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RELATIONSHIPS

Is Your Relationship
Good for You?

Relationship
Responsibilities

Are You Safe in Your
Relationship?

Relationship Responsibilities

Relationship Responsibilities at a Glance

In sexual or romantic relationships, we have responsibilities to our partners and to ourselves.

Understanding these responsibilities can help us build healthy relationships.

In any relationship, we have responsibilities to our partners and to ourselves. Sometimes we are so worried about our partners' needs that we forget to take care of our own. Or we may worry so much about our own needs that we forget about what our partners need.

Knowing our responsibilities can help us develop respectful, fair, and healthy relationships. Many of the basic relationship responsibilities in healthy sexual or romantic relationships can be applied to all the relationships we have in life.

What Are Our Responsibilities?

In our ongoing romantic relationships, whether or not sex is involved, we have great responsibilities to ourselves and to our partners. We need to

Listen and be listened to. We need to hear our partners' thoughts, feelings, and ideas. We should also expect our partners to care about what we have to say.

Be honest and expect honesty. We need to be truthful with each other about what we do, think, and feel.

Share our feelings and expect our partners to share theirs. We need to be able to say what is on our minds and know that we will react to one another respectfully.

Disagree and allow disagreement. Partners often have different desires, opinions, and ideas. They have the right to think differently. Partners need to respect each others' unique points of view.

Be fair and expect to be treated fairly. Partners need to be considerate of each other and treat each other equally in their relationships.

Consider our partners' needs and have ours considered. Decisions that affect both partners should be made together with one another's well-being in mind. Partners need to be able to compromise.

Give support and be supported. Partners need to support one another's emotional needs.

Help our partners feel good about themselves and expect the same in return. Partners need to acknowledge one another's efforts and accomplishments.

Forgive and expect forgiveness. No one is perfect, and making

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can move on. We shouldn't constantly remind one another of past mistakes.

Let our partners use their own money as they like and expect the same in return. We should all be allowed to make our own decisions on how we spend our own money. We also have a responsibility to live up to whatever financial commitments we have made together.

Respect our partners' needs for other relationships and expect the same in return. We all have a right to friendships outside of our primary relationships. Spending time apart with family and friends is normal and healthy.

Respect our partners' privacy and need for time apart and expect the same in return. We all need privacy and time apart from one another — alone or with others. It is not fair to be angry or treat someone badly for wanting time apart.

Respect our partners' need to feel safe and secure and expect the same in return. We all need to always feel safe and secure. Physical or emotional abuse, threats, or violence are deal breakers and end our responsibility to try to maintain our relationships.

Respect our partners sexually and expect the same in return. Whenever we have sex, we should be attentive to each other's pleasure. We should always have each other's consent, and we should never use pressure to get consent. We should share in the responsibility of guarding ourselves and our partners against unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection. And we should always be clear about what we want to do and respect what our partners want to do sexually.

Often, partners experience a conflict. What you need or want may be different from what your partner needs or wants. In these situations, the solution is to compromise. Each of you will have to decide what's more important at that moment — fulfilling your desires, fulfilling your partner's desires, or working with your partner to find a way for each of you to get some of what you want or need.

When you're trying to work out a compromise, keep the big picture in mind — remember that in a healthy relationship, there is an equal balance of who gets their needs fulfilled and how often. So, if you give in to your partner's needs this time, your partner will give in to your needs sometime soon.

In building and maintaining healthy relationships, we need to pay constant attention to balancing all of our responsibilities. Good communication and compromise are key to achieving that balance.

Want to know more?

Find Dr. Cullins' answers to common sexual health questions.
Q&A WITH DR. CULLINS