



*James J. Tedesco III, Bergen County Executive  
and the Bergen County Board of Commissioners*

**Alternatives to Domestic Violence  
Bergen County Department of  
Human Services**

# Our Relationship Health Check — TOOLKIT

**Contact our 24-Hour Confidential Hotline 201-336-7575**  
to speak with a counselor or schedule an appointment  
1 Bergen County Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hackensack, NJ 07601

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# INTRODUCTION

At **Alternatives to Domestic Violence**, we envision a Bergen County where all persons, families, and communities are able to access and thrive in safe, equitable, and autonomous relationships.

This "**STAYING SAFE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS**" toolkit was prepared to support all persons striving towards the pursuit of healthy, loving, and affirming relationships and recognizes that there are different kinds of love and relationships with family members, friends, and partners.

It was created to provide support to teens, young adults, and allies on how to recognize healthy connections that bring out the best in us, and how to safely detect and detach from unhealthy, toxic, or abusive relationships that leave us feeling unsafe and disconnected from our best selves.

Statistics tell us that **1 in 4** women and **1 in 7** men will experience some form of intimate partner abuse in their lifetime. For teens and young adults, the risk of finding yourself in an unhealthy relationship is at its highest - up to **3 times higher** than the national average. It's difficult to know what to do in these situations at any age but it's toughest when we feel alone in our experience.

If you've made it here in search of support for healthier relationships, we want you to know that you're **NOT ALONE**. Seeking education is a **HUGE** step and a personal form of **POWER** that will follow you everywhere you go!

Feel free to share all or part of this safety planning toolkit with your friends, roommates, resident assistants, family members, and or your therapist. When you come across information that you think others should know about, take a screenshot or download a section of the toolkit and post it on social media. The information you share could save a life.



**The PTE Team at ADV**

# ADV'S

## ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

Alternatives to Domestic Violence (ADV) celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion. ADV disavows racism, homophobia, sexism, and actions that attempt to silence, threaten, and marginalize the most vulnerable in Bergen County, NJ.

ADV recognizes that the land now known as New Jersey has been home to the Lenape for over 14,000 years. Some tribal nations, officially recognized by the state of New Jersey, maintain communities that still thrive in the state today.



*Alternatives to Domestic Violence, County of Bergen*

# Our Relationship Health Check TOOLKIT

When we think our personal health, we often think about healthy habits such as making sure to get a medical check-up, eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and practicing self-care.

Regular exercise & fitness routine

Healthy diet & eating habits

Restful sleep & recovery

Stress management & Relaxation

Personal Hygiene & Self-care

It can be a challenge to keep up a healthy routine and we benefit by the education and reminders we get at school, the media, apps, family & friends.

When we are having a health problem, we also know to check in with our doctor or other healthcare professionals for advice and guidance.

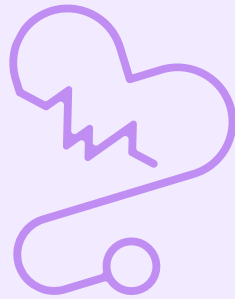
But what about our **relationship wellness**? The health of our relationships also plays an important role in influencing our overall wellness but we often don't receive as much support in shaping those habits and routines.

# What is a RELATIONSHIP HEALTH CHECK?

A relationship health check is an important practice to learn, regardless of your current relationship status.

Like a physical or mental health check, a relationship health check is a great first step to making sure you have the information and support you need to understand what is working well and what isn't within your relationships.

Just like doctors have thermometers to check our body temperature or stethoscopes to monitor our heart, we are able to use different educational tools to explore the overall health of our relationships.



## How do I get my Health Check started?

The following sections will help you to identify the components of healthy, positive relationships. These tools can be used to evaluate past or current experiences in all types of close relationships, including romantic, family, or friendships.

They will help you detect the relationship habits that fall outside the range of "healthy" and signal that it may be time to check in with others for additional support.



# Ingredients

## for a Healthy Relationship

**Intimate relationships** have the potential to be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling aspects of our lives. They include platonic, family, sexual, or romantic relationships and involve elements of trust-building, closeness, or bonding.

Maintaining a healthy relationship takes time, energy, & dedication and a successful relationship depends on certain ingredients being accessible to us **most** of the time.

