



Self-Worth – Unhealthy Relationships

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Unhealthy relationships are usually characterised by negativity, power and control. For people with low self-worth, this is a disaster. Some people with low self-worth have a desire for the ‘perfect’ relationship, and this can lead to issues when reality doesn’t match up with the person’s dream. Too often, people with low self-worth become reliant on their partner for approval and recognition, with that dependence leading to a loss of self-worth if they’re rejected. An unhealthy relationship can lead to stress and may place pressure on other relationships, such as with family and friends.

Characteristics of an unhealthy relationships

You might notice these negative behaviours of yourself in an unhealthy relationship:

- Neglecting the self and self-worth in favour of a partner
- Experiencing physical or sexual violence, or feeling obligated into intimacy
- Attempting to control or manipulate each other
- Being fearful of disagreeing with a partner
- Changing personality for a partner
- Being asked to stop seeing family and friends
- Being asked to justify every action
- Being pressured into agreeing with a partner’s opinion on everything
- No privacy, with everything shared (inclusive of emails, bank accounts, etc.)
- Being unable to settle conflict without yelling or violence
- No fair resolution of issues
- Putting distance between each other
- Being deprived of shared resources, such as money or possessions
- Being pressured to give up activities that bring joy.

These characteristics highlight a major power imbalance in a relationship, if not outright abusive behaviour. Most couples would admit to petty arguments, but in a healthy relationship, a couple with the right boundaries will find common ground and work back to a healthy place.

Behaviours characteristic of an unhealthy relationship

How a person behaves in their relationship is telling. Being aware of what constitutes negative, controlling and abusive behaviour is essential to ensure that a person makes the best decision for their own safety and quality of life. And while we’ve just covered a list of characteristics indicative of



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an unhealthy relationship, there are certain thoughts, feelings and actions that can also signify an unhealthy situation.

- Your partner makes you feel worthless.
- You feel afraid of your partner.
- You are being physically hurt or verbally abused by your partner.
- You are being emotionally manipulated by your partner.
- You are being forced into physical or sexual intimacy without your consent.
- Your partner puts you down, criticises or demeans you.
- Your partner stops you from seeing your family or friends.
- Your partner follows you as you go about your day.
- Your partner checks your email or phone.
- You have no access to shared money or joint assets.
- You feel afraid to disagree with your partner.
- Your partner tells you that you don't understand things properly.
- Your children are being used against you by your partner.
- You are being threatened with violence for voicing your displeasure within the relationship.
- Your partner is threatening to make your life a misery if you leave.
- Your partner tells you with that without them you're nothing.
- Your partner tells you that no one will believe a word you say.
- You don't know who you are any more.

Nearly every single behaviour on this list is abusive. If you feel that any of this list applies to your situation, then you may be caught in an unhealthy, toxic and abusive relationship. Any type of physical, sexual, psychological or financial abuse is unacceptable. Please look to your own safety and report domestic violence to the authorities.

The average relationship

Most relationships aren't abusive or violent. In fact, most people have average relationships, made up of both good and bad. It's possible to love someone and clash over petty decisions. For someone with low self-worth, it can be easy to miss the signs that something is amiss, especially if they don't recognise their own unhealthy decision-making.

Low self-worth and relationship choices

Here are a few unhealthy choices that people with low self-worth may make when starting a relationship.



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- **Looking for the perfect partner:** Holding onto a fantasy of the dream partner can lead to a person missing someone great while they search for an illusion.
- **Keeping a guard up:** High walls can sometimes be a barrier to far for a partner. A person might have walls to protect themselves, but it can lead to heartbreak if a partner doesn't feel like they can reach their loved one.
- **Repeating patterns:** Some people only feel comfortable with the familiar, but it's dysfunctional if a person has the same relationship dramas with each new partner. Learn from what didn't work last time.
- **Testing a relationship:** Low self-worth can lead to high insecurities. In asking a partner to consistently validate a relationship, it may create tension and lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy where they leave.
- **Fearing intimacy:** The 'flight' instinct may kick in when a person is overwhelmed, steering a person away from what could be beneficial.
- **Settling for the first option:** Despite evidence that a partner isn't the right fit, just the idea of someone else thinking that we matter is enough for some people to settle for a relationship that doesn't necessarily make them happy.

When a relationship starts to fail

Not all relationships last forever. Sometimes, there's a party at fault, and sometimes two people have just reached the end of their journey together. Here's a list of possible signs that a relationship is starting to collapse:

- We're failing to communicate
- We don't like to be touched
- We no longer trust our partner with our safety, confidence or heart
- We're bored
- Our life plans no longer align
- There was a betrayal or sacrifice that showed a power imbalance
- Arguments are escalating
- We loathe being in their company.

Not taking action on a failing relationship

Sometimes, all the counselling, communication and hard work in the world can't fix what's broken. People can try as hard as possible, but at a certain point, a relationship just needs to end. It's natural



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to feel resistance to this, and there are many reasons why people might delay taking this step, despite knowing it's what needs to happen. Here are a few:

- Fear of leaving
- Fear of loneliness
- Hurting the children by splitting up the family
- Not wanting to admit failure
- Hoping for a change that's never going to happen.

At some point, an unhealthy relationship will fail. While going through counselling and trying to save a relationship are all steps that are worthwhile to resolve differences and move to a healthy footing, sometimes a couple will face the inevitable and part ways. If you decide to leave your relationship, try to make a plan. Talk to those you trust and come to an amicable understanding with your partner where possible. Seek help from the appropriate organisations (legal, etc) should it be necessary.

Rediscovering yourself

It's worthwhile spending some time on your own and get to know yourself again following the end of a relationship. Here are some things you may like to try. Some of these might help you strengthen your self-worth and grow your understanding of who you are as a single person, and who you are as part of a couple.

- Reflect on your time as part of a couple. Did you like who you were?
- Reflect the certain standards of behaviour you expect of yourself in a relationship. Did you act fairly towards your former partner?
- Find your voice and hone your individuality
- Know the difference between your wants and needs
- Reassess your life goals and what you want out of your next relationship
- Try new things and keep growing your personal life experiences
- Reconnect to life in ways meaningful to you.

Where to get help

Always remember you are not alone. Your doctor or registered health professionals are there to help you.

Our online resource page also has a full list of organisations where you can get further information. <http://mindshift.org.au/suggested-links/>.



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Things to remember

Unhealthy relationships can be detrimental to a person's self-worth. Don't tolerate abusive behaviour and always act with your best interests in mind. Recognise the signs of a failing relationship and make a plan should you wish to move on.

In Summary

In an unhealthy relationship, people will experience a lowered sense of self-worth when they allow themselves to be controlled by their partner, have no personal boundaries or limitations and do not communicate their thoughts and feelings. The perfect relationship doesn't exist, but healthy relationships do. If a couple can work through their issues, they can find their way back to a good place. If not, then it may be time to accept that the journey together is over. Finding oneself after an unhealthy relationship is a good way to boost self-worth and grow your vision of how you see future relationships.

Updates and Further information

For the latest updates and further information please visit www.mindshift.org.au.

Our Mission

It is our mission to ensure that every person has access to the resources available to build healthy self-worth, to have a positive sense of self, and to find meaning in life.

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