

What to Expect in a First Relationship



A guide to understanding common experiences in first sexual relationships

sexualized
violence
prevention
and response

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Land Acknowledgement

This booklet was created in Tk'emlups te Secwepemc within Secwepemc'ulucw, the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwepemc people.

We recognize detrimental and long-lasting effects of colonization have done much to erase Indigenous peoples' culture, language, tradition, and worldview. We are grateful for their caretaking of this land since time immemorial.



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Personal Values & Expectations

When entering your first relationship it is important to reflect on your values and expectations about relationships.

Values function like a compass, bringing our attention to what is right and wrong and how we feel about it inside.



Every culture sets different standards for what people should value and expect in relationships. Values come in all shapes and sizes: subtle, obvious, strict, flexible etc. These cultural differences show up in our relationships.

It is important to remember that personal values and expectations may change over time and that it is okay to re-evaluate and communicate with your partner as the relationship progresses.

Personal Values & Expectations

Here are some examples of personal values and expectations that may be important to consider in a first relationship:

Growth: A healthy relationship is one where both partners can grow and develop as individuals, as well as together as a couple. This means supporting each other's goals and aspirations and being willing to work through challenges and obstacles together.

Boundaries: It is important to establish boundaries and respect each other's personal space and individuality. This entails being aware of and respecting each other's boundaries, as well as not pushing each other beyond what is comfortable or acceptable.

Respect: Mutual respect is crucial in any relationship. This means treating each other with kindness and consideration and valuing each other's opinions and feelings.

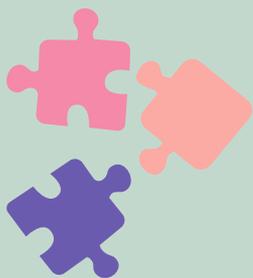
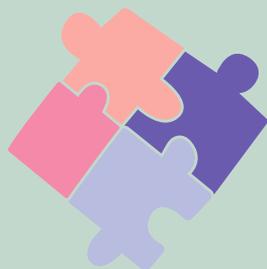
Honesty: Open and honest communication is essential in any relationship. It is important to establish trust early on and be transparent with your partner.

Compatibility: It is important to be with someone who shares similar interests and values. This can help to create a strong connection and sense of shared purpose in the relationship.

Personal Values & Expectations

First-time relationships can be described as puzzle pieces. Each person has their own unique shape, with specific needs, desires, and values. When we meet someone who fits well with our puzzle piece, we feel a sense of connection and attraction.

Just like puzzle pieces, we seek out partners who complement us and help us create a larger picture. We might want someone who shares our values, challenges us, or simply makes us feel good. There are lots of reasons why we decide to enter into a relationship with someone and they're all valid.

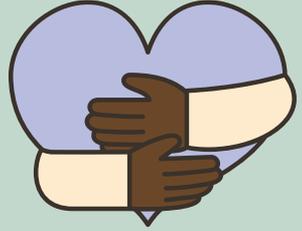


However, just like in a puzzle, not all pieces fit perfectly together. It's important to remember that no one person can fulfill all of our needs, and it's important to have realistic expectations in relationships. We should respect that each person has their own unique puzzle piece and not try to force someone to fit into our own.

Standards & Expectations

Standards are guidelines for what you will accept right now. They represent what you want in a partner: For example, you might be seeking:

- A sense of humour
- Shared values and beliefs
- A positive attitude and outlook on life



Expectations are what we want to happen in the future, specific actions we want someone to take or events we want to occur.

- When what we expect does not occur, we are disappointed, sad, and even angry

There's nothing wrong with having standards, and if someone does not meet your expectations, you are free to move on. However, your partner can meet all of your standards while still falling short of your relationship expectations. These expectations can cause problems in relationships.

Types of Relationships

Every relationship has its own unique characteristics and expectations. Here are some common types of relationships:

Friends with benefits: This is a type of relationship where two people are friends who also engage in sexual activity. They are not committed to each other in a romantic sense, but they may enjoy the physical aspects of their relationship.



Types of Relationships

Casual relationship: This is a non-committed relationship where two people are seeing each other but not in a serious, exclusive way. They may go on dates and hang out, but they are not necessarily looking for a long-term commitment.



