



# A Student Guide to Healthy Relationships

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# About this Toolkit

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## Purpose Statement

This toolkit was created to support post-secondary students in building and maintaining healthy friendships and relationships in general. Relationships can be joyful, complicated, messy, and meaningful. Post-secondary education is a period during which many people are figuring out what they want and need in their relationships. This can include not only how to set boundaries, but how to communicate openly and with care, articulate what needs have to be met, and how to end relationships when they are no longer working.

This toolkit offers evidence-based ideas, reflections, and tools to help you think about your current relationships, how to create new friendships and connections, where you want to be, and how to get there. It doesn't have all the solutions, and it's not about being perfect. Take what you want, leave what you don't. Our hope is that this guide can be a starting point for learning more about yourself and the connections that matter to you most.

As with all of our toolkits, this is a living document. As we continue to learn and grow, we will keep adding new ideas and approaches for navigating relationships in ways that feel real and respectful. We are open to and value your feedback; if you wish to complete our toolkit evaluation, please visit this [link](#).

## Positionality Statement

This toolkit was created in collaboration with individuals working across post-secondary institutions and community organizations who are in close connection with students and understand the complexities of navigating relationships on campus. Contributors brought experience from areas such as student wellness, crisis support, residence life, and Indigenous mental health. The lead on this project, Ella, is a trained social worker who works from a critical, anti-oppressive framework and brings those perspectives to this toolkit. The co-lead on this project, Julie Porrot, is the Bilingual Knowledge and Research Lead at CICMH and focused on ensuring that the content was informed by current research and accessible in both official languages. Every available effort was made to include information that speaks to the diverse ways students experience and navigate relationships. This toolkit primarily discusses relationships from a Western perspective.

## How Should I Use This Toolkit?

This toolkit is designed for students and uses a “choose your own adventure” style to support self-guided exploration. You can start wherever feels most relevant to you and there is no need to read it in order. Whether you’re thinking about starting new friendships, ending a relationship, reflecting on your values, or learning how to set boundaries, you’ll find sections that speak to different aspects of relationships. We also acknowledge that students can be from any age group, but this toolkit primarily focuses on advice for young adults. You’re welcome to print and/or download the full toolkit or any section you need.

We have also included short stories, “tableaus”, to put this information into real life contexts. These stories are not based on any specific person, but reflect some of the challenges, concerns, and successes students experience.

Please note, the recommendations and advice provided within this toolkit are meant to be an introduction to what healthy relationships look, sound, and feel like. This toolkit is not meant to replace therapy, other formalized mental health supports, or medical advice. We do not guarantee the level of success you will experience following the advice and strategies in this toolkit. Results will vary for each individual.

## Acknowledgments

This toolkit would not have been possible without the knowledge and contributions from our collaborators and reviewers:

- Michelle Denton
- Amy DeSilva
- Abby Conklin
- Emma Conner
- Micah Ricardo Riedl

We are also grateful to the students who informed this toolkit through informal interviews.

# Introduction

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## What is a Relationship?

A **relationship** is “the way two or more people are connected, or the way they behave toward each other” (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Relationships are the connections we build with others and the interactions we have with them over time.

**Interactions** are made up of one person’s behaviour and another person’s response to it. For example, one person might share information, and the other might listen, give advice, or change the subject. These responses can be verbal or non-verbal, like talking, nodding, ignoring, fighting, or kissing (Hinde, 1976).

Relationships **evolve and change** throughout our lives. For example, the relationship you had with a parent as a baby is likely very different from the one you have now as a young adult.

There also can be different approaches to relationships depending on cultural backgrounds. For example, according to a paper by Karandashev (2015), non-verbal confirmations of love may be more common among people within collectivistic cultures.

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*Collectivist cultures are cultures that value community/group needs over individual needs.*

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There are **many types** of relationships, and they involve different kinds of interactions. These might include friendships, classmates, romantic partners, sexual partners, family members, roommates, or even people you follow online. All of these are part of post-secondary student life.

For many young adults, post-secondary is a time of **major transition**. As your environment changes, your relationships may also shift - some may grow, others may fade, and new ones may begin. This is completely normal and a part of any major transition.

These relationships play a big role in **how you feel, learn, and show up every day**. They can affect your mental health and be a source of both support and stress, which isn’t always easy to navigate (Darling et al., 2007).

On campus, **relationships are everywhere**: in residence, student clubs, study groups, part-time jobs, hook-ups, long-distance relationships, shared spaces, classrooms, and more.

**Relationships can be fun**, supportive, confusing, frustrating, or all of those at once. Knowing how to navigate them can help support your mental health, academic success, and increase your sense of belonging (Lamothe et al., 1995; Pittman & Richmond, 2008; Shochet et al., 2006).

## What Are the Different Levels/Types of Relationships?

There is no single way to categorize all the different types of relationships people have. In this toolkit, we will focus mainly on friendships and romantic relationships, but let's take a brief look at other types of relationships:

### Platonic

- Not romantic or sexual
- Can be casual, long-term, and/or short-term
- Can be formed through mutual friends, hobbies, or shared classes

### Romantic

- Can be categorized as serious, casual, and/or long-distance
- Sometimes develops from a platonic relationship
- Feelings of being in love

### Sexual

- May or may not include romance
- Importance of consent and creating/maintaining boundaries
- Fun, opportunity to explore sexuality and desire

There are more relationships that don't fit clearly into categories or fit into multiple categories, and that's okay! What matters most is how a relationship makes you feel and whether it supports your values, needs, and boundaries.

### Familial

- Chosen or organized by law, guardianship, blood, or commitment – includes parents, siblings, extended relatives

### Acquaintances

- People you see or run into but don't know much about
- Classmates, teammates, coworkers, people you see on campus – more friendly relationships
- Can still shape everyday experience

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*For more information on platonic relationships, check out this infosheet on Healthy Platonic Relationships and this webinar on healthy platonic relationships.*

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# Why Do People Have Relationships?

There are lots of reasons people have relationships. People have relationships for practical support, but also to meet emotional, social, and cultural needs. Here are a few main categories that reflect why people create and maintain relationships (Vangelisti & Perlman, 2006):

**Resource sharing:** Relationships provide practical support, such as sharing tasks and responsibilities.

-> *For example, a classmate might share lecture notes when someone is sick, or a partner may cook dinner when the other is working late.*

**Social safety net:** Relationships offer emotional support and stability and prevent people from falling through the cracks.

-> *For example, Sanja checks to make sure her friend Kiki gets home safe after her night shifts.*

**Connection:** Being able to share feelings, thoughts and experiences, and for feeling less lonely.

-> *For example, I moved to a new city and met a new friend in class. Over time, we talk about homesickness, future goals, and feel connected.*

*For more information on loneliness and connection, check out this [infosheet](#).*

*For more information about homesickness, check out this [infosheet](#).*

**Being seen and understood:** Feeling accepted for who we are.

-> *For example, someone might feel loved by friends who appreciate their quirks, or are comfortable dressing authentically around their family.*

**Having fun:** Enjoying shared activities strengthens bonds.

-> *For example, playing board games with roommates or attending a concert with a sibling.*

**Cultural reasons:** Shared values and cultural experiences help people feel more connected.

-> *For example, having a roommate who enjoys cooking traditional foods from one's home country can reinforce cultural identity and mutual understanding.*

**Biological/Evolutionary reasons:** For reproduction and raising children.

-> *For example, I am building a relationship with my partner because we want to raise children together.*

## TABLEAU: Resource sharing? What does that even mean?

The following “tableau” (short scenario) is meant to take concepts and put them into everyday situations and offer a moment for reflection. The tableau’s are not based on real events or people.

