

## Further Reading

Stigma against consensual non-monogamous relationships can make it difficult for people to be out about their relationship structure, which can mean there are fewer role models for how those relationships work in your personal life. See below for some resources online and in your local library:

### Books:

- “Polysecure” and “Polywise” by Jessica Fern
- “Love’s Not Color Blind: Race and Representation in Polyamorous and Other Alternative Communities” by Kevin A. Patterson
- “Opening Up” by Tristan Taormino
- “The Ethical Slut” by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy
- “More Than Two, Second Edition: Cultivating Nonmonogamous Relationships with Kindness and Integrity” by Eve Rickert and Andrea Zanin

### Podcasts:

- Polyamory Weekly
- Multiamory
- Non-Monogamy Help

### Comics:

*My First Year of Polyamory* by Sara Valta: [www.bit.ly/OJSTsvalta](http://www.bit.ly/OJSTsvalta)

## For youth ages 13-29

### Planned Parenthood Toronto Health Services

Offers drop-in and scheduled appointments  
Call 416-961-0113 or visit [www.ppt.on.ca](http://www.ppt.on.ca)

## For youth ages 13-19

### Teen Health Source

Offers anonymous and confidential sexual health information for teens by teens.  
Text (647) 933-5399, call (416) 961-3200, email [teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca](mailto:teenhealthsource@ppt.on.ca)  
Chat online and visit [www.teenhealthsource.com](http://www.teenhealthsource.com)

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## relationships and self esteem series

# consensual non-monogamy

Consensual non-monogamy is an umbrella term describing an array of different kinds of non-exclusive romantic and/or sexual relationship structures. It’s an alternative to monogamy, which is an agreement between two people to only have sex with and/or be romantically involved with each other. When we talk about consensual non-monogamy, we mean that everybody in the relationship is aware of and agrees to the arrangement

## Examples of relationship structures

There are many kinds of consensual non-monogamy. Even within the broad categories, there is a lot of variation. Language changes rapidly and may mean different things to different people. Some of the common subtypes of consensual non-monogamous relationship structures are:

- **Polyamory:** The practice of, or desire for, intimate and/or sexual, loving relationships with more than one partner. Sometimes there are hierarchal structures within these relationships, and sometimes they are non-hierarchical. A polycule refers to a network of people connected through polyamory.
- **Open relationship:** A romantically exclusive couple who are open to either partner having sex with other people.
- **Swinging:** A romantically exclusive couple who may appear monogamous to most of the people in their lives (i.e. usually aren’t “out” to friends/family), who have sex with other people together.
- **Relationship Anarchy:** Doesn’t rank relationships or impose structures on them, for example not seeing intimate friendships as less important/valuable than romantic and/or sexual relationships
- **Asymmetrical arrangements:** One partner of a couple has outside romantic and/or sexual relationships and the other doesn’t.

## **Describing different types of relationships within a structure**

Some people who are in consensual non-monogamous relationships use titles to denote the different kinds of relationships they have with different people. For example, partners who live together might refer to each other as anchor or nesting partners. Partners in a long distance relationship might refer to each other as comet partners. Some partners practice hierarchy in their relationships and choose to refer to primary and secondary partners.

Titles can be used as an honorific, to both describe and celebrate a relationship. The same title may have very different meanings to different people, so many people need to discuss and agree on how to use them in their specific relationships.

## **Consensual non-monogamy and the law**

Polygamy refers to the practice of one person being married to multiple people. This type of marriage is not legal in Canada.

Consensually non-monogamous couples or groups can co-parent together, but issues around custody, wills and asset management may be more complicated to work out. If you are considering parenting with more than one other person you may want to get support from a counselor, a lawyer or a mediator to help you draft detailed written agreements about care for the child(ren) and how to proceed in the event of big changes.

## **Frequently asked questions**

### ***How is consensual non-monogamy different from “cheating”?***

People who are in monogamous relationships often still feel attracted to or get crushes on people other than their partners, but they commit to remain exclusive and not to act on those feelings. If people in a monogamous relationship break their commitment to be sexually and/or romantically exclusive, that is non-consensual non-monogamy, often referred to as cheating or being unfaithful.

People in consensual non-monogamous relationships do not commit to only being sexually and/or romantically active with one partner, but may make other kinds of commitments. People in consensually non-monogamous relationships can have sex or relationships with multiple people and still be faithful or true to their words, because they are not breaking a commitment or expectation when they do so.

They can also be true to their words by upholding the commitments that they do make with their partner(s). For example, they might agree within a relationship that it is okay for each of them to have other sexual partners besides each other and to always use condoms with those partners. They can uphold their commitment to each other by consistently using condoms with other partners.

### ***Don't people who try consensual non-monogamy get jealous?***

Jealousy is a common experience in all types of relationships, including monogamous and consensually non-monogamous ones. Jealousy isn't a comfortable feeling, but you can learn to navigate it in ways that support your wellbeing and the wellbeing of the people in your life.

Sometimes feeling jealousy can help you identify where you have needs that aren't being met or boundaries that have been crossed. Sometimes it can be an opportunity to try to see that your partner's love for others doesn't make their love for you less real or to challenge cultural messaging that says jealousy is proof of love or there is a limited amount of love to go around.

You can also build feelings of security in relationships by making collaborative agreements, and having transparency, communication, and shared understanding of where your boundaries are.

You can build feelings of security in yourself by seeing your emotions (including jealousy) as neither good nor bad but as valuable insights about your internal life, taking time for reflection, building community around yourself and employing kind self-talk to be a good friend to yourself.

Consensually non-monogamous communities have a special term for the opposite of jealousy: compersion. Compersion describes a vicarious feeling of joy when someone you love is joyfully connecting sexually and/or romantically with someone else. Setting an intention to make room for compersion can be a way to build empathy.

### ***Consensual non-monogamy sounds like a fad or something just made up.***

Though the language describing them may be modern, some types of consensual non-monogamous relationships have existed throughout history, often woven into traditions that existed prior to monogamous relationship structures imposed through colonization. Consensual non-monogamy can be and is practiced by all different kinds of people.

### ***Why would somebody want to practice consensual non-monogamy?***

Advantages to consensual non-monogamy might include things like:

- More access to love, sex and/or connection.
- More availability of practical supports like childcare or money.
- Less pressure on one person to provide everything a partner needs or wants.
- More freedom to create relationship structures that work for you.
- Feelings of belonging and joy.