*Are there any ingredients here that are missing for a healthy intimate relationship(s)?*

Respect for Physical and Emotional Boundaries

Mutual Support for Dreams & Growth

Quality Time to Enjoy & Bond Together

Open & Effective Communication

Respect for Independence and Separate Identities

Honesty & Trust-Building Opportunities

Taking Accountability for Mistakes

Genuine Gratitude and Appreciation for One Another

Reliability & Consistency

Shared Values & Life Goals

Proactive Problem-Solving

Prioritizes Repair over Always Being "Right"

Safety & Security Free from Violence

Generosity & Acts of Service

Genuine Curiosity & Willingness to Understand Each Other

Willingness to Compromise

Our #1 Recipe for Healthy Relationships

Validating & Affirming to our Feelings

Sharing Power and Responsibility

Verbal & Physical Affection





# The Look & Feel of a

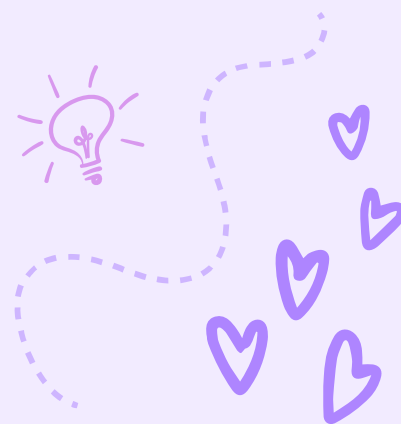
# Healthy Relationship

Being in loving intimate relationship has the power to boost our health and grant us new dimensions of purpose.

When intimate relationships are healthy, they can be exciting and empowering. They can even awaken new, intense feelings and sensations in different areas of our life.

Healthy relationships are linked to lower rates of anxiety and depression and the development of positive self-esteem. They can support the exploration of new passions and interests that motivate and satisfy us. We learn a lot about ourselves through healthy, intimate relationships!

Positive, healthy relationships are also crucial to our sense of connection, build our capacities for empathy, and grant us opportunities to understand other perspectives. Positive relationships help us be more open to and successful in forming healthy relationships!





# The Normal HIGHS and lows of Healthy Relationship Stages

**Both positive and negative sensations are normal in healthy relationships and have a lot to do with what relationship stage you are in.**

## 1. THE INFATUATION STAGE



Have you ever described the sensation of being in love as "walking on clouds" or being "over the moon?" It's not surprising as the highs of being in love can be overpowering.

During the **infatuation stage**, you may find it hard to stay focused on anything other than our new partner. It's normal to see our new partner as "perfect." You may feel anxious, worried that they don't like you as much as you like them, or disappointed that you aren't spending more time together.

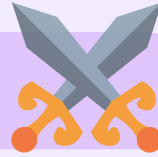
During this stage, it's important to reality check these feelings, maintain healthy boundaries, and stay connected to family, friends, and hobbies.

We know that relationships are not all sunshine and rainbows. Eventually the "love potion" wears off and you may start to notice habits and traits in your partner that you don't like. You may even start questioning how much you are willing to give to the relationship.



# The Normal **HIGHS** and **lows** of Healthy Relationship Stages

## 2. THE POWER STRUGGLE STAGE



After the initial stage of building attraction comes the challenging **power struggle stage**. This stage has fewer highs and more lows, but this is where real intimacy and trust is formed.

True compatibility is tested through points of conflict and tension. Being different people makes it easy to activate "tug-of-war" battles over the need to push our unique preferences, needs, and fears.

Having arguments is **normal**. So is feeling sad in realizing that neither your partner or your relationship is as "perfect" as you'd like. These lows are tricky to navigate because they tap into intense, negative feelings, such as annoyance, insecurity, anger, or pain.

During this stage, it's essential to keep to conflict that's productive and to ask for help if it becomes unhealthy. It's also important to find good sounding boards for our thoughts, such as trusted friends or a counselor, to keep our perspectives open and grounded.

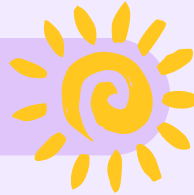
Many relationships end at the power struggle stage and that's okay. There are many good reasons for breaking up at this stage. One reason is if the lows are frequent or hurtful to either partner in the relationship.