Here are a few examples of resource sharing in action!

“Hey! Are you driving to the store again this week? Can I catch a ride?”

“Uhhh... This is awkward, but um...”

“Oh. You aren’t? That’s okay.”

“No, um. I AM going, I just... Paying for gas and insurance is really expensive for me right now. I’m happy to give you a ride, but could you give me some gas money in exchange?”

“Oh, yeah, that makes sense. Okay, yeah. How much—ten?”

“Ten would be great. Thank you!”

“Hey, I saw you taking notes during class today. I know you’re smart, so I bet yours are way better than mine. Would you mind sending me a copy?”

“Thanks? I think?”

“Sorry. That came out weird, but I did mean it as a compliment.”

“...”

“So, could I get a copy of your notes?”

“Sure? But it feels kind of weird for you to just ask me like this. Could we do a swap or something?”

“Okay. Is there a class you don’t really like?”

“I’m super bad at English Lit, actually. My notes make no sense.”

“I’m BOMB at lit. I can make us a shared folder online, and we can upload our notes for each other there?”

“You know what, yeah. That would actually be super helpful. What’s your email address?”

Person 1: "Is anyone in the chat cooking tonight? I'm not gonna have time, but I definitely can't get takeout. Payday isn't until later this week."

Person 2: "I'm not, but I have leftover rice and some eggs, if you wanna do something with that?"

Person 3: "I have bacon. I can contribute bacon."

Person 4: "I have soy sauce!"

Person 2: "Person 3, how much bacon?"

Person 3: "A whole pack! I got it on sale yesterday!"

Person 2: "Okay, if everyone who mentioned something brings it over to my place at like 6:30 tonight, and Person 1 picks up a cabbage on their way here, I can make us stir-fry."

Person 1: "YESSS THANK YOUEUU!"

As shown by these tableaus, resource sharing can help people within a relationship feel cared for, heard, and supported.

## A Moment to Reflect...

**What other resources can be shared within your relationships? Material? Non-material?**

**How do you reciprocate when someone shares something with you?**

## Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupts the way post-secondary students socialize on campus which, in turn, has deeply affected how students form and maintain relationships. Why is this important? Research suggests that having a social group and meaningful connections on campus with your fellow students, staff, and faculty is hugely important for a variety of reasons, including improving your mental health (Smith et al., 2022).

Even today, many classes remain virtual, making it harder for some students to connect and build relationships due to fewer chances to meet and spend time in person (Ewing et al., 2022). These changes have affected students' sense of belonging, which plays a key role in mental wellbeing, academic success, and the likelihood of seeking support when needed (Penner et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022). This is especially important for students from minority and culturally diverse backgrounds, who may already face additional barriers to connection and inclusion (Penner et al., 2021).

# Where am I Right Now?

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## Important Note About Abuse

The remaining portion of this toolkit is going to focus on actions you can take to create, repair, and end relationships. The advice and information in these sections are **not** intended to be used in relationships that are abusive or unsafe. If you are concerned that you or someone you know are in an abusive or otherwise unsafe relationship (platonic, romantic, sexual, familial, etc.) please take a look at the following resources:

### [Assaulted Women's Helpline](#)

**1-866-863-0511 or text #7233 (24/7, multilingual)**

Offering support for women who have experienced abuse. They provide counselling, emotional support, and referrals.

### [Fem'aide Support Line](#)

**1-877-336-2433 (24/7, French only)**

For French-speaking women experiencing gender-based violence, offering support and referrals.

### [Good2Talk](#)

**1-866-925-5454 (24/7) or text GOOD2TALKON to 686868**

Offering free, confidential support to post-secondary students in Ontario.

### [Kids Help Phone](#)

**1-888-579-2888 (24/7)**

Offering counselling and support for youth and young adults on issues like abuse and relationships.

### Ontario Male Survivors Line

**1-866-887-0015 (24/7)**

Offering support for male survivors of sexual abuse, both recent and historical, and referrals to counselling programs across Ontario.

### Talk4Healing Helpline for Indigenous Women

**1-855-554-4325 (24/7)**

Offering a culturally grounded helpline for Indigenous women available in 14 languages across Ontario.

#### **How do I know if I am in an abusive relationship?**

Abusers use a variety of tactics to harm their victims, isolate them from support, and maintain control over their daily lives. If you think you might be in an abusive relationship or if something doesn't feel right about the way you are being treated, reach out to a trusted person. If you don't have anyone around you that you trust, above is a list of free resources and supports that can help you. Also, below you will find a brief and non-exhaustive list of some warning signs that you might be in an abusive relationship (friendship, romantic partnership, familial relationship, or other). If you don't identify with any of the items on this list (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2013), that does not mean you are not in an abusive relationship. If something feels wrong - talk to someone. Has the person ever:

- Called you names, made jokes at your expense, or humiliated you in private or in front of others?
- Told you what to wear, or harshly criticized how you dress?
- Constantly demanded to know where you are, what you are doing, and who you are with?
- Monitored your phone calls, text messages, emails, Facebook, etc?
- Refused to let you phone your friends or family? Or forced you to put your phone on speaker/be present when you're speaking to friends or family?
- Constantly questioned your spending or taking control of your money? If you are financially dependent on them, have they unreasonably limited the money they give you or refused to tell you about your shared financial situation?
- Used physical force (push, punch, slap, choke, shake, use objects/weapons, etc.)?
- Threatened to kill you or others if you leave? Threatened to kill themselves if you leave?

- Used your religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate or control you, or to justify their violence towards you? Denied you freedom of religion by refusing to let you practice your spiritual beliefs or insisting that you follow theirs?
- Blamed you for their hurtful behaviour and told you it was your fault?
- Destroyed your personal possessions?
- Showed up unexpectedly, when they were not invited and not welcome, to social or work events?
- Insisted you use drugs or alcohol against your will?
- Hidden your keys or purse so you can't leave the house?

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*For more information about abusive relationships and the tactics abusers use to keep you in the relationship, check out the further reading section at the end of this toolkit and visit Love is Respect. Love is Respect is a project by the National Domestic Violence Hotline in the US. It aims to provide information, support and advocacy on romantic relationships to people between 13 and 26.*

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For more information on intimate partner violence, check out this [infosheet](#).

## Campus Spotlight:

Many post-secondary institutions in Ontario have centers dedicated to sexual violence prevention and support. Below is an example:

The [Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support & Education](#) at **York University** offers support and resources if a student or someone they know has experienced sexual or gender-based violence.

For more information on Sexual Violence Response on Campus, please see our [toolkit](#).



## Reflection Exercise

How are you doing right now? How are you feeling about the friends and people in your life? The first part of this toolkit is going to focus on these questions. Before we can make an action plan (a to-do list to get us from where we are to where we want to be) we need to stop, take a look around, and take notice of our current circumstances.

