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Let’s be honest: college life is not always smooth sailing. It can be fulfilling and exciting, but it can also be stressful and frustrating. One of the largest factors that affects stress in college is the formation and maintenance of relationships. While it does take time and practice to learn the type of effort that goes into different relationships, the good news is that there are many tips that can help you. In this guide, you will find strategies to help you manage relationships with friends and family and communicate effectively with others where you live, at school and at work. We hope this information will help you create healthy, happy relationships in these areas of your life. (Note: For tips and strategies for enjoying physically and emotionally safe, pleasurable and fulfilling sexual experiences, we suggest you read How to Be Sexcessful, the companion booklet to this publication.)

Healthy Relationships: The First Step is You!

An important component of creating and sustaining healthy relationships is managing your own stress levels. The less time and energy you spend stressing about your relationships, the more time and energy you have to connect with others. Tips to prevent and manage stress include:

**Imagine others complexly:** Imagine other people with empathy and assume that they are not deliberately trying to harm or annoy you. Harboring fewer negative thoughts and emotions can make it easier for you to form relationships and improve your overall mood.

**Allow yourself feelings:** There is often a stigma around stress that makes students feel that any stress is a sign of weakness. However, the earlier you accept that something is causing you stress, the earlier you can develop a plan to cope with that stress. Remember, feeling some stress is normal!

**Stay in the present:** Focus on fixing the specific stressful situation you are in, rather than imagining all the stressful events that might occur in the future.

**Evaluate control levels:** In stressful situations, determine which factors you can influence and which are out of your control. Then, focus your energy on the things you can change.

**Avoid default negativity:** Voicing your concerns or saying when you feel hurt are important actions that can help you manage stressful situations. However, if your first reactions to situations are usually negative, it can make forming or maintaining relationships difficult. If this describes you, it may be helpful to self-impose a ban on complaining/criticizing out loud.
Making Friends in College

“Don’t be afraid to put yourself out there! Join a student organization, get a job where you’ll have coworkers, talk to strangers in class, everything! In college, you are the one who decides if and how you want to meet new people.” - Cathy

For many students, the move to college can mean a shift in their social circle. You are in a new location, surrounded by thousands of people who you do not know. If you find the thought of making new connections under these circumstances overwhelming, there are a few things you can do to ease the process.

First, using the chart below, try brainstorming activities you enjoy doing or would like to try. By pursuing what interests you, you can meet people with whom you have things in common and some of those people can become your friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things I like to do</th>
<th>Things I’ve always wanted to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g., exercise</td>
<td>e.g., photography</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Another tip for finding friends is to outline what traits are important to you in a friend, as doing so may help you narrow down where you look (e.g., if it’s important to you that your friend loves animals, you may want to volunteer at a local animal shelter).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits I need in a friend</th>
<th>Traits I like in a friend</th>
<th>Traits I tolerate in a friend</th>
<th>Traits I avoid in a friend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g., honest</td>
<td>kind</td>
<td>flakiness</td>
<td>mean-spirited</td>
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</table>
If you are still stuck on ways to meet people, consider some of the following activities:

- Get to know the people in your living situation by getting together to eat, study or just talk.
- Go to a football game or other sporting event. You may not meet your new best friend there, but it will help you feel as though you belong to a community.
- Join an Intramural sports team.
- Join a student club. You can find organizations focused on politics, academics, spiritual life, and everything in between (check out csi.ucdavis.edu for a complete list).
- Get involved with a community or volunteer organization.

Finally, keep in mind that not all friendships are equal in the time and energy they require. Advice columnist Captain Awkward recommends visualizing your friendships in terms of their dosage: how often you need to see or contact the other person for the relationship to be happy and healthy. There may be friendships where the perfect “dose” is meeting once every two months for coffee, while for others it is seeing each other almost every day. Expecting different dosages with different people will help you avoid feeling pressured to be best friends with everybody at all times.

**FYI: Green Flags for a Healthy Friendship**

While most people will not display every “green flag”, if the majority of them are present it is likely that the relationship is healthy.

