

Healthy Relationships

NEW OPPORTUNITIES:

Going to university, especially if it is in a new city, brings many opportunities to learn and try new things, to see new places and make new friends from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. This can be an exciting time of personal growth. However, making new friends can be scary, especially if none of your old school friends are with you. It can also be a lonely time before your social network is established.

It is easy to assume everyone else has friends, especially if you see them surrounded by people at social gatherings. Starting new friendships involves taking a risk, risking rejection. If someone isn't interested in making friends with you beyond an acquaintance level it's not necessarily a judgment about you. They may already have some friends and not feel the need or have the time to develop new friends. It is easy to fall prey to negative self-talk, such as- "there's something wrong with me," or "I'm the only one who feels like this."

It may feel a little awkward at first to make the step from greeting someone in the lecture room to inviting them for a coffee or to meet for lunch, but if you take the risk you may be rewarded by friendship. Turning a chance encounter into a friendship takes time, and can't be rushed. Take courage in the friends you had before, if you've done it before you can do it again. Be patient, and don't jump to critical conclusions about yourself.


TIPS FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

1. Keep expectations realistic. No one can be everything we might want him or her to be. Sometimes people disappoint us. It's not all-or-nothing, though. Healthy relationships mean accepting people as they are and not trying to change them!
2. Talk with each other. It can't be said enough: communication is essential in healthy relationships! It means—take the time to communicate. Really be there. Genuinely listen. Don't plan what to say next while you're trying to listen. Don't interrupt. Listen with your ears and your heart. Sometimes people have emotional messages to share and weave it into their words. Ask questions. Ask if you think you may have missed the point. Ask friendly (and appropriate!) questions. Ask for opinions. Show your interest. Open the communication door. Share information. Studies show that sharing information especially helps relationships begin. Be generous in sharing yourself, but don't overwhelm others with too much too soon.
3. Be flexible and open to change and growth. Most of us try to keep people and situations just the way we like them to be. It's natural to feel apprehensive, even sad or angry, when people or things change and we're not ready for it.
4. Be dependable and available for other commitments, responsibilities, and relationships. If you make plans with someone, follow through. If you have an assignment deadline, meet it. If you take on a responsibility, complete it.
5. Fight fair. Most relationships have some conflict. It only means you disagree about something, it doesn't have to mean you don't like each other! When you

have a problem: Negotiate a time to talk about it. Don't have difficult conversations when you are very angry or tired. Ask, "When is a good time to talk about something that is bothering me?" Healthy relationships are based on respect and have room for both. Don't criticize. Instead, attack the problem, not the other person. Open sensitive conversations with "I" statements; talk about how you struggle with the problem. Don't open with "you" statements or assigning blame or motives. Let others speak for themselves.

6. Say, "I'm sorry" when you're wrong. It goes a long way in making things right again. Healthy relationships can admit mistakes. Don't assume things. When we feel close to someone it's easy to think we know how he or she thinks and feels. We can be very wrong!
7. Ask for help if you need it. Talk with someone who can help you find resolution—like your RA, a counselor, a friend or even parents. There may not be a resolved ending, so be open to compromise or to disagree about some things. Healthy relationships don't demand conformity or perfect agreement. You don't have to accept anything and everything, but don't hold grudges—they just drain your energy. Studies show that the more we see the best in others, the better healthy relationships get. Healthy relationships don't hold on to past hurts and misunderstandings. Studies tell us that loyalty is very important in good relationships, but healthy relationships are NOW, not some hoped-for future development.
8. Show your emotional warmth. Studies tell us warmth is highly valued by most people in their relationships. Be where other people are. You can't make friends if you aren't in the situations where there are people. Involvement entails both COMMUNICATION and LISTENING. Share feelings, ideas, opinions and activities, and listen -- listening to both the speaker's words and feelings conveys your interest.
9. Keep your life balanced with a variety of fulfilling opportunities, experiences, and relationship. Other people help make our lives satisfying but only you can fill your life. Don't overload on activities, but do use your time at college to try new things—clubs, volunteering, lectures, projects. You'll have more opportunities to meet people and more to share with them. Healthy relationships aren't dependent!
10. Be yourself! It's much easier and much more fun to be you than to pretend to be something or someone else. Remember that connecting and relationships are a process. Sometimes it looks like everyone else on campus is confident and connected. Actually, most people feel just like you feel, wondering how to fit in and have good relationships. It takes time to meet people and get to know them. So, go out there and make "small talk", respond to others, smile, and keep trying!

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