One way to begin this process is Pod-Mapping. Pod-Mapping is an exercise to help give you a better sense of all the pieces and people that make up your support system. Whether they are friends, family, health care practitioners, classmates, or people on campus, this reflection exercise can give you a visual representation of where they are in relation to you. Originally developed by disability activist Mia Mingus (2016), this exercise is meant to help you build and strengthen your community.

Pod-Mapping can help you understand who is close to you, who you would like to bring into your inner circle, and what gaps you might want to consider filling.

Sometimes we refer to our “community of support” but what do we really mean by that? Who makes up that community? This exercise can give you more concrete and clear understandings of where you are.

Click [here](#) for the Pod Mapping worksheet and instructions.

### Why is this important?

We all have different needs when it comes to relationships. Some people like to have a few close friends, others like to maintain a wide network of acquaintances. There are an infinite number of combinations of intimate and distant relationships. Support networks are made up of a wide range of people who you may interact with on a professional or personal level. Some people in your network may be very event or location specific, while others may be your go-to for a wide range of circumstances. However, if we don't have a clear understanding of who we have near us and who, perhaps, is missing, it will be a much harder task to get our pod to where we want it to be.

You will also find that your Pod-Map changes constantly - with people moving in and out of your life as both people's needs shift and change. Don't worry about making it perfect or neat and tidy. Make it make sense to you.

Once you have completed this exercise, let's move into the next section where we talk about how to create relationships (bring people into your Pod), how to repair relationships (move them around in your Pod), and how to end relationships (remove them from your Pod).

### How are you feeling after completing this exercise?

Stop for a moment, do some breathing, and think about how this Pod-Mapping exercise has made you feel. Maybe you feel neutral (that is okay!), but maybe the exercise has brought things up for you - this is also normal and okay! Systematically reviewing the people in your life isn't a simple data gathering exercise. It requires honesty and vulnerability. Be patient, kind, and compassionate with yourself as you feel whatever has come up for you.

For information on emotional regulation, check out this [infosheet](#).

## TABLEAU - Seeking support from your pod

Myung is meeting with his advisor, Sean. It is almost the end of his first semester at university, and his advisor wants to check in. As Myung settles into one of the chairs in Sean's office, he slumps backwards a little. Sean furrows his brow and leans across the desk.

"Hey—what's going on? School stuff, or other stuff?"

Myung closes his eyes for a second. "Other stuff, I guess. Technically. My research job."

Sean sits back. "Is Professor Call giving you issues?"

"No, actually. It's my co-worker." Myung goes on to describe exactly how difficult it has become to work with Tatiana, the other student doing research for Professor Call. Tatiana has insisted from the start that she doesn't need help from Myung, either on her projects or when she is reviewing her work. But, Myung explains, when he does what Tatiana has asked and doesn't offer to help, just focuses on his own work, she seems to get angry at him. She won't look him in the eye, talks to him from over her shoulder instead of face-to-face, and keeps her responses short. Almost sharp, honestly. Myung doesn't know what to do.

"I'd be happy to help her!" he explains to Sean. "We're working on really interesting stuff, but the workload is big. I could certainly use some help from her sometimes. But I don't feel like I can ask for help because she told me she didn't want my help. But then it feels like she hates me? And working in the office has just gotten so awkward. I hate it. I can't read her mind AND respect what she asked me to do. You can't have it both ways!"

Sean nods slowly. "If I were in your shoes as a student, I probably would've done the same thing. But now, having worked a couple of jobs and had different kinds of coworkers, I might do things a little differently. Would you like some recommendations from me? If not, completely fine. I can certainly offer sympathy. This sounds very frustrating."

Myung shakes his head, and explains that, no, he would really like some recommendations, please and thanks. Sean grins and nods. "Listen," he says. "When you can't be sure of how someone's feeling, but you know that their feelings are having a negative impact on everyone's wellbeing, you're allowed to ask about it. Not like, 'hey, what's wrong with you?' but more 'hey, I feel like things have been stressful in here lately. Could I help you out with anything? Or is there anything you need?' Your experience is not their responsibility, but how they treat you IS. When in doubt, try some gentle curiosity, maybe. You're allowed to want things to be better."

In this tableau, Myung seeks support from one of many people in his life about a tough situation at work. Sean may not be a close friend or family member, but is still able to provide advice and reassurance.

## A Moment to Reflect...

**Is there someone in your pod that you haven't considered going to for support? Why not?**

**What worked well about this interaction between Myung and Sean?**

## Common Relationship Concerns

### Enmeshed Relationships

Have you ever found yourself in a relationship (friendship, romantic, or otherwise) where you can't seem to put your needs first? You may be in what's called an "enmeshed relationship". An enmeshed relationship is when you are "overly connected and [need] to meet the other person's needs so badly that [you] lose touch with [your] own needs, goals, desires, and feelings" (Marie, 2021). Enmeshed relationships are missing vital boundaries.

You may be in an enmeshed relationship if (Marie, 2021):

- You don't feel in touch with your feelings because you're concentrating on another person's needs
- You believe it's your responsibility to save, protect, or serve another person — or someone is treating you that way
- You're giving up hobbies or interests to adapt to the lifestyle or expectations of another
- Your relationship determines your happiness, self-esteem, or sense of self
- You experience another person's emotions as if they were your own
- You're replacing other relationships with your partner's or family's
- You suppress your own feelings to avoid disagreement or conflict
- You can't make a decision without your partner or family's approval, or when you make an independent decision, you face backlash, guilt, or shame
- You feel uncomfortable spending time away from your partner or family
- There's a lack of privacy between you and your parents, family, or partner

Losing touch with yourself, your needs, and your boundaries is not a healthy place to be. If you think you might be in an enmeshed relationship, consider the following next steps:

**Recognize the problem** - Take some time to reflect on the points above. Do they sound and feel familiar to you? There is no need to rush to conclusions but it is important to take this reflection seriously. Recognizing that there is a problem in your relationship is the first step to addressing it and making things better.

**Think about boundaries** - Try thinking of a past or current relationship (friend, family, romantic, etc.) where you felt safe, secure, and cared for. What boundaries from that other relationship made you feel safe, secure, and cared for? If you haven't had a lot of experience with healthy boundaries (totally normal!), talk to a trusted person about what boundaries they have with others that make them feel good. For more information about boundaries, check out this [infosheet](#).

**Communicate** - Once you have done some careful thinking (and maybe even jotted down some notes), it is time to consider how you will communicate them to the person you are in an enmeshed relationship with. Kindness and directness can be a powerful combination in these interactions. Try your best to be clear about what is not working for you and what actions you hope both parties can take to change the dynamic. Take a look at this [infosheet](#) on How to Have Curious and Courageous Conversations and the section below on Relationship Check-Ins for more information on communication.

**Be prepared for resistance** - These conversations are hard to have and hard to hear. Be prepared for the person you are speaking with to have objections and maybe have some big feelings about what you are saying. Remember, part of breaking out of enmeshed relationships is developing a

tolerance to disappointing the person you are in a relationship with. Whatever happens in this conversation, you are taking steps to change a situation that is not working for you and for that, you can be proud of yourself.