Monogamous: This is a romantic relationship where two people are exclusively dating each other. They are committed to each other emotionally, physically, and sexually. They may share their lives together and make plans for the future.

Types of Relationships



Open relationship: This is a type of relationship where two people are committed to each other emotionally, and engage in sexual activity with other people. They may have agreed upon rules and boundaries around their other sexual partners.

Polyamorous relationship: This is a type of relationship where three or more people are in a romantic relationship with each other. They may all live together, share finances, and consider themselves a family.

Consent

What is consent regarding our relationships?

- consent is the voluntary agreement to engage in activity
- it must be communicated through words or body language and can be taken back at any point
- consenting to one kind of activity does not mean that consent is given for all activities
- consent must be negotiated each time you change activities

Consent can not be given if individuals...

- are underage
- are intoxicated or incapacitated by drugs or alcohol
- agree to an activity under pressure intimidation or threat



Consent

**We practice consent
in all our
relationships:**

Coworkers / Acquaintances:

- Can I sit with you during our lunch break?

Family:

- Can I hug you?
- Can I share that funny story about you with my family?

Friends:

- Can I post this picture of us on social media?
- I like pepperoni pizza, is it okay with you if we get that kind?

Intimate Partners:

- Can I kiss you?
- Would you like to have sex?
- What are some sexual activities that you would or would not like to do?

Consent



Consent can be thought of as a key that unlocks the door to intimacy. Just as a key is necessary to enter a locked room, consent is necessary to engage in any type of physical or emotional interaction with another person. Without the key of consent, the door remains locked and any attempt to force it open would be a violation of personal boundaries and a breach of trust. However, when the key is willingly given, it opens the door to a safe and enjoyable experience for all parties involved.

If you would like to learn more about consent, keep an eye out for SVPR TRU Consent Tea Workshop

Boundaries

Setting boundaries in a relationship is like building a fence around a garden. Just as a fence sets a clear boundary around a garden, establishing healthy boundaries in a relationship can help create a safe and secure space for both partners. The fence helps protect the plants from outside threats, just as healthy boundaries protect the relationship from potential harm.



The fence can also be decorated and customized to the gardener's liking, just as boundaries in a relationship can be tailored to each partner's needs and values.

Setting boundaries is an essential aspect of nurturing and protecting a new, healthy relationship, much like building a fence is a critical step in creating a thriving garden.

Boundaries

Setting boundaries is important because it establishes mutual respect and helps both partners understand what is acceptable and what is not.

Tips on setting boundaries include:



- **Communicate openly:** Be clear about what you are comfortable with and what you are not. Be willing to listen to your partner's perspective as well.
- **Start small:** Begin by setting simple boundaries, such as how much time you would like to spend together, or what kind of physical contact you are comfortable with.
- **Be consistent:** Once you have set a boundary, stick to it. This will help establish trust and reliability in the relationship.
- **Don't compromise your values:** If a boundary is important to you, do not compromise on it just to please your partner. Your values should always come first.

Healthy Relationship Characteristics

- **Trust:** One partner makes the other feel physically and emotionally safe and demonstrates mutual respect for boundaries.
- **Intimacy:** Each partner is physically and emotionally vulnerable with the other. Intimacy nurtures feelings of safety, well-being, and connection between you and your partner.
- **Safety:** Both partners are equally responsible for creating and maintaining safety. Examples might include: using protection/birth control; getting regular STI tests; using respectful language when disagreeing or stopping when your partner says 'no'.
- **Individuality:** You are comfortable being yourself in your relationship. Examples might include: developing your own interests; and respecting each other's opinions and feelings even if you disagree.
- **Empathy:** Both partners show understanding towards each other and respond to each other's emotions and needs.



Healthy Relationship Characteristics

- **Good communication:** Both partners understand how to listen to one another and demonstrate respect during conversations.
- **Equality:** Both partners contribute equally to the relationship, whether it's emotional support, physical effort, or financial resources. They share decision-making and power.
- **Playfulness:** Both partners feel an element of fun in the relationship. You make time for one another, plan outings, and surprise each other. You continue to look for ways to grow with one another.
- **Teamwork:** Both partners are responsible for contributing to problem-solving, doing tasks together, and helping one another out.
- **Conflict resolution:** Every relationship will experience conflict at some point. In healthy relationships, people feel safe to disagree and can engage in conflict respectfully.



