

## Healthy Relationships

### Healthy Relationships Start at Home

Healthy development depends on healthy relationships and it starts at home. Children who form secure attachments and feel a loving bond with a caregiver fare well in terms of many measures of health and wellbeing and those whose attachments are insecure or disorganized fare more poorly. This discrepancy demonstrates the need for adults involved in the care of children to establish healthy relationships with them and provide a balance of warmth and control aligned with the children's developmental capacities.

Healthy habits start to develop early. Through positive interactions and positive, deliberate learning opportunities, children and youth in healthy families develop the self regulation, social, and coping skills that enable them to develop in healthy ways.

Children and youth who grow up in healthy family relationships develop relationship skills that form the foundation of healthy relationships through adolescence and into adulthood. A substantial proportion of Canadian youth do not develop the capacity for healthy relationships. Nearly a quarter of Canadian youth report having experienced aggression with a dating partner (Connolly et al., 2010). Both girls and boys who are involved in an aggressive romantic relationship have a range of emotional and behaviour problems that have a potentially strong and negative impact on health and wellbeing as they move into adulthood (Wolfe et al., 2003).

### Healthy Relationships vs. Unhealthy Relationships

Part of being a young person is exploring new relationships. This is exciting for kids, but can be scary for parents, who don't want to see their kids get hurt. Relationships can be supportive and help people learn more about themselves. They can also be difficult, frustrating, and even unhealthy. **Your child needs your help learning about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships.**



Defining characteristics of a healthy relationship include:

- Seeing your friend/partner as trustworthy
- Being supported
- Feeling physically and emotionally secure
- Having the ability to be completely honest
- Frequently expressing appreciation
- Feeling respected which includes treating oneself with respect
- Being true to oneself and not changing so someone will like you more.

Unhealthy relationships do the exact opposite. When someone is in an unhealthy relationship, they can feel confused, anxious, and unsure. Knowing the differences between a healthy and not-so-healthy relationship will help in making good choices around relationships and friendships.

### Talk to your Children/Youth about Relationships

- **Share your values.** You can help your children understand what it means to be in a healthy relationship. By talking to them about respect, healthy relationships, and what they want out of his/her relationships, you can help them stay away from or get out of an unhealthy relationship.
- **Talk with your child/youth about what you want for him/her.** "I want you to have relationships where you feel respected", "I want you to have relationships where you feel comfortable", "I want you to enjoy your relationships and feel fulfilled because you have people in your life that care about you".
- **Listen and be supportive.** When talking to your child, be supportive. If they do open up, it's important to be a good listener. Your child may feel ashamed of what's happening in their relationship. Many teens fear that their parents may overreact, blame them or be disappointed. Others worry that parents won't believe them or understand. If they do come to you to talk, let it be on their terms, and meet them with understanding, not judgment. Ask questions and encourage open discussion. Make sure you listen to your son or daughter, giving them a chance to speak. Avoid analyzing, interrupting, lecturing or accusing
- **Talk about dating abuse and how to recognize unhealthy relationships.** Include physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual coercion, digital abuse and financial abuse.
- **Keep it low key.** Don't push if your child is not ready to talk. Try again another time.
- **Encourage other relationships.** Encourage your child to meet new people through activities, after school programs and other friends.

### Resources/References for Healthy Relationships

- Edmonton Catholic Schools Parent Resources: <https://www.ecsd.net/ParentsStudents/ParentResources/Pages/default.aspx>
- Teen Mental Health [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)
- [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org)
- <https://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Teens/InfoBooth/Dating/healthy-relationships.aspx>
- <http://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/HealthyRelationshipsPaper.pdf>

### Phone Numbers:

- Call Health Link Alberta: 811
- CYFAMH Intake: 780-342-2701
- Youth Addiction Services Edmonton: 780-422-7383
- Mobile Response Team: 780-427-4491
- Call 211 – Alberta Community resources
- Catholic Social Services: (780) 432-1137
- The Support Network, Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357)
- Kids Help Phone: 1 800 668 6868: