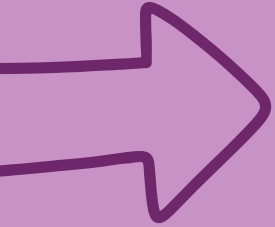


Lincoln Bishop
University



Maintaining Healthy and Positive Relationships!



Let's
talk!

Be the reason someone
feels welcome, seen,
heard, valued, loved, and
supported



What's the deal with healthy relationships?

In any relationship (with friends, family, colleagues, or partners) sometimes there is often a lot of excitement when you first meet, chat, and develop a relationship, however, as it goes on people may forget to connect on a deeper level and take time to care for the relationship. You also may feel vulnerable about opening up part of yourself, but this can create a stronger relationship! People also change and grow all the time, so it's really important to check-in with each other and see where you're both at!





QUICK REFLECT!

It can be really good to remind ourselves what makes a healthy relationship! Take a look at some of the key points below!

- **Respecting and supporting others**
- **Open communication**
- **Honesty and understanding**
- **Shared values around finances, child raising, and other important life moments**
- **Trustful relationships**
- **Make you feel confident**
- **Support you to try new things and learn more about yourself**



Early Relationships:

As mentioned earlier it's important to consider relationships over the long-term and maintain healthy communication and habits with each other. However, how do you begin to develop these relationships and see past the initial excitement?

Try asking some of these questions below and listening to the responses. It's okay if their answers are different to yours – try reflecting on these and seeing their perspective – differences are good! Also, don't worry if these seem like simple questions, they can often develop into something bigger as you go along!



- 
- 
1. Do you tend to be early, on time, or fashionably late?
 2. What is the ideal way for you to wake up?
 3. What's the ideal way for you to fall asleep?
 4. What do you need when having a bad day?
 5. What would you do if you had a spare hour in the day?
 6. How do you like to be calmed down if you're upset?
 7. When was the last time you got upset?
 8. What three things would you change in your life if you could do so instantly?
 9. Are there any pets that you definitely want in the future?
 10. What do you hope your life would look like in 20 years?
 11. What would be your ideal job and what do the hours look like?
 12. Would you want children, and how many?

WANTS AND NEEDS

Hopefully, the above exercise has given insight into some positive (and maybe) some negative aspects of your relationship person. It's a great idea to establish your wants and needs in a relationship - why are you engaging in this relationship, what excites you, what is definitely something I don't want right now, what is something I definitely need from this relationship (without relying on them for this).

Layout a plan below with YOUR NEEDS, THEIR WANTS, and HOW you are going to meet theirs, and what they have to do to meet yours.



PRIORITIES!

A good start to any relationship is being on the same terms about key priorities. Above, you've already discussed your needs and wants in a broad term - give this exercise a go with your partner and rank each of these (at the top your highest priority, and the bottom, lowest!) We recognise there is more to a relationship than these, but it can give you an immediate overview of any conflicting priorities.

INTIMACY
WANTS CHILDREN
MONEY
DATES
OCCUPATION
LOOKS
TRAVEL
FUN
STABILITY
RELIGION





Let's
change the
perspective!

Often we can be guilty of focusing on solely ourselves in relationships. Try this exercise and gain a new perspective on your relationship! Write your responses to each prompt. The aim is to look at having your needs met vs meeting their needs.

If they really loved me...they would



If I really love them...I would





Our Dream Relationship

For this exercise, grab a piece of paper for each person in the relationship. Write down what your dream relationship would look like. Start each sentence with 'I' as if you're already living it.

Once you've done it, share notes, then write another one with your shared vision. Only write down things which you both agree on! Stick it on your fridge and review it every month!



Loving and Knowing Yourself:

Before we can have relationships with others, we must first understand and love ourselves. This is so we are less reliant on other people for approval of our already amazing selves. It can also foster healthier and more harmonious relationships with others as you know good relationship strategies!



Check out our 'Building a Relationship with Yourself' guide on the Lincoln Bishop website or ask a Mental Health Adviser for it!

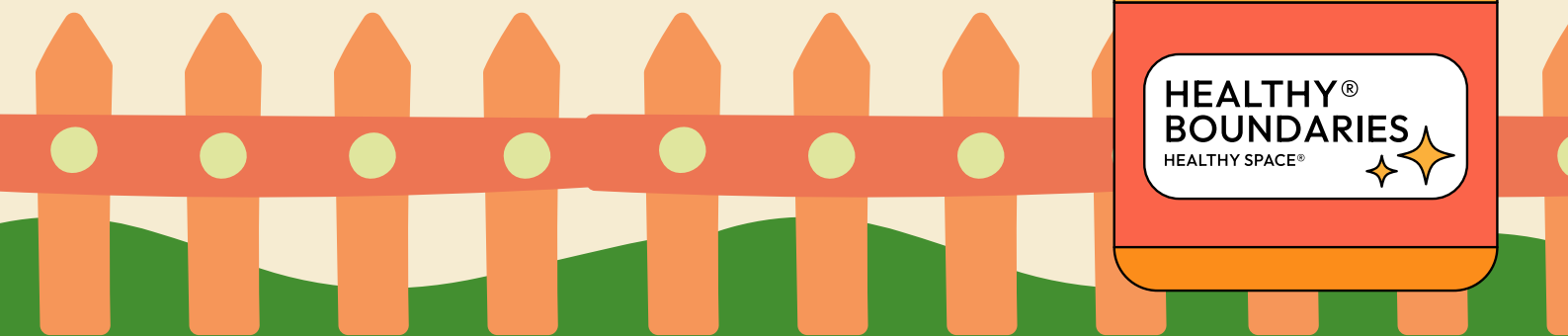


SETTING BOUNDARIES:

Healthy boundaries define what is appropriate behaviour in a relationship, keeping everybody happy and safe. Setting boundaries is not only about the things you don't like in your relationships, it's also about letting people around you know what you appreciate. Boundaries can be physical (e.g. personal space), or actions and verbal communication (e.g. being on time, or being open and honest all the time).

