

Your EAP|Here4TN! for you and your family

Build healthier, supportive relationships

Good relationships take work. Just like tending a garden, relationships require continual attention, care and nourishment. The fruits of that work, however, can be stronger relationships that are supportive and resilient.

When you're in a friendship or romantic relationship, it's tempting to think that your interactions will go smoothly all by themselves. But that's rarely the case, even when we have much in common with the other person. Since so much in life changes every day, even the best relationships require that each party dig in and do some work. This often means listening well, helping to solve problems, and regularly assessing whether you're being as responsive as possible to the other person's needs—in both good times and bad. Some suggestions:

Be an active listener. You can learn to improve your listening skills, and this can serve as a basis for healthy communication in your relationships. Practice withholding your own opinion until the other person has finished speaking. Take a moment to contemplate and summarize their statements before you respond.

Be encouraging. You can serve as a positive beacon in your relationships with others by offering encouragement to them about their plans, accomplishments and dreams. Help your friends and family solve problems and keep moving toward their goals.

Be able to self-assess. Take an objective look at your conduct in each of your relationships. You might ask yourself if you've been available enough to those who have needed someone to listen, supportive enough of those having difficulty, and encouraging enough to those who could use a boost.

Be open to compromising. If you have a disagreement with someone, try to approach the issues with an open mind. Be respectful of the other person, accept his or her feelings without being judgmental, and avoid trying to "win" in a discussion. Try to find a solution that is satisfying for both parties.

Be willing to repair a friendship. If your relations with someone have broken down, make the first move by offering to meet and talk. Extend an apology, then fully let go of old conflicts.

In a month that includes Valentine's Day, it's not a bad time to assess your relationships... whether romantic or platonic.

If you think about what makes a healthy relationship, you'll probably think of most or all of the following qualities:

- treat each other with respect
- openness and honesty in sharing thoughts and feelings
- accept each other's differences
- resolve issues without fighting or arguing
- support and encourage one another
- able to laugh and have fun together

If you see these attributes in your relationships, your quality of life is likely quite good. If, however, some of your relationships aren't as healthy, there are steps you can take to repair them.

Your ParTNers EAP provides confidential in-person or telephonic counseling 24/7 to help you with relationship issues. Call **1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486)** or visit the www.HERE4TN.com website for information and resources.



Depression and relationships

Relationships are impacted by depression. The struggle someone experiences can cause confusion and feelings of helplessness for those close to him or her. It can be difficult to watch a loved one suffer with depression—an illness that usually makes people sad, tired and generally uninterested in life.

It is hurtful and confusing when—as often happens—loved ones increasingly isolate themselves, pull away and don't respond to others' efforts to help. These reactions can damage relationships, whether they're with spouses, partners, children or friends.

When someone's feelings of sadness and worthlessness are intense or continue for two weeks or more, they may be suffering with depression. If you recognize the symptoms of depression in a loved one, the most important thing to remember is that treatment works. Usually with a combination of "talk" therapy and medication, people with depression can recover from their symptoms and reconnect with life and relationships.

If you're in a relationship with someone experiencing depression:

- **Provide support and encouragement.** Ask questions and listen carefully to your loved one's descriptions of depression. Strongly encourage him or her to seek professional diagnosis and treatment as you would with any other illness. Explain that with the right care, people with depression can get back on track in life.
- **Offer advice in the form of options.** To support their recovery, recommend that he or she see a therapist through the ParTNers EAP by calling 1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486) or going to www.Here4TN.com and click on the 'Get Started' button.
- **Remember that depression is a serious medical illness.** Untreated depression can have a harmful effect on one's mood and thinking. For some people, depression can even lead to suicide. Don't belittle the person by saying things such as, "Snap out of it," "Get over it" or "Everyone feels down now and then." Try your best to understand the illness. If someone expresses thoughts of hurting him- or herself, get professional help immediately.
- **Recognize that depression is not rational.** It is painful to be rejected, scorned or ignored, but this may be how your loved one responds to your efforts to help. Stay the course and be persistent in recommending treatment and follow-up support.
- **Care for yourself.** Carve out time to pursue your own interests and to socialize even when your partner can't join you. You might also want to consider seeking individual counseling.

On the www.HERE4TN.com website, click on the **Topics & Tools** tab to view information on a full range of behavioral health topics including depression.

Successful communication starts with listening

Are you a good listener? (Most people think they are, just as we're all certain we're good drivers!) Listening well can be harder than talking because it requires that we delay expressing our own opinions. Everyone can learn to listen better, and this can improve relationships. Here are some listening tips.

- Maintain eye contact in a manner that is culturally appropriate for you.
- Show you're paying close attention by leaning forward and making gestures like nodding your head. Add occasional verbal comments like "right" or "uh huh."
- Don't interrupt even when you disagree or have something to share. Listen without formulating your response as the other person is talking. Take a moment to pause and consider the other person's statement.
- Ask questions if you haven't fully grasped the message.
- Briefly paraphrase the other person's statement to show your understanding and get clarity. For example: "It sounds like you're saying that _____. Is that right?"
- If there's a conflict, try to convey that you've truly heard the speaker's points. This can help calm negative emotions and lead to mutual problem solving.

How to fix a friendship

Sometimes a good friendship gets damaged because of a disagreement, hurt feelings, a communication breakdown—or some combination of these causes. What can you do to fix the relationship?



- **Take the initiative and meet face-to-face.** If you've grown apart, make the first move toward healing. Sometimes friendships stay broken because both people waited too long to address the issues. Tell the other person how much you value and miss his or her friendship and that you would like to talk.
- **Apologize regardless of the circumstances.** Even if a prior misunderstanding was not your fault, reach out and extend a heartfelt apology for what went wrong. Doing so without expecting anything in return can help rebuild the friendship.
- **Listen to your friend's viewpoint.** Without interrupting, give them plenty of space to provide their perspective on the issues. The person needs to feel like they are being heard and understood.
- **Create an action plan.** After you have both addressed the relationship challenges, think of ways to avoid such problems in the future and move forward with your friendship.

Unplug for your family!

It's often tough to put that smartphone down and risk missing a compelling text or social media post. But parents might want to consider recent results from Highlights magazine's annual "State of the Kid" survey of children ages six to 12.

- Sixty-two percent of kids surveyed said their parents are distracted or focused on other things when they try to talk to them. The leading cause of distraction cited: smartphones.
- Most kids said the best time to talk with their parents is when they are sitting down together at mealtime.
- "The simple act of having a family meal together several times a week—with no TVs and phones—can have a big effect on kids' social and emotional development, as well as academic performance."
— *Dr. Michele Borba*
- "I know my parents are really listening to me when they are sitting down and not on their phones."
— *Female survey respondent, age 10*