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INTRO- DUCTION



What Makes a Good or a Bad Relationship?

What's your status? Single? In a Relationship? It's Complicated? How do you change your status? Is it possible to have relationships without getting hurt or hurting someone else? The truth is that dating relationships can make you happy or bring you down. But, here's the good news about dating: healthy, happy relationships aren't random.

There's even more good news.

You have the power to decide.

You can:

- ★ Discover if a relationship isn't good for you and walk away from it
- ★ Build a healthy relationship from the "ground" up
- ★ Take a good relationship and make it even better

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It all comes down to **skills**, *knowledge* and choices.
You need to:

- 1** develop the skills to build fulfilling relationships that make you a better, happier person
- 2** know the facts and danger signs that signal relationship trouble
- 3** choose to date only those people who share your relationship values and demonstrate they “have the skills” for healthy relationships.

If you’re dating now, have ever dated, have never dated, or hope to date (at some point in your life!) this book is for you. We’ll give you 10 tips for successful dating relationships.

In each chapter, you’ll read a couple’s “relationship” story. Some of the relationships are positive, and some are not. All of the stories offer some wisdom on how to create or maintain a healthy relationship (or recognize when it’s time to end an unhealthy one). Many situations may remind you of your own experiences in the dating world.

You also learn specific skills to help you along the way. Each chapter contains relationship facts (including how to navigate dating relationships in *The Wired World*) and highlights “danger signs” that tell you when to get out and move on before you really get hurt.



Relationship Status

What's yours?

Marcus and Shania first met in seventh grade. They had a couple of classes together and some mutual friends so they occasionally hung out as part of a larger group, but didn't really talk much at all. Over the next few years they ran into each other in class and at some school sporting events.

Their sophomore year in high school they both started working on the school newspaper. They talked about the stories they were working on and shared feedback on each other's work.

They saw each other every day and found they had lots in common. Marcus was the oldest of three boys in his family and Shania had a younger sister. They each really liked basketball, to play and to watch, and they were in chorus together, too. Shania told Marcus she thought he had a wonderful singing voice and encouraged him to try out for the all-state chorus.

By Christmas of that year, Marcus realized how much he looked forward to the time he spent with Shania. He thought she was

Say Whaaat?

“You have to walk carefully in the beginning of love; the running across fields into your lover’s arms can only come later when you’re sure they won’t laugh if you trip.”

– JONATHAN CARROLL

easy to talk to and very pretty. Shania thought Marcus was cute and funny. They had the same lunch period and started sitting together every day.

When they got back to school after winter break, Marcus asked Shania to a Friday night school basketball game. She explained to him that her family had a rule that any guy she went out with had to come to the door and meet her parents before she could leave the house with him. Marcus was nervous about this, but he showed up at her door, shook her Dad’s hand, introduced himself and spent a little time talking with her parents before they headed out to the game. He assured them that he’d get her home by her 11:45 p.m. curfew.

They cheered on the team, enjoyed time with their friends, and talked all evening. After the game they went out for tacos with two other couples. They watched the time and Marcus made sure Shania was home when he promised her parents she would be.

After that night they started seeing a lot of each other, and all of their friends and others at school recognized them as a couple. They spent time alone, but often included other friends, too. They both were happy and liked being together.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

Dating and relating. Sometimes fun, sometimes confusing. Relationships can help you learn about yourself and others and bring a lot of joy and comfort to your life. And, sometimes, relationships can be dangerous and bring a lot of pain to your life.

Before you change your status from “Single” to “In a Relationship”, it’s important to know yourself first, and to think about whether or not you’re ready to “put yourself out there.”

So let’s say you’ve mastered some basic social skills, have talked with your parents and other adults you trust, and feel ready to tackle dating. You probably have lots of questions.

How do you know if you’re in a good relationship? How do you know if you’re in a relationship for the right reasons? Can you tell when someone really likes you or just is using you? How do you know if you’re in over your head?

This book will help you answer some of these questions. We’ll share tips and talk about the skills you need to get the relationships you want, as well as what you need to know to avoid being a “dating danger” to yourself and others. We’ll look, too, at the benefits and pitfalls of technology when it comes to building relationships.

Some people think good relationships happen by accident – maybe you meet the right person and it all “clicks” and maybe you don’t and things go wrong. The big key here is that, as the old saying goes, finding the right person (and relationship) starts with being the right person. In other words, to paraphrase Napoleon Dynamite, “You gotta have skills.”

Take Marcus and Shania, for example. They’re off to a great start. They have lots in common. They have mutual friends and they show respect for each other and for each

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other's families. So far, it looks like they know how to start a good relationship and keep it going. They're getting better and better at the skill of Maintaining Relationships.

