

Rebuilding Trust in Your Relationship

Objective

To rebuild trust in your relationship with your partner.

You Should Know

Trust is a necessary element in close, healthy, intimate relationships. Yet you can probably recall situations when your trust was broken, when you were betrayed or hurt. It is much easier to lose trust than it is to build it, and it can take a long time to rebuild trust. You might believe your relationship is over if your trust is betrayed. Or, you might wish to maintain your relationship and rebuild trust. Either way, it is critical to rebuild trust after difficult situations, either between you and your partner or you and future partners, family members, or friends.

If you hope to rebuild trust, you will need to release or suspend some of your doubts. While you have the right to feel hurt, angry, or sad, if you cannot move on from those feelings, the relationship might not continue.

In any relationship, healthy communication plays an important role in establishing or rebuilding trust. Talk honestly and openly, and if conflict arises, “fight fair” without name-calling or resurrecting the past. When rebuilding trust, your relationship might look quite different after a major breach or infidelity, but it is possible to build something new together. Here are some suggestions on establishing or rebuilding trust.

1. **Trust yourself.** Learning to trust yourself and your own feelings is important to any healthy relationship.
2. **Say what you mean and mean what you say.** Avoid making promises you will not follow through with or saying things that do not accurately reflect how you feel. Lying, even if it feels small or insignificant, results in your partner no longer trusting what you say.
3. **Be emotionally vulnerable.** Building trust requires you to open yourself up to the potential risk of being hurt. You begin to trust when you can rely on your partner, share your deepest fears, and feel assured that your partner will be there for you.
4. **Show respect.** One way of damaging trust is if you belittle your partner or look at him or her with condescension or contempt. Lack of respect destroys trust. Unfortunately, you might occasionally show your partner your worst qualities, losing sight of the fact that respect is even more significant to people you love due to the harm that lack of respect causes. Each time you treat your partner in a way that is disrespectful, you damage the connection, making it more difficult for your partner to trust you over time.
5. **Give your partner the benefit of the doubt.** If you trust your partner, it is easier to default to the belief your partner’s intentions are honest when there is uncertainty or doubt surrounding

the circumstances. Assume your partner has good intentions. If he or she disappoints you in some way, it may be a misunderstanding or a simple mistake. Get clarity before pointing fingers.

6. **Express your feelings.** An important element of emotional intimacy is expressing your feelings without shouting, verbally attacking, or shutting down the conversation. So, to build trust, develop ways of discussing your feelings that are collaborative and respectful.

7. **Consider reciprocity.** Be willing to give as well as receive.

8. **Communicate openly.** Openly talk and truly listen to each other, considering each other's needs. If either partner feels they are not willing or able to meet his or her partner's needs, the couple may need to review their options.

9. **Take responsibility for your actions.** Admit to your behavior, reflect on your actions, and assume responsibility. Also, understand how your behavior affected your partner.

What to Do

Make two copies of this worksheet, one for you and one for your partner. Then answer the questions below. After each person has completed this worksheet, share your responses.

Do I trust myself? If not, what can I do to learn to trust myself?

What are some ways I can say what I mean, and mean what I say?

What are some ways I can be emotionally vulnerable with my partner?

Do I distrust my partner because of a recent situation or betrayal? Describe.

Do I feel comfortable asking my partner for what I need and want in the relationship? Explain.

Am I vulnerable with my partner, including relying on him/her for help and support? Explain.

Do I treat my partner with respect? What are some ways I can be more respectful?

Next, choose at least one of the following actions to try over the next week:

- **Schedule time to practice communicating honestly about key issues in your relationship.**

Discuss important topics that impact your life together, such as your finances, or concerns about a child or family member. Listen to your partner's side of the story, and unless your partner gives you a good reason to distrust him or her, believe you are hearing the truth. However, trust your intuition – if there are red flags, ask for clarification.

- **Follow through on a promise.**

• **Apologize.** If you catch yourself being unkind or disrespectful, immediately take responsibility for your behavior and apologize.

- **Spend 30 seconds looking each other in the eyes.** Share a fear or secret with your partner.

• **Avoid looking at your partner’s phone, reading email, and so forth.** Though it might be difficult, in order to reestablish trust, it is important to give your partner the benefit of the doubt.

Other ideas:

Use the following chart to track your “trust-building” activities.

Date	Trust Building Activity	How Did My Partner Respond?	Outcome

Reflections on This Exercise

Which of these actions did you try? What was most effective? Explain.

How did this exercise help establish or rebuild trust in your relationship? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5= moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