**Get support** - Consider talking to a trusted person or a professional such as a therapist or counsellor about the challenges you are facing. You don't have to tackle this alone. Especially with enmeshed relationships which can sometimes make you lose part of your sense of self, advocating for your needs and boundaries can be challenging. Consider leaning on your support network in this process to get other perspectives, validation, and advice.

**Remember what comes next** - Undoing an enmeshed relationship is not about hurting someone or throwing a relationship away, it is about reclaiming your independence, identity, and re-establishing healthy boundaries that will positively affect your mental health and well-being. Keeping in mind all the positives that are waiting for you at the end of a tough process can help you stay motivated and on track when things feel overwhelming.

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*For more information on enmeshed relationships, go to the Further Reading section at the end of this toolkit and check out an article written by Simone Marie and reviewed by Jennifer Litner, PhD, LMFT, CST. It discusses what enmeshed relationships can look like among couples and families, specific signs of enmeshed relationships and what you can do if you are in one.*

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## Toxic Relationships

Toxic relationships can be hard to spot at first (or sometimes it's really obvious!) but either way, toxic relationships can be really damaging to your self-esteem, mental health, and even your physical health. Toxicity can look like a lot of things. Sometimes it can look like (Han, 2025):

- Lying
- Gossiping
- Name-calling or bullying
- Overt selfish behaviour or self-centeredness
- Jealous or controlling behaviour

Toxicity can show up in the way people act and/or the way they communicate. If you find yourself in a relationship where you feel drained by the other person and when you try to bring up your concerns, you are met with anger and denial, you may be in a toxic relationship.

Sometimes it can be hard to tell if a relationship has gone from toxic to abusive. If you are unsure, always talk about it with a trusted person or professional such as a therapist or counsellor. You also don't have to wait for a relationship to meet a threshold of harm to leave. Leaving is allowed regardless of if you're sure about calling it toxic or abusive.

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*You can also read more about the overlap and differences of toxicity and abuse in our Further Reading section in an article from the Gottman Institute which discusses characteristics of a toxic relationships, the key differences between toxic and abusive relationships, the impact of toxic relationships on physical, psychological and social health, as well as common warning signs. The article wraps up with how boundaries can play a role in supporting ourselves, as well as the many ways of having a healing process.*

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## TABLEAU - Is this a toxic relationship? Friends who offload and lack curiosity about your inner world.

**Talia:** OHMYGOD, Mari, thank God you answered your phone, I've been calling you all afternoon. Why didn't you pick up?

**Mari:** Hey, yeah, I was in class, sorry! I just stepped out to go to the bathroom so I could call back real quick. I'm here now. What's wrong? What do you need?

**Talia:** Listen, I just got off the bus, and I swear to God, the woman next to me was taking up so much room, it was SO disrespectful, holy—

**Mari:** Wait. I'm asking what's wrong? Because you called me five times in a row?

**Talia:** What, I can't talk to my best friend?

**Mari:** Talia, I literally told you that Tuesdays are my lab days. They're important.

**Talia:** Oh, right! Your super-special doctor class!

**Mari:** It's an organic chemistry class that I need to pass in order to actually become pre-med officially. It's a big deal, girl. A HUGE deal. I can't just take a phone call during it.

**Talia:** Dang, okay. Chill.

**Mari:** So, is there an emergency, or not?

**Talia:** I mean. No. Not if you're going to make our friendship all about whether there is a good enough reason for me to call you or not. Since your career comes first or whatever.

**Mari:** Talia, did you literally disrupt the class that can literally make or break my chances at getting into med school because you forgot about it? You've been doing this kind of thing for a while now, I really want you to think about where I'm coming from.

**Talia:** This conversation is not giving me what I need right now. Go back to your stupid class.

Bye.

Mari's and Talia's interaction showcases a situation where there isn't respect or consideration from Talia towards Mari's capacity and needs. Mari is not feeling heard or valued of her priorities and boundaries.

### A Moment to Reflect...

**How would you feel if you were in Mari's position?**

**How do you think Talia was feeling before, during, and after the conversation?**

**What do you wish Talia had done differently?**

**What of Talia's behaviour do you relate to? What of Mari's behaviour do you relate to?**

## Situationships

“Situationships” are usually romantic or sexual relationships that live in a gray area between casual and committed, sometimes between a friendship and romantic partnership. Situationships are relationships that (Cleveland Clinic, 2023):

- Don’t have a mutually agreed upon “label”
- Can be confusing to one or both parties involved
- Often have fewer boundaries or parameters
- Put an emphasis on physical intimacy
- Often include irregular or inconsistent communication
- Don’t have clear obligations, exclusivity, or commitment

If you are comfortable and consent to a lack of formalized and discussed boundaries for your relationship, that is totally fine (hopefully it is fun and enjoyable!). You can also consent to that for a period of time and then decide later that you would like more clarity about the relationship. There is nothing inherently wrong with situationships unless it is negatively affecting you. Problems arise when a party is not comfortable with, and does not consent to, being in a situationship. If that is the case, communication is key.

Initiating a conversation with the other person in a situationship can be hard, scary, and vulnerable. For a more detailed guide on how to approach these conversations, check out our [infosheet](#) on having Curious and Courageous Conversations.

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*For more information about consent, check out the Further Reading section for an article from Toronto Metropolitan University.*

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## Potential Pros and Cons of Situationships

PROS	CONS
Lack of time obligation	One-sidedness
No commitment (can be a pro or con)	Feeling undervalued
Flexible	Mixed signals
Fun	Lack of transparency
Freedom to explore	Limited long-term planning
Excitement in ambiguity	Emotional insecurity and vulnerability

## A Moment to Reflect...

**What are some other pros and/or cons you've experienced in situationships?**

**If you find yourself in a situationship, reflect on if your needs are being met. Is the dynamic healthy for you? Does it align with your values? Do you feel safe and respected?**

**What would you need from the other person in order to healthily engage in a situationship?**

## Campus Spotlight:

Laurentian University organizes a [Consent Awareness Week](#) for campus community members to engage in discussions focused on consent, healthy relationships and sexual violence response and prevention. Throughout the week, they have booths with activities, lunch and learn, training for faculty, staff and students, self-defense classes, and more.

# Where do I Want to be?

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## Self-Reflection on Values

We make and keep relationships for all sorts of reasons (head back to our introduction for more on this). Sometimes we make friends over a common interest or hobby, sometimes proximity and location helps us build a relationship; but at the core of many fulfilling, close relationships, there is a sense of shared values. What are values? What are shared values? Let's take a look at what a value is, how we might uncover ours, and how we can look for them in others.

“Values guide our behaviors, decisions, and actions” (Jeffrey, 2024).

“Values are things that are important to you” (The University of Edinburgh, 2024). We often name our values so we can have a shared language that others can understand. To uncover our values we may ask ourselves: What do I enjoy doing? How do I like to relate to others? What is important to me? These are all big and broad questions but they are the beginnings of learning about our values.

