your actions align with your words. The thoughts and feelings you express are genuine.
- Intimacy – You feel close and connected with your partner physically and emotionally.
- Self-Confidence – You feel comfortable being yourself in the relationship.



### Fair Fighting Rules

- Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.
- Are you angry because your partner left the mustard on the counter? Or are you angry because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence?
- Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.
- Discuss one topic at a time. Don't let "You left dishes in the sink" turn into "You watch too much TV." Discussions that get off-topic are more likely to get heated, and less likely to solve the original problem.
- Choose one topic and stick to it.
- No degrading language. Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling.
- Express your feelings with words. "I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." Structure your sentences as "I" statements ("I feel emotion when event") to express how you feel while taking responsibility for your emotions.
- Take turns speaking. Give your full attention while your partner speaks. Avoid making corrections or thinking about what you want to say. **Your only job is to understand their point of view, even if you disagree.**
- No stonewalling. Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset.
- No yelling. Yelling does not help anyone see your point of view. Instead, it sends the message that only your words matter.
- If an argument starts to become personal or heated, **take a time-out**. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down. Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding. There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument.

If you are having problems in your relationships, conflict happens in many of them, take the time to call Vancouver Island Counselling so we can assist in discovering what is in the way of healthy relationships.



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