

Healthy Relationships

A lesson plan from Healthy Connections: A Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center Sexual Health Education Curriculum for high school students

Grade: 10-12

Time: 50 minutes

Materials Needed:

- Computer/projector to display PowerPoint
- Healthy Relationships Activity Sheet (printed)
- Healthy Relationships Activity Key (printed)

Washington State Health Standards:

Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

- Compare and contrast characteristics of healthy and unhealthy romantic and sexual relationships.

H1.Se5.HSb

OVERVIEW

Students will learn the difference between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships. Students participate in a small group activity where they determine what relationship type is depicted in a scenario.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Be able to distinguish between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships
- Know how to respectfully end a relationship
- Develop skills to address conflict in a relationship

TEACHER PREPARATION

- Print copies of Healthy Relationships Activity Sheet (one or two for each group)
- Print one copy of Healthy Relationships Activity Key

A NOTE ON INCLUSIVITY

This curriculum is inclusive of all gender identities and expressions. You are encouraged to use gender-neutral language when presenting this lesson. That means using “they/them” pronouns rather than “he/him” or “she/her” pronouns, unless otherwise specified.

When talking about romantic relationships, do not assume heterosexuality. This curriculum is inclusive of all sexual orientations. Do not always assume abusers are male-identified, and do not always assume survivors of abuse are female-identified.

Please keep in mind that people of any race, gender, sexual orientation or ability can experience abuse.

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AGENDA

Introduction - 5 minutes

Slide 1: *Hello everyone, welcome to today's presentation on healthy relationships. [Introduce self if needed]*

Before we get started, I do want to mention that we will be talking about abuse and other forms of violence during this presentation. Please take care of yourselves as needed. If you need to take a break, that's totally okay.

Slide 2: *Before we get started, here are some gentle reminders as we go through the presentation. First, everyone should be respectful of others. That means try not to speak over each other and instead speak one at a time. Second, be mindful of what you share. I am what's called a mandated reporter. Does anyone know what that means? [Pause for responses] A mandated reporter is someone who cares about the safety of students and has a legal obligation to report if a student has been assaulted or abused to the police or Child Protective Services. Please keep that in mind as we go through the lesson. If anyone wants to report anything, find a mandated reporter you trust, so a teacher, coach, or counselor, and they will help you. Lastly, no shaming others. Everyone should feel safe here. Let's get started!*

Slide 3: *This is today's agenda. We'll start by defining healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships, then we'll discuss dealing with conflict in relationships, then we'll talk a bit about break ups, and we'll end the lesson with an activity.*

Discussion - 20 minutes

Slide 4: *There are all kinds of relationships. There's friendships, casual dating, monogamous or exclusive relationships, non-monogamous relationships, and so on. All are valid, but it's important that people form the types of relationships that feel good to them.*

We're going to focus on romantic/intimate relationships in this lesson, but that can range from hooking up to serious relationships. A lot of what we discuss today can also apply to friendships.

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Slide 4 (continued): *Relationships exist on a spectrum. There's healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships. Many relationships don't fit neatly into one category. Someone could be in a healthy relationship where there are a few characteristics of an unhealthy relationship. Someone could view a behavior as unhealthy, and someone else could view that same behavior as abusive. As we talk about the different types of relationships, remember that relationships are complicated and need to be looked at with more nuance.*

Slide 5: *Is anyone willing to share characteristics of a healthy relationship?* [Pause for response]

Thank you to those who shared. We'll talk about this more in the next slide.

Slide 6: *For the most part, relationships are supposed to feel good. It's normal and expected to argue or disagree sometimes, but overall a relationship should be something that adds to your life, not subtracts from it.*

People in healthy relationships usually respect their partner's boundaries, keep their promises, are willing to have hard conversations, create a safe space for their partner, communicate openly and honestly, and respect their partner's time with others.

People in healthy relationships often know and understand that their partner has a life outside of their relationship. It's perfectly okay to prioritize a romantic relationship, but not at the expense of other relationships, like friends or family.

Healthy relationships also take a lot of intentional upkeep and effort. One way to make sure someone is putting an effort into their relationship is by having relationship check-ins. A relationship check-in is a scheduled time for partners to discuss what is going well in their relationship and what could be improved. The check-ins could range from once or twice a month to once a week, depending on the needs of the people involved.

