

Communicate and Connect

Factsheet

Our relationships form the fabric of our lives and greatly influence our outlook and overall mental health. Strong social networks are linked with better physical and mental health.

Evidence shows that people with strong social ties have better outcomes with regard to coronary heart disease, exercise, blood pressure, obesity and stopping smoking. It is also easier to cope with difficult periods in life when there are others to confide in or rely on.

Social isolation can lead to taking less care of physical and mental health and can ultimately result in a reduced life span.

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

Relationships are created and sustained through communication. Open and positive communication is the key to successful relationships and is therefore an essential tool for maintaining good mental health.

We are so used to communicating with others that we forget how complicated it can be.

To communicate clearly you need to:

- Be clear about what you want to communicate
- Convey your message so that it can be received and understood

The other person must

- Hear the message accurately and
- Understand what you mean

At any of these stages, misunderstandings can occur. These can easily lead to hurt, anger or confusion. The good news is that with a little persistence, these misunderstandings can be easily corrected.

We give a great deal of information without using words, by our body posture, by our tone of voice, and by the expression on our face. This tells the other person how we feel about them. If our feelings don't fit with the words, it tends to be the non-verbal communication that gets heard and believed.

Try saying "I love you" to your partner in a flat, bored tone of voice without looking at him or her, and see what reaction you get!

The message you send is not necessarily the one the other person will receive and respond to.

There are two ways we can guard against this sort of distortion:

- Be aware of what you want to say. Especially be aware of what you are feeling about the person or the situation
- Use "I" statements. That is, say what you want or feel, rather than make a statement about the person.
- That way, they are more likely to listen to you without feeling attacked

Communication can be improved. Open and clear communication can be learned. Start by asking these questions;

- What things cause upsets between you and other people? Are they because you are not listening to each other?



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- What things cause you disappointment and pain?
- What things don't you talk about and what stops you talking about them?
- How would you like your communication with those close to you to be different?

As you become more aware of how you communicate, you will be able to take more control over what happens between you and with those close to you. Opening up new issues and areas of communication may not be easy at first, but as time passes you will find that it leads to more fulfilling relationships.

If you find that there are aspects of communication in your close relationships that you cannot improve by yourself, consider having a talk with a relationship counsellor.

TIPS FOR GREAT RELATIONSHIPS

There are many different kinds of relationships, but all good relationships are based on people respecting each other and being able to communicate clearly.

For a relationship to be good, both people must want to make it work and show good will. You may be pleasantly surprised by how much difference taking the first small step can make. Ask yourself how you would like your relationship to be different. If you know, then commit yourself to making the changes you need to make. One small change can sometimes make a difference to a lot of big things.

Relationships need to be looked after:

- Have clear definitions of the type of relationship you want and share your views
- Practice empathy by always considering the other person's point of view
- Develop or find common interests, shared values and beliefs
- Some minor problems may not be 'fixable'; you may have to decide whether some issues are worth learning to live with if, in general, the relationship is good and you want to keep it

Conflict in Relationships & 'Fighting Fair'

You do not always have to agree with each other; what makes us unique as human beings is that we all see things differently and that is part of what makes our relationships valuable. There are ways of making sure that you and your friend deal with conflict in positive and helpful ways.

- Attack the problem, not the person
- Stick to the conflict at hand without dragging up past grievances
- Avoid using words like 'always' and 'never' when telling the person what you are upset about. This may make the person feel attacked, encourage them to argue whether the statement is true, and avoid dealing with the actual issue
- Take 'time out' if one or both of you get angry, but agree on a time to discuss the problem when you have both calmed down, so you are not just walking away from the problem
- Use 'I' statements to express how you feel, this



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feels less hostile to the person you are talking to and helps you to take responsibility for your own feelings

Relationships are about learning how to care for ourselves as well as others. In order to take care of yourself, you must be responsible for your own needs and set your own personal boundaries.

- It's all right to disagree
- It's all right to ask for personal and emotional space
- It's all right to leave an issue or problem temporarily unresolved
- It's all right, if you do not like their behaviour, to discuss the issue with them

Information for this fact sheet courtesy of Relationships Australia. www.relationships.com.au

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Where to from here?

For further information you might like to have a look at some of these resources:

Contact these people/organisations:

- Relationships Australia:
1300 364 277 or www.relationships.com.au
- Relationship Help Online:
www.relationshiphelponline.com.au
- Interrelate:
1300 736 966 or www.interrelate.com.au
- Australia Counseling Association (ACA):
1300 784 333
- Mental Health Information Service:
1300 794 991 or www.mentalhealth.asn.au