How do we set healthy boundaries? Assertiveness is important first of all, and involves expressing your feelings openly and respectfully. Let's take a look at the steps below:

- 1** Be as clear and straightforward as possible, but do not raise your voice.
- 2** State your need or request directly in terms of what you'd like, rather than what you don't want or like.
- 3** Accept any discomfort that arises as a result, whether it's guilt, shame, or remorse.





Where are you on the scale?

The table below helps you identify where your current boundaries are. Reflect on how you feel afterwards and think about implementing some of the boundaries above to become healthier!

Porous Boundaries	Healthy Boundaries	Rigid Boundaries
Has difficulty saying no to other people's requests.	Accepts it when others say no to them	Avoids intimacy and close relationships
Over-involved with others' problems.	Seeks support when appropriate.	Unlikely to ask for help
Dependent on the opinions of others for self-worth	Values own opinions and perspectives.	Offers an opinion and then uses the silent treatment to manipulate compliance
Fears rejection if they do not comply with others.	Doesn't compromise their values for others	Cuts people off easily. 'It's my way or the highway.'
Over-shares personal information.	Share information appropriately	Very protective of personal information.
Accepts abuse or disrespect.	Communicate their wants and needs clearly	Is aloof and detached even with romantic partners.

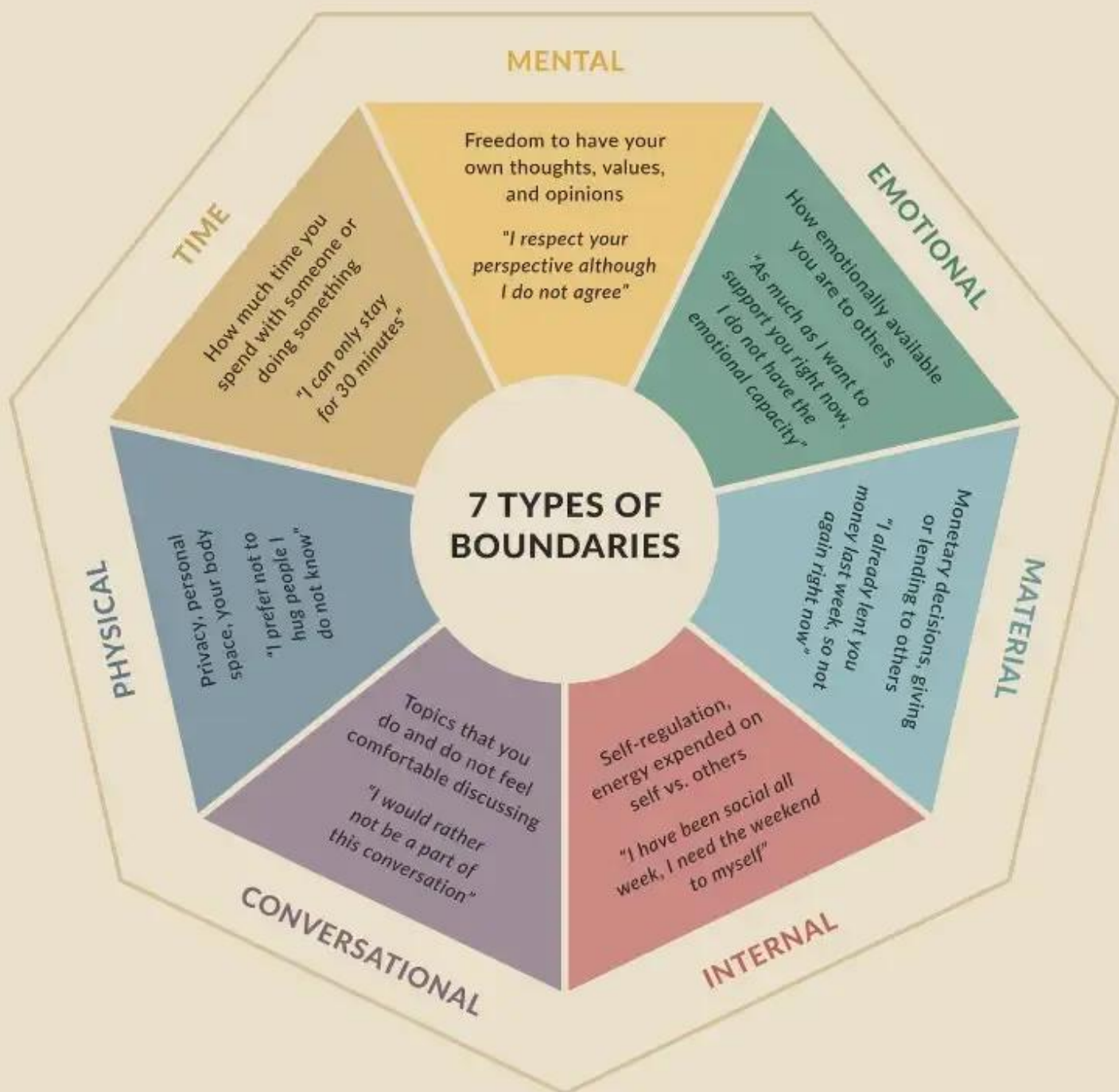


EXAMPLES OF HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

- Declining anything you don't want to do.
- Expressing your feelings responsibly.
- Talking about your experiences honestly.
- Replying in the moment.
- Addressing problems directly with the person involved, rather than a third party.
- Making your expectations clear rather than assuming people will figure them out.

Next take a look at some of the categories of boundaries below!





