

KNOW AND ACT

Supporting intimate relationships

Relationship with one's partner is one of the most important interpersonal relationships during a person's lifetime. The majority of people are born into a relationship or live in one for at least a part of their lives, either as a partner or a child. People often have major expectations for a relationship. On the other hand, there are people who do not want to be in a relationship and consider their lives good without one. However, every one of us needs other people. Living alone is not a problem, but loneliness might be.

Living in an intimate relationship has been found to increase well-being and health.

Having capacity to guide and give advice to clients in relationship issues is part of the competence of all social and health care professionals.

Discussion on the well-being of a client's relationship initiated by a professional is an effective way to consider relationship issues during social and health care appointments.

Broaching the topic of sexuality is also part of supporting relationships.



Early interaction also as a basis for emotional relationships in adulthood

An infant cannot survive without the care of an adult. The first care relationship teaches the child to either trust or mistrust the person caring for him or her.

The impacts of this first interpersonal relationship are felt throughout the person's life. The early attachment forms the basis for relationships in adulthood.

The willingness and ability to commit to another person is the key question of an intimate relationship in adulthood. Two people negotiate and are flexible so that two ways of living can grow into one in a relationship in which both feel safe. In order to initiate a relationship, both need to take a risk in trusting another person; a relationship cannot begin without risk taking.

In a relationship, partners learn to tolerate both intimacy as well as distance. After all, everyone needs their own space in a relationship, but in a way that does not make distance appear threatening.

It is good to consider this aspect of intimacy and distance before the relationship becomes intimate and so that the partners can retain their personal identities and individuality.

Sexuality in relationships

Having sexual intercourse, physical intimacy and ability to talk about sex with the partner increase happiness in a relationship. During sexual contact, a person is most open and receives feedback from the partner on his or her worth – whether he or she matters to the partner.

The end of a relationship is usually an outcome of difficulties in talking about and dealing with disagreements, infidelity, falling in love with someone outside the relationship, not taking care of the relationship and lack of love.

Sexual well-being and satisfaction are forces maintaining the relationship. However, every couple personally determines their own pace and way of having sex.

Both partners are responsible for sexual satisfaction and well-being. Problems in the relationship are often reflected on sex.



Guide your clients in relationship crises

Broaching the topic of the relationship and counselling help are a part of low-threshold relationship counselling service. The topic of the relationship can be brought up at any meeting. Even small interventions have an impact.

- Seek qualify on relationship issues and keep up your counselling skills.
- Show initiative in offering help. People may consider seeking help as a failure, and thus help and counselling must be provided actively and as a natural part of other counselling in social and health care services. Give guidance on interactive and relationship skills.
- Talk about sexuality in the relationship throughout pregnancy and after childbirth.
- Initiate discussion; do not wait for the client to ask about the issue.
- Sexual and relationship counselling is also a part of client work related to involuntary childlessness and should also be provided in connection to fertility treatments and adoptions.

The gender experience or sexual orientation of the client must not affect the quality and amount of available counselling and guidance services, but everyone must be organised and offered services equally and quickly enough before situations reach a crisis point.

Refer the client to further services if primary health care cannot offer sufficient help

- Intimate relationship and sexual counselling and therapy can be used to help couples with many problems.
- Typical reasons for seeking help include lack of sexual desire or problems in reaching orgasm, the treatment of which requires special expertise.
- Broaching issues in couples counselling may also reveal other problems intertwined with sexuality, for which support can be provided.
- Relationship help is also available online. It is beneficial to guide clients to seek information on caring for their relationship even if they do not have problems, as there is always room for development in interactive skills.
- Good relationship skills prevent the onset of difficulties and improve problem solving skills.

Further information



Promote, prevent, influence – action programme for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health 2014–2020.

Reija Klemetti, Eija Raussi-Lehto (ed.). National Institute for Health and Welfare. Guide 33/2014

The priority areas of the action programme include children and adolescents, supporting the resources of parturients, multiculturalism and men's sexual and reproductive health.

www.thl.fi/kirjakauppa

Know and Act cards on many different topics have been prepared for professionals. Read more:

www.thl.fi/topics >
Sexual and reproductive health

www.thl.fi/seliverkostokirje

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