

# Healthy Relationships



# Relationships

In good, healthy relationships, you can trust each other and talk about anything. You can disagree without hurting each other. And you always make sure your partner consents to any kind of sex.

Sometimes, a relationship isn't healthy. In this section, you can learn how Canada's laws try to protect people in unhealthy friendships and romantic relationships.

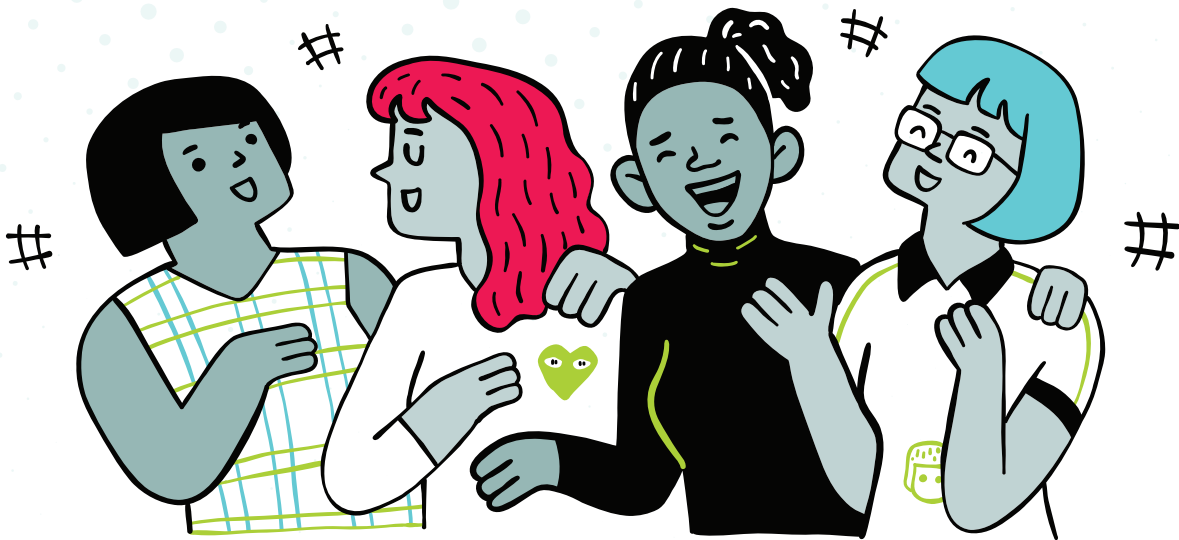
## FAKE FRIENDS

Healthy friendships give us so much: People to hang out with. Someone who listens to you and supports you. A feeling that you belong. Having friends helps us learn to get along with others and to solve problems without drama.

Unhealthy friendships may make you feel bad about yourself. Fake friends might lead you to do things that make you feel guilty or that get you in trouble—at school, with your parents or teachers, or with the law. A friendship may be “toxic” if your “friend” puts you down, pressures you, leaves you out, or is mean when you're together or on social media.

If a friend's actions make you feel bad or if you are acting in ways you want to change, think about it. If you want to talk to your friend but think it will start an argument, you can ask someone else to help. Someone who is not involved in the argument can help you see both sides and understand each other better.

Here are some other things you can do.



*A healthy friendship supports you.*

- ▶ Tell your friend how their actions made you feel.
- ▶ Use language that won't feel judgmental (for example, you could ask "What happened?" instead of "Why did you do that?")
- ▶ Apologize if you are wrong.
- ▶ Listen without interrupting.
- ▶ Think about how your actions affect others.
- ▶ Fix your mistakes if you can (for example, replace things if you damage them).

Sometimes you can't have a healthy relationship if the other person keeps treating you badly. You might want to end that "friendship." It can be hard to end a difficult friendship, but making a plan can help.

A plan might include:

- ▶ trying new hobbies
- ▶ meeting new people through a sport or activity
- ▶ thinking about how you will answer questions about what happened (it's ok to say "I just wanted to try something new" or "I've been really busy lately")
- ▶ talking to other friends, a trusted adult, or a therapist about your feelings
- ▶ thinking about how to manage changes in your social circle



***"I just wanted to try something new!"***

If you see signs of abuse in a friend's life or relationships – like bruises, isolation, sadness, depression, or falling grades – offer your support. This might mean listening without judging, reminding your friend that no one deserves to be treated badly, or helping them talk to a trusted adult.