Are there other characteristics of a healthy relationship that are missing from this list?
[Pause for responses]

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Slide 7: *Next, let's talk about unhealthy relationships. Someone in an unhealthy relationship might not properly communicate with their partner, disrespect their partners' boundaries, not believe what their partner says, lie to their partner, not be able to compromise, and only spend time with their partner.*

Some unhealthy relationship characteristics can often be changed through proper communication. It's possible for a relationship to have characteristics of a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship. The difference is usually based on how much of the relationship is unhealthy. If a relationship has mostly healthy characteristics, but one partner has trouble compromising, that does not mean the entire relationship is unhealthy. That just means that person needs to work on their ability to compromise.

Does anyone have any questions about this list? [Pause for response]

Slide 8: *Lastly, let's discuss abusive relationships. Abusive relationships are never okay. Some warning signs of abuse include someone going through their partner's phone without permission, someone not allowing their partner to spend time with others, someone making fun of their partner or intentionally embarrassing them, someone getting extremely jealous, someone pressuring their partner to do things they don't want to do, and someone who physically hurts or threatens to hurt their partner in any way.*

Let's take a moment to talk about jealousy. Jealousy can lead to a lot of disruptive and potentially abusive behaviors. However, jealousy in itself is not a bad emotion. It is perfectly normal and okay for people to experience jealousy. What is not okay is when people use jealousy as justification for other problematic behaviors, such as someone controlling their partner.

Does anyone have any questions about this list? [Pause for responses]

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Slide 9: *Some of you might be thinking, "What's the difference between an unhealthy relationship and an abusive one?" For some people, the distinction is not very noticeable. Many of the characteristics of an unhealthy relationship could fall under abusive relationships as well, that's why it's a spectrum. The main difference is that abusive relationships are about a pattern of power and control. Typically in abusive relationships, one partner will use tactics to keep the other partner in the relationship. Some of the tactics can be subtle, continual behaviors, while others could include physical or sexual violence. If one partner doesn't have freedom in the relationship, always feels anxious around their partner, or is scared for their safety, then the relationship is most likely abusive.*

If someone is a victim of an abusive relationship, it is not their fault.

Slide 10: *Is anyone willing to share if they believe cheating would be considered unhealthy or abusive and why? [Pause for response]*

Thank you all for sharing. Generally speaking, cheating is never okay. Cheating involves someone lying and betraying their partner's trust. It can also put their partner at risk, depending on if safer sex practices were used. That being said, cheating isn't always unhealthy or abusive. It depends on the situation. Each person also has different views on what they consider cheating, which is why everyone should have clearly established boundaries in their relationship.

Slide 11: *Power dynamics are another important thing to consider in relationships. Power dynamics in romantic relationships refers to the control and influence one partner has over the other.*

Large age gaps are a common power dynamic. The older person in the relationship often has more power and control. If there's a large age gap between two people, and one person is a minor and the other is an adult, then the younger person may have been a victim of grooming. Grooming is when an older person builds a relationship and trust with a younger person in order to manipulate or abuse them. Grooming is never okay or healthy. If someone has been groomed, it is not their fault.

Finances are another power dynamic that people have to navigate. This mostly applies to adults, but if one partner makes a lot more money than the other, that can also create a power dynamic.

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Slide 11 (continued): *Lastly, people in positions of authority have to consider and acknowledge the power dynamics of those they get into relationships with. For example, it's not okay for a boss to date an employee or a doctor to date a patient because one person has more power over the other.*

Any questions about power dynamics before we move on? [Pause for responses]

Slide 12: *Unfortunately, teen dating violence is fairly common. 1 in 12 high school students in the United States experience physical and/or sexual violence in a dating relationship. Additionally, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 10 boys experience physical and/or sexual violence in their intimate relationship. I want to note that this statistic is binary, and non-binary and gender nonconforming teens also experience dating violence, but unfortunately there is not a lot of data for that population yet.*

On the other hand, LGBTQ+ teens experience dating violence more often than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Also, nearly 89% of trans youth experience physical dating violence.

This shows the importance of why young people should learn about healthy relationships, and be able to identify characteristics for unhealthy or abusive relationships.

Slide 13: *Now let's discuss conflict. Conflict is not always a bad thing. All relationships have conflict; many of you have probably navigated conflict with a parent, a sibling, or maybe even a friend or a teacher. Conflict also shows up in romantic relationships, even healthy ones. But how much conflict is too much?*

If most interactions between two people are negative, then there's probably too much conflict. Conflict is a time for two people to tackle a problem together. Conflict is not an excuse to blame, insult, or yell at each other.

