



Developing healthy couple relationships

Research shows couples that are struggling in their relationship will wait an average of six years before seeking help. You read that right – six years! No relationship is perfect – even happy couples go through ups and downs – and most couples will benefit from receiving support, especially if they reach out for it early instead of living with the issue for years.

“In this time, the problem festers and becomes more complex as the ripple effect of the issue creates more pain. People who have been suffering an unhappy relationship are understandably exhausted and have little energy to invest in the work required to make the relationship better, with or without a therapist’s help,” says Jodie Voth, manager of Employee Assistance Services at Manitoba Blue Cross.

While going to therapy is one approach, there is another valuable option that may be more accessible for many people. Manitoba Blue Cross has created an online learning program, Developing Healthy Couple Relationships. This self-paced couple relationship education program will help you learn about what makes couple relationships healthy and how to strengthen your own relationship.

“After providing couples counselling for over 10 years, I’ve come to believe that everyone can benefit from being taught the skills needed to be in a healthy relationship because they aren’t instinctive and we don’t learn them by chance,” says Voth, who has a Master of Marriage and Family Therapy degree. “Most of our learning happens from seeing other relationships, and few of us were exposed to flawless relationships as we were growing up. We aren’t born knowing how to be great at relationships, but there are decades of

research to teach us what it takes.”

Throughout the program’s eight sessions, you’ll learn about:

- attachment (the safe connection between partners)
- communication
- how to have healthy conflict
- calming and coping strategies
- how to bring balance to the relationship
- fostering commitment
- and other valuable relationship-focused topics





“Couples today commonly report a lack of time and energy for the things they know will improve their relationship. That’s why this program gets right to the point about what makes relationships tick. Each session can be completed in an hour or less. That means participants learn tools they can use right away in about the same amount of time they’d spend in a therapy session, but it can be done anytime, anywhere, together with a partner or separately,” says Voth, who wrote the program.

The program also benefits people who aren’t currently in a relationship but wish to learn the skills to make their next one thrive. Many of the principles of healthy couple relationships also apply to other significant relationships. Although there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution to relationship concerns, Developing Healthy Couple Relationships is based on core principles that apply to most love relationships, regardless of age, life stage, gender, sexual orientation, or relationship status.

When creating Developing Healthy Couple Relationships, Voth wanted to address the issues that most commonly bring couples to therapy in a sound, research-supported, evidence-based format.

“When I was doing the research to develop the program, I found a lot of online couple programs that were not supported by research. I wanted to create something that would make it easy for participants to access reputable information that is proven to help in a self-paced course format,” says Voth.

The result is a practical, accessible and interactive program with lots of opportunities to discuss and reflect along the way.

When it comes to what makes a healthy relationship, Voth says that first and foremost, it’s emotional, physical and mental safety. “Couples need to be able to have conflict in a way that isn’t damaging and ideally make up when the conflict is over. Couples also need to invest in what we call ‘pro-relationship behaviours’ by making time to talk to each other, doing things together that they both enjoy, fostering commitment to the relationship, and engaging in a conscious decision-making process rather than ‘sliding’ into big changes such as moving in together or having children.”

Voth also reminds couples that relationships are dynamic and will change over time. “As couples move through various life stages and events, it’s important to consistently invest in the relationship by engaging in shared activities and making time to talk, connect in ways that are meaningful to each of you, even to argue! By doing these things, you’ll maintain a strong thread through time that allows the relationship to mature along with the individuals in it.”

To start the program, visit learn.mb.bluecross.ca/learn/register.

Manitoba Blue Cross members with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Individual Assistance Program (IAP) coverage can access the program at no cost.

Or if you feel you need more support, consider finding a couple therapist to help you grow and strengthen your relationship. Members with EAP or IAP coverage can get counselling support from a qualified clinician. Start the process.

If you’re unsure of your coverage, login to your [mybluecross](https://mybluecross.ca)® account to confirm.

For more information call the Employee Assistance Centre at 204.786.8880, TTY 204.775.0586, toll-free 1.800.590.5553 or visit mb.bluecross.ca.



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