

PROBLEM SOLVING

You may find yourself in a situation that involves frequent arguments, questioning whether this is a good relationship, feeling like you are “walking on eggshells,” and worrying about the future. This can be normal at times of high stress, especially if there are financial issues or children involved, but may also be signs that something needs attention. Maybe there is an issue with expectations, communication, or boundaries, or a combination of all three. Openly discuss any concerns using some of the communication skills listed above. Couples counseling can also be helpful in working through difficult issues.

Be aware of any warning signs that may warrant seeking outside help from a family, friend, counselor, or physician, such as:

- Intimidation or threatening behavior
- Physical aggression such as hitting or pushing
- Forced sexual activity
- Guilt trips
- Controlling/dominating behavior
- Constant put-downs or criticism
- Unreasonable jealousy
- Refusing to communicate
- Infidelity
- Withdrawal of affection
- Embarrassing you
- Using money to control
- Making everything your fault
- Isolating you from friends and family
- Overreaction to small problems
- Angry outbursts

BOTTOM LINE

Healthy relationships empower both partners to pursue their own goals and interests. Roles may change over time and one partner may need to pick up the slack or make sacrifices at various times in the relationship. Each partner should be active in the decision-making process with trust and respect in place to provide a supportive environment. Balance between school, friends, and the relationship will look different for each couple, but should ultimately be mutually agreeable and satisfying for both people.

If you have any questions or would like to make an appointment please contact:

Ed Magalhaes, PhD, LPC

Director of Academic and Counseling Services
Virginia Campus
emagalhaes@vcom.vt.edu
540-231-1944

Or outside counseling services at the New River Community Services:

700 University City Blvd / Blacksburg, VA 24060
Phone: 540-961-8400
(Be sure to identify yourself as a VCOM student)

For emergency care, 24 hours a day, call ACCESS at 540-961-8400

Natalie Fadel, PsyD

Director of Academic and Counseling Services
Carolinas Campus
nfadel@carolinas.vcom.edu
864-327-9875

Or outside counseling services at Spartanburg Area Mental Health Center:

250 Dewey Avenue / Spartanburg, SC 29303
Phone: (864) 585-0366
(Be sure to identify yourself as a VCOM student)

For emergency care, 24 hours a day Crisis Hotline: (864) 585-0366 or 1-800-277-1366

Mary Ann Taylor, PhD

Director of Academic and Counseling Services
Auburn Campus
mtaylor@auburn.vcom.edu
Room 214 // 334-442-4037

Or outside counseling services at Clinical Psychologists, PC:

248 East Glenn Avenue / Auburn, AL
Phone: 334-821-3350
(Be sure to identify yourself as a VCOM student)



Committed Relationships and Medical School

The Center for Institutional, Faculty, and Student Success



Edward Via College of
Osteopathic Medicine
VIRGINIA • CAROLINAS
AUBURN

Relationships

Being a student and being in a committed relationship may present you with a situation in which important life roles come into conflict. Your relationship may provide you with important emotional support as you cope with the stresses of school, and at the same time entail additional responsibilities and demands on your time. Not surprisingly, trying to juggle the demands of school and a committed relationship can be a confusing and frustrating experience. In your relationship, the nature of your expectations, the way you communicate, and the way you handle inevitable “boundary issues” can greatly influence both the quality of your relationship and the quality of your student experience.

EXAMINE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Both you and your partner will have expectations regarding time together, affection, emotional support, and ways that schedule conflicts will be handled. The goal is to try to discuss and establish these expectations together, rather than assuming both partners are on the same page. Take a preventive approach! Expectations may need to be modified and negotiated as schedules and circumstances change over time, particularly if both partners are students. When expectations are unrealistic or unbeknownst to one or both partners, frustration and resentment can build easily.

COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS

Good communication can make all the difference in the world for couples in school. Partners need to express positive feelings, negative feelings, complaints, needs, and above all, affection. Both partners have needs, both individually and as a couple. Some people have more trouble with expression and others may need to improve listening skills, for example. The following page discusses some guidelines in both areas.

SKILLS FOR SHARING

1. State your views subjectively (your thoughts/feelings), not as absolute truths. Speak for yourself, not your partner—I think, I feel.
2. Express your emotions, not just ideas.
3. State your feelings about your partner, not just about an event or situation.
4. Include any positive feelings you have about your partner or the situation when expressing negative emotions.
5. Be as specific as possible.
6. Speak in “paragraphs”—Express a main idea with some elaboration, then allow your partner to respond.
7. Express thoughts and feelings with tact and timing to avoid your partner becoming defensive.

BOUNDARIES

Learn to set appropriate boundaries *between yourself and medical school*. This is a lifelong skill, so this is the perfect place to start. Be in the driver’s seat. If school requires 80% of your time, actively plan how you will spend the remaining 20%. Involve your partner in this process and brush up on time management skills if needed. Realize that you will need to learn to say “no” to outside requests for your time in order to make time for your partner. Ask yourself if an activity is worth taking away time you could be spending with your partner.

However, too much pressure on the relationship can be problematic when either party relies on it for a sense of self-worth and competence. Healthy boundaries *between you and your partner* will allow each of you to engage in other dimensions of your life (social, school, fitness, etc.) in addition to the time you spend together.

SKILLS FOR LISTENING

Ways to respond while your partner is speaking:

1. Show (tone of voice, facial expressions, posture) that you understand your partner’s statements and accept his/her right to have those thoughts and feelings.
2. Practice empathy -- try to put yourself in your partner’s place and look at the situation from that perspective. How do you think he/she feels and thinks about the issue?

Ways to respond after your partner finishes speaking:

3. Practice reflection: Summarize and restate your partner’s most important feelings, desires, conflicts, and thoughts.
4. While you are in the listener role, do not:
 - Ask questions—except for clarification.
 - Express your own viewpoint.
 - Interpret or change the meaning of your partner’s statements.
 - Offer solutions or attempt to solve the problem.
 - Make judgments or evaluate what your partner has said.