- ✔️ They communicate their emotions clearly and early. You are not constantly guessing how they feel or how they will react to something.
- ✔️ They have interests outside of their relationship with you and do not rely on you to meet all of their emotional needs.
- ✔️ They ask for and listen to your opinions, no matter the size of the decision being made.
- ✔️ You feel safe contradicting or disagreeing with them.
- ✔️ They admit and apologize for mistakes, rather than blaming others.
- ✔️ They support you when you need them to, but they are not fixated on helping you. If you ask for space or alone time, your request is respected.
- ✔️ They help set and maintain boundaries within the relationship.
- ✔️ They show respect and kindness towards others.
Exiting a Friendship

Unfortunately, there may come a time when you realize that a friendship that once felt enjoyable is now stressful to be in. Signs it may be time to end a friendship include:

- They consistently violate or ignore your boundaries.
- They say mean or rude things to you.
- You find yourself looking for any excuse to avoid spending time with them.
- When you try to talk to them about behaviors that bother you, they dismiss you or accuse you of being too sensitive.
- They exhibit red flags (see box).

If you decide that you want to end a friendship, there are a few tips to help you through the process.

- Remember, it is okay not to be friends with everyone, even if you and that person share mutual acquaintances. Do not feel as though you have to keep spending time with someone who makes you uncomfortable or unhappy just for the sake of group unity.

- Gradually fade out of the other person’s life. This strategy works well if the friendship is already in decline (i.e., you are seeing each other less, not keeping in contact as much). Stop initiating contact with the other person and give shorter and shorter responses if they contact you until you cease communicating at all.

- If gradually fading out does not work, you may have to end the relationship more directly. Plan what you would like to say, and remember it may help to be concise, polite and firm. If telling them in person does not seem possible, consider sending the person a letter or email telling them that, while you appreciate the friendship you have shared, you need some space and will not be spending time with or contacting them anymore. If you decide to have this conversation in person it may be best to do this privately, unless you think that doing so will put you in any danger.

- If you are at a social event and run into someone who you have ended a friendship with you can be friendly and polite, but keep interactions to a minimum.
FYI: Red Flags for an Unhealthy Friendship

Red flags signal that a relationship is not healthy and may, in fact, be abusive. While not every person shows the same signs or displays them to the same extent, the presence of these red flags increases the likelihood that the relationship is unhealthy and you may want to reevaluate keeping this person in your life.

✔ They question you extensively about where you have been and what you have been doing, try to monopolize your time or try to control where you go or whom you see.
✔ They expect you to be the perfect friend or roommate and depend on you for all their emotional needs.
✔ They rarely accept responsibility for a situation. Whatever happens will always be someone else’s fault.
✔ They perceive the normal setbacks of life (like a bad test score) or any criticism of or disagreement with them as personal attacks.
✔ They use force during arguments, including: breaking your belongings on purpose, restraining you so that you can’t leave the room, lashing out at you with a hand or other object, shouting in your face, or pinning you against a wall. Any such display is very serious and a sign of violent behavior. Threatening to do these things if you don’t do what they want is also a red flag.
✔ They move or hide objects (keys, cell phone) in order to make you feel as though you are forgetful or absent minded. They may also contradict your version of events so that you feel as if you can no longer trust your own judgment.
Roommates 101

“The best advice I have for getting along with roommates is to set boundaries and expectations early on and learn how to be flexible when a situation comes up.” - Kirah

Odds are, if you are in college you will have a roommate at some point. Whether you are sharing a room or an apartment, and whether you are close friends or just acquaintances, it is generally a good idea to sit down and talk about what you need and expect from each other in your shared spaces.

Questions for Roommates

- What time do you prefer to go to sleep?
- What is an acceptable level of noise?
- What time would you like quiet hours to begin and end?
- What’s your preferred study environment?
- Is it okay to have visitors over while you are studying? Sleeping? Can guests stay overnight? If so, how frequently?
- If I have a visitor over, would you be more comfortable if they stay in my room/on my side of the room?
- Are you comfortable with visitors of a different gender than your own?
- What are your preferences around using the AC/Heater?

Additional Questions for Off-Campus Roommates

- How will rent be divided?
- Who is responsible for getting the rent payments to the landlord?
- Will food and household items (toilet paper, dish soap) be shared?
- If food and household items are being shared, how are they being paid for?
- How are utilities like power and Internet being paid for?

Another issue that roommates often deal with is the cleanliness of shared living spaces. Talk with your roommate and set up ground rules for cleanliness, when certain chores need to happen and who is going to do them. You can use the chart to the right to get you started.