Remember, no amount of intense highs are worth keeping a relationship that constantly drives you back into deep lows without any signs of improvement!



# The Normal **HIGHS** and **lows** of Healthy Relationship Stages

## 3. THE STABLE COMMITMENT STAGE



Making it to this stage depends on the quality of the bonds formed in the earlier stages, and how well partners apply healthy communication, trust-building, and conflict resolutions skills to resolving problems. This is the most rewarding stage in relationships.

The **stable commitment stage** is where you and your partner have learned to share control in your relationships, accept each other for who you truly are, and enjoy deeper security and connection.

By this point, intense feelings have tapered off and evolved into less disruptive but still pleasurable sensations of acceptance, support, and connection to your partner.

Mature love can feel like you've traded the feverish, unstable highs of early love with the soothing constancy of a warm, comforting blanket. Although you haven't escaped the occasional feelings of sadness or disappointment in response to new stressors or changes to the relationship, this stage represents overall satisfaction with the calm waters of connection.



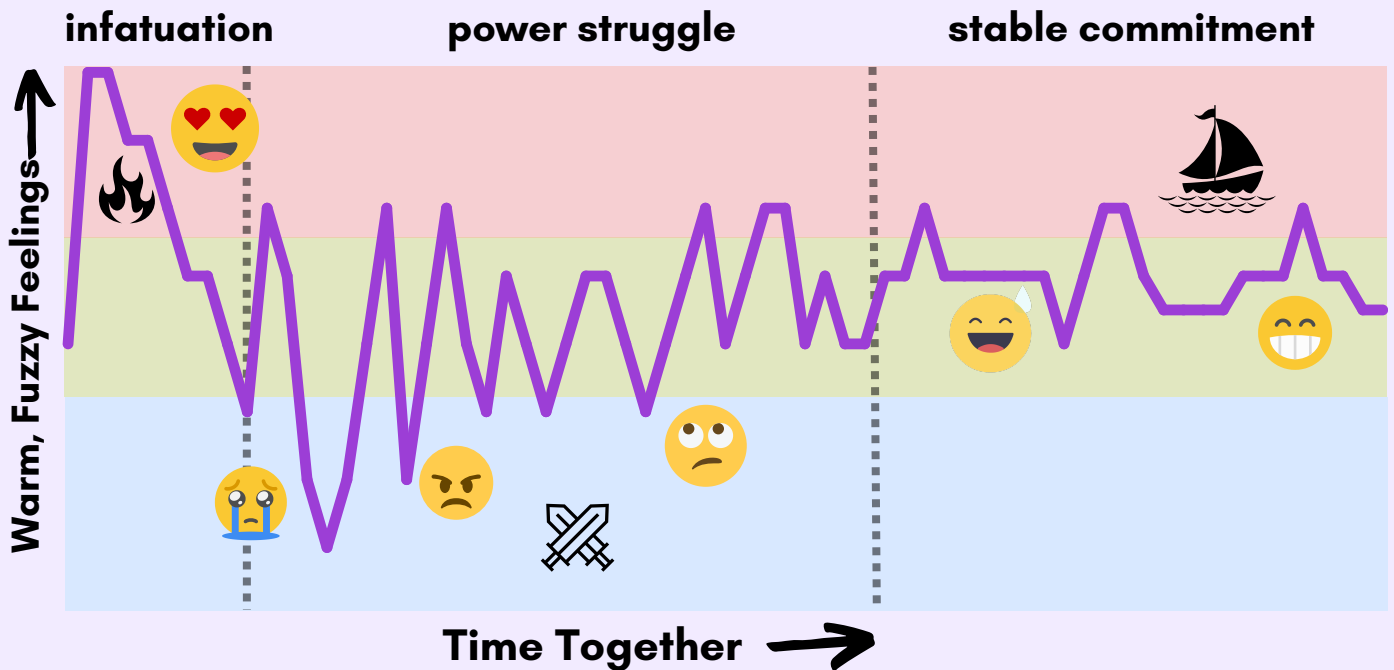
To see all the relationship stages together...

CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE



# How Feelings Change Over the Course of a Healthy Relationship

While every relationship is unique, the graph below provides a general idea of normal highs or lows for all three relationship stages.



Neither intense highs or lows should last forever. It's also common and normal for new relationships to fizzle out after the infatuation or power struggle stages.

How long should each stage last? Every relationship is unique but experts say infatuation can last between 6 months to 3 years, while the power struggle stage can last for several years before reaching an equilibrium!

**It's vital to give relationships time and space to develop before making assumptions about their viability to work out. If you're unsure about the highs or lows being normal, talk to a counselor!**

# Real Love Isn't Always


## INSTA-WORTHY

Our recipe for a healthy relationship does not include the following "Hollywood movie" ingredients:

 **Falling in love at first sight**

 **Making ultimate sacrifices for love**

 **Fulfilling all of our loved one's needs**

 **Counting on love to solve all problems**

Consumption of "Hollywood" love stories is harmful when unrealistic myths, singular stories, or unhealthy behaviors in relationships are accepted by us as the "normal" experience of love. Movies, music, and social media accounts that highlight the infatuation phase of romantic, usually heteronormative, relationships, rarely show us unfiltered, diverse representations of stable, committed love and other forms of healthy intimacy.

Believing intimate relationships should be just like what we see in shows, or in "picture perfect" posts on social media sets us up to be disappointed or frustrated when our lived experiences don't align with airbrushed expectations. It also blinds viewers to how some commonly romanticized behaviors, like possessiveness or stalking, are warning flags for abuse in real relationships!

 142  37  27

To help debunk some unreasonable takes on love, continue to the next page to see our **Top 10 examples of common love myths!**



### **We Must Find "The One" To Be Happy**

1

There is no such thing as one perfect match. Let go of the idea that your partner will magically appear. It will keep you from opening your eyes to potential happy, yet imperfect connections!

### **Romantic Love Offers Everything You Need**

6

It's not possible to find everything in one person. A network of healthy relationships with friends & family enables us to thrive in romantic relationships. And it prioritizes the most important love of all--self-love!

### **Love Should Always Feel Exciting & Passionate**

2

The exciting stages of love help form solid bonds but are not meant to be sustained indefinitely. Successful relationships combine passion with steady connections, keeping the magic going!

### **True Love is Everlasting**

7

Love is most powerful (and healthy) when we accept its limits, make the most of what's in our control, and do our best to stay present in the moment.

### **Changing Yourself for Love is OK**

3

Change is great if it's for your self-esteem or self-love. If you try to change yourself to please someone else, you're making them responsible for your sense of self-worth -- that's unhealthy!

### **You Can Change Others If You Try Hard Enough**

8

Making it your goal or holding out for a partner to change is a recipe for resentment and disappointment. Attitudes and behaviors change when the change comes from within.

### **True Love is Perfect & Always Positive**

4

It is normal and healthy to experience moments in relationships that are not wonderful all the time. Imperfect moments offer us opportunities to learn and grow together.

### **Love Means It's OK to Pursue Someone**

9

It's okay to be open about feelings, but healthy relationships acknowledge the importance of mutual interest & respect. If someone makes it clear they're not interested, the pursuit must stop.

### **Having Arguments Is Bad For Your Relationship**

5

Arguments can help partners learn how to reach a compromise, agree to disagree, and better understand each other's thoughts and perspectives.

### **Love is All-Powerful & Conquers All**

10

Love isn't enough to keep us fulfilled if relationships don't include respect, trust, support, & communication. It's not fair to expect love to heal all wounds or solve all problems inside or outside of the relationship.

## **Common Love Myths**



## Real Love Is...

**equitable & nonviolent**

queer & nonbinary

**temporary & permanent**

biological & chosen

**finding beauty in imperfections**

facing our fears

**romantic & platonic**

healing & transformative

**truthful**

sex positive & body positive

**self-discovery**

cyclical & generational

**elevating what serves you**

imaginative & borderless

**built on boundaries**

learning our history

**monogamous & polyamorous**

disconnecting & reconnecting

**black, brown, & indigenous**

courageous & radical

REAL *you* LOVE IS





# FACT VS. MYTH

## REALITY CHECKING

### *Our Relationships*



Continue to the next page for our relationship reality checklist to help clear the air on what expectations are normal and what's straying into unhealthy territory!



