



## My Relationship is ... healthy/unhealthy?

By Malinda Williams

**H**ealthy relationships are built on an understanding between two people who recognize how their actions affect their partner and how important it is to negotiate, empathize, apologize, support and love one another. Two people who struggle to make these things important and do not realize how their decisions affect one another may be in an unhealthy relationship.

Even people who are raised in families built on healthy relationships don't always approach their own relationships with a knowledge and appreciation of what it takes to be in a healthy relationship. It often takes work and discussion for each to understand the other's needs.

You cannot create a loving and supportive relationship alone. Healthy relationships are based on trust, mutual respect and compassion. They are ones in which partners:

- Support each other through rough spots. Caring about the other means being willing to compromise and seek mutually satisfying solutions.
- Contribute honest, respectful

communication, share power, build trust, support each other's goals and give each other the benefit of the doubt.

- Focus energy on the positive; they're each clear about what their partner does well and what it is about them they appreciate and enjoy. (This does not mean to ignore serious problems or violence, which are dangerous issues that need serious attention.) A healthy partner complements the other, encourages them to achieve goals and does not resent the other's accomplishments.
- Acknowledges the other's point of view and is willing to compromise; neither expects their way all the time.
- Fights fair. Sticks to the subject of the disagreement, tries to understand the other's point of view and seeks reasonable solutions.
- Helps create a safe space for their partner to share their feelings. If one needs time or space to sort out feelings first, the other respects that and waits until s/he is ready to talk.
- Respect each other and their individuality. Each understands the other's needs to have time alone and to hang out with other friends or family members.

Many people know that a relationship where violence (verbal, physical, sexual, spiritual, financial, etc.) is used to coercively control the other is unacceptable and falls squarely into the unhealthy category. That kind of relationship dynamic is domestic violence. Other unhealthy or "toxic" relationships can sometimes be identified by several red flags.

Unhealthy relationships may be ones in which one or both partners:

- Call each other belittling names, makes fun of or puts the other down, especially in front of someone else or on social media. (Individuals may find themselves apologizing frequently and making excuses for the partner's bad behavior.)
- Checks up on their partner constantly by calling or texting and asking where they are, what they're doing, who they're with, or checks the other's cell phone or email without permission.
- Becomes jealous when their partner gets attention from other people. They may also try to keep their partner from talking with or spending time with others, including family and friends. Demands to know every moment of their partner's time; tries to control their partner's behavior, how they dress,

or who they talk with. (To try to "keep the peace," their partner may begin to lose interest in activities they used to enjoy, thinking "it's just not worth it.")

- Has explosive anger, violently loses their temper, often striking or breaking things. (The other partner may begin shutting down and avoid sharing thoughts or feelings that may trigger their partner's rages.)
- Does not take responsibility or apologize for actions and constantly blames others for everything, ignoring facts or their role in an issue.
- Other signs of an unhealthy relationship include a partner who keeps the relationship out of balance by continuing to raise old arguments; ceaseless complaining; or unwillingness to address serious issues, such as chronic depression or other mental health issues or alcohol and substance abuse.

It is important to honestly evaluate your relationship. When you better understand qualities of healthy and unhealthy relationships and can step back to look at your own, you can decide whether to leave or limit it, or whether you want to invest in it to help the relationship become one in which you both feel supported and loved.