Jean Hailes for Women's Health

MULTICULTURAL CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Healthy relationships and consent



You deserve to feel safe and respected in your relationships. This fact sheet tells you about healthy relationships, consent, signs of an unhealthy relationship and where to get help if you need it.

A healthy relationship includes respect, safety, trust and open communication. These are important in any relationship, including those with partners, friends and family members, no matter where you grew up or how long you've lived in Australia.

Respect means your feelings and choices are valued, even when someone disagrees with them.

Safety means you feel physically and emotionally safe, without fear of being treated badly, threatened, controlled or hurt.

Trust means you can rely on the other person to be honest and to care about your relationship.

Open communication means you can talk about what you want, what you don't want and how you feel. It also means you're listened to.

Understanding consent

Consent means you freely and clearly say yes to something, whether it's a hug, a photo being taken, or having sex.

You have the right to make decisions about your body. You can't give consent if you're asleep or unconscious, affected by alcohol or other drugs, or feeling pressured, scared or threatened.

Consent must be given every time. If you say yes to something at the start, you can change your mind and say no at any time, even if you're married or in a long-term relationship.

What are the laws about consent?

You must be a certain age to consent. The laws differ across states and territories. Learn more on the Youth Law Australia website www.yla.org.au (English only).

In Australia, it's against the law to do anything sexual with someone who hasn't given consent. That's sexual assault.

Consent also applies online. Sharing or threatening to share private pictures of someone without their permission is against the law.

You have the right to choose who you marry. It's a crime to force someone into marriage in Australia.

Remember, it's okay to ask questions. Health workers and support services can explain how consent and the law work in Australia.

Unhealthy relationships – the warning signs

Warning signs that a relationship isn't healthy include someone:

- controlling who you can meet, where you go, what you buy or how you look
- checking your phone without permission
- saying mean things to you or about you
- using guilt or pressure to make you do something you don't want to do
- making decisions for you about pregnancy, contraception, money or whether you work
- getting angry when you say no or disagree.

Abuse is never your fault. Contact a support service if you're scared or worried.

Where to get help

If something in a relationship feels wrong, talk to someone you trust, such as:

- a close friend
- a doctor, nurse or midwife
- a community health nurse or school nurse.

For your safety, you may want to keep this fact sheet somewhere private. And if you call a support service, consider using a phone that isn't shared.

Support services

In an emergency, call 000.

Some of these services and websites are in English only. You can call the free Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) on 131 450 to talk to a support service in your own language.

- 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) – 24-hour counselling for sexual assault, domestic and family violence, with interpreters if needed.
- Lifeline (13 11 14) – 24-hour crisis support for people who feel overwhelmed.
- Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 – mental health support for everyone in Australia.
- Headspace 1800 650 890 – mental health support for people aged 12 to 25.
- Relationships Australia 1300 364 277 – relationship support services.
- eSafety Commissioner – online safety and reporting online abuse, with information in languages other than English (www.esafety.gov.au/about-us/contact-us).

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This fact sheet has been developed in partnership with Multicultural Centre for Women's Health.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we recognise that people who identify differently may use our content.

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