Healthy Relationships for Teens 2.0

PRINCIPLE

All teens deserve to have healthy relationships. In order to recognize healthy relationships, teens must be taught the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as how to communicate when they have concerns. Teen employees or volunteers can also help communicate concerns to adults regarding other children.

OBJECTIVES

Through this lesson, the adult lesson leader will help lead the youth to develop a better understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Following the lesson, youth will be able to:

- Identify the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Follow a plan to "do the right thing" for themselves and others if they recognize an unhealthy situation.
- Communicate regarding concerns of unsafe situations.

CATECHISM / SCRIPTURE

"I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace." —Paul, in Ephesians 4: 1-3

"…Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love." —Paul, in Ephesians 4:15-16

Background for Lesson Leaders:

Please note this lesson has three components: Step 1, a brief introduction; Step 2, a required video component (entitled *Healthy Relationships for Teens 2.0*) for the teens to view together in the classroom setting and continues with an expanded video section specifically geared for youth who are employees/volunteers assisting as teen peer leaders (please stop the video at 33.57 minutes), and Step 3, a discussion component.

Before beginning this lesson, the Lesson Leader should complete the VIRTUS *Lesson Leader Orientation and Certification* Online Module, and/or read the VIRTUS *Teaching Boundaries and Safety Guide*, as it gives a wealth of information regarding boundaries. While adults are the main protectors of youth, there are skills youth can learn to better protect themselves and each other when faced with tough situations where caring adults aren't present.

Although this lesson focuses on healthy relationships and boundaries, please be very clear in your communication to youth that they are *not responsible* for each other.

Misinforming youth by saying that one person's welfare is a youth's responsibility could make a youth feel more guilt if they weren't able to prevent or stop abuse from occurring for themselves or for another child. The distinction for this lesson is that there are times when children are being abused, or they know a peer is in need of help, but, they don't always know the best way to assist. Having a healthy relationship means that youth do the "right thing" for themselves, and for each other—meaning that they perform action, or intervene in safe ways when they are aware of a problem.

Keep in mind some of these myths to unpack during the lessons: sometimes youth may not be aware that they're allowed to say "no" to a behavior that makes them feel uncomfortable. They may make promises with their peers to keep safety secrets in an attempt to protect them, not realizing that it's most important to deliver knowledge about unsafe situations to safe adults. They'll also need to know that it's never their fault (nor will it ever be their fault) if they or someone they know has been abused or is hurting.

This age group: Working with teenagers–key concept is "searching"

Teens believe in their immortality and may tend to be reckless in their behavior—in person and online. Although it would appear that they reject authority while defining their own independence, in reality they rely on the strength and support they find in parents and other influential adults. Feeling supported and understood is important for this age group, as is upholding boundaries while the reasoning portions of their brains continue to develop. Teens have a great deal of personal freedom. This freedom also puts them at risk in various ways. Parents and guardians expect teens to take care of themselves and to ask for the help that they need. Caring adults must know that children's online behavior and boundaries may need to be fortified.

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STEP #1: Provide a Brief Introduction

Tell the youth this lesson will be discussing relationships—because it's important to know the differences between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship.

- Ask the youth: "What types of relationships do you have?"
    - Responses may include a range of relationships between the following: parents, friends, family, girlfriends, boyfriends, teammates, co-workers, neighbors, acquaintances, etc.

- Ask the youth: "How are these relationships different from one another?" [The Lesson Leader is simply asking this question without providing explanation, and allowing the youth to provide their thoughts.]

- Say:
    - "You deserve to have healthy relationships, no matter whom your relationship is with—whether it be peers or adults. Today we will be discussing tools to navigate your relationships in a healthy way. We will also review how to communicate to a safe adult if you feel you, or a friend, are in an unhealthy relationship. To begin our lesson, we will watch a video illustrating key concepts in healthy and unhealthy relationships. For those of you who are also employees or volunteers, the end of the video will also include safe environment information when serving other youth."

STEP #2: Show the Video

Access the "Healthy Relationships for Teens" video here - https://vimeo.com/1210604717/32230930fd

STEP #3: Discussion

Following the video, ask the youth if anything stood out to them in the video or the message.

Then, lead students on a discussion reviewing the following questions and scenarios. You can separate the youth into groups and have them present their question, and their answer to the group, or you can lead the entire group in the question-and-answer format—explaining the material as you go along if there is any confusion (the explanation pulls directly from the video, so the Lesson Leader does not need to read fully from the explanation if the students seem to grasp the material).

Questions:

1. **Is the following information true or false?** Boundaries are only an essential component of a relationship between people who are in a dating type of relationship. Otherwise, boundaries that exist within relationships between youth and others (such as acquaintances, family members, adults, peers and relationships that are friendships), actually hinder the development of the friendship.

    - **Answer**: False
    - **Explanation**: Remember, our lives are made up of relationships with *all* of the people around us, including relationships between family members, teachers, coaches, other adults, our friends, and other significant people in our lives. Some relationships are such that we know the person really well, but others are simply casual acquaintances. We have relationships with people that we know "in person" and whom we've merely met "online."