There are lots of stages to "dating" relationships. A solid foundation in one stage sets you up for success in the next stage.

STAGE 1 Platonic Friendships

Before you start dating, the first stage is learning how to be and have friends. Many teens have discovered that they have more fun in school just being good friends together – hanging around and having fun in a group, without the pressure of dating. In such friendships, you can learn a lot not only about the others, but also about yourself, and ultimately about how to best communicate with, understand, and be friends with a future dating partner or spouse.

STAGE 2 Friendly Dating

It is only when you have mastered the skills needed for the first dating stage that you should move on to Stage 2. In order to participate in *Stage 2: Friendly Dating*, you must be very clear about your own physical, emotional,

Say Whaaat?

"Love is a fire. But whether it is going to warm your heart or burn down your house, you can never tell."

– JOAN CRAWFORD

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

sexual, and spiritual boundaries. And, you must be able to communicate these boundaries to those you will date.

Friendly dating will most likely involve spending time with and practicing friendship skills with someone to whom you are attracted. For friendly dating to remain friendly, each person must maintain healthy physical and sexual boundaries.

Talk to your parents or another trusted adult about how far is far enough – how physically and sexually close you should get to someone you are friendly dating. Maintaining clear boundaries regarding limited physical and sexual closeness can free you to really get to know one another and to practice the rules for good boundaries. Limiting physical and sexual closeness helps you to develop important skills like saying and accepting “no,” exhibiting sexual self-control, and respecting others’ boundaries.

Friendly dating can happen in a group or as a single date. But it always implies that you are getting to know and going out with various people. In other words, friendly dating is “dating around.” It is not an exclusive relationship.

If you want to keep it friendly make sure to avoid:

- ★ **Couple behavior** – Exclusive dating, “hooking up,” exchanging gifts like jewelry, clothing or stuffed animals, only walking with, only talking to, or always thinking about this one person, writing romantic or sexual notes, hanging all over each other
- ★ **Grooming tactics** – Jealousy and possessiveness, insecurity, intimidation, anger, accusation, bribery, flattery, status, or control

Keeping it friendly helps you to keep your options open and date around without hurting or using others. It

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keeps your reputation clean and helps you steer clear of giving mixed messages. It lets you meet, get to know, and perhaps even become friends with several people of the opposite gender while avoiding messy and painful breakups.

STAGE 3 Steady Friendly Dating

It is possible that while friendly dating you may meet one person that you would like to get to know even better. After a period of friendly dating of this person and others, the two of you decide to friendly date only one another. This is *Stage 3: Steady Friendly Dating*.

Teens who are ready for this dating stage are teens who demonstrate the following skills – they are able to set and communicate clear boundaries and limits, have self-control, are able to resist peer pressure, can handle their sexuality and frustration appropriately, can express feelings appropriately, and show self-respect and respect for others.

It is extremely important that teens involved in serious steady friendly dating do not limit themselves to spending time only with their boyfriend or girlfriend. Now more than ever before, these teens need to spend a good amount of time with other male and female friends, as well as with family, so that their boundaries remain firm and priorities clear.

STAGE 4 Serious Steady Dating

This type of dating relationship is not for high school teens. It is in this dating stage when you begin to ask yourself: Is this the spouse for me? Do I really love this person? Does he or she really love me? It is at this stage that the couple begins to examine the relationship in light of marriage.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

source: dictionary.com

re-la-tion-ship *noun*

1. a connection, association, or involvement.
2. connection between persons by blood or marriage.
3. an emotional or other connection between people

STAGE 5

Engagement

At this time, the couple begins preparing to create and share a life together. Discussions about finances, in-laws, conflict resolution, child-rearing, etc., need to happen now. The focus should be on preparing for the future, not just for the wedding day.

STAGE 6

Marriage

For most people, marriage is the ultimate goal of dating. If all the previous stages have been followed, friendship skills have been mastered, each have maintained appropriate boundaries, and a real love for and commitment to the other person exists, then the couple will have an excellent chance of achieving a lasting, loving marriage.

RELATIONSHIP SKILL

Maintaining Relationships

1. Frequently ask for feedback and be willing to accept it

Marcus and Shania talk all the time; they trade feedback on their newspaper stories, and are comfortable sharing thoughts and feelings.

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2. Express concern and appropriate affection

Marcus and Shania show respect for themselves and each other by following their families' rules, like curfew and meeting the parents first.

3. Negotiate and compromise on activities

They don't always want to go to the same places, but can talk through their differences and come to a decision that's acceptable to both of them.

4. Share attention with others and avoid possessive and exclusionary behaviors

They spend lots of time with friends and family – balancing “alone” time with time with others.

