



## **How Can I Trust Again?**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Frequently my clients tell me that they have been so hurt in the past that they don't think they can ever trust others again. Their reaction might be to withdraw from relationships in order to protect their heart or to lash out in anger at the person who last hurt them.

Well, withdrawing or lashing out doesn't help over the long term. They may offer you a little space to begin with but people who are distant or abrasive never build healthy relationships in the long run.

If you are wondering how you will ever be able to trust other people in the future consider the following:

1. Don't assume that everyone is trustworthy - Just because you are kind and responsible doesn't mean that everyone else thinks and acts in the same manner. Perhaps you have a tendency to be in relationships with "takers" rather than "givers". Think about those who you have been close to in the past and consider developing new connections with individuals who are able and willing to have mutually-beneficial and healthy associations.
2. Remember that patterns don't lie - If you hear about or observe behaviours that are troubling - be cautious! No matter how dysfunctional a lifestyle, people tend to continue making poor choices over and over again until their life doesn't work anymore. You cannot predict if or when change might come for them. Don't minimize information that might actually be a good warning for you!
3. Slow down! Moving from introduction to common law in 15 minutes is not wise! Everyone presents their best at the beginning of a relationship but watching the person over a period of time will give you a more accurate picture. I usually recommend that people "date the seasons" before they marry. That way they will have a whole year to see how they will handle Christmas, the summer, birthdays and all the other times of the year that can lead to conflict or misunderstandings.
4. Give yourself permission to say "No" - How often have you let someone borrow an item which they never returned? Just because someone has a need and think that you are the person to fill that need, doesn't mean that you should comply. If you lend something that you care about and it isn't returned you will likely lose both the item and the relationship.
5. Understand all the details - It used to be that a handshake and one's word was enough to seal a deal. Not so anymore. Before you enter into any agreement whether it is personal, family or work-related, make sure you know exactly what you are getting into. It is easier to have a written job offer, for example, with all the dates, perks and financial details than to end up being resentful because promises were not kept. Be honest with family members about expectations rather than making assumptions and then experiencing bitterness or regret. Even sharing items with a neighbour needs to be discussed in detail. When will they use the item? When will you use it? What will happen if it is damaged? Think ahead and avoid difficulties.
6. Address problems as they occur - It is far better to deal with issues as you become aware of them rather than let things build up into unmanageable resentment. Thousands of times I

have heard clients say "I wish I had done something about this sooner". When you deal with things in an honest and assertive manner you gain respect from others and for yourself.

7. Keep realistic expectations - If you think that every situation should be wonderful, you are setting yourself up for trouble. Some people aren't a good match for each other. Friends can come and go over the years. People change jobs. Just because something ends doesn't mean that you can't have new beginnings. Forgive yourself and the other person and move on!

Trust is something that we tend to give at first without conditions but it is important to remember that trust needs to be earned. As soon as someone shows the first sign that they are not trustworthy you will need to make adjustments in your thinking and your actions.

Can you trust again? Absolutely! But this time make sure that you are using your head and not just jumping into a situation that will cause more pain in the future.

If you need help in this area of your life, do not hesitate to contact a psychologist who will help you to learn about how to make decisions that will lead to healthy relationships and wonderful experiences.