

Dr. Jill Murray

LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE YOUR DESTRUCTIVE RELATIONSHIPS
IS THE FIRST STEP IN BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

I have to admit that I talk a lot about abusive/unhealthy relationships on this website. So much so that you now know what a bad relationship looks like, but perhaps you are confused as to what you should be looking for!

Here are the eight signs of a good partnership. As you read this, understand that every one of these are necessary, not just a few. Also, remember that you must GIVE and RECEIVE them all.

1. HONESTY AND ACCOUNTABILITY - This means that both partners accept responsibility for their own actions and don't blame them on others. If there is a need to change, they do so for their own emotional growth and not because their partner is nagging.
2. NONTHREATENING BEHAVIOR - This includes talking and acting in a way that makes your partner feel safe to express herself/himself. There is a commitment not to use threats or manipulative actions.
3. NEGOTIATION AND FAIRNESS - Do both partners seek mutually satisfying resolutions to conflict? Are they accepting of change? Are they willing to compromise?
4. COMMUNICATION - We have all heard the term "open lines of communication." This implies that both partners talk openly and truthfully. They are able to be honest with themselves and about their own feelings.
5. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY - Both partners make decisions together. If a job has to be done, they share it as equally as possible.
6. RESPECT- Aretha Franklin had the right idea! Without respect, and our next sign, trust, there is no relationship. When you respect your partner, you listen non-judgmentally. You value each other's opinions and are emotionally affirming and understanding.
7. TRUST AND SUPPORT- This means that you support each other's goals. You also respect each others' right to individual feelings, friends, activities, and opinions. You do the hard work of overcoming your own feelings of jealousy, envy or resentment.
8. INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY- Both partners are aware of their own dependency needs and don't foist it on their partner or make them responsible for it. They can be apart and be happy. They can do activities separately with friends of the opposite sex and be fine.

I hope you have been able to find your own relationship in this exercise. If you have a few of these signs—but not all—in your relationship, now would be a good time to print out this list and show it to your partner, asking for a commitment to working on the relationship together to make it even better..



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HOW CAN YOU HELP A FRIEND WHO IS IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

So many people ask me this question that I thought I'd devote a short article to it this month. I hope it will be helpful to you if you know someone who is stuck in a creepy relationship.

Helping a friend who is in an abusive relationship is a very frustrating experience. You see a creep for who s/he is but your friend is oblivious to everything you see or say. It's as if she doesn't have eyes, ears, or a brain! How do you get through to her (I will use "her" or "she" from now on, but feel free to substitute your male pal's name, if it applies)?

Attempting to help a friend get out of an abusive relationship usually goes one of two ways:

- She smiles, nods in agreement, and says things like, "You're right," "I know he's bad for me and treats me like dirt," "I know I should break up with him," or "I can see what you're saying and I'm gonna break up with him tomorrow." What do you see the next day? They're hanging all over each other or she has that same miserable expression on her face as he humiliates her, calls her names, treats her like dirt.
- She turns all your helpfulness back onto you and says things like, "You're just jealous," "You don't really know him and are just judging him unfairly," "When did you become so judgmental? I thought we were friends!" "Well, if you can't stand him, I guess we can't be friends anymore."

Does any of the above sound familiar? Usually when people are in lousy relationships, they are in such denial of what's really going on, you wonder if their formerly smart brain has taken a vacation. Why can't they see what's going on in front of their eyes?

Denial is a handy coping mechanism. It shuts out the truth until you are ready to look at the situation honestly, otherwise you'd have to make an unpleasant decision you aren't prepared to make at the time. That's where your friend is right now.

As a sweet, loving, loyal friend who only wants the best for her, what can you do to help this pal who is in denial? Well, after you've talked until you're blue in the face, you probably want to give up, right? She may have insulted you, not been such a good friend since she just wants to spend all her time with her boyfriend and you now feel like you are persona non grata.

In fact, this is the very best time to swallow your pride and hurt and stay the course with her. You see, one of her boyfriend's best chances of doing whatever he'd like with her is to isolate her from her friends, then her activities, and finally her family. Why, you ask? Because, if she has no one and nothing else in her life except him, how's she gonna break up with him? She has no one else to turn to and nowhere to go. She's completely emotionally dependent on him and that's just what he wants. He's got her hook, line, and sinker!



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