



Maintain healthy relationships to improve mental health and well-being

Mental Health and Relationships:

Humans are social creatures. Throughout our entire lives, we depend on each other to survive. Being self-aware allows us to see this need, which drives us to seek out caring relationships in our efforts to connect with others. Keep in mind that relationships extend beyond romantic and include family, friends and colleagues. Researchers believe that people spend 80% of their time in the presence of others, making it important to maintain positive and healthy relationships. According to the Mental Health Foundation, a relationship is “the way in which two or more people are connected, or the state of being connected.” Our need to feel that we belong is a major driving force behind our desire to seek out these connections. Not only does building positive relationships make us happier, improve our feelings of security, and provide meaning to our lives, it also affects both mental and physical health.

Health Benefits of Relationships:

Relationships play an important role in our mental health. Research shows that those involving marriage or living together have the most powerful effects on health. Increased happiness and life satisfaction, improved psychological well-being, and reduced risk of suicide and death are often the result of being a part of a positive relationship. There are many reasons why relationships involving marriage and living together are good for people’s mental health and well-being. For example, these types of relationships provide a source of companionship, intimacy, and social support. Additionally, they also connect people to their partners’ social networks and reduce financial stress. These benefits influence our health in many different ways. For example, they reduce stress levels and modifiable health behaviours such as tobacco and alcohol use; as well as improve self-esteem, exercise, and diet.

The Double-edged Sword of Relationships:

Being in a relationship does not always translate into health benefits. Not only does the degree of closeness of the relationship matter, but also the quality of the relationship has a powerful influence on health. Negative relationships can often create toxic situations involving conflict and stress.

Stress is an important factor when it comes to our physical and mental well-being as it not only triggers responses in our nervous system, but it also influences our ability to cope with negative life events. This often results in sleep loss and an increase in health damaging behaviours, such as smoking and alcohol use making it important to maintain positive and healthy relationships in our lives.

Tips for Maintaining Healthy Relationships:

The Mental Health Foundation (2016) believes that the quality of a relationship is also important in maintaining health and happiness. To help with building positive personal relationships, here are some tips to improving relationship quality:

Give Time: Set time aside for family, friends, and significant others.



Be Present: Disconnect from work and social media to devote attention to your loved ones.

Listen: Actively listen to what others say, be attentive to needs, and avoid passing judgement.

Be listened to: Share your feelings, be honest, and welcome support from others.

Recognize unhealthy relationships: Harmful relationships, which include physical, verbal, or emotional abuse, can leave you unhappy and at risk for health damaging behaviours. Addressing these problems is an important step towards improving health.

When it comes to building and maintaining healthy connections, it is important to work towards improving the quality of the relationships in our lives. The tips mentioned above will help you know what to look for in a positive relationship, in order to use them to improve your mental and physical well-being.

TRAITS IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS:

In order to ensure that the relationships in our lives have a positive effect on our health, we must be aware of what both creates, and takes away from, a supportive relationship. The Mental Health Foundation (2016) has identified a list of positive behaviours between two people in healthy relationships, some of which we have listed below:

- Both people trust and respect each other
- Both people protect and value the relationship, and make it a priority
- Both people listen to each other and compromise when necessary
- Both people are responsible for their own needs, as well as the relationship
- Both people can speak openly, and share their thoughts and feelings
- Both people are able to set boundaries for the relationship
- Arguments and disagreements do not lead to threats or violence
- There is no physical, verbal, or emotional abuse

Reference:

Mental Health Foundation. (2016). *Relationships in the 21st century: the forgotten foundation of mental health and wellbeing* (p. 45). Mental Health Foundation.