      Regardless of the *type* of relationship or the people in the relationship, boundaries are key elements that help keep everyone safe and healthy. Properly placed boundaries do not hinder the development of healthy relationships between anyone—in fact, they provide context and ensure that the relationship is the best that it possibly can be. Note, that even God sets boundaries with His people.

2. **List the different types of abuse that were learned from the video. After reviewing the following examples, which type of abuse are they most characteristic of?**
        - When one person uses insults to make the other person feel poorly about themselves
        - When someone is manipulative to make the other person feel guilty
        - Embarrassing someone else on purpose
        - Not letting you spend time with others because of jealousy or insecurity
        - Threatening to hurt themselves if you don't do what they want

    - **Answer**: Psychological / Emotional abuse
    - **Explanation**: Unhealthy relationships can include grooming behaviors, which are the things someone does to control you. Or, get you to do what they want. Grooming behaviors tend to be subtle at first and increase in severity over time. Emotional abuse is also known as verbal or psychological abuse, where one person uses insults to make the other person feel bad about themselves. Emotional abuse can include manipulation to cause fear or guilt. It can also

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include embarrassing someone on purpose, along with dishonesty, lying and stealing.

Emotional abuse can be occurring if the person is always jealous of your time with others. Or, doesn't want you to hang out with others. They might want you to be available *all* the time, or say *you've* ruined *their* time! They might manipulate you so much that you believe *you're* the problem. And, if you want a break or distance, they might *threaten to hurt themselves* or others, and make you feel like you're responsible for their wellbeing. Psychological / Emotional abuse is not healthy, and when you recognize that it is happening, it's probably time to put an end to the relationship, place very clear boundaries, or get help.

3. **Which of the following statements is (or are) *incorrect*?**
   A. Sexual assault, or rape, are not possible between a couple when they are in a relationship.
   B. Sexual exploitation and abuse aren't always violent.
   C. Most victims know their abusers.
   D. Someone who cares about you will respect your wishes and won't force, pressure or manipulate you to do anything.

- **Answer**: The statement of "A. Sexual assault, or rape, are not possible between a couple when they are in a relationship" is incorrect.
- **Explanation**: It is incorrect to say that it can't be rape, exploitation or sexual abuse if you're in a relationship with the person, or, if you've performed sexual activities in the past, or, if you didn't seem to fight back. In fact, this is a common myth! The truth is that rape, exploitation and sexual abuse can all occur in relationships, and most often do occur with people you know. Also, sexual abuse, exploitation and rape aren't always violent. They can happen when someone says "no" at any point, and their wishes aren't respected.

  Date rape is a type of sexual abuse. "Date rape," or, acquaintance rape, is any non-consensual sexual activity between at least two people who know one another. Most victims know their abusers. It's more common than you might think, and can happen between friends, acquaintances, people who are dating, teammates, classmates and people who have recently met…

  Remember this key fact: Someone who cares about you will respect your wishes and won't force, pressure or manipulate you to do anything.

4. **Which of the following statements is (or, are) true?**
   - Only females can experience unhealthy or unsafe relationships; they are never the abusers
   - If both persons are behaving unsafely in the relationship, then it's OK if abuse is occurring.
   - Abuse in relationships is sometimes OK, depending on the circumstances and how angry someone is.
   - You deserve to be in a healthy relationship. No one deserves to be treated poorly.

- **Answer**: The true statement is that you deserve to be in a healthy relationship. No one deserves to be treated poorly.
- **Explanation**: Let's break down some common myths. Females or males can experience unhealthy or unsafe relationships, regardless of their age. Sometimes both persons in the relationship behave unsafely, which doesn't make abusive behavior "OK" or more acceptable. Anyone can be abused, just as anyone can be abusive. Abuse in relationships is never "OK," and you deserve to be in a healthy relationship. No one deserves to be treated poorly.

5. **Is the following statement true or false?** Victims of abuse are usually in some way at least partially responsible for the abuse that happened to them.
   - **Answer**: False
   - **Explanation**: Survivors of abuse are not fully, OR, partially responsible for any abuse that happened to them. Both persons in a relationship might behave inappropriately, but that does not justify abuse. It is important to know that a victim is never responsible for abuse. Keep in mind that victims will often blame themselves, and others blame them, too. Victims tell themselves they are unworthy and that they are not entitled to getting help. But, every survivor is entitled to respect and help, and no survivor caused or is responsible for the abuse that happened to them.

Case Study Scenarios: Read these aloud to the youth within one large group, or assign them to small groups and discuss the answers at the end.

6. **Case Study:** Cristina's best friend, Meg, has been acting differently, lately. She seems withdrawn and isn't as much fun to be around. When Cristina asks her what is going on, Meg tells her that something awful happened and she can't say anything unless Cristina promises to "keep it a secret" and "not tell ANYONE." Cristina promises to keep it a secret, and Meg discloses that one of their teachers (the really good looking one, that all the girls have a crush on) sent her sexually explicit texts and exposed himself to her, and did "other stuff," too. It's not good.

   Meg tells Cristina that she's really upset. Above all, she doesn't want anyone else to know. Since Cristina promised to keep it a secret already, Cristina feels conflicted. Cristina feels like she can't say anything to