PositivePsychology.com

Credit - PositivePsychology.com



VISUALISING BOUNDARIES

In this activity we are going to try and define your boundaries which will help you clarify where you need to set your limits. Grab a couple of sheets of paper and a pen (or something to write things down)

Step 1 - REFLECT! - Jot down answers to the following questions:

- What is causing me stress or discomfort right now?
- What do I look forward to each day?
- What do I dread each day?
- Who or what gives me energy?
- Who or what drains me?
- Who or what makes me feel safe, supported, and valued?
- Who or what makes me feel unsafe, unsupported, and devalued?

Step 2 - INSIDE THE CIRCLE! - Draw a large circle on a blank piece of paper. Inside the circle, write everything that makes you feel safe and stress free.



Step 3 - OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE! - Write down anything or anyone that makes you feel stressed, uncomfortable, or unsafe outside the circle.

Hopefully this exercise has helped your visualise your boundaries.

Specific Work Boundary Tips!

- 1. Assess your own personal boundaries first.**
- 2. Communicate professionally but directly.**
- 3. Let people know when you are available.**
- 4. Use a work calendar to schedule in work when you're busy.**
- 5. Keep work colleague relationships professionally - this can prevent blurred lines around boundaries later on.**
- 6. Delegate tasks to others if you're struggling.**
- 7. Get comfortable saying no - you don't have to do everything!**
- 8. Take time off to rest and recharge!**
- 9. Use helpful apps and planners to stay on track!**

1. Establish clear consequences - these should be realistic (that people can follow through with them to maintain their boundaries), and clear (what will happen if you do a specific thing, e.g. if you start making sexual advances, I will go home).
2. Stay consistent - maintain consequences every time there is an action, regardless of who it is.
3. Maintain your stance - people who don't respect your boundaries will persist. Don't give up - calmly remind them that you won't change.
4. Be firm - you know what is good for yourself.
5. Remind others of the boundaries if they forget.
6. Calmly express the violation - firmly but calmly tell them what's happened, don't attack.
7. Stay patient.
8. Cut off a persistent violator.



Dealing
with
Boundary
Violations

Tactics and
strategies!



TEST

YOURSELF

Here's a fun exercise to do with your relationship buddy! How much do you know about them? This can spark some fun conversations and feelings!

READY.

SET. GO!



Question 1:

What was their favourite song as a kid?

Question 2:

Where is their ideal vacation spot?

Question 3:

What is the TV show they currently can't get enough of?

Question 4:

What upcoming events are they looking forward to?

Question 5:

is there a book/film that has significantly influenced their life?

Question 6:

What is the most important thing on their bucket list?

Question 7:

Who is your partner's oldest friend?

Question 8:

What was their dream job/career as a kid?

LET'S GET MOVING



Physical activity is a wonderful way to reduce stress and improve your mood! Exercise releases natural chemicals in your body that reduce feelings of pain and stress, and also helps regulate sleep patterns. If you and your significant others are on the same page and have the same routine, it can benefit your relationship and overall mental health. For this activity, use a workout app at home, or go to the gym with your relationship buddy and workout together!

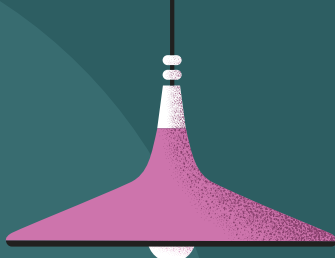




Travel Buddies!

Not only is physical activity a healthy exercise for relationships to engage in together, travelling is also a fun activity to bond over. You get the opportunity to learn about new places and understand your friend/partner in a new light!

For this exercise pick a random city or country and book a cheap weekend away. Not only travel together, but sit down and plan your activities together too!