### Difference between values and core values:

We all have lots of values that help guide us through our lives, but a few of those are *really* important to us to the point where we find it hard to do things that conflict with them. Those 2-4 *really* important values are our core values. If you find yourself in a situation that makes you uncomfortable, confused, and distressed, part of the reason for that may be that it conflicts with your core values. Maybe you are being asked to lie about something and one of your core values is honesty. Or perhaps someone is encouraging you to ditch a friend and one of your core values is loyalty. Pay attention to those big reactions or think about times you have had them in the past - they may help you uncover your core values - the things you are not willing to compromise on.

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*Check out the Further Reading section at the end of this toolkit for an article by TapRooT that outlines how you may determine what your values are by providing a list of examples, as well as helping you identify what themes emerge from the values you have selected so you are able to identify your core values.*

*You can also check out a four-page document by The University of Utah, Student Success Coaches, which provides a step-by-step process of identifying your values by reflecting on times that have made you the happiest, most proud, and most fulfilled.*

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Values reflect our identity and they help us understand ourselves, our motivations, and our priorities. Values and sometimes core values, will shift over time and space.

### **What do you want to feel like?**

When you are in a place where you are intentionally trying to make friends and create connections, you may be inclined to ask yourself - what kind of friend do I want? Instead, you might want to ask yourself: how do I want to *feel* in a friendship or relationship? Consider the following questions:

- Do you want to feel deeply listened to? Heard and understood?
- Are you looking for someone to be excited with you about things you have going on in your life? Someone who can help amplify feelings of joy and excitement?
- Do you want someone to be calm and quiet with you in times of reflection, grief, and sadness?

Perhaps you want someone who makes you feel multiple things, that's okay too! Your answers to these questions can help you get a better understanding of what kinds of people you would like to have in your life.

For more information on critical self-reflection, check out this [infosheet](#).

## **How do I Want to Use Technology in My Relationships?**

How do you feel about the way you use technology (cellphones, social media, etc.) in your relationships? Do you struggle with feeling like you always have to be available to answer calls and messages? Do you get overwhelmed with notifications and managing relationships virtually? Now might be a good time to reflect on how you use technology in your relationships. Technology is a tool and it is up to you to decide how you want to use it. Consider the following steps:

### **1. Reflect** - ask yourself the following questions:

- How are you using technology in your relationships right now (ex. texting, posting on social media)?
- What is working about how you use technology in your relationships?
- What isn't working?
- Ideally, if all societal expectations were removed (ex. my grid should show I have friends and do things, people should respond to texts within a set number of hours/ days), how would you like to use technology in your relationships?

If there is a big difference between how you are currently using tech in your relationships and how you would, ideally, like to be using it, it may be time to set some new rules both for yourself and for the people you are communicating with about how technology will be used in your relationships moving forward.

**Quick note:** Some people are available 24/7 via their phones and are content with that - that is fine! It is also okay to not want to be available 24 hours a day or even 2 hours a day. How available you are through your phone or other pieces of tech is a personal preference. You are allowed to set the rules AND you are allowed to change them whenever you want.

## 2. Set expectations

Now that you have done some reflecting on how you are using technology in your relationships and how you would like to use technology in your relationships, it is time to communicate some new expectations with the people involved. Some examples of expectations you can set around your use of technology in your relationships:

- I don't check my phone after 10pm/I put my phone on Do Not Disturb after 10pm
- I won't answer my phone unless you call twice in a row or text me in advance
- I don't like it when you send 4 messages in a row instead of just 1 long message
- I only check social media once a day so I may not see your posts/stories right away
- I don't have social media so I can only be reached by text
- I don't like having long conversations over text OR I prefer to have long conversations over text rather than in person or over the phone
- I don't want to commute to school on days I don't have class so I'd rather do plans (studying, socializing) over video call on those days
- If you want me to like your specific post, send it to me
- Don't share photos of me on social media without asking first
- If you want to talk to me about demonstrations or protests, message me on an encrypted app

## 3. Stick to the plan

Some people in your life might be upset, confused, or annoyed by the expectations you are setting with your technology use. While this can be upsetting, it is not your responsibility to shift your practices based on someone else's needs. Keep doing what you need to do to maintain your mental health and a healthy relationship to technology. Don't sacrifice your boundaries to make someone else more comfortable. If someone has a persistent issue with the way you use technology in your relationship, consider having a relationship check-in which can be found in the next section of the toolkit.

## 4. Repeat

Keep reflecting on how you use technology in your relationships and revise your expectations accordingly. You are always allowed to change your mind!

Are you feeling like you might be addicted to your phone or social media? Check out our infosheet on [Social Media and Cellphone Addiction](#) for more information.

## **TABLEAU: How do other people use technology in their friendships? Here are the top 3 people I text and what we text about:**

### **Person #1: my brother**

Honestly, I text him the most because I am his caretaker. I'm three years older. I make sure he gets to school, he gets home, he eats, he does his homework, etc. If my parents forget, I sign his report cards and stuff. I have never tried "going to him" for something, but I like his sense of humour when he's not being super annoying. I could try going to him when I need a laugh, or something to pick my mood up when I'm feeling stressed or sad.

### **Person #2: my friend Kali**

I go to her for everything. Literally. But what I appreciate most about her is that she doesn't let me get away with stuff. Like, if I tell her a guy has been ignoring my texts and it's messing with me, then the next time he DOES text she's immediately critical. I can go to her when I need someone to be direct with me, because she cares. She wants me to be okay, and shows that with her ideas and feedback.

### **Person #3: my group chat with the girls on the pick-up basketball team**

The chat is mostly memes, but sometimes, folks will share about stuff they have going on. I've noticed that when one of them shares about having trouble with class, someone else will have a recommendation for studying, or even offer to tutor them. I bet that I could message the group when I'm feeling disrespected by a prof, or like I'm doing badly in a class, and they could support me.

These scenarios show how different people in your life can serve different purposes through text and other online formats. Connection through technology can be cultivated in many ways.

## **A Moment to Reflect...**

**Who are the top 3 people you message on your phone?**

**Are you getting what you need from those 3 people/chats?**

**How has technology affected your relationships, both positively and negatively?**

## How do I Want to Manage my “Friend-time”?

Maybe making new friends isn’t your goal or focus - maybe it’s managing the friends you currently have! Do you find yourself having trouble juggling all the different aspects of your life (friends, family, school, work, down time)? Are you feeling distressed about not meeting certain “expectations” around how you should spend your time? Now might be a good time to reflect carefully on how you spend your time and how you might like to spend it in the future.

The following exercise is adapted from the Public Service Alliance of Canada’s exercise entitled “Caring for Labour Activists - Time Management” (2022) which was originally used for labour activists to budget their time between competing demands so they could achieve their activism goals, live by their values, and avoid burnout. The original manual and exercise can be found in the Further Reading section at the end of this toolkit.

The point of this exercise is to think about your time as a precious commodity that you intentionally distribute amongst all the different areas of your life. It’s basically a “time-budget”. This activity is not meant to result in a rigid schedule that remains unchanged forever. The core idea is looking at how you can realistically spend your time doing what you have to do and what you want to do. It is a tool to help balance commitments, uncover what is important to you, and (hopefully) avoid burnout (academic, professional, social).