In all negotiations with your roommates, each of you should be prepared to compromise, as nobody can get everything they want and need from every interaction. If issues do arise, talk to your roommate about them as soon as possible. If, for whatever reason, you are not comfortable bringing issues up only in the company of your roommate(s) you can involve a neutral third party to help mediate the discussion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task/person</th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thu</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g., clean bathroom/</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
Working in Groups

“Good group members are not those who lead the most, or are the most outspoken, but those who know when it is appropriate to take the lead and when to follow.” - Kevin

In both college and professional life, it is to your benefit to know how to manage relationships that come with working on group projects. After all, group work is an effective way to complete assignments, but if there is a lack of communication, lack of a sense of mutual commitment and/or respect among group members, the experience can be a source of stress. With that in mind, here are a few ways to make group work easier.

• Concrete planning: The first time you meet as a group, create a timeline for the assignment that includes deadlines for contributions, dates for progress checks and who will do what tasks.

• Time cushion: Set the deadlines for your group a few days ahead of the deadlines for the class, in case something goes wrong.

• Focus: When meeting, avoid getting off topic and concentrate on the project.

• It’s about ideas: Try to separate ideas from the people who suggest them (e.g., “the bridge idea” and not “Pat’s idea”).

• Be inclusive: If you are someone who eagerly shares their thoughts and ideas, make an effort to draw less talkative members into the conversation. And, be sure to include everyone in all email and text exchanges related to the project.

• Stay positive: Complement each group member’s contributions.

In the event that a group member is not completing their tasks, talk to them about it and try to work out a solution. If you have tried this and they are still not contributing, talk to your professor, teaching assistant (TA), or supervisor sooner rather than later. That way, they can help you figure out the next step before the deadline looms and causes you added stress.
Relationships with Faculty and Supervisors

*The one piece of advice I have is: keep the lines of communication open. Ask questions, ask for feedback, ask for advice.* - Sam

While forming relationships with your peers is important, it is also helpful to make connections with professors, TAs, and supervisors, as this can make your time at school and work more enjoyable. The best strategies for creating these connections involve demonstrating genuine interest in your work and/or their research.

**In Class**

- Participate during lecture and discussion section to help the instructor get a sense of you as a student.
- Visit office hours or talk to your professor/TA after class. If you find this intimidating, it can help to come with a specific question about the material.
- If you are in a class with a professor whose research interests you, go and talk to them about it. This can help foster a relationship between the two of you.

**At Work/Internship**

- Start early: To help set the tone for your relationship, meet with your supervisor soon after you start a job to discuss topics such as performance expectations, methods of evaluation, communication, office culture, etc.
- Take initiative: If you see something that needs doing, do it. If you have a new idea, try tactfully proposing it to your supervisor.
- Ask questions: Talk to your supervisor about what you can do to help improve the workplace. And, if you are working in a field of interest to you, ask if you can set up a short meeting or coffee date to ask for career advice or about their career path. This will demonstrate your interest in the work you are doing for the organization and you might even find a new mentor!
- Make positive contributions: If you want support and guidance from your supervisor, you need to give a consistent performance and stand out. Show enthusiasm for your work, maintain a professional and positive attitude, and be responsible (e.g., meet deadlines, be on time, participate during meetings).
Maintaining Relationships with Family

“I was fortunate to have my family’s support while attending UC Davis. I was able to have a more meaningful relationship with my family, especially with my mother. We have become really close friends.” - Rosa

When transitioning to college, many students struggle to renegotiate the relationship they have with their families, particularly their parents or guardians and even siblings. In this situation, there are several approaches you can use to prevent changes to these relationships from becoming a source of stress. First, accept that while each family dynamic is unique and different, that dynamic will most likely change while you are in college. It is equally important to acknowledge that these changes may not necessarily be negative. Many students find that their relationships with their parents or family members improve while they are at college, as not living in the same space means fewer opportunities for conflict.

It can also be helpful to work out a regular schedule for communicating with your family, be it a phone call on the same day every week or a bi-weekly email. You can deviate from a set schedule if something important comes up, but sticking to it as closely as possible will help both you and your family members adjust to the new boundaries of your relationship. It will also reassure them that they are still part of your life while helping you adjust to greater freedom without feeling as though you have lost a piece of your support system. And, as time goes on, you may find yourself renegotiating the frequency of communication as you start to feel more confident and skilled at living away from home.

