

Starting a new relationship



What is a 'good' relationship?

We know that a good partner in life can make all the difference to our feelings about ourselves and our overall wellbeing. That's why we seek out relationships but what do we need to know when starting a new relationship so that it goes well? More importantly, how can we tell if it isn't good enough?

Trusting our feelings alone can be risky, so how else do we judge who is right for us? Understanding the essential things for establishing a new relationship and also the red flags to beware of can help you to decide if the relationship is healthy, safe and respectful and worth continuing.

How do you start a new relationship?

Read our ten tips for useful ways to establish a new relationship

1. Set a foundation of respect and honesty

Honesty and respect are the basic foundations of every healthy trustworthy relationship. If you don't respect the other person, or they don't treat you with respect, it will erode the goodwill and generosity between you. Emotional closeness can only grow when there is trust between you.

2. Make sure you are listening to each other

Be intentional about listening to the other person. It is the only way to really know what they want, need, and are passionate about. It is also important to feel heard yourself, and know your feelings, thoughts and needs will be understood.

3. Take it at the right pace for both of you

Talk about when to tell others about the relationship, and how you want to do it. It can be a big step to share your relationship with significant people in your life and get their feedback.

Take time to decide if it is right to live together or get engaged, taking into consideration your values, current needs, financial situation, and ability to resolve conflict. Rushing to commit can add pressure to a forming relationship.

4. Don't assume the other person feels the same as you

It may feel awkward, and intense, but it is important to talk about the relationship: 'how are we going?'. Discuss how you both feel about the relationship - is it unfolding the way you hoped it would? It takes courage to ask, but there's no point pursuing a relationship that only one of you is committed to.

5. Evaluate your own motives

Why do you want the relationship? Are you wanting to be with that specific person or are you afraid of being alone, or perhaps feeling the pressure to settle for any relationship? Do you like spending time with them, have some common interests, similar sense of humour? Be honest with yourself, and if it's not right, keep looking.

6. Talk about physical intimacy and what you like

If the physical affection, and sexual connection between you is not working for you, you might need to initiate a conversation about what you both like and don't like physically intimate. It's hard to discuss for many people, but only gets harder over time.

"The most important questions to ask about the other person: Are you there for me? Will you be there if I need you? Are you interested in my needs and concerns? Can I rely on you? Am I safe with you?"

7. Focus on now, not long term plans

Wait until you are both committed to continuing the relationship before planning your future. Talking about children and marriage, where you want to live and your long term plans can overshadow your enjoyment of getting to know each other here and now. The foundation of the relationship needs to be built before you start to construct the house!

8. Be careful not to expect them to change for you

Do you like mostly everything about someone but are hoping they will change for you? That they will change a habit you don't like, or give up some friends? Hoping that your partner will change in the future will only lead to disappointment. It's better to be up front about any expectations.

9. Don't ignore red flags!

Danger signs might be alerting you to future issues, but sometimes at the start of a relationship you might be tempted to ignore them. Don't! It is important not to minimise bad behaviour like jealousy, alcoholism, gambling, dishonesty, and financial recklessness. They can cause you a lot of pain. Observe how the other person behaves, not just what they say: how do they treat pets, their parents, elders, wait staff? Are they respectful to everyone equally or do they have a sense of entitlement or superiority over others? Be real about things that are red flags for you, and decide whether it's worth the risk.

10. Be an anchor for each other

The most important questions to ask about the other person: Are you there for me? Will you be there if I need you? Are you interested in my needs and concerns? Can I rely on you? Am I safe with you?

If you can answer yes to these questions then the relationship is starting out on the right foundation.

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About Relationships Australia

Relationships Australia is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations.

For over 70 years, we have been supporting children, adults, families and communities.

As a federation of Relationships Australia organisations in each state and territory, we have over 118 service locations across the country, with our National Office based in Canberra.

We provide a broad range of services including counselling, family dispute resolution and mediation, family violence prevention, support and recovery services, and mental health services.

Our services are for all members of the community, regardless of religious belief, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Relationships Australia receives funding from the Commonwealth Government, as well as state and territory governments, and other sources.

Next steps

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

Call 1300 364 277

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