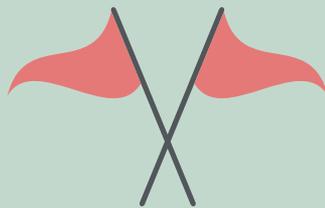
Unhealthy Relationship Characteristics

- **Control:** One partner tries to control the other's behaviour, choices, or actions. They may be jealous, possessive, or manipulative.
- **Lack of trust:** One partner may be dishonest, unreliable, or secretive, causing the other partner to feel anxious and unsure about the relationship.
- **Disrespect:** One partner may belittle or ignore the other's opinions, interests, or boundaries.
- **Power imbalance:** One partner may hold more power or control in the relationship, leaving the other partner feeling marginalized or powerless. Power can take many forms, including things like social status, wealth, age, physical ability or employment.
- **Lack of empathy:** One partner may dismiss or ignore the other's emotions or needs, showing little concern or understanding for their partner's experiences.
- **Non-consensual behaviour:** Any sexual activity that is not fully consensual, whether due to pressure, coercion, or force, is unhealthy and unacceptable. Both partners must freely and enthusiastically consent to all sexual activities.



Red Flags

Red flags are warning signs or signals that you need to pay attention to



Rushing into things:

- you neglect your own needs or interests in the relationship to make your partner happy
- your partner pressures you to be physically intimate even when you have had conversations about boundaries

Possessiveness & jealousy:

- they constantly monitor your activities and demand to know where you are and who you are with at all times
- they try to isolate you from friends & family
- they try to control how you present yourself

Disrespectful behaviour:

- Your partner is regularly belittling or disrespecting you
- they dismiss your opinions, feelings, or experiences
- they disregard your boundaries or repeatedly cross them

Manipulation:

- they try to make you doubt your own perceptions or reality, often called "gaslighting"
- they use guilt to manipulate you into doing something you don't want to do
- they withhold affection, love, or attention as a way to manipulate you into behaving in a certain way or to punish you for something

Lack of communication:

- they always become defensive or dismissive when confronted with a problem or concern
- they always withdraw from hard conversation or shut down emotionally. This can be a way of avoiding conflict, but it can also create distance and resentment

Reminder: Red Flags

Remember that red flags are concerning, they but don't always mean that your relationship is doomed.

People are complex and can exhibit negative behaviour patterns due to various factors such as past experiences, mental health issues, or communication problems. However, it is important to recognize and address through communication these unhealthy patterns to maintain a healthy and fulfilling relationship.

If red flags persist, it may be time to re-evaluate the relationship and seek support from friends or professionals.



The Importance of Communication

Communication is a vital aspect of any relationship. It is the key to building a strong and healthy foundation for the relationship to grow and thrive. Here are some reasons why communication is important:

Conflict resolution:

Disagreements and conflicts are inevitable but communication can help address them and find a resolution that works for both partners.

Without proper communication, conflicts can escalate and cause long-term damage to the relationship.

Intimacy:

Communication can increase intimacy in a relationship. When partners share their thoughts and feelings, it can create a sense of emotional closeness.

Trust:

Open and honest communication builds trust between partners. When both partners feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings, they are more likely to trust each other and develop a deeper connection.

Understanding:

Communication helps both partners understand each other's thoughts, feelings, and expectations. It allows them to get to know each other better, which can lead to a deeper connection and a stronger bond.



How to Express Feelings in a Healthy Way

In a first relationship, it is common to experience a range of emotions and feelings, and it is important to express them in a healthy way to maintain a positive and fulfilling relationship. These are some ways you can do that:

- **Communicate openly and honestly:** Share your feelings and emotions with your partner, but be respectful and considerate of their feelings too. Speak from a place of kindness and understanding, and avoid criticizing or blaming your partner.
- **Use "I" statements:** When expressing your feelings, use "I" statements to convey how you feel without making your partner feel attacked. For example, "I feel sad when you don't text me back" instead of "You always ignore me."
- **Listen actively:** Pay attention to your partner's emotions and feelings too. Show that you are interested in what they have to say and offer your support.
- **Practice empathy:** Try to put yourself in your partner's shoes and understand how they feel. This will help you better communicate and connect with them.
- **Avoid passive-aggressive behaviour:** This can be damaging to a relationship. Instead of hinting at your feelings, be upfront and direct about them.
- **Take breaks when needed:** If you're feeling overwhelmed or upset, take a break and give yourself some space to process your emotions before discussing them with your partner.