Social Media and Relationships

“Facebook as a current media to express our ideas and interact with friends is pretty reasonable. However, it’s not a substitute for our entire social life. Being around people brings a lot to your life.” - Pablo

These days, the majority of people have two parallel social lives: the one they live face-to-face and the one they live digitally. While online interactions are often seen as less “real” than in person interactions, they can still carry emotional and psychological weight. And, the wide visibility of online interactions can present unique challenges for balancing public and private interactions. It is important to develop a filter for what information you feel comfortable sharing, as well as to learn what information from others you are comfortable seeing. If you are stressing about these sorts of decisions, there are four strategies you can use to minimize online unpleasantness.

• Be selective: The more people you add into your online circle, the greater the chance that you end up with someone who bothers you. So decide on the criteria you will use for including people and stick to it.
• Establish filters: If someone you need to stay on good terms with is posting unwanted information, you can customize your settings so that only important updates appear and unwanted topics are blocked. On sites like Facebook, this is just a matter of adjusting the “friend” settings for that person. Other social media sites (like Twitter) allow you to download filters that block posts containing certain words or tags.

• Know your privacy settings: If you want to post photos from a particularly exciting night out, but don’t want your grandmother to see them, you can restrict individuals on Facebook, which prevents them from seeing some of the information you share. If you only occasionally need to hide information, you can adjust the privacy setting on a particular post to keep certain people from seeing it. Just remember, even if you restrict access to unwanted information, there is always the chance that someone else could share it.

• Accept rejection: If you are unfriended, try not to take it personally. We invest a lot of emotion into our digital selves, so when someone rejects the online version of us it can sting. However, people have many reasons why they unfriend others. The best reaction is to accept the new boundaries they have created and not pester them for another chance.
FYI: Harassment

Harassment can occur anywhere that affects a student’s work or learning environment, and it can take both obvious and subtle forms. Sexual harassment is a common type of harassment that can include repeated unwanted requests for dates, physical contact or requests to turn a friendship into a sexual or romantic relationship. Issues of general harassment can arise if roommate relationships go sour, and one person perceives the other’s negative feelings as a potential source of threat. If you find yourself facing harassment of any kind, there are several options available to you:

• Don’t ignore the situation: Many students try to ignore harassment because they do not want to create conflict within their peer group or they are afraid of negative consequences if they report it. However, ignoring the situation rarely ends the unwanted behavior and, often, leads to the behavior escalating.

• Know your rights: In cases where the harasser is in a position of authority, remember that not only does University policy prohibit harassment, but retaliation for reporting it is prohibited as well. This means that it is against the University’s policy for a student’s grade or job to suffer as a result of reporting harassment.

• Talk to someone: Experiencing harassment can be very stressful! A good way to cope with such stress is to get support. Students can reach out to family members, friends, mentors, professors and campus resources like the Harassment & Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program (HDAPP) or Student Judicial Affairs (SJA) to talk about their concerns. For sexual harassment concerns, students can call HDAPP to make a report of sexual harassment and/or discuss how to resolve a situation, either by calling the main office number or by calling the anonymous phone line, A-CALL. For concerns about general harassment, students can contact SJA. Or, students can opt to visit a confidential campus resource like Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) or Campus Violence Prevention Program (CVPP) to talk about what they’re experiencing, get support and discuss how they want to proceed.

Communication

An important step you can take to maintain a strong, healthy relationship is to learn how to communicate effectively. The following tips can help you navigate the trickier aspects of conversation:

• “I” statements: This keeps the focus of the conversation on problem solving, rather than on assigning blame. It also reduces the risk of the other person from becoming defensive which means they will be more receptive to what you are saying.
Example: “You annoy me whenever you do that” vs. “I find (insert behavior) annoying.”

• “No, but thanks”/“thanks, I’ll think about it.” We have all encountered that person who loves to give advice, even if that advice is unwanted or unneeded. Responding with “No, but thanks” or “Thanks, I’ll think about it” accomplishes two things. First, it heads off potential confrontation by keeping the interaction polite. Second, it helps prevent further suggestions by making it clear that you heard what was said and have considered it, and now the discussion is over. This tactic is most effective if combined with a change of topic.