## **BAD ROMANCE**

Sometimes a friendship turns into a crush. It's totally normal to want some kind of relationship and it's also normal not to be in a relationship.

If a crush grows into hanging out or dating, you have the right to be in a healthy, safe relationship.

But sometimes a relationship can be bad for you. If your crush treats you badly, that's called abuse.

Abuse can be sexual, emotional, or physical. Here are some examples:

- ▶ Your partner (your bf or gf or crush) keeps you away from family and friends.
- ▶ Your partner calls you names or spreads rumours.
- ▶ Your partner is possessive or jealous.
- ▶ Your partner touches you in ways you don't like or consent to.
- ▶ Your partner pressures you to go further sexually than you are comfortable with.

**If someone treats you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, you have the right to say “no.”**

An abusive partner may try to make you think their actions are your fault. This is not true. In Canada, the law says that everyone has the right not to be harmed, no matter how they dress or act, or whether they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol.



If you are uncomfortable with how a romantic partner treats you, you can do something about it.

- ▶ Go to a safe place or call 911 if you are in danger now.
- ▶ Tell a friend or trusted adult.
- ▶ Talk to a guidance counsellor, psychologist, doctor, nurse or other health care professional.
- ▶ Think about calling the police if you have been physically or sexually assaulted.
- ▶ Go to a doctor or emergency room if you have been sexually assaulted.
- ▶ Remember that you have the right to break up with someone who does not treat you well.
- ▶ Know that using drugs or alcohol may make it hard for you to deal with a dangerous situation.

## CONSENTING TO SEX

If you're thinking about sex, think about consent because that's a huge part of sex. Everyone taking part needs to be good with exactly what you are doing and how long you do it. Consent is so important that it's a crime to try to have sex with someone who has not consented. That's the law in Canada and many other countries.

The law talks about how old you and your partner should be if you're having sex. In Canada you have to be 16 to consent to any sexual activity. This includes kissing, touching, sending sexual messages, pictures or videos, and sexual intercourse.

There are two exceptions to this law about age and sex:

- ▶ **A 14- or 15-year-old can consent to sex if their partner is less than 5 years older. This means that if the partner is 5 years older (or more) than the 14- or 15-year-old, any kind of sex is a crime.**
- ▶ **A 12- or 13-year-old can only consent to sex with a partner who is less than 2 years older. This means that if the partner is 2 years older (or more) than the 12- or 13-year-old, any kind of sex is a crime.**

Sex of any kind is never okay if the older person is a teacher, coach, babysitter, relative, or your boss. In these relationships, one person has power over the other. They are called "relationships of trust, authority, or dependency." Even if your babysitter is 14 and you are 13, they are in a position of trust and authority and it's wrong for them to try to have sex with you. In fact, it's against the law.

You should also know about exploitation. When you're a teenager, you start to see the world in new ways. You see things you didn't notice as a kid. New things to do, new places to go, new people to meet. Older people know this and some will use this knowledge to get things they want. It could be things you wouldn't want to give them if you really understood what it could mean. This is called "exploitation." It means taking advantage of someone's trust or lack of knowledge. Some exploitation is against the law. In a court case, a judge would think about

- ▶ the young person's age
- ▶ the age difference between the young person and their partner
- ▶ how the relationship developed (for example: quickly, secretly, or over the internet)
- ▶ whether the partner may have controlled or influenced the young person

This all sounds a bit scary, but most relationships don't turn out this way. Your friends are usually good to you. Your teachers and coaches nearly always just want the best for you and don't want anything in return. Your crush might not work out, but most people don't abuse others. However, now if something does go wrong, you will see what is happening and be ready to deal with it.

# Resources

## HELP LINES

### Call 211

- ▶ Women's Help Line
- ▶ Men's Help Line
- ▶ All Genders Help Line

## VIOLENCE PREVENTION RESOURCES

- ▶ [Native Women's Association of Canada](#)
- ▶ [Nova Scotia Domestic Violence Resource Centre](#)
- ▶ [Offering Support to Someone Who is Abused](#)
- ▶ [Promoting Relationships & Eliminating Violence Network \(PREVNet\)](#)
- ▶ [Men's Intervention Programs](#): Help for men who have been violent with partners and want to change.

## SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRES

### Avalon Sexual Assault Centre

- ▶ Halifax: (902) 422-4240
- ▶ Crisis line: (902) 425-0122

### Colchester Sexual Assault Centre

- ▶ Truro: (902) 897-4366