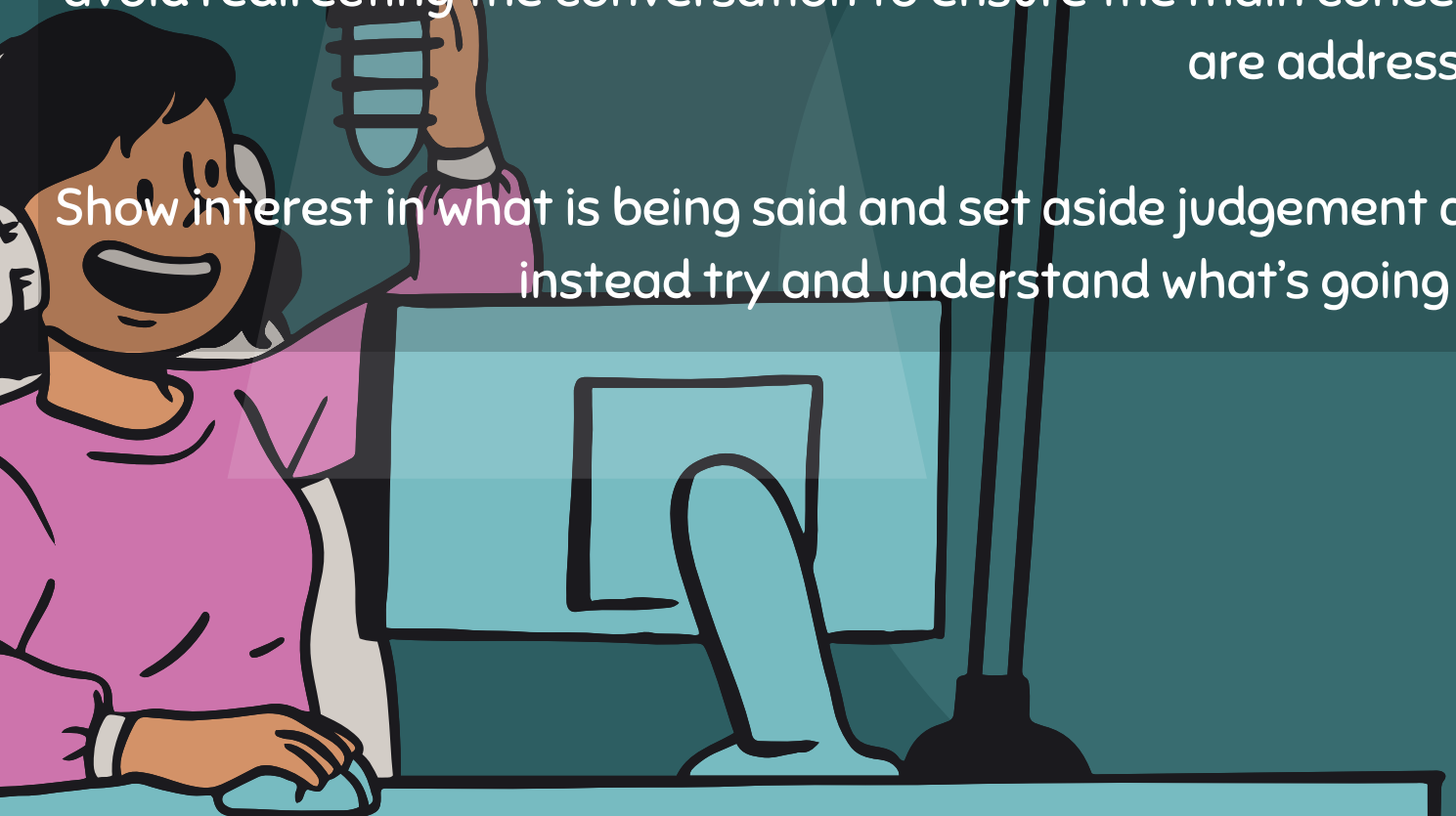
COMMUNICATION

Good communication is a fundamental part of a healthy relationship. When there is positive emotional connection with your partner, you feel safe and happy. When people reduce their communication, this leads to disconnect.

To ensure effective communication, you must first break down any barriers. This means you must address any stress or out-of-control emotion, any lack of focus, and any inconsistent body language before engaging in communication with a buddy.

Also, ensure you avoid interrupting your partner when they speak to give them the chance to express how they feel, and avoid redirecting the conversation to ensure the main concerns are addressed.

Show interest in what is being said and set aside judgement and instead try and understand what's going on.



Check-ins can be an amazing way to keep up-to-date with what's going on in any relationship, whether that's to gain feedback at work, or see how your partner is doing! See some of the steps below to plan your check-in and then use any of the questions or other resources together!

Schedule a time and day of the week when you are all available. → Find a comfy space and stop any distractions. → Ask questions on the next page.



Question 1:

How do you feel we communicated this week?

Question 2:

How satisfied were you with how we managed conflict in our relationship last week?

Question 3:

What's something that's working well in our relationship lately?

Question 4:

Is there anything we should focus on to strengthen our relationship?

Question 5:

Are there any issues that feel unresolved?

Question 6:

Do you feel supported, and is there anything I can do to support you?

Question 7:

Is there anything you'd like to be acknowledged or appreciated for?

Question 8:

Have I done anything to upset you this week that you didn't bring up?

Question 9:

How do you feel about the intimacy in our relationship this week?

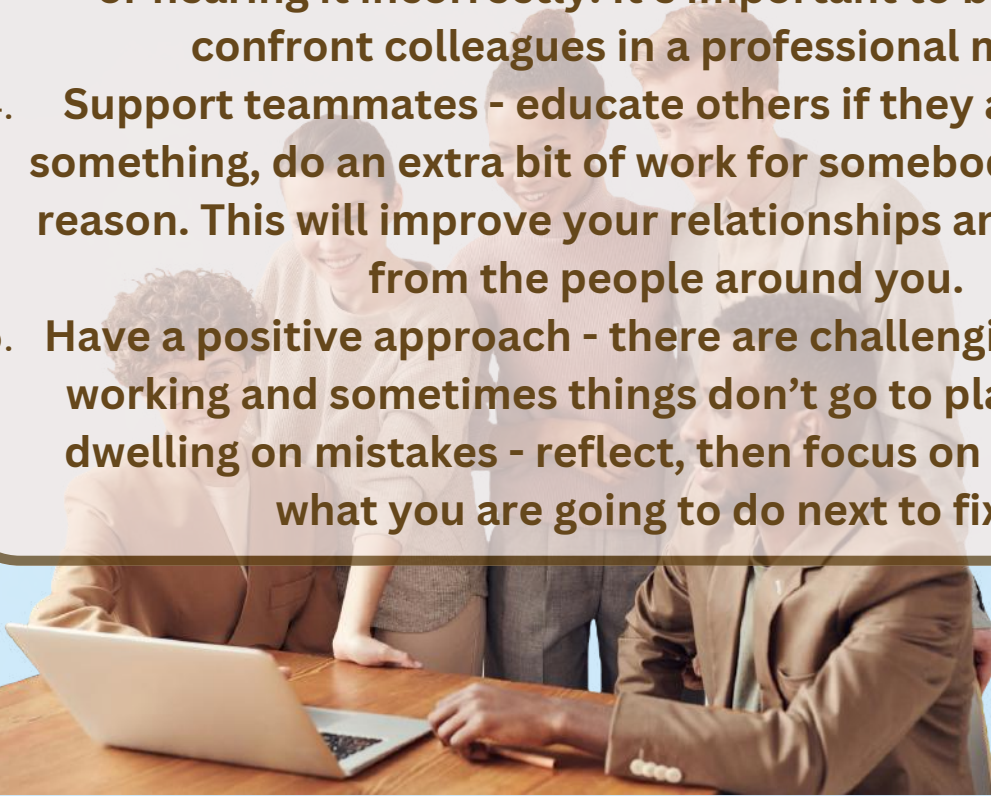
Question 10:

Is there anything else we want to share? What shall we do after our check-in, and can we do the same time next week?