Example: “Thanks for suggesting I switch my major in my senior year, I’ll think about it. So, how about that football game last night?”

• Speak up early: Speak up the first time something annoys or upsets you. This strategy prevents situations in which you suppress your emotions about an issue, only to have them explode out of you during a heated moment.

• Listen to what the other person is saying: In certain situations, especially if someone is upset and looking to vent, the best thing you can do is listen to them. Resist the urge, no matter how well intentioned, to give advice (although you may, if asked). Just listen. If you are unsure if someone is seeking advice, simply ask, “How can I be helpful?”

How to “Fight Fair”

“If I am feeling defensive during an argument with a friend or partner, I find it helpful to take a pause if possible, and write down my thoughts. Writing calms me down and re-focuses my attention to finding a solution so that I can come back to the conversation feeling more grounded.” - Merril

In most relationships, conflict is inevitable. If you find yourself in an argument, the above communication tools are still useful, but there are additional tips that can help you resolve the fight as quickly and smoothly as possible.

• Focus: Keep the argument about a specific issue.
• Be honest: Be up front about why you are upset and what you want from the interaction.
• It is not personal: Keep the argument about the issue or behavior that’s causing the problem, not the person you are speaking to.
• Stay in the present: Avoid bringing up past issues or frustrations.
• Be willing to compromise: Do not think in terms of “winning” the argument. Remember, you are trying to resolve a problem, and doing so involves compromise.
• Know when to stop: If you have both made your wants and feelings clear, why are you still fighting? Be willing to step back, evaluate the conversation, and then shift the focus to working out a solution to the issue.
Conclusion

We hope you now feel better prepared to navigate the various relationships you encounter in your everyday life. By raising your awareness of the signs of healthy (and unhealthy) relationships, learning tools for effective communication, and thinking about strategies for forming connections, you can be on your way to creating happy, fulfilling relationships.

Resources

Student Health & Counseling Services: shcs.ucdavis.edu

Primary Care Clinic: Primary Care Provider (PCP)

A PCP assigned to every registered student coordinates continuous primary care throughout your UC Davis enrollment. Your PCP can help address stress, sleep, sexual health, physical activity level and other general wellness needs through assessment, treatment and referral to campus and community resources.

Counseling Services: shcs.ucdavis.edu/services/counseling

• Individual Counseling
• Group Counseling (groups include men’s, women’s, Black, Latina, LGBTQIA, survivors of sexual trauma and more).
• Stress & Wellness Clinic
• Mind Spa
• Referrals to on-campus and community resources

Health Education & Promotion: shcs.ucdavis.edu/hep

• Offers information and resources on a variety of topics including sexual health, stress, sleep and wellness, and alcohol and other drugs.
Other Campus Resources

Campus Recreation and Unions: cru.ucdavis.edu

Campus Violence Prevention Program: cvpp.ucdavis.edu
Confidential crisis intervention & victim advocacy including:

• Navigating options, rights and resources
• Hospital, law enforcement and/or court accompaniment
• Advocacy for academic assistance and/or reporting violations to Student Judicial Affairs

Captain Awkward: captainawkward.com

• Advice on how to manage stressful social situations
• Scripts for dealing with difficult conversations

Davis Wiki: daviswiki.org

Unofficial Survival Guide to UC Davis: daviswiki.org/ Unofficial_Survival_Guide_to_UC_Davis

• Provides advice on topics such as stress, social support and relationships

Cross Cultural Center: ccc.ucdavis.edu

Harassment & Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program: hdapp.ucdavis.edu

• Offers anonymous A-CALL line that students can use to discuss their situation and options
  • 530.752.2255
• Students can call and report harassment

Internship and Career Center: iccweb.ucdavis.edu

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Resource Center: lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu

Mediation Services: mediation.ucdavis.edu

• Conflict management for faculty, staff and graduate students

Student Housing: housing.ucdavis.edu

Student Judicial Affairs: sja.ucdavis.edu

• Report misconduct, sexual harassment and/or stalking

Student Recruitment and Retention Center: srrec.ucdavis.edu

Women’s Resources and Research Center: wrrec.ucdavis.edu