# Top Tips for LGBTQIAP Relationship Health

These tips are from research on general relationship health, as well as specific studies with LGBTQIAP relationships.

- Work together to face the challenges of discrimination, prejudice, and hate. Seeing your relationship as thriving as you survive these hardships will ultimately strengthen your relationship (Frost, 2014).

- Friendships improve relationship health (Graham & Barnow, 2013). Cultivate friends who value your relationship and support you. For example, seek out friends who say, "He's a good man, go back and apologize. You can work it out."

- Find ways to be proud of who you are. Shame fuels depression and anxiety. And depression has a negative impact on relationships (Frost & Meyer, 2009).

Conflict

Learn to embrace conflict. Anger can be useful and healthy when it steers us to resolve differences.
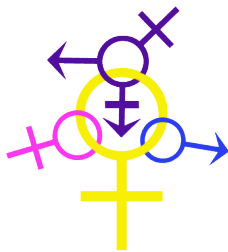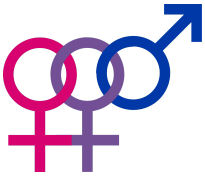
- ❑ Bring up problems with humor or kindness.
- ❑ Discuss the behavior, not what you think your partner means by the behavior.
- ❑ Avoid words like always and never.
- ❑ Approach the topic with desire to find a solution.
- ❑ Learn to accept differences, character flaws, and faults.
- ❑ When your partner brings up a problem, be non-defensive
  - o find something you agree on
  - o take responsibility for at least some of the problem
- ❑ Repair is done in the healthiest relationships.
  - o Sometimes repairs are saying "I'm sorry" and sometimes repairs mean doing something different.
  - o Make repairs to prevent misunderstandings.
  - o Make repairs to apologize for misunderstandings.
  - o Make repairs if you said something mean or hurtful in the heat of the moment.
  - o A successful repair is one that works. Don't give up.

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Friendship

Keep your friendship alive.

- o Tell your partners what you love about them – often.
- o Look to each other first when you need support, want to connect, or want company.
- o Give your relationship the time and priority it deserves. Put kids, family, friends, and others in third place. Put yourself first; put your relationship second.
- o Make dreams together and help make your partners' dreams happen.
- o If you are in a lesbian couple, affection has been show to be important. Find out if this research is accurate for you: Cuddle, hug, and offer touch your partner likes.
- o If you are in a gay male couple, validation has been show to be important. Find out if this research is accurate for you: Validate feelings especially.
- o Sex keeps friendship alive and well. Sex is about physical pleasure and/or emotional connection. Expand your definition of sex – what gives your partner(s) physical pleasure and emotional connection? A healthy sex life can look different for different couples and partners. Find yours.
- o In studies with gay male couples, both open relationships (partners had sex with others) and monogamous relationships (partners had sex only with each other) were potentially happy and satisfying. The key in any arrangement is to work toward agreement.

What helps partners when transgender partners are in transition? Here is what some couples had to say.

- Communication – They talked about everything that they could. They talked about their feelings. They talked about timing for changes. They talked about their partner's feeling and timing.
- Self-talk (getting perspective) – They reminded themselves of the bigger picture and their deeper connection to their partner.
- Social networks – They sought folks going through a similar process. They got help, perspective, and empathy. Support sometimes can from online connections.
- Positive interactions – They made time with each other. They had mutual support conversations. They had fun.
- Impression management (for example, managing displays of affection in public)- They compromised on when to be physically affectionate in public. They took new steps when they comfortable and ready to take on new challenges together.
- Social activism –They got involved in transgender rights, education, advocacy, and activism. (Aramburu Alegria, 2010)

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