## WHAT WE THINK IS NORMAL...

## WHAT IS ACTUALLY NORMAL...

**1** Feelings of jealousy proves it's love.

Jealousy means I'm feeling insecure and need to spend time exploring where it's coming from.

**2** I should want to spend all my time with the person I love.

Spending time with my loved one is enjoyable, but so is spending time with other people or by myself.

**3** My partner should always know what I'm feeling without having to ask.

Building good communication takes time and effort. We can learn to ask for what we need.

**4** Love means getting my loved one to improve themselves or to try new things.

I can support my loved one and their goals, but I can't force them to change or control their choices.

**5** Saying or doing hurtful things during arguments comes from a place of love.

Disagreeing may be a sign of mutual investment but guidelines for healthy behavior need to be followed.

**6** I am solely responsible for making sure the relationship succeeds.

A healthy relationship is the responsibility of both parties.

**7** It's up to my loved one to tell me if we are moving forward with the relationship or not.

Without mutual respect, trust, communication, and safety, no relationship is sustainable.

**8** Love means ensuring a loved one is happy even if it means I do things I don't want to do.

I'm not responsible for my loved one's happiness. Our relationship is consensual, reciprocal, and respectful.

**9** Trust means there should never be any doubt. We should know everything about each other.

Trust builds over time and is based on honesty, openness, and a right to privacy.

**10** Frequent periods of stress or pain means my relationship is serious.

While all relationships experience stress & conflict, mine feels satisfying and fulfilling most of the time.

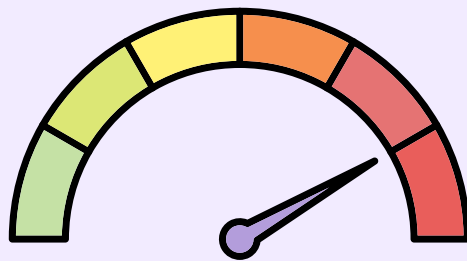
## MY RELATIONSHIP

## Bill of Rights

***While no relationship is perfect or able to give us exactly what we want or need all the time, safe and healthy relationships do not deny us our essential rights to be respected and treated equally. Below are some fundamental rights that each of us are entitled to in any intimate relationship. Without them, our relationship is at risk of straying into unhealthy or abusive territory!***

- ✓ I have the right to be treated with respect
- ✓ I have the right to say no and not feel guilty
- ✓ I have the right to express my feelings, opinions, and identity
- ✓ I have the right to take time for myself
- ✓ I have the right to feel physically and emotionally safe
- ✓ I have the right to make my own decisions
- ✓ I have the right to change my mind
- ✓ I have the right to ask for what I want
- ✓ I have the right to nurture relationships with other persons
- ✓ I have the right to do activities with others or by myself
- ✓ I have the right to make mistakes
- ✓ I have the right to feel good about myself
- ✓ I have the right to not be pressured into doing stuff I don't feel like doing
- ✓ I have the right to disagree or resolve conflicts without the use of violence or intimidation
- ✓ I have the right to be respected if I want to end a relationship

# THE HEALTHY-UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP SPECTRUM



Relationship health is on a spectrum where it may fall into **healthy**, **unhealthy**, or **abusive** categories.

It's not always easy to tell whether the quirks or challenges in a relationship amount to something repairable or disastrous. Explore the chart on the next page to learn more about the differences and prognosis for each category.

**REMEMBER!** Intimate relationships include all types of romantic, family, sexual, or platonic relationships where we have formed a close bond with someone and rely on them for emotional, physical, sexual, intellectual or spiritual intimacy. While no relationship is perfect, they should all be based in mutual respect and feel good to all parties -- at least most of the time!

# HEALTHY

## All persons are doing the following most of the time:

- Communicating openly and effectively with each other
- Respecting each others' differences even when we disagree
- Telling the truth about things that impact our relationship
- Trusting and believing in each other
- Considering each other equal (neither superior nor inferior) to each other
- Enjoying personal time apart from each other
- Making decisions together with intent to compromise
- Supporting each other while promoting independence
- Keeping the relationship a safe zone free from violence

### Prognosis:

Looking good!  
Signs indicate that the key ingredients for intimacy are present in the relationship. Keep building on strengths and fine-tuning areas of weakness!