Remember, if you are not able to allocate time (or as much time as you would like) in the areas that are important to you because of the demands of work, school, family, or health reasons - that is not a personal failure. There are many things in our daily lives that we simply *have* to do in order to survive and that can leave little to no time to do the things we *want* to do. These systemic forces take time to change and are largely outside of our immediate control. It is normal for that to bring up feelings of fear, overwhelm, hopelessness, and dread. Be gentle with yourself as you go through this exercise. Take breaks, talk about it with a trusted person or professional, and take care.

As you go through this exercise, ask yourself:

- What can I control?
- What can I say “no” to?
- What can I say “yes” to?
- How would I like to see my time-budget change in the short, medium, and long-term?
- When would I like to review my time-budget next to see where I am at?

Click [here](#) for the Time Budget worksheet and instructions.

# How do I Get There?

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## Making Friends

### Where/How Do People Make Friends?

There are lots of ways to make friends, some more obvious than others. Here are a few common ways people make friends:

- On campus - in class, during on campus events, in residence
- At work or volunteering
- Through housing (e.g. roommates)
- Through friends or family members
- At parties/social gatherings
- In clubs or study groups
- During group projects
- Joining sport teams
- Through shared interests (e.g. table-top gaming)
- Workshops/ extra-curricular classes (e.g. knitting circle)
- Community work (mutual aid groups, protests, demonstrations)
- Religious and/or spiritual gatherings
- Community-specific celebrations (Diwali, Dyke March, Carnival, Nowruz, Mad Pride)
- Dating (some people that don't work for dating work as friends!)
- Being helpful (offering to help a friend move can strengthen your connection to them and introduce you to other people in their network)
- Volunteering

## Campus Spotlight:

The [Healthy Relationships Program for 2S/LGBTQIA+ Youth](#) is based at **Western University** that offers evidence-based initiatives promoting healthy relationships and addressing unique challenges like identity invalidation and discrimination.

[Humber College](#) created a video series to learn more about setting healthy relationships boundaries and prioritizing self-care for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. They offer resources for survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and gender-based violence (GBV).

The **Student Union** at [Sheridan College](#) organized a speed dating and movie night with snacks on Valentine's Day for anyone who is single.

### **How do I Navigate Fear and Anxiety When Trying to Make Friends?**

What if they think I am weird? Navigating anxiety, fear, and feelings of rejection while trying to create relationships can add a whole other layer to what may already be a challenging process. First and foremost, it is important to remember that experiencing anxiety is both normal and extremely common, both in general and while creating relationships.

Acknowledging that you are experiencing anxiety is the first step to managing it. Next, consider reflecting on when and how you experience anxiety in the context of relationship building. You may ask yourself:

- When does my anxiety come up?
- When does my anxiety feel most intense?
- Does my physical environment impact my anxiety (ex. Outside vs inside, crowded space vs. empty space, public vs private setting)?
- Am I more able to manage my anxiety with one-on-one interactions, small groups, or large groups?
- Are there times of day where it is easier for me to spend time interacting with others/ making friends/ creating relationships?

Considering these questions may help you find ways to lessen your anxiety and/ or provide more comfortable environments in which you can explore relationships. Remember - it is always okay to pace yourself, take it slow, and take a step back if things get overwhelming.

Anxiety is so common - consider sharing how you are feeling with others. They may be feeling the same way and/or have tools that help them tame their own anxiety to share with you. Anxiety can feel so isolating and lonely; sometimes sharing with others can help lessen the load.

For more information about anxiety and panic attacks, take a look at these [two infosheets](#).

## **Campus Spotlight:**

The [Sexual Education Centre](#) at the [University of Toronto](#) is a non-for-profit, volunteer-run student service group that offers phone support, peer support, and resources around human sexuality, sexual diversity and sexual orientation in a welcoming environment.

# Repairing Relationships

## Relationship Check-Ins

All types of relationships need maintenance. Regular maintenance looks like communicating, sharing feelings, and spending time together. But sometimes relationships need a more intentional “check-in”. If you have a relationship that is feeling hard or just not right, maybe it’s time to set a Relationship Check-In.

What is the purpose of a relationship check-in? It is a time for you and the other person to get together for a purposeful conversation about what is working, what is not working, and how you can work together to make things better. These conversations can bring up a lot of emotions for both parties so it is important to prepare and remember that having difficult conversations, especially ones that involve emotional vulnerability, takes time, patience, and practice. Consider these steps for before, during, and after a relationship check-in.

### BEFORE:

- **Think carefully** about what you want to communicate. Make notes, talk it through with trusted people, consider your words.
- Think about **what you hope to come out of this conversation**. Are you hoping that an action is taken afterwards or do you just want validation and to be heard? Going into a conversation with a clear(er) picture of your needs will help you stay on track. Of course, this can change through the conversation and in consultation with the other person but at least beginning with an initial idea can help bring clarity to a space that so easily gets jumbled up.
- Envision how you will **compassionately and clearly communicate** what you want to say. Remember all that stuff about “I statements” where we communicate from our perspective instead of blaming? That can really help express tough feelings without the other person feeling like they are being blamed and need to defend themselves.
- Get in the **mindset of curiosity and care**. If you are feeling off in a relationship, sometimes the other person is too. When we approach conversations with curiosity, we open the door to the perspectives and thoughts of the other person. Those perspectives and thoughts are crucial to solving problems in your relationship. And remember, it is not enough to just be curious - we have to care about what the other person is saying and honour their experience.

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*For more information about "I Statements" check out our Further Reading section at the end of this toolkit for a resource from Boston University about how to form statements and what their purpose is.*

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- **Invite the person for a conversation.** No one wants to receive a text that just says, “We need to talk.” as the ambiguity and seriousness can cause unnecessary anxiety and stress. Try giving some context so the other person has an idea of what to expect. For example, “Hey, are you free today or tomorrow? I want to have a conversation with you over the phone. I have been feeling like a few things in our friendship aren’t quite working the way I want it to and I want to talk to you about it because I care about this relationship.”
- **Consider where and when.** If the conversation is going to happen in person, consider the location carefully. Is it quiet? Private? Will you be able to stay there longer if needed or will you have to leave by a certain time? For time of day, if you can, try to make sure you have time to decompress (i.e. walking, listening to music, journaling, exercising, etc.) after as these conversations can be emotionally exhausting and you may need time to think, reflect, and rest.

## DURING:

- Do your best to **remain engaged** in the conversation through active listening. Active listening can look like eye contact and nodding along but it can also look like asking clarifying questions to make sure you have understood the person correctly. You can also try rephrasing what the person has just said back to them to check that you have understood what they are trying to say.
- If you find yourself getting distracted or overwhelmed during the conversation, you can always ask to **take a break** and/ or use something to keep your hands busy such as a fidget or a pen and paper for doodling.
- At the end of the conversation have a mini check-in. You can both **share how you are feeling in the moment**, discuss or confirm any action items there are, and set a time to check-in later on.