Workplace Specific Relationships

Relationships with colleagues/co-workers can have many similarities to friends, family, and romantic partners, but also have a variety of different factors that influence a good relationship. Here are some things you could consider:

1. **Communicate often** - it's important to actively listen within discussions with colleagues to understand a different point of view or their experience before responding. Also take note of non-verbal communication which may show disinterest. When responding, ensure you talk directly to the group and ensure everyone is clear about what was said.
2. **Maintain consistency and trustworthiness** - make sure you stick to your tasks. It's okay to say you are unable to do something, but if you say you are going to do something, try and schedule the appropriate amount of time to complete it.
3. **Try and avoid gossip** - a lot of the time, gossip isn't factual and is based on lots of people obtaining snippets of information or hearing it incorrectly. It's important to be polite and confront colleagues in a professional manner.
4. **Support teammates** - educate others if they are unsure on something, do an extra bit of work for somebody else without reason. This will improve your relationships and gain respect from the people around you.
5. **Have a positive approach** - there are challenging tasks when working and sometimes things don't go to plan. Instead of dwelling on mistakes - reflect, then focus on a solution for what you are going to do next to fix it!



Dealing with Conflict

When conflict arises, it can be difficult to find solutions if things are heated. The first thing to consider is how to remain calm. Here are some quick tips!

- Remember! Respectful disagreement doesn't have to be scary - it's important to be able to express any differences or views but without humiliation, degradation, or insisting being right.
- Allow times to pause and collect your thoughts - this can stop you saying something quickly without actually meaning it.
- Focus on one concern at a time - this can avoid the conversation becoming overwhelming and forgetting what was said.
- It's okay to postpone a talk until you are ready.
- It's okay to be angry, but you must be respectful.
- Be willing to forgive each other to allow growth.
- Avoid dragging old arguments into the mix.

COOL DOWN!

Feeling tense and angry in a conflict? Take a deep breath through the nose, HOLD, and then out through the mouth.

Look for your EXIT signs - do you need to disengage?

Separate yourself - use calming techniques.

Quick Reflect - What triggered you?

What's a better strategy/angle of approaching this?

How do I re-engage? - Perhaps talk about a pleasant conversation first.



Recognising when to say

SORRY

If you've recognised yourself that you've done something wrong it's important to:

1. Acknowledge the offense - identify the hurt you've caused whether intended or not, tone down your defences and focus on the feelings of the other person. You could say "Help me understand how I've upset you".

2. Express remorse - apologise and say 'I'm sorry'. Say sorry carefully and admit your faults and don't try to justify them - you don't need to necessarily explain yourself as what you do right now is more important, rather than reflecting on what you've just done.

3. Ask whether they need an explanation - as said previously it's important to focus on what you're going to do now from this, however, you can ask whether the other person wants a simple explanation to understand why something has happened. Remember - focus on explaining yourself whilst recognising and explaining how that has affected the other person, showing you've listened.

4. Express and practice your intentions - apologising and having little intention to change will lead to further and potentially worse conflicts, instead talk about you can both move on using 'we', and note how you are going to change with 'I'. Then consistently show you are working towards these goals.

Reflecting After a Negative Situation

We can be worn out after experiencing conflict or another negative emotional situation, however, to learn from these situations we must reflect! Grab a notepad and write down your responses to the questions below, or chat through them with a person external to the conflict.

1. What meaning have I given to this situation?
2. Is there a difference between the facts and my opinion of the situation?
3. What advice would I give to somebody else in this position?
4. Is there another way to look at the argument?
5. What event of situation triggered the conflict/behaviour?
6. Are you happy with how you behaved in the situation?
7. Are you happy with how the other person(s) behaved in the situation?
8. What do you do to be mindful for next time?
9. Is there a pattern in the conflicts?
10. How can you stop this pattern?
11. Ask for clarity and review a plan on how everyone is going forward to address this.



Understanding your family situation

Everybody's family background is different - some will have had difficulties in their childhood, some may have complex family dynamics, others may feel reluctant to leave home life, and others very excited to move away! We recognise that everybody is different - and this is okay! This exercise will help you try and understand the relationships you have with parents or family members, and what you want to do about it.



As you grow up being surrounded by different people, we often be shaped by the experiences and people around us. However, it is important to remember, you are not your parents, and you don't have to be like them. You get to choose who you want to be and who you want to connect with.

Below are some tips and strategies to use when engaging with family relationships, regardless of whether you are close or distant.

1. Accept feedback - sometimes you and family members might not see 'eye to eye' with lots of different topics. You don't have to agree with them, but it's important to accept feedback about how the relationship feels. Ask what makes them feel comfortable or uncomfortable, what would they like more of, what do you need more of?
2. Realise it's everybody's responsibility - it's not entirely on you to 'fix' a relationship with family members (even if they want you to). For a relationship to work successfully, everyone needs to work together and if the other party doesn't want to, it's not your fault! However, show your intentions and your drive to want to repair things, but set your boundaries and state that it doesn't rely on just you!
3. Listen if you expect to be heard - fights can happen with family members - it's normal! However, if you want to express your feelings about something, ensure you listen to theirs too. It's important it works both ways so everyone feels understood!
4. Stay in touch (even if it is difficult) - even if you don't particularly get on with family members, it's important to keep open lines of communication. This ensures that if feelings change, you can try building a relationship again when you all feel ready.

This can just be a simple message at Christmas or their birthday, checking in from time to time, or sending a thoughtful gift.



5. Take time to discover yourself - even if you have the best relationship with a family member, it's important to let go of what you have temporarily and go off to discover yourself! Remember, you have your own life ahead to choose your own path as well as taking on board what family members have said to you growing up. Try something new and discover yourself - you can even tell them about it later on and encourage them to rediscover themselves too!



6. Recognise everybody has different needs. Your grandmother is going to have different needs to a 21 year old student at university. It's important to ask others what their needs are and try and take a different viewpoint to see why their needs are different to yours - do they have different experiences, are they at a different time in their life, do they have different values?



