

# Top 10 Tips

## For Healthy Relationships



★ From RHEP's Youth Advisory Board



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Advancing Reproductive Health  
Equity for Youth in Foster Care

# Top 10 Tips

## For Healthy Relationships

★ *From RHEP's Youth Advisory Board*

- Practice mutual compassion
- Engage in honest communication, even in times of conflict
- Don't let your trauma define you or your relationships. Your past trauma is only one small piece of your whole self
- Be open to trusting yourself & others again
- Be patient. Personal growth happens over time
- Set boundaries. Share your needs in your relationship
- Understand yourself, your emotions, and your needs
- Learn when it's time to grow and when it's time to move on
- Redefine your relationship to relationships
- Recognize that conflict is inevitable in your relationship, and that is okay



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In healthy relationships, we feel safe and comfortable expressing respect for ourselves and others. Mutual trust, honesty, good communication, empathy, and consent are all essential components of a healthy relationship. On the other hand, unhealthy relationships usually have a lack of mutual trust, effective communication, compromise, honesty, or consent. In some cases, unhealthy relationships can lead to physical, emotional, or sexual violence.

We (RHEP's Youth Advisory Board) produced this guide to assist other young people who are interested in developing healthy relationships with friends, family members, and romantic partners. Our guide is based on our 2023 research project in which we interviewed current & former foster youth with and without sexual trauma. Their responses helped us to identify the skills these young people implemented to build healthy relationships as they grew older. In addition to these tips, you can scan the QR code for handpicked resources to help you strengthen your relationship skills.

### Practice mutual compassion

Relationships require mutual care. However, some days may be harder on one person. They might need more compassion and support. It's important to provide that extra kindness and compassion when needed. One quick, easy way to practice mutual compassion: share your emotional state in terms of a percentage. For instance, "I am at 10% today" could signal that you need more support, while "I am at 90% today" could express your ability to provide extra support.

### Engage in honest communication, even in times of conflict

Honest communication involves expressing your thoughts, feelings, and intentions clearly and authentically. Before engaging in a potentially difficult or sensitive topic, take time to identify your own feelings and needs. For instance, if you are bothered when your roommate leaves the dishes in the sink, first recognize that you are feeling upset and that you need a clean, safe space. Next, select an appropriate time and place for the conversation. You can use a communication strategy to express yourself, such as using "I" statements.

An example of an "I" statement is: "I feel frustrated when dishes are left in the sink because I have to do extra dishes each day. I need to have the dishes done so that in the morning, I can use the bowls to make breakfast."

### Don't let your trauma define you or your relationships. Your past trauma is only one small piece of your whole self

Past traumas can significantly influence the behaviors, reactions, and feelings in your current relationships. These behaviors and reactions may have helped you cope with your past experiences, but they are not always applicable to current relationships. Your self-worth is not solely determined by your past and you deserve to have healthy relationships. It is not too late to develop new patterns to achieve fulfilling connections.

### Be open to trusting yourself and others again

It is important to remember that bad past experiences do not signify automatically mean that every future situation will also be bad. In order to build trust, be kind to yourself by avoiding excessive self-blame. Self-blame can look like telling yourself, "I should have noticed the signs," or, "This is my fault". Instead, try to reframe your way of thinking by treating yourself with compassion.

To build your trust with a new person, start with small conversations or requests. Then, gradually allow yourself to be more open and vulnerable. For example, you can begin by asking a classmate for help with an assignment. If they prove reliable, you can gradually open up more and share personal stories or little secrets. It is healthy to start with smaller acts of trust and vulnerability before gradually building those up over time.



### Be patient. Personal growth happens over time

Personal growth is not linear. This means that on some days, you may feel like you've made a lot of progress while on other days, you might feel like you have not made any progress at all. If you feel disappointed at what seems like a setback in your growth, remember to be patient with yourself. Everyone's personal growth journey is unique!



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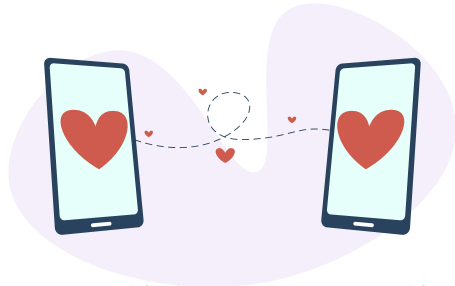
## Set boundaries; share your needs in your relationship

Take time to reflect on what you need or do not need in a fulfilling relationship. You can manifest those needs through communication and sharing your boundaries. We often associate boundaries with actions that make us feel uncomfortable. For instance, if a new romantic partner touches your hair in a way that you don't like, you might have to set a boundary to stop this behavior. However, setting healthy boundaries also involves communicating what we need to feel appreciated, such as asking a friend to text us good morning more often because it makes us feel cared for.

Though it seems awkward to establish boundaries early in a new relationship, it is crucial to communicate your needs. As a relationship progresses, be open to the idea that these needs may change over time. Therefore, it's okay to express a new boundary at any time. Feeling comfortable, secure, and empowered to communicate our needs is vital for our mental health and the health of our relationships.

## Understand yourself, your emotions, and your needs

Understanding yourself and the unique aspects that make up your personality is actually a crucial component if you want to bond with others. Understanding yourself helps you feel confident in your individuality. Identifying your emotions, needs, and triggers surrounding relationships can help you communicate them more effectively. Additionally, it is important to recognize that you are valuable and significant, whether or not you are in a romantic relationship.



## Learn when it's time to grow and when it's time to move on

Keep in mind that nobody is perfect, including ourselves, our friends, family, and partners. It's important to be open about our mistakes and shortcomings, as well as those of a significant other, and use these experiences to learn and grow. While forgiveness and understanding are crucial in maintaining a healthy relationship, there may be times when it's best to move forward. Communication is key in any relationship - it's important to communicate openly with your partner and evaluate the health of your relationship. Ask yourself if your relationship meets your needs and has a positive impact on your life. Self-reflection is also necessary to recognize potential patterns, set boundaries, and even knowing when to move on.



## Redefine your relationship to relationships

Examine your current mindset when it comes to relationships. Acknowledge that past negative experiences can impact your perception of future relationships. You are deserving of love and kindness, so approach the possibility of new connections with an open mind. Bonding with others has to potential to bring fulfillment and positivity into your life.

## Recognize that conflict is inevitable in your relationship, and that is okay

Spending a significant amount of time with someone will lead to disagreements. It's natural to feel frustrated, angry, upset, or hurt when this happens. How you respond to that conflict will shape your relationships. **Healthy conflict** involves empathy and understanding. Understanding another person's perspective and feelings is a more effective tactic than trying to be "right."

Healthy conflict happens when everyone involved maintains respect for one another. Signs of healthy conflict include:

- Using a calm tone,
- Refraining from using insults or character attacks,
- Providing constructive feedback,
- Active listening,
- A willingness to compromise,
- And focusing on the current problem rather than previous difficulties.

On the other hand, **unhealthy/destructive conflict** consists of defensiveness, name-calling, blaming others, hostility, and other verbal or nonverbal attacks.

When addressing conflict, here are three things you can do to communicate clearly in spite of tension:

1. **Self-soothe.** Use your preferred self-soothing strategy to regulate your emotions (self-holds, fidget toys, tensing & un-tensing your muscles, etc.).
2. **Take time to reflect** and clear your thoughts either alone or with a trusted person.
3. **Calm your body down.** For example, take a few deep breaths or go on a walk.



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