



# BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

A Mental Health Guide

**Silence  
the Shame**

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# OVERVIEW

A relationship is defined as "how two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected." Relationships come in many forms, such as family relationships, friendships, acquaintanceships, and romantic relationships. As predominantly social beings who crave meaningful social connections, our innate need to form, grow, and sustain relationships is universal and evident from early infancy.

High-quality interpersonal relationships provide a source of joy and meaning across the life span. They have been identified as one of the most reliable indicators of happiness, health, longevity, and life satisfaction for all ages. Relationships are as important as material living standards, health, and education in determining the quality of life globally.

People who feel more connected to others have lower levels of anxiety and depression. Moreover, studies show they also have higher self-esteem, greater empathy for others, are more trusting and cooperative, and, as a result, others are more open to trusting and cooperating with them.

In other words, social connectedness generates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional, and physical well-being. Feeling socially connected depends on the quality and number of meaningful relationships with family, friends, and acquaintances. Going beyond the individual level also involves a feeling of connecting to a larger community.

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true for those who lack social connectedness. Low levels of social connection are associated with declines in physical and psychological health and a higher likelihood for antisocial behavior that leads to further isolation.

# ARE YOU EXPERIENCING HEALTHY OR TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS?

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## SIGNS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

- mutual respect
- trust and honesty
- compromise
- individuality/independence
- good communication
- anger control
- fighting fair
- problem-solving
- support and understanding
- self-confidence
- healthy sexual relationship (where it applies)
- safety and privacy
- equality

## SIGNS OF A TOXIC RELATIONSHIP

- control
- hostility
- dishonesty
- disrespect
- dependence
- intimidation
- physical violence
- sexual violence
- intensity
- isolation
- extreme jealousy
- belittling
- volatility
- gaslighting



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# IMPACT OF TOXIC RELATIONSHIPS

## PHYSICAL IMPACT

- Disrupted sleep
- Poor nutrition
- Digestive issues
- Muscle tightness
- Fatigue/feeling constantly worn down
- Immunity issues

## EMOTIONAL IMPACT

- Anxiety
- Feeling unworthy unheard, or unseen
- Living in fear
- Emotional exhaustion
- Low self-esteem, co-dependency, and depression

## SOCIAL IMPACT

- Performance at work is affected due to distress
- Feeling more tired and unmotivated
- Disinterested in life outside of the relationships

# BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## BUILDING TRUST

- Honor your word
- Take time making decisions
- Understand and practice forgiveness
- Show mutual respect
- Be patient with the process
- Learn to communicate

## COMMUNICATION

- Listen intently
- Ask questions
- Share information
- Use Assertive Communication:
  - "I" feel statements
  - Describe the problem
  - Request for change

## CONNECT AND REFLECT

Each day, look for three opportunities to interact and connect with others. It can be the same person three times or three different people.

- After these interactions, reflect:
  - How do I feel from that interaction?
  - Why did I feel disconnected from the other person?
  - What can I possibly do next time to enhance my connection with the other person?

# TIPS ON IMPROVING FRIENDSHIPS



## BE THE FRIEND YOU WANT

Treat your friend just as they want to be treated. Be reliable, thoughtful, trustworthy, and willing to share yourself and your time.

## BE A GOOD LISTENER

Be prepared to listen and support just as you want to be heard and supported. Be present in your interactions and limit distractions.



## LIMIT RULES AND EXPECTATIONS

Allow friendships to evolve naturally. Everyone is unique; therefore, friendships will develop differently. Limit the rules of engagement to allow flexibility.



## RESPECT BOUNDARIES & GIVE SPACE

Don't be too clingy or needy. Everyone needs space to be alone or spend time with other people as well.

# RESOURCES

## 01 Crisis Text Line

Text SILENCE to 707070 to be connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. The Crisis Text Line provides free, text-based support 24/7.

## 03 Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administrator (SAMHSA)

Call 1-800-662-4357 to access national information about local mental health services and treatment in your community. The federal agency that leads efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.

## 05 Managing Relationships and Mental Health

Check out this Community Conversation with **Shanti Das, Dr. Joy & Spirit** as they discuss strategies to manage healthy relationships in times of crisis. (Click the linked title)



## 02 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255 to access a national network of local crisis centers providing free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24/7.

## 04 The Trevor Project

Call 1-866-488-7386 to access crisis intervention and suicide prevention for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer & questioning youth. TrevorText START to 678-678.

## 06 STS Podcast Episode 39: Divorce and Depression

Check out Silence the Shame Podcast- **Shanti Das** and co-host **Free The Vision** speak with special guests about how divorce can lead to depression and the potential impact on our mental, physical, and emotional health. (Click the linked title to listen to podcast episode)

# Silence the ~~Shame~~

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**PODCAST**



If you need to connect with someone,  
text "**SILENCE**" to 741741