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*If eye contact is hard for you, not appropriate in your culture, or you find yourself putting more work into showing you're engaged than being engaged, get creative and communicate. For example, you could try, "I know I'm not looking at you, it helps me to listen. You are welcome to check-in and ask if I heard you, but I promise I'm listening and want to hear more." Or "I know listening looks like nodding and quick responses for you, but I can show you I am listening through taking notes and responding after we take a two-minute break."*

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## AFTER:

- Jot down some quick notes of how the conversation went. Sometimes in intense conversations, our memory doesn't always work as well. Write down anything that stood out to you, any action items that were mutually agreed upon, how you feel, if there is something you want to do differently next time, and any other thoughts you think you might want to reflect on later. Don't worry about writing in full sentences or having proper grammar and spelling. These notes are for you only.
- When you have recovered and rested, take action on those items that were discussed. Perhaps you need to have even more conversations with that person. Be proactive.
- Check-in with the person. If you agreed on a post-conversation check-in time, make sure you honour it. Further check-ins can also be really helpful because reactions have had time to subside and give way to clarity.

*For more information about how to have difficult conversations with someone you care about, check out the Further Reading Section at the end of this toolkit*

## TABLEAU: How do I tell my current roommate and friend that I can't do this again next year?

Julio lives with his best friend Miles in their university's dorms. They've been close for years, but living together has shown Julio that he really doesn't like Miles as a roommate. Miles seems to take up the whole room, even when he's just sitting in the corner at his desk, gaming. He wears really aggressive cologne on top of aftershave, his clothes are on the floor, and he only plays games with headphones on when Julio asks him to. Otherwise, the game is blaring for the entire dorm to hear.

Julio knows that if he wants to keep being friends with Miles, he needs to not live with him. But he and Miles have never had a conversation like this before. How do you even tell someone that they're a bad roommate but a good friend? Julio texts his friend Khalil. Khalil has three brothers, and has told a lot of stories about the fights they've had. He would probably have some ideas. Right?

"Give Miles space," Khalil advises, before Julio can even finish his story. "Tell him what's real—he's pissing you off, but also that he's important to you. You want a different roommate, that's going to hurt his feelings. Let him feel that. All you can do is respect him while taking care of you." Julio pulls out his phone. Together, he and Khalil make a list of the things Julio wants to make sure he says. Then Khalil has him practice saying them aloud. "It's easier if you do it a few times, first," he explains. "It kind of gets you used to doing it."

That evening, Julio sits down with Miles after classes to tell him he will be finding a new roommate for the next school year. Miles is furious. Julio is only part way through explaining himself when Miles storms out of the room. Julio wants to give his friend the space to be upset, like Khalil recommended, but also wants to finish expressing himself. He texts Miles, explaining that he values their friendship, but living together has made that hard. By living separately next year, they can just be friends, again. Julio adds that he understands that this isn't fun news to get. "I'm going to leave our room now," he concludes, "and not come back until 10pm tonight, so you can have some space to think about things. I'm sorry this has turned out this way."

Julio spends the evening in the student lounge. Miles doesn't answer his text, but Julio sees that it's been read. A little after 10pm, he goes back to the room. Miles is there, gaming at his computer. He turns when Julio comes in, and says, "I get what you're saying, but I'm still really upset. Can we talk about this in a few days? Like, on Friday?"

"I'm not going to change my mind," Julio says. "We can definitely talk about the situation and how we're both feeling, but I'm still going to find a new roommate for next year."

Miles's shoulders slump, but he nods. "Okay. Yeah. I'm mad, but I appreciate the honesty, I guess." He turns back to his game. "We can talk it out on Friday."

This situation shows the complex nature of relationships and how some people might be great as friends but not as something else. Julio cares about Miles but recognizes that he is not what he looks for in a roommate. The conversation they have is respectful, allows for emotions to be expressed and has a time-frame for returning to the conversation after some space to reflect and emotionally regulate.

For more information on how to get along with your roommate, check out this [infosheet](#) (and check this one out on creating a [Roommate Agreement](#)).

## A Moment to Reflect...

**What tools/supports did Julio use to have this difficult conversation?**

**How do you think Miles felt before, during, and after the conversation?**

**What do you think about the advice Khalil gave Julio? Do you agree? Disagree?**

# Ending Relationships

## Romantic Breakups

Here are some tips on dealing with romantic breakups, adapted from University of Alberta's "Surviving A Relationship Break-Up - Top 20 Strategies" (Maertz, n.d.):

### Don't fight your feelings

A break-up is often accompanied by a wide variety of powerful and negative feelings including sadness, grief, loss, anger, confusion, resentment, jealousy, fear and regret, to mention a few. If you try to ignore or suppress these feelings, you will likely only prolong the normal grieving process, and sometimes get totally stuck in it. Healthy coping means both identifying these feelings and allowing ourselves to experience these feelings. As hard as it is, you cannot avoid the pain of loss, but realize that by experiencing these feelings, they will decrease over time and you will speed up the grieving process. Naming feelings is often the first step to taming them.

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*For more information about grief and loss, take a look at our infosheet*

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### Avoid personalizing the loss

Try not to blame yourself for the relationship ending. Much of the pain of a break-up comes from seeing the loss as your fault and regretting the choices you made while in the relationship. This process of self-blame can be extremely damaging for your mental health. Do your best to see the ending of your relationship as a result of conflicting needs and incompatibilities that are no one's fault. Each person in a relationship is trying to get their own needs met and some couples are able to help fulfill each other's needs and others are not. Communicating and negotiating those needs is hard, takes practice, and is not always possible to achieve.

### Give yourself some slack

Expect that you are not going to be functioning at full capacity for a time due to the distress you are experiencing. Therefore, it is okay to lighten your load for a while. This might mean allowing yourself a break from studying, or studying less than you usually would. It could also mean withdrawing from a class if you're really struggling. Although some of these options may sound drastic, they will give you more time to adequately process your loss. It may also mean expecting that your grades will go down a bit and not judging yourself for this.

### Reflect on what you can learn from the relationship

We can learn a lot from all the relationships we have been in. It's very helpful after a relationship ends to spend some time thinking about and perhaps even writing down what you have learned so that you can take those learnings with you into your relationships in the future. However, don't use this as an opportunity to beat yourself up or blame yourself for the relationship not lasting. Learning promotes growth, while self-blame (i.e. feeling you're a failure) only extends your suffering.

### Consider performing a closure ritual

At some point in the process of letting go and grieving the loss, it can be very helpful to have a closure ritual. This symbolic gesture can be very meaningful if it is well thought out and considered. This could involve such things as writing a letter to yourself or to your ex with your final words about the relationship, removing all of the photos you have of your ex, or burning some reminders of your ex in a ceremonial fashion

## Friend Breakups

How do you break up with a friend? In a romantic relationship we might text our partner the ol' "we need to talk" message and they would probably have an idea about what social script is about to happen. But with friends? Well...it depends. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to ending a friendship but here are some things to consider.

Ending a friendship is an activity that exists on a spectrum from explicit communication to 100% ghosting, with a slow fade-out in between. It is up to you what:

- Feels right
- Is aligned with your values
- Is practically doable (i.e. maybe you can't "fade-out" because you see this person every day at work, on campus, or in class)
- Is safe

These are hard things to balance. Again, consider reaching out to other members of your support network to talk about it and strategize.