RELATIONSHIP QUIZ

Please answer the following questions about the person you are in a relationship with (or someone you'd like to date). Your response can be agree, disagree, or not sure.

1. We are very supportive of each other's activities.

Agree Disagree Not Sure

2. We give each other plenty of social freedom with our friends.

Agree Disagree Not Sure

3. We are both great listeners when it comes to problem solving.

Agree Disagree Not Sure

4. Our friends approve of us being a couple.

Agree Disagree Not Sure

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

5. **We both are involved in multiple activities and support each other.**

Agree Disagree Not Sure

6. **What are some sure signs of a healthy relationship?**

- a. respect
- b. true acceptance
- c. allowing individuality
- d. supportive of dreams
- e. encouraging personal growth
- f. all of the above

Now, go back and look at your answers. What “stage” do you think the relationship is in now? Do your answers reflect that, most of the time, you’re comfortable sharing your thoughts and feelings, being supportive of each other, giving each other space, and including your family and friends in some of your activities together? If so, you are probably in a healthy relationship.



THE UNWIREN WORLD

Remember, real relationships happen in real space; in other words, you need to spend time face-to-face to really get to know someone. You can text each other, or talk “online,” but that should never replace talking or spending time together, including time with family and friends.

It’s risky to start a relationship online because all you really know about someone you’re talking to via text, social networking or chat is that the person has access to a “wired” device at that time. You can’t see a face, hear a

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voice, watch the person around family or friends. It's easy for someone to "fake it" online, so make sure your relationships start face-to-face.

DANGER SIGNS

Confused About Our Relationship

My boyfriend and I broke up about a month or two ago. He said it was because we never hung out, or hardly talked. About three weeks ago he apologized a hundred times, and said I was "the beautifullest person in his life," and "he made the biggest mistake ever when he broke up with me."

Since I still love him; I went back out with him. We talked that whole week about loving and missing each other. Every other day the next week we sent messages when we could. Now he hasn't talked to me in almost a week. Every time I give him a hug, it's from the side... I'm confused? Help?

We hardly ever talk in person. It's always over Facebook. How can we get more comfortable talking in person?

A Relationship Or An Obsession?

"I think I'm obsessed with my love. We're 15, but really mature and we love each other. We can't be together until I'm 16 so I always feel the need to text him constantly and just always think about him and depend my happiness on him. Every little thing gets me jealous even if he just talks to a girl. Every little mistake he makes I point out. I do it because I feel like when he makes a mistake, it's because he doesn't love me anymore. It's hard to explain.

RELATIONSHIP STATUS

When I'm not talking to him I feel empty and I'm so afraid I will lose him to another girl. I'm just really obsessed with him and feel that my happiness depends on him. I guess I'm insecure about myself."



These girls are in relationship trouble. The first one can't figure out what's really happening because she and her boyfriend aren't talking face-to-face, so she's missing most of the communication.

The second girl hasn't built a strong foundation of friendship skills, so her boyfriend is her "everything." Building your life around another person can lead to out-of-control jealousy and heartache for everyone involved. It looks like she needs a timeout to learn relationship skills so she can avoid trouble.

source: dictionary.com

sta-tus *noun*

1. the position of an individual in relation to another or others, especially in regard to social or professional standing.
2. state or condition of affairs



ENCOURAGEMENT Not ENSLAVEMENT (CONTROL)

Christine met Dwayne at “Club Imagination” during spring break. Dwayne spotted her from across the room and could not keep his eyes off her. He immediately walked over to her and started a conversation. They realized they were mutually attracted to each other. Dwayne asked if he could contact her. She answered, yes.

Two weeks later they were going out together – exclusively. Christine very seldom had time to date and had not been in a serious relationship for a while, so her friends were happy she had finally entered the dating scene. Christine even changed her Facebook status from “Single” to “In a Relationship.”

As weeks went by, her friends were starting to become concerned because they were seeing less and less of her. They usually studied at Jackson’s Coffee House together, but recently she stopped going there because Dwayne wanted her to “hang out” with him. He told her he wants to spend his time with her, not her friends. He even takes her shopping and tells her what clothes and makeup he thinks she should wear.

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Christine recently found out she was chosen to participate in a regional debate competition in Philadelphia. She was thrilled, so she shared the news with Dwayne. He immediately told her he thought she should not go to a “stupid event” like that. He said he hated debates and he would not come to see it. Christine was hurt and became angry. She was starting to see Dwayne did not want a girlfriend; he wanted a puppet he could manipulate and control.

