

Characteristics that distinguish a sexually healthy relationship

Below are examples of “operational criteria” for a sexually healthy relationship, as developed by NIU students in a sexuality education class. Groups were encouraged to use positive rather than negative descriptors whenever possible.

- 1) **Consensual** complete agreement by both partners on all activities; both partners can make a conscious decision; no one is “impaired” or “under the influence;” verbal agreement; unanimous decision; after talking about it and asking, permission is given; both agree 100%; all behaviors are voluntary; if no is used, then no action is taken; both are willing and competent, contract is agreed to and upheld
- 2) **Non-exploitative** values and beliefs of both have equal weight; shared decision-making, all parties are equally empowered; weakness of one is not used to the advantage of the other; confidentiality upheld; taking care of each other’s needs. R.E.S.P.E.C.T! Use good judgment with the power you hold in the relationship. Neither person is taken advantage of or feels threatened. Both partners can fully trust each other. Neither partner has ulterior motives in the relationship. Privacy is respected regarding intimate and sexual matters. Neither person feels manipulated or controlled. Both feel valued and honored.
- 3) **Honest** upfront, sincere, and truthful; actions demonstrate trustworthiness; open communication; clarification given and received; vocalizing likes and dislikes; being true to yourself; a truth sayer; possessing a sense of trust; no relevant information is withheld; feelings are shared; past sexual history is not exaggerated, downplayed, or omitted; self-disclosure of verifiable facts; promise keeping
- 4) **Mutually pleasurable** all participants enjoyed what happened, not self-centered, expectations satisfied for those participating, both parties are content, emotionally and physically attracted to each other, both parties end in smiles, neither feels forced, both are happily fulfilled, good time was had by all, being patient with each other to produce a win-win situation, balanced give and take relationship, able to communicate levels of satisfaction, agree on different varieties of pleasure, take pleasure in pleasing your partner, establish comfort zones and understood signals, equal respect for each other’s desires, everyone puts forth an equal effort; comfort for each; satisfaction for both; synergy between partners; Private time together is gratifying.
- 5) **Safe and protected** (from unwanted pregnancy, STDs, or other harm - physical or emotional) have knowledge and resources to avoid harm; appropriate measures taken to ensure the security of all parties; If you’re going to walk in the rain, wear a raincoat. Consciously and consistently adhere to healthy practices of contraception, get tested, have regular check-ups, have a monogamous relationship, agree on appropriate form of contraception, respect confidentiality between partners, discuss consequences of any failures, feel emotionally secure in the relationship, abstain or delay when appropriate.