If you are the friend being broken up with and it is feeling hard, that is a normal feeling. Friend breakups can be hard for many reasons, including (Zarrabi, 2024):

- Not being ready to let go of the past/ the relationship
- Abrupt endings are jarring and can be confusing
- Fear of never having a friend like this again
- Wondering if it is your fault or something you did wrong
- Feelings of alienation - wondering if anyone else has ever experienced this before?
- You continue to see what they are up to through social media

Return to your Pod/ network of support to lean on during these times of transition and hurt. Talking about the feelings you are having and reflecting on the relationship are crucial steps on the road to feeling better, learning from the experience, and moving forward with more knowledge.

### **Do we Want to Try to Fix Whatever is Wrong? Have we Tried?**

It is perfectly normal to find yourself in a friendship that isn't working for you. It can be unfortunate, but you are not required to try to fix it. You can if you want, but you are also always allowed to walk away. However, if you do want to try and repair it, start by taking some time to think carefully about what is not working. You may want to write down some notes on your phone, computer, or a piece of paper to help you get clarity and/or remember your thoughts when you head to the next step. Try asking yourself:

- How do I feel when I am with this friend?
- How do I feel after I spend time with or speak to this friend?
- Is there something specific they say or do that makes me upset? Angry? Sad? Afraid? Annoyed? Ashamed? Guilty?
- Do they seem to have similar values to me? (refer to values exercise)
- What do other trusted people in my life say about them?
- What is my gut telling me?

After you have done some thinking and reflecting (and don't forget that reaching out to people whose opinion you trust is always an option!) go back to the question: Do I want to try and fix this? If the answer is still yes, consider setting up a conversation.

Conversations can look differently for different people. They can happen in person, they can happen in a video call, they can happen through texts or voice notes, they can happen on the phone...the list goes on. Consider both yourself and the person you want to speak with. How can we set the stage for this conversation to ensure that everyone's needs are taken into consideration? Sometimes writing a letter and reading it to the person is helpful. Sometimes writing a letter and handing it to them to read on their own and then discuss later is helpful. Consider your approach. These conversations can be hard and make people feel vulnerable, defensive, upset, and so much more. See this [infosheet](#) for more information on How to Have Curious and Courageous Conversations.

Remember, you won't probably be able to "fix" a friendship in one conversation, it may take time and it will certainly take willingness from both sides to address the issues. If you want to change something about a friendship and the other person is unwilling, it may be time to end that relationship, or at least take a pause until the other person is ready to work with you.

## TABLEAU: That friend who is always trying to one-up you and doesn't get excited for your achievements

Hey, what'd you get on the midterm?

For which class?

The one we're both in?

Oh, East Asian Lit? I got a pretty high B. I'm happy with it. Why?

Oh you definitely should feel happy about that. That's a good grade.

... Thanks?

Grades are so made up, you know? I got an A, but it wasn't even my best work. Like, I'm not as proud of myself as you are of yourself for getting a B. Does that make sense?

Honestly, I'm not exactly proud of myself. I'm just glad I got a decent grade.

OMG don't put yourself down like that. I'm proud of you! If you ever want some tutoring or anything just let me know. We're overdue for a hangout anyways!

I don't think I'm putting myself down. In fact, I know I got an A in calc, so I'm feeling super psyched about that. Which kind of balances the whole thing out.

Wait, what? You did?

What level of calc?

I'm in calc this semester, too.

The 202 section. Why?

Oh, um. I... didn't get an A in that.

Hey, listen, math sucks most of the time.

If you ever want some tutoring, I would be happy to have the practice.

No, I'm fine. Don't worry about it.

I've been super busy lately, anyways.

That probably explains my grade.

**Sorry if I said the wrong thing?**

**I feel like I said the wrong thing.**

You didn't. I'm just super busy.

**When would be a good time for us to hang out?**

**Even if it's not about school, we are overdue**

**like you said**

Oh probably not for a few weeks. I spoke too soon.

Sorry.

**... Wait, so, because I got a good grade on something  
and you didn't, you don't have time for me now?**

No, that's not what's happening. I forgot how packed my calendar is right now.

It doesn't have anything to do with you. Sorry, I know that sounds harsh, but it's the truth.

**What's harsh is that you were super interested in me until you found  
out you weren't doing better than me at multiple things.**

**This feels really bad, dude.**

I don't have the mental and emotional room to hold space for you right now.

I'm sorry you experienced our conversation that way.

That wasn't my intention.

Be well. We can catch up some other time. Ciao.

**???**

You don't have to see me if you don't want to...

...

Wait, seriously?

You're not answering, now?

Wow. Okay.

Bye.

## A Moment to Reflect...

**What didn't work about this exchange? What did work?**

**How do you think each person is feeling after this exchange?**

**How would you approach a follow-up conversation as the receiver of these messages? Sender?**

# Being a Good Friend/ Partner/ Girlfriend/ Boyfriend/ Significant Other

There are so many ways to be a good friend/ partner/ girlfriend/ boyfriend/ significant other and they vary by person, place, and time. Below is a list of some of the ways you can be a good friend. This list is meant to be non-exhaustive and a starting point to help you brainstorm for yourself what kind of friend/ partner/ girlfriend/ boyfriend/ significant other you want to be.

## Empathetic

- You listen carefully to understand what the other person is experiencing
- You feel *with* them

## Reliable

- You follow-through on what you say you are going to do
- You show up when you say you are going to show up
- The other person can count on you

## Kind

- You treat the other person with respect and generosity

## Trustworthy

- You don't share information about them with anyone else without their explicit permission
- They can feel comfortable sharing their whole selves with you without fear of judgement

## Accountable

- You acknowledge when you make a mistake, apologize, and take action so you don't repeat that mistake again



# Conclusion

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## Final Thoughts

The purpose of this toolkit is to share ideas, exercises, and opportunities for reflection for individuals in the post-secondary environment looking to build and maintain healthy and joyful relationships. We hope that by creating healthy relationships, individuals can protect, maintain, and strengthen their mental health as they navigate through transitions and new environments. While this toolkit was not able to cover the full breadth and depth of relationships, we hope that it has shed some light on the complexity and importance of healthy relationships for students while also providing practical tools to put the knowledge into action.

## Further Reading

The links below have been included for those looking to learn more about some of the concepts mentioned in this toolkit.

[8 tips for difficult conversations with friends - Kids Help Phone](#)

[Caring for Labour Activists - Time Management Manual](#)

[Defining Your Values](#)

[Consent Education - Toronto Metropolitan University \(TMU\)](#)

[Gottman - What Defines a Toxic Relationship](#)

[How to Create Emotional Intimacy in Relationships: An In-depth Look](#)

[How to have difficult conversations with someone you care about](#)

[I Statements - Boston University](#)

[Let Friendship Be Fluid](#)

[Live Your Core Values: 10-Minute Exercise to Increase Your Success](#)

[Love is Respect](#)

[Navigating Relationship Changes in Post-Secondary](#)

[Pod-Mapping Worksheet](#)

[Understanding Consent - Consent Comes First; Office of Sexual Violence Support and What Are Enmeshed Relationships?](#)

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*We would love to hear from you! If you have any feedback on how we can improve this toolkit, please reach out to us. Our contact information can be found on our website <https://campusmentalhealth.ca/contact/>*

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