



## Relationships

Developing good communication and connectedness, and learning to manage and address underlying stressors and relationship problems effectively is important to building and maintaining a healthy and fulfilling relationship.

Conflicts and disagreements occur in all close relationships, and are a normal part of dealing with differences in ideas, beliefs, and experiences. However, ongoing conflict in a relationship can lead to a range of problems, be very stressful and lead to diminishing well-being and the complete breakdown of a relationship.



### What contributes to the risk of relationship problems?

The following factors increase the risk of relationship problems:

- **Past experiences.** Family, upbringing and past experiences can play a role in future romantic relationships. For example, experiencing parental divorce, or hostility growing up.
- **External Stress.** Stressful life events, such as work problems or financial difficulties, extended family issues, issues with children.
- **Life transitions.** Life transitions such as commencing living together, marriage, having a baby, children leaving home and retirement.
- **Cognitive.** The way we think about ourselves, our partner and our relationship is important to maintaining healthy relationships.
- **Emotional.** Becoming less positive about the relationship over time can create high levels of negative feelings and thoughts which start to outweigh the effects of positive behaviours on the relationship.
- **Behavioural.** Particular patterns of behaviour can be important signs that a relationship is at risk. For example, interactions that include contempt, defensiveness, criticism and avoiding or being unresponsive to each other.

### The impact of relationship issues:

- Stress, conflict, relationship breakdown and separation.
- Individuals experiencing relationship problems are more likely to experience health issues, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, a weakened immune system, or high blood pressure.
- Negative impacts on other important relationships, such as with family and friends, or with work colleagues.
- Children exposed to high levels of conflict are at greater risk for behaviour issues, anxiety, depression, and poorer physical health.



### Treatment

Treatment plans for relationship issues usually involves conflict resolution and communication training (Behavioural Couple Therapy) to help bring about changes in thinking and behaviours and establish ways of communicating that are more respectful, open and caring.

Common strategies may include:

- Changing the view of the relationship
- Expressing emotion and vulnerabilities
- Using playful affection and positive humour
- Improving communication
- Changing problem interactions
- Forgiveness and feeling and expressing gratitude
- Promoting strengths and positives in the relationship
- Improve problem solving skills to navigate life's challenges



The psychologist will also assist each partner to address any lifestyle factors and mental health concerns that may contribute to conflict or distress within the relationship to help you realise a resilient, healthy and fulfilling relationship.