**Forming Healthy Dating Relationships**

During your teen years, it’s normal to have many different dating relationships. This helps you learn what you like and don’t like in a boyfriend/girlfriend (partner) and in a dating relationship. When you’re dating someone, it’s important to form healthy relationships that include important things like trust and respect for each other.

Here is a list of characteristics (features) of a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship.

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- **Healthy relationship**
  - Trust in each other. You and your partner should trust each other equally.
  - Have respect for each other. Respect means each person understands and doesn’t push the other person’s boundaries. It also means you and your partner value each other for who you are.
  - Individuality. You or your partner shouldn’t have to change who are. You or your partner’s identity (who you are) shouldn’t be based on the other person.
  - Support each other’s interests and hobbies. It’s okay to like different things. You should each continue to see friends and do things you enjoy.
  - Open and honest communication. You and your partner should speak openly and honestly with each other. If one of you needs time to sort out your feelings, that’s okay. Respect those wishes and wait until you or your partner is ready to talk.
  - Express your anger in a healthy way. Everyone gets angry and that’s okay. Find healthy ways to express your anger without taking it out on your partner.
  - Compromise. Each partner doesn’t get his/her way all the time. Be willing to give and take. Understand your partner’s point of view.
  - Understanding. You and your partner should take time to understand each other and respect what you are both feeling.
  - Healthy sexual relationship. If you and your partner are in sexual relationship, it’s important that both of you are comfortable with it. No one should feel pressured to do anything he/she doesn’t want to do.

- **Unhealthy relationship**
  - Physical violence. You or your partner should never use physical violence to get your way. This includes slapping, hitting, shoving or grabbing.
  - Sexual violence. You or your partner should never force each other into sexual activity. Ask for each other’s consent (permission) before engaging in a sexual relationship.
  - Disrespect. You or your partner shouldn’t make fun of each other or each other’s interests or opinions. You also shouldn’t push each other’s boundaries.
  - Dishonesty. Both you and your partner should be open and honest with one another. Don’t hide things from each other or tell lies.
  - Control. You or your partner shouldn’t tell each other what to do, who to spend time with or what to wear. Don’t keep each other away from family and friends. Decisions about your relationship should be made by both of you, not just one of you.
  - Hostility. This is when one partner purposely picks a fight with the other. Hostility can make people feel like they need to change their behavior to keep their partners from getting angry.
  - Dependence. This is when you or your partner feels you can’t live without the other partner. You or your partner might threaten to do something serious if the relationship ends.
  - Intimidation. This is when one partner tries to control the other partner’s life by making him/her feel afraid or shy. It can also mean one partner keeping the other away from family or friends, threatening to break up or threatening to use violence to get his/her own way.
WHO SHOULD I ASK IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT MY DATING RELATIONSHIPS?
You can ask your doctor or any one of us in Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at MassGeneral Hospital for Children. We can help answer questions about healthy or unhealthy relationships. We can also help you if you feel like you’re in an unhealthy relationship. We care about you and your wellbeing and we are always here for you.

I’M WORRIED I MIGHT BE IN AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP. WHO CAN I TALK TO?
If you’re worried that you might be in an unhealthy relationship, it’s important to tell an adult you trust. This can be:

- A parent or other family member you trust
- Your doctor
- Anyone on the Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine team at MGHfC. You can call us anytime at 617-643-1201. We can also refer you to a counselor (psychologist) in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, if needed.

A note for your parents...

Sometimes, teens aren’t sure who to turn to when they have questions about healthy or unhealthy relationships. They might not recognize the warning signs of abuse. Teens might also confuse controlling or possessive (clingy or demanding) behaviors as signs of “true love.”

Sometimes, teens don’t ask questions about relationships. They usually tell their friends more information than they tell their parents. This is for a few reasons, including not trusting adult care providers (like doctors or parents) or worrying that doctors or other care providers will tell their parents. Teens also might have trouble finding the right type of medical care.

When your teen asks questions, it’s important for you to listen without judging him/her. Support your teen. Don’t accuse or blame him/her. If you have questions about relationships or are worried that your teen might be in an unhealthy relationship, call your teen’s doctor. You can also call any one of us in Adolescent and Young Adult Medicine at MassGeneral Hospital for Children at 617-643-1201.