Are you your **AUTHENTIC** self?

In relationships with others, it's important to maintain your authenticity (what makes you YOU) and don't change your core self to match that of others. This quick check will see if you're doing just that!

Are you authentic with yourself? Do you...	Yes /No	If No, what are you going to change going forward?
Know your boundaries and are you clear with others about what is acceptable?		
Use challenges as opportunities to learn about yourself?		
Listen to your inner wisdom?		
Accept yourself for who you are?		
Focus on what others lack (rather than nurture their talents and strengths)		

Are you authentic with yourself? Do you...	Yes /No	If No, what are you going to change going forward?
Keep others down rather than point out their potential?		
Try and make others more like you (rather than become more of who they are)		
Try to control others (or accept that others are entitled to their own outlook on life)?		

On the next page there is a similar exercise focusing on authenticity, only this time it asks you to score your response from 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely)

How comfortable are you in this person's company?



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How freely can you express yourself with this person?



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Are you able to talk about anything (or do you have to avoid certain subjects?)



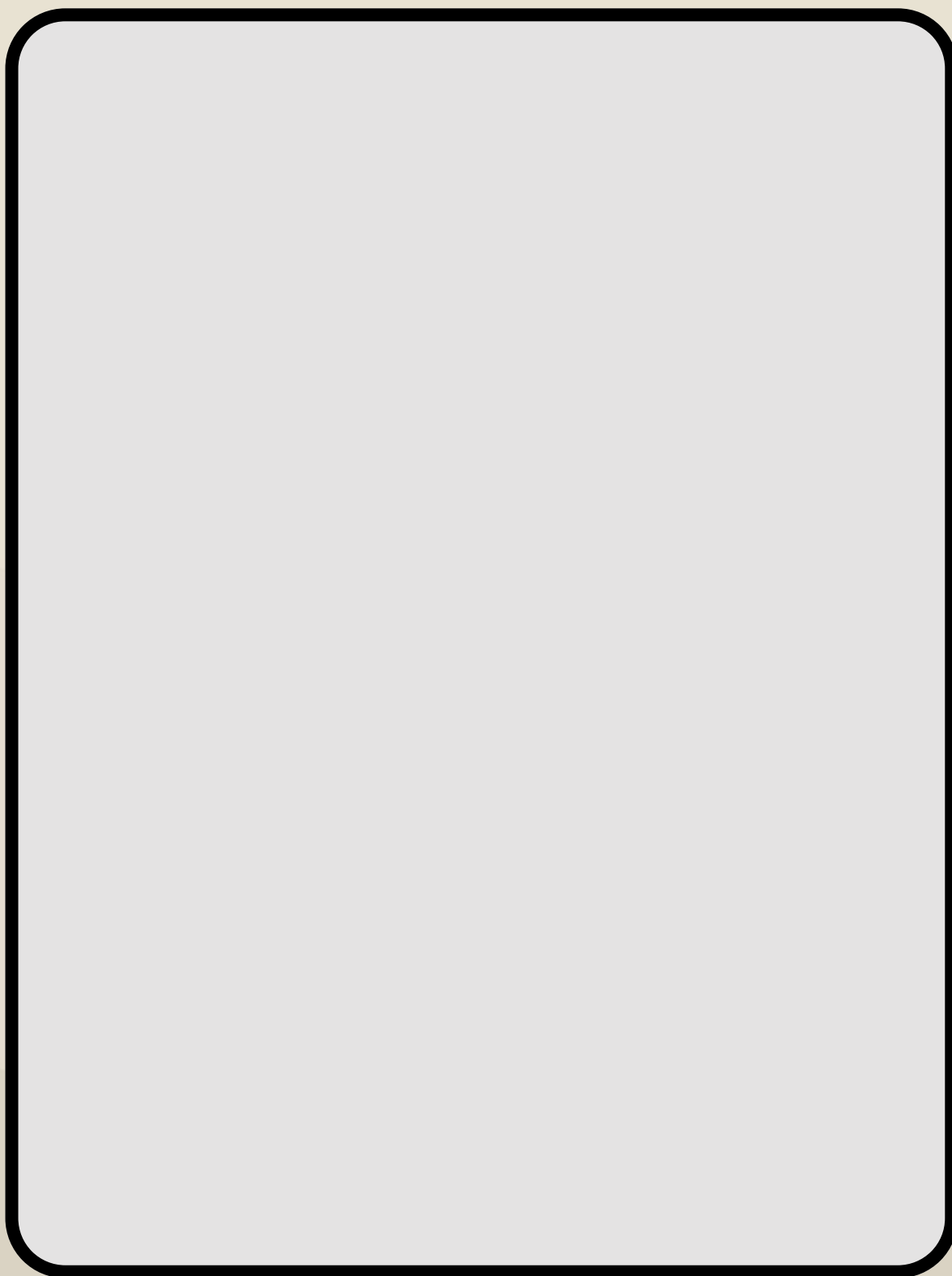
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Have you ever said something about this person that you would not want them to hear?



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Use the space below to write and reflect on your answers above. Share your thoughts, reasons, and feelings - these responses are a strong indication of how authentic you are with that person.

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a thick black border, intended for writing and reflection. The box is light gray and occupies the central portion of the page. The background of the entire page is a light beige color, decorated with abstract, wavy, organic shapes in teal and reddish-brown tones in the corners.



CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

Co-dependent relationships are those which are characterised by an excessive dependence on another's approval for one's sense of identity and self-worth. This can include a feeling of extreme responsibility for others' actions and feelings, difficulty maintaining healthy boundaries, difficulty making decisions, staying with a partner despite recognising they have maladaptive behaviours, putting others' needs above your own at the expense of your own personal wellbeing.

On the next page there is information about what a healthy relationship looks like, and what a co-dependent one looks like. Try to recognise which resonate with you.