# UNHEALTHY

## At least one person is doing the following:

- Ineffective communication that inhibits understanding or vulnerability
- Using disrespectful language or behaviors to belittle the other person
- Not telling the truth or keeping secrets that impact the relationship
- Questioning the other person's loyalty or fidelity without reasonable cause
- Dominating or imposing their needs or opinions
- Resisting opportunities to spend time apart from each other
- Directly or indirectly pressuring others to agree with them
- Struggling to have their own set of goals, activities, or separate relationships
- Violating physical, emotional, financial, or sexual boundaries

### Prognosis:

Alert!  
Signs indicate key areas need work or repair. Take steps to learn more, with or without your loved one, or consider seeking help from a counselor.

# ABUSIVE

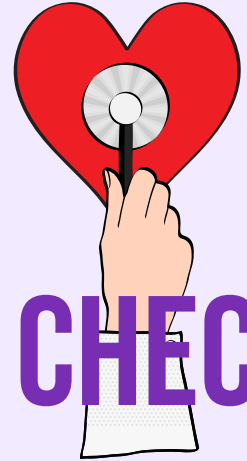
## At least one person is doing the following:

- Communicating in a hurtful or threatening way
- Using disrespectful language or aggressive behaviors to intimidate others
- Not telling the truth or manipulating information to disorient others
- Accusing others of infidelity or blaming them for all issues in the relationship
- Denying that their actions are hurtful, abusive, or scary to others
- Views their loved one's needs, opinions, or interests as less important
- Controlling loved one's behaviors, activities, habits, or relationships
- Being possessive and isolating to loved one but expecting to do what they want
- Repeatedly violating physical, emotional, financial, or sexual boundaries, and/or communicating threat of harm if the other person tries to end relationship.

### Prognosis:

Warning!  
Signs indicate that relationship may be unsafe to work through with loved one at this time. Seeking professional assistance is highly recommended.

**Still not sure which category a current or past relationship falls? Proceed to take our Relationship Health Check Questionnaire on the next page.**



# RELATIONSHIP HEALTH CHECK QUESTIONNAIRE

**DISCLAIMER:** This questionnaire is not a diagnosis tool or a substitute for speaking with a counselor. It is meant to help gain a better understanding of your relationship dynamics.



**Read the following questions to help you explore the health of past or current intimate relationships. Answer each question with "Yes" or "No" and keep track of your answers.**

Scores will be totaled at the end of the questionnaire

## MY PARTNER . . .

- 1 is very supportive of things that I do.
- 2 encourages me to try new things.
- 3 likes to listen when I have something on my mind.
- 4 understands that I have my own life too.
- 5 is not liked very well by my friends.
- 6 says I'm too involved in different activities.
- 7 texts me or calls me all the time.
- 8 thinks I spend too much time trying to look nice.
- 9 gets extremely jealous or possessive.
- 10 accuses me of flirting or cheating.
- 11 constantly checks up on me or makes me check in beyond what I'm comfortable with.
- 12 controls what I wear or how I look.
- 13 tries to control what I do and who I see.
- 14 tries to keep me from seeing or talking to my family or friends.
- 15 has big mood swings, getting angry and yelling at me one minute, sweet and apologetic the next.
- 16 makes me feel nervous or like I'm "walking on eggshells."
- 17 puts me down, calls me names or criticizes me.
- 18 makes me feel like I can't do anything right or blames me for problems.
- 19 makes me feel like no one else would want me.
- 20 threatens to hurt me, my friends, or family.
- 21 threatens to engage in self harm because of me.
- 22 threatens to destroy my things.
- 23 grabs, pushes, shoves, strangles, punches, slaps, holds me down, throws things, or hurts me in some way.
- 24 breaks, throws, or hits things to intimidate me.
- 25 yells, screams, or humiliates me in front of other people.
- 26 pressures or forces me into having sex or going farther than I want to.



