

# Serious challenge

Young adults embarking on serious relationships face some challenges.

At the same time that they are trying to develop and maintain a serious relationship they are also in the process of establishing who they are in the world. Both are about discovering their mature selves and getting comfortable in their own skin.

So the challenge for a young relationship is to develop and nurture it at a time when the partners may be going through huge changes.

They are emerging from childhood and adolescence and moving away from the direct influence of their parents, and dealing with changes, such as moving from school to university, or into the workforce, or perhaps moving away from home. All these are big life changes, and relationships that survive these transitions need to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of both partners.

Relationships are best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because they are the act of relating to each other on a continuing basis. A relationship is dynamic, not static.

The relationship credit bank is useful here – the more good will and positive memories that you can experience and deposit in that “bank”, the more flexibility the relationship will have over time, and the better the chance of it lasting.

At the same time as discovering what their needs are as individual adults, they need to learn to respect their partners needs and not do unreasonable things that may hurt the relationship.

People in early long-term relationships may need to consciously acknowledge the choice that they have made to be in a committed relationship.

Many good things go with that, but the cost is the decision not to have a variety of romantic experiences with less intimacy and connection. Relationships that flourish learn to handle differences in opinions, choices and taste, without perceiving them as threatening.

Being able to disagree or manage conflict is integral to developing a healthy sense of one’s self in the relationship. The disagreement should always be respectful, and never hurtful or controlling.

Learning how to disagree and keep the relationship safe when conflict arises is important.

People in young relationships need to learn how to keep themselves happy and healthy, to be mindful of the needs of their partner and be committed to the relationship’s welfare.

## Survival tips

- **Young people in relationships face the additional challenge of discovering who they are as individuals, as well as their identity as a couple.**
- **Learning to manage conflict and stay respectful is vital to the survival of a young relationship.**
- **Building up good will and positive experiences helps young relationships withstand the inevitable low points.**