An effective way to deal with conflict is by using "I" statements. An example could be, "I feel that you didn't communicate with me." By using "I" statements, it removes the feeling of blame and focuses on how a behavior made someone feel.

If conflict is consistent and not properly dealt with, the relationship might need to end.

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Slide 14: *For the next few slides, we're going to discuss break ups. Break ups are often uncomfortable to talk about. It can be difficult to acknowledge that a relationship isn't working out. Break ups can make people feel hurt, rejected, lost, anxious, relieved, or a mix of different emotions. Many people will experience a break up at some point in their lives, so it's important to know ways to end a relationship in a respectful way.*

Slide 15: *A relationship ending does not always mean it was unhealthy or a failed relationship. Some relationships are only meant to last a certain amount of time. "Forever" doesn't have to be the goal. Relationships are a good way to connect with others and discover new things about ourselves.*

If a relationship needs to end, there are ways to do it respectfully. First, don't ghost the person. Be direct with them. Second, be honest, but not overly hurtful. This isn't the time to point out someone's flaws. And third, if possible, end the relationship in person. Sometimes ending a relationship over the phone is necessary, like in long-distance relationships, but ending a relationship in-person is more respectful.

Slide 16: *Sometimes people don't have control over if someone ends a relationship with them. If someone is broken up with, it's normal to feel hurt by that. It's important to hold space for your emotions, and to allow yourself to grieve the loss of the relationship.*

No one should ever try to pressure or persuade someone into staying in a relationship with them. People should be in relationships where both people are invested and interested in being together. Someone pressuring their ex-partner to stay in a relationship could also be considered harassment, which is never okay.

Getting over a relationship can be very challenging. But with time, it gets easier. This can be a time to talk with friends, spend more time on after-school activities, or focus on school. But with the right support and with a little distance from the break up, things will start to feel normal again.

As a reminder, almost everyone who dates has experienced a break up in one way or another. It's a normal part of dating, and a normal part of being a teenager.

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Slide 17: *Getting out of an abusive relationship often looks different than other break ups. Safety can be an issue, so it's important to plan ahead.*

Someone getting out of an abusive relationship should decide if it's better to speak in person or over the phone. If meeting in person, make sure to meet in a public place and tell a friend or family member where you'll be.

Be clear and direct; tell the person you want out of the relationship. If they want you to clarify, remember that you don't owe them an explanation. It's also okay to set a time limit on the conversation. If the conversation isn't going anywhere, it's okay to say, "I think it's time for this conversation to end."

If things ever escalate, ask a friend or trusted adult for help.

For many people, going no contact is also an option when leaving an abusive relationship. Sometimes, it can be the only way for someone to ensure their safety.

Any questions about this slide before we move on? [Pause for responses]

Slide 18: *Before moving onto the activity, I want to provide a few resources for survivors of teen dating violence.*

New Beginnings, the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and the Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center are three local organizations that can support survivors of teen dating violence.

Nationally, there are hotlines that teens can call or text for help. There's the National Domestic Violence Hotline, or the Love Is Respect hotline.

Slide 19: *We talked about a lot of important things today. It's important to remember that relationships are supposed to feel good. Healthy relationships take a lot of intention and upkeep to be successful. Also, sometimes healthy relationships have one or two unhealthy characteristics. As long as both parties in the relationship are actively working on making the relationship better, the relationship is still healthy.*

Any questions before we move on to the activity? [Pause for responses]

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Activity - 23 minutes

Slide 20: *Now we're going to do an activity!*

Please get into 5 groups. I'm going to pass out an activity sheet with 5 different scenarios on it. Each group will have 5-7 minutes to work on one scenario. With your group, determine if the scenario is healthy, unhealthy, abusive, or somewhere in-between. Think about ways the people in the scenario could handle the situation differently.

Then, we'll come back together as a larger group and discuss each scenario. Please be ready to share out.