# SCORING

**To score your answers, give yourself...**

**one** point for every **NO** you answered to numbers **1-4**

**one** point for every **YES** you answered to numbers **5-8**

**five** points for every **YES** you answered to numbers **9-26**

**Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**Score of 0 points = Signals that your relationship is likely to be on a healthy track!**

Maintaining your healthy relationship may still mean a lot of hard work but keep it up as the key ingredients are there to be successful. While you may have a healthy relationship, it's possible that a friend or loved one of yours does not. Keep reading this toolkit to learn more about how to spot an abusive relationship and how to support a friend who may be experiencing one!

**Score of 1-2 points = Signals that you may be noticing several things in your relationship that may be unhealthy.**

While no relationship is perfect, keep an eye out for any unhealthy patterns forming. As long as the key ingredients of a healthy relationship are there, there is *potential* to work through issues or repair harm done from an unhealthy relationship. Seek supports on how you can expand communication with your loved one about any concerns you have and learn more about warning flags to look out for.

**Score of 3-4 points = Signals that there are likely warning signs of abuse in your relationship.**

They may not be present all the time which makes it easy to downplay them when the relationship feels good. Unfortunately, early signs of abuse usually get worse over time. A healthy relationship may slip into unhealthy behaviors from time to time but should *never* lead to *abusive* behaviors. Read Part 3 to learn more about what abusive behaviors look like and how to stay safe in your relationships. Consider reaching out to a counselor to seek support individually if you suspect you are experiencing abuse.

**Score of 5-26 points = Signals that there are significant warning signs of abuse in your relationship.**

In cases where someone is abusing power in the relationship, it's very unlikely that patterns will improve without outside help, no matter how hard you try to make it work or how much a loved one promises to change their behaviors. When a relationship becomes abusive, the most important thing to consider is your safety and whether any steps to make it healthier or safer will result in more abuse. If you believe that you are experiencing abuse, remember, you do not have to deal with this alone. There are many people who can help.

**Would you like to connect with someone safe to discuss these questions?**

**Bergen County,  
NJ residents can call:**  
Alternatives to  
Domestic Violence  
24-hour hotline 201-336-7575

**National & State-wide:**  
National Domestic Violence Hotline  
New Jersey Domestic Violence Hotline

**chat** at [loveisrespect.org](https://loveisrespect.org)  
**text** "loveis" to 22522  
**call** 1-866-331-9474  
(peer advocates available 24/7)

# More Resources for Keeping Relationships Healthy

## If you scored high on the assessment, here's some suggestions for what you can do:

- Reach out to a counselor on campus and/or in your community and set up an appointment
- Make an appointment with the violence prevention office and/or psychological services on your campus
- Consider counseling resources in your community and/or faith-based counseling at your church or house of worship.
- Call ADV, the National Domestic Violence, or other hotlines for survivors of domestic or sexual violence to get information and support
- Share your concerns with a trusted family member and/or friend.

## If you scored in the mid-range of the assessment, here's some suggestions for what you can do:

- Read about healthy relationships
- Prioritize your emotional, physical, and spiritual needs
- Focus on self-help by reflecting on your goals, having an honest talk with your partner, sharing with them what they could do (or not do) to help you achieve your goals of self-care, prepare for resistance and don't be surprised, insulted, or disappointed if there's resistance, and reciprocate.\*
- Consider couple's counseling but only if you feel like you are safe and there is no history of abuse in your relationship
  - Consider resources in your community and/or faith-based counseling at your church or house of worship

## If you scored low on the assessment, here's some suggestions for what you can do:

- Be realistic about your expectations
- Take time to listen, ask questions, and share information with your partner
- Be flexible and dependable
- Keep your life balanced and take care of yourself
- Know that every relationship has its ups and downs
- Understand the 10 Signs of a Healthy Relationship

\*<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-other-side-relationships/202202/there-is-no-such-thing-self-care-in-relationships>

# Acknowledgements

The PTE Team would like to extend their sincere gratitude to Bergen County Executive James J. Tedesco III and the Bergen County Commissioners for their endless efforts in supporting domestic violence survivors.

We would like to thank our Division Director, Marisa Heluk for her continued encouragement and entrusting our team to pursue our vision of creating this comprehensive toolkit.

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