Conflict Resolution

If you and your partner are struggling, a boundary is ignored, or you have caused harm, here are some ways you can move through it:

Listen: without becoming defensive, making excuses, denying harm, or making yourself the center of the story:

Focusing on both facts and feelings can help reduce tension and defensiveness and allow for conflict to be resolved more easily. Pay attention to what your partner is saying through words and body language. Reflect on what is being said, accept the message, and attempt to understand your partner's point of view.

Manage your responses: get yourself grounded using calming techniques, and identify any feelings you have and why you might be experiencing them.

During tense discussions, staying calm and respecting your partner's feelings are important. It's not okay to make rude comments at your partner even though you may be angry in these moments. Be thoughtful of the language you choose to use and the meaning behind your words. It is okay not to discuss it right away and ask your partner if you can take a step back from the moment and talk about it later.



Conflict Resolution

Offer an apology: take responsibility, identify how you're going to change your behaviour, and do not expect forgiveness.

- Try to understand what your person needs in the moment. You could ask them if they'd like to talk about what happened and explore your shared perspectives on the situation.
- Giving or receiving an apology can put you in a vulnerable position, so give yourself a safe place to process your emotions.
- Acknowledge your responsibility and express remorse. Just because you apologized doesn't necessarily mean the relationship will be fixed or that you will be forgiven.

Identify actions you can take: Think about how they will impact the person you have harmed and why they are good actions to take.

- Conflict resolution requires us to take the actions we discussed during the apology process seriously; otherwise, our promises are meaningless and can cause more harm to your partner. An apology is an agreement to action.

Seek support- you don't have to do this alone, asking for support from those around you is beneficial throughout this process.



Trusting Each Other

Trust is a delicate plant and requires careful nurturing, attention, and patience to grow and thrive. It starts as a small seed that is planted in the ground, and over time, with the right conditions, it begins to sprout and grow.

In a first relationship, trust can be fragile and requires consistent care and attention to ensure that it continues to grow and strengthen. Just as a plant needs sunlight, water, and nutrients to flourish, trust in a relationship needs honesty, communication, and consistent actions.



Importance of Trust

Trust...

Helps to resolve conflicts: trust is essential for resolving conflicts in a healthy way, and you are more likely to be able to work together to find solutions that work for both of you.

Encourages honesty and transparency: when there is trust in a relationship, both partners are more likely to be honest and transparent with each other.

Fosters emotional intimacy: when you trust your partner, you are more likely to open up and share your thoughts and feelings with them.

Strengthens communication: trust is closely linked to effective communication. When you trust your partner, you are more likely to communicate openly and honestly with them.

Promotes a sense of security: trusting your partner gives you a sense of security and stability in the relationship, and trusting your partner has your best interests at heart.

Respect

Respect in a first relationship is like the foundation of a house. Just as a strong foundation supports and stabilizes a house, respect provides a solid base upon which a healthy relationship can be built.

Respect is crucial for a relationship to be healthy and strong. Without a solid foundation, a house can crumble or shift. When a house has a strong foundation, it can withstand storms and other challenges that may come its way. Similarly, when a couple has respect for each other, they can weather any problems or difficulties that arise in their relationship. They can handle disagreements and conflicts with kindness and understanding, and work together to find solutions.

Just as a foundation needs to be carefully constructed, respect requires ongoing attention and effort. Building and maintaining respect in a relationship involves actively listening to your partner, being considerate of their feelings and needs, and treating them with kindness and empathy. It also means setting healthy boundaries and being respectful of your partner's boundaries.



Practicing Safe Sex

Communication and Trust:

- Open and honest communication between partners can build trust and intimacy. It's important to have a conversation about sexual health and protection before engaging in any sexual activity. Everyone has their comfort levels and it is important to establish boundaries and make sure that both partners are on the same page about what they are comfortable with. This can help prevent misunderstandings or awkward situations. If you have any concerns or questions about sex, it is important to address them with your partner.