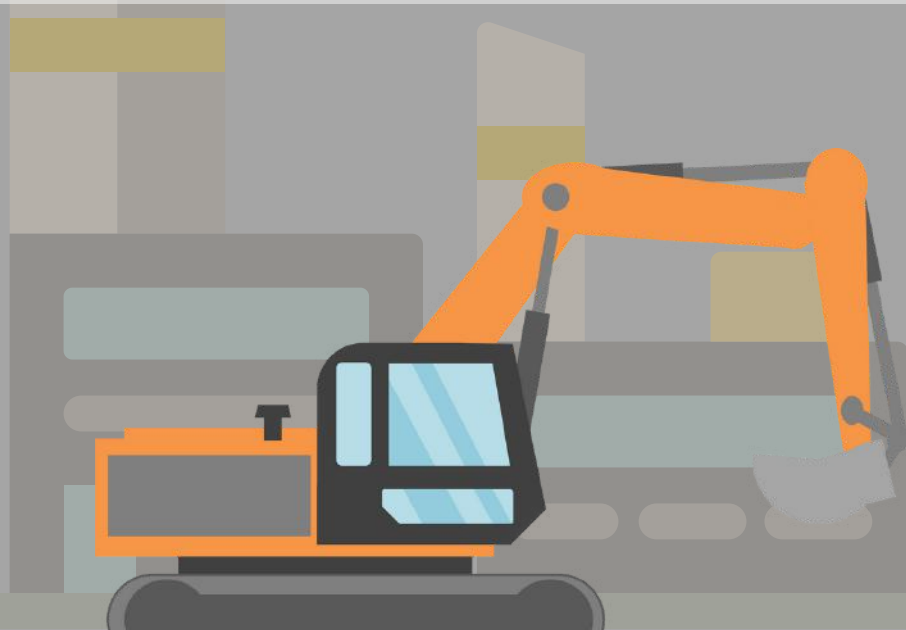
	Healthy Relationship	Co-dependent Relationship
Definition	A relationship in which both parties have a sense of being their own, separate person. Each owns their own beliefs, feelings, decisions, actions, and maintains responsibility for their self-worth and happiness. A functional balance is upheld between each party's own personal and professional lives.	A dysfunctional relationship in which one or both individuals feel extreme amounts of dependence on the other, along with responsibility for their feelings and actions. This may involve enabling maladaptive behaviours such as substance abuse, self-neglect, and/or other harmful tendencies.
Beliefs	• Taking responsibility for one's own actions • Maintaining a sense of self-worth without need for the other's approval • Having balanced expectations about offering and receiving advice from the other • Mutual reliance, balanced give-and-take between partners	• Excessive sense of responsibility for the other's well-being • Over-reliance on the other's approval for a sense of identity or self-worth • Unreasonable expectations about what one's partner should do, think, or feel • An imbalance between giving and receiving, providing support
Attributes	• Empowering others to help themselves • Establishing and maintaining healthy personal boundaries • Openness and acceptance of partner's opinions, beliefs, and actions • Supportive, encouraging • Provides help and assistance where appropriate • Practicing suitable self-care, making time for one's own interests	• Performing unnecessary duties that one's partner is capable of fulfilling, creating dependency • Merging or enmeshment of emotions and identity to the detriment of personal growth • Harsh judgment of the other's feelings, beliefs, or behaviours • Resistant, demanding, or over-controlling • Withholding, restrictive, or resistant attitudes and behaviours • Difficulty making own decisions, taking care of oneself
Outcomes	Mutually supportive relationships nurture the personal growth and flourishing of both parties involved. Each partner receives help and guidance, experiences their own feelings, sense of self, valuing and upholding their own beliefs. Feelings of security and safety, as well as emotional health and physical well-being	Co-dependent relationships perpetuate self-destructive behavioural and emotional tendencies. Partners may feel anxious, trapped or isolated, and may fear judgment, rejection, or abandonment. Over-reliance on the other, or on the relationship, for one's sense of self or well-being

WHAT WORKS?



When conflict arises, we can often focus on the negative things - but what does work? Ask yourself and each other these questions!

What qualities first attracted me to my partner?
What qualities do I find attractive in my partner now?
What has my partner done in the past that makes me feel valued and cared for?
Why is this so special to me?
What three things do we have in common?
What differences do you both have that you enjoy having between you?
What makes you both an unstoppable team?
What three things do you wish that will never change?
As a couple, we are good at:
What goals do we share?



Reminder about control!

You may feel out of control when in a relationship for a variety of reasons.

You cannot control exactly what someone else does in a relationship. A lot of our life is about how we react to our experiences and encounters.

Knowing that you can only really control what you do and not what anyone else does will save you time and stress.

Intimacy:

Intimacy is more than sex. It can be physical touch by cuddling in bed, or holding hands down the street, intimate words and love as well as emotional closeness, and is ultimately what separates friendships, working relationships, and everything else from romantic relationships.

If you are interested in a sexual relationship, ensure it is what every party wants, it is consensual (remember consent is dynamic - so you may start to want something, but then decide you don't want to later), and you explore at your own pace. Relationships don't have to be sexual to be healthy, but it's important to consider other forms of intimacy!



Living Together?

If you live or are thinking of living with a partner or friend, have a little think about these things.