[Instructions]

1. Divide the class into 5 groups
2. Once the students are in their groups, give each group an activity sheet (you may give each group more than one activity sheet depending on the size of the group)
3. Tell each group which scenario their group will be working on (from 1-5)
4. Give the groups 5-7 minutes to determine if their scenario is an example of a healthy, unhealthy, or abusive relationship (or somewhere in-between)
5. After the 5-7 minutes, ask someone from each group to read out their scenario. Then ask the group what their response was to the scenario
6. Once the group has finished sharing what they responded to the scenario, ask if anyone else in the class wanted to add anything
 - a. i.e. "What do others think of their response? Do you agree or disagree?"
7. Provide the class with the preferred response listed in the key (if needed)
8. Repeat actions 5-7 until each group has shared
9. Return to slide deck to finish out the lesson

Conclusion - 2 minutes

Slide 21: *Thank you all for listening and participating in today's lesson. Are there any last-minute questions?* [Pause for responses]

Slide 22: [Sources - may share with students if needed]

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HANDOUTS

- Healthy Relationships Activity Sheet

Activity for Healthy Relationships Lesson

Instructions: With your group, determine if one of the following scenarios is describing a healthy, unhealthy, or abusive relationship (or somewhere in-between). Your instructor will let you know which scenario your group is doing. Once finished, be prepared to share your responses with the larger group and explain your reasoning.

1. Dominic and Alejandra have been dating for a couple of months. Dominic wants to spend time with his friends, but Alejandra doesn't want him to. Dominic reminds Alejandra that they have been spending every night together and that it's important that he gets some alone time with his friends. Alejandra says Dominic can only spend time with his friends if she's there too.

2. Davina and Hanna just started dating. Davina lets Hanna know that she struggles with jealousy due to how she'd been treated in past relationships. Davina tells Hanna that she's working on ways to deal with these emotions and promises to communicate when she's feeling jealous.

3. Mae and Garrett have been talking for a while, but just started dating more seriously. Garrett saw a post on one of Mae's social media accounts, and noticed a photo of her and her friends at the beach. Garrett told Mae to delete the photo because he didn't want other guys looking at her in her swimsuit.

4. Andy and Edgar have been best friends since middle school. They met up with some old friends and started telling stories from when they were younger. Andy started telling everyone an embarrassing story about Edgar from when they were in 7th grade. Edgar told Andy to stop, but Andy continued making jokes at Edgar's expense.

5. Colin and Andre are a new couple. Many of their interactions so far have been disagreements. During their most recent fight, Colin threw a water bottle against the wall.

Key for Healthy Relationships Lesson

1. Dominic and Alejandra have been dating for a couple of months. Dominic wants to spend time with his friends, but Alejandra doesn't want him to. Dominic reminds Alejandra that they have been spending every night together and that it's important that he gets some alone time with his friends. Alejandra says Dominic can only spend time with his friends if she's there too.

Preferred response: In-between an unhealthy and abusive relationship. Alejandra is trying to control Dominic. Could be a warning sign for abuse if Alejandra does not value Dominic's time with other people.

2. Davina and Hanna just started dating. Davina lets Hanna know that she struggles with jealousy due to how she'd been treated in past relationships. Davina tells Hanna that she's working on ways to deal with these emotions and promises to communicate when she's feeling jealous.

Preferred response: Healthy relationship. Davina is being communicative and is working on her feelings of jealousy. Jealousy is only considered unhealthy or abusive if one partner uses jealousy as an excuse to try to control or manipulate their partner.

3. Mae and Garrett have been talking for a while, but just started dating more seriously. Garrett saw a post on one of Mae's social media accounts, and noticed a photo of her and her friends at the beach. Garrett told Mae to delete the photo because he didn't want other guys looking at her in her swimsuit.

Preferred response: Unhealthy relationship. Garrett is allowing his jealousy to dictate how Mae behaves online. Could be a warning sign for abuse as Garrett is displaying some controlling behavior.

4. Andy and Edgar have been best friends since middle school. They met up with some old friends and started telling stories from when they were younger. Andy started telling everyone an embarrassing story about Edgar from when they were in 7th grade. Edgar told Andy to stop, but Andy continued making jokes at Edgar's expense.

Preferred response: Unhealthy relationship. Andy should not have continued making fun of Edgar, especially after being asked to stop.

5. Colin and Andre are a new couple. Many of their interactions so far have been disagreements. During their most recent fight, Colin threw a water bottle against the wall.

Preferred response: Abusive relationship. Physical violence is not okay. It does not matter if the water bottle did not hit Andre, throwing things is still considered physical violence.