

Accountability in Relationships

Accountability: a willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

Learning to hold ourselves and our partners accountable, or really anyone who we are in a relationship with, is one of the most empowering things that we can do for ourselves. It can't be stated enough: *you are worthy of respect, dignity, and love right now, just as you are.*

Accountability goes hand in hand with setting boundaries: we decide on personal rules and limits that dictate how we want to be treated and we hold ourselves and the people around us responsible for adhering to those guidelines. *You are the author of your own life* and it is never too late to make a change.

Speaking of change, it's important to remember that *the only person we can ever change is ourselves*. We can share ideas, desires, and opinions with people, request that they adapt a certain aspect of their behaviour, but when it comes down to it, change only comes from within. Sometimes the hard truth is that it doesn't matter how kind, loving, and patient we are, we just cannot change our partner. In that situation, accountability becomes essential as we shift the focus to being kind, loving, and patient with ourselves to determine whether or not this relationship is the healthiest place for us to be.

Guidelines for Holding Ourselves and Our Partners Accountable:

- *Clear Expectations:* No mind reading here, it never works anyway. The only way to set boundaries that stick is to be crystal clear about what type of behaviour you expect from a loved one, and perhaps more importantly, the types of behaviour you will not accept. Ask your partner to be clear about their own expectations of you as well so that you are both on the same page about the terms of your relationship.
- *Realistic, Achievable Expectations:* The only way to change your reality is to first accept your reality. Expecting a date at a five-star restaurant every week may not be realistic if you and your partner are both struggling to make ends meet, but agreeing that you will both choose one night a week to put the phones away and eat a meal together is achievable. Expecting that your partner quit smoking cold turkey is unrealistic, but expecting that your partner will work with their doctor to make a plan with assistance to quit smoking is achievable.
- *Clear, Respectful Feedback:* Humans are imperfect, mistakes are bound to happen. When you or your partner slips up, ensure that there are open channels for communication about what went wrong, what it felt like, and what should be different moving forward. Use shame-free language and make sure that each side is given a fair amount of time to speak and be heard. It doesn't have to be an argument, but it does need to be talked about.
- *Clear Consequences:* When boundaries aren't being respected, be clear of the consequences and stick to them. Whether it's that you won't do an activity together anymore or that the relationship will be ended, both sides of the relationship need to be clear on what will happen when the other's wishes aren't respected. Remember that consequences are natural and healthy, they shouldn't be punitive, malicious, or harmful.

We deserve to ask for what we need in a relationship and to have our needs met respectfully.