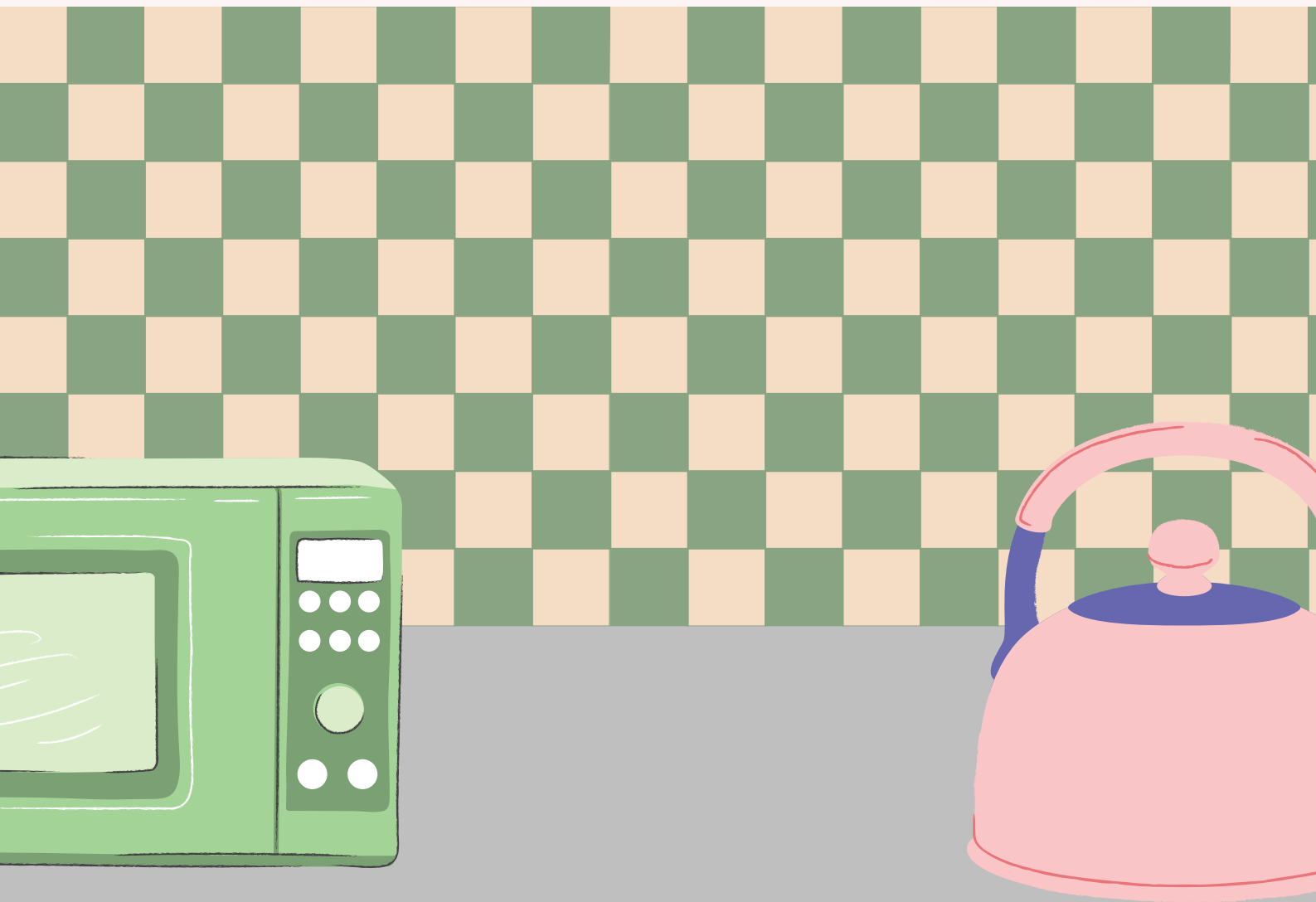
Remember, living with someone can be completely different from not living with someone - people can act differently, have different routines, interests, habits, and ideas of what living should be.

1. Decide, don't slide - make a plan and understand your reasons. Don't move in together as it seems like the easier thing to do, or because you feel expected to by society.



2. Have an escape plan - it is very possible that you may not feel the same about your friend or partner as positively as you do at this present moment (even you think you never will!) For this reason, think about money plans, bills, contracts, who gets certain things if they leave, what time frame do you leave.

3. Talk about responsibilities - think about who is doing what chores, who pays the bills/percentage of the bills, think about pets you may have.



4. What are your biggest fears about living together, how do we get past it?

5. Make spaces for alone time.

6. Communicate clearly all the time, consider conflict.

7. Embrace the challenges and have fun!

Leaving a Relationship

Deciding that a relationship should come to an end can be an upsetting experience, as well as a release. Ask these questions to yourself below to decide if ending a relationship is a possibility for you:

- Do I want to connect to the person?
- Do I just want to get my own way?

If you answered yes to number 2, it may be time to consider if you are actually ready to form a connection.

- What do you want to create in your relationship with the other person?
- What would a successful interaction look like (e.g. have your concerns heard, recognise and show their love)?
- Is the other person prepared to reach these?

***Citizens Advice offer support around separation if needed.**

How should a relationship come to an end?

It can be useful to write out what you want to say about how the relationship currently is and how you want to move on from this.

Be respectful and communicate calmly (try and avoid breaking up in the middle of a conflict if possible to ensure what you communicate are your true beliefs).

Accept you are going to see things differently. The other person may not initially accept the decision, and this is okay, communicate the need for them to have space and reflect themselves.

Consider a final relationship ritual. This can be something you enjoy doing together. Try and make this difficult situation more positive. Talk about future goals, all the positive experiences and lessons learnt from this relationship, and instil hope for the other person. However, be clear about future intentions - if you don't want to be friends, don't, but be respectful and explain this clearly.

Useful Resources

NHS Support for Domestic Abuse and Violence
- <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/getting-help-for-domestic-violence/>

Relate - A national charity that provides help and support with relationship problems

Golden Threads - useful relationship support, resources, and activities -
<https://www.relateni.org/golden-threads/>

Mental Health Foundation - useful guides and resources, as well as an interesting Podcast channel around *friendship and mental health* -
<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/healthy-relationships>

For any further support surrounding your mental wellbeing, reach out to the mental health adviser team and make an appointment on the Lincoln Bishop website.