Respect:

- Practicing safe sex involves respect for yourself and your partner. It shows that you care about their health and well-being and are willing to take steps to protect them. Avoiding pressure is also a part of respect.

Protection against STIs:

- Using forms of protection can significantly reduce the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). It's important to discuss STI testing and protection with your partner before engaging in sexual activity.
- Check out "*A Culturally Sensitive Beginners Guide to Sexual Health*" resource created by SVPR for more information. (QR Code pg. 30)



Understanding Yourself:

The Importance of Self-Awareness

Understanding yourself is an essential aspect of any relationship. Self-awareness means having a clear understanding of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and how they impact yourself and others.

- **Identifying your needs and boundaries:** By knowing yourself well, you are better equipped to communicate your needs and set boundaries that are important to you.
- **Managing your emotions:** By recognizing your emotions, it can help you to avoid reacting impulsively and to communicate effectively with your partner.
- **Developing self-esteem:** By understanding your strengths and weaknesses, you can focus on your positive qualities and work on areas that need improvement. This helps you to build confidence and feel more secure in your relationship.
- **Avoiding codependency:** Recognize when you are at risk of becoming overly dependent on your partner and take steps to avoid it. This helps you to maintain your own identity and independence within the relationship.



Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is an essential aspect of any healthy relationship.

It involves taking the time to think deeply about your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, as well as how they impact your relationship. Through this process, you can gain a deeper understanding of yourself, your partner, and your relationship dynamics. This understanding can help you to identify areas where you can improve, set boundaries that are important to you, and communicate effectively with your partner. It can also help you to manage your emotions and avoid reacting impulsively in challenging situations.

Self-reflection is like a mirror. Just as a mirror reflects your physical appearance back to you, self-reflection allows you to see yourself more clearly. Through this reflection, you may discover new aspects of yourself, including your strengths, weaknesses, and values.



Self-Discovery

In your first relationship, you may experience a range of emotions and challenges that can lead to self-discovery and personal growth. As you navigate the ups and downs of your relationship, you may begin to understand your values, beliefs, strengths, and weaknesses in a new way. You may discover what you want and need in a partner, as well as what makes you happy and fulfilled in a relationship. Through this process of self-discovery, you learn more about yourself, your motivations, and your goals, which can help you to build healthier and more fulfilling relationships in the future.



The Importance of Independence

Independence includes taking care of yourself, making decisions, and pursuing your goals and interests. Independence is crucial to have in your first relationship when you are just beginning to establish your own identity.

Independence can be like the roots of a tree. Just as roots provide stability and nourishment, your independence allows you to establish a strong sense of self and take care of your own needs. When you have strong roots, you can weather the storms of life and remain standing, even in challenging times. Similarly, when you are independent in a relationship, you have a solid foundation that allows you to maintain your own identity and pursue your own goals, while still being a supportive and loving partner.

By nurturing your independence and maintaining your sense of self in your first relationship, you can build a relationship that is strong, healthy, and fulfilling for both you and your partner.



Sexualized Violence Prevention & Response Office



Location: OM 1486

Phone: 250-828-5023

Email: svpr@tru.ca

Hours: Mon-Fri 9:00 am - 4:00
pm. Closed for lunch from 12:00
pm - 1:00 pm

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Resources



Supports offered:

- Emotional support for survivors of sexualized violence (recent or historic)
- Academic and housing support
- Referrals to services on and off campus
- Information and support through the reporting process
- Educational opportunities; workshops, events and trainings

Resources

TRU Campus Resources:

- **Wellness Centre:** OM 1479
- **Counselling:** OM 1631, 250-828-5023
- **Campus Security:** 250-828-5033 (Non-Emergency)
- **SafeWalk:** 250-828-5033

Community Resources:

- **RCMP:** 911 (Emergency)
 - 250-828-3000 (Non-Emergency)
- **VictimLinkBC:** 1-800-563-0808
- **Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre:** 250-372-0179
ksacc.ca
 - **Crisis Line:** 1-888-974-7278
- **Y Women's Emergency Shelter:** 250-374-6162 or kamloopsy.org
- **Stopping the Violence Outreach Services:** call or text 250-320-3110
- **Kamloops Immigrant Services:** Women's Empowerment Program Call or Text 778-694-3884

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