At first she thought he was so sweet to want to be with her all the time. She now feels pressured, enslaved, and unable to be herself. She realized her friends had always encouraged her, while Dwayne was extremely discouraging and belittling. Christine decided it was time to become assertive by having a “talk” with Dwayne about his controlling behaviors. She calmly, yet firmly, told him she wanted her independence and friends back. He tried to make her feel guilty for speaking her mind and expressing her feelings. She took a few deep breaths, and calmly stood her ground.

“I have become increasingly closed off from my friends and the things I love. I have been feeling like a puppet, but today I am cutting the strings to this relationship,” she told him.

In healthy relationships, people encourage each other’s independence and realize they don’t “own” each other. Dwayne expressed his control over Christine through possessive and belittling words and behaviors. He didn’t want anyone else “messing” with his “territory.” He attempted to control who she talked to, how she dressed, and even how she spent money. He acted as if he completely owned her feelings and behaviors and was resentful and extremely

Say Whaaat?

“Some of the biggest challenges in relationships come from the fact that many people enter into a relationship in order to get something: they’re trying to find someone who’s going to make them feel good. In reality, the only way a relationship will last is if you see **your relationship** as a place that **you go to give**, and not a place that you go to take.”

– ANTHONY ROBBINS

jealous of anyone who got any kind of attention from his “possession.”

Treating someone like an object to own, rather than a person to relate to, is at the heart of jealousy and possessiveness. You may see and hear signs of this everywhere: “She’s my woman,” “You can’t talk to him,” “You belong to me,” and so on. But remember, people are not objects to be owned or possessed or controlled.

Keep in mind there’s a fine line between someone enjoying your company and wanting to spend time with you, and a dating partner who monopolizes your every moment and monitors your every move. While you want to have “quality time” with your boyfriend/girlfriend (free from distractions like texting, phone calls, tweeting, or Facebook), you also need to give each other freedom to “do your own thing,” too.

In healthy relationships, partners support and encourage each other’s independence. They are not threatened by others and do not treat their partner like a possession. Christine finally realized that Dwayne was controlling her

Say Whaat?

“Love can sometimes be magic.
But magic can sometimes... just be an illusion.”

– JAVAN

LEARNING ABOUT BOUNDARIES

You begin learning about and setting boundaries at an early age. Your parents help teach you right from wrong, as well as how and who to be physically and emotionally close with. When you were young, your parents probably had all kinds of rules for you, like “Look both ways before crossing the street” or “Don’t talk to strangers.” Both of these rules are also boundaries, designed to help you protect your physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual self.

As you grow older and begin to develop more and more relationships outside your family, you begin to put what you’ve learned about boundaries into practice. Think about emotional boundaries for a moment. In your family, you probably learned to trust your parents and brothers and sisters enough to tell them your personal thoughts and feelings. As we grow older, most people continue to share their private thoughts and feelings only with family and best friends.

People with healthy boundaries are selective about whom they allow inside their closest emotional and physical boundaries. They know that most relationships, like those with casual acquaintances or classmates, are not as personal and therefore it would not be wise to share personal thoughts, feelings, or experiences within such relationships. Not enough trust has been established. Casual acquaintances should talk about “light” and non-personal topics like the weather, sports, movies, schoolwork, or current events.

Boundary Questionnaire

How do you know if a relationship has unhealthy boundaries? A careful reading and discussion of the topics in this book should give you a pretty good idea of what an unhealthy relationship looks like and sounds like. The following questions can help you take a closer look at your friendships and dating relationships. Be honest with yourself as you answer these questions. These questions may help point out unhealthy qualities in some of your relationships.

Think about your closest friends (or your boyfriend or girlfriend):

- ⊙ Does this person try to tell me what to do, how to dress, who to hang out with?
- ⊙ Do I spend most of my time worrying about this relationship?
- ⊙ Does it seem that this person purposefully tries to make me feel jealous or insecure?
- ⊙ Does it seem that I do all the giving and my friend does all the taking?
- ⊙ Does my friend put unrealistic demands on me? What demands?
- ⊙ Does my friend ignore me or attempt to control me when others are around? What usually happens?
- ⊙ Does it seem like this friend is always trying to change me? How?
- ⊙ Does my friend purposefully do things to hurt me emotionally or physically? What?

About the Authors



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Laura Buddenberg joined the Boys Town staff in 2000. In her capacity as Manager, Training and Community Outreach, she works with staff, children, and families on issues relating to parenting, relationships, bullying, and the role of faith in family life. She is co-author of five books, and appears regularly on radio and television to share Boys Town parenting tips and strategies. Laura holds a Master of Science degree in Family and Youth Services, as well as a provisional mental health practice license and a Certificate in Family Life Ministry. She and her husband Roger have been married for 29 years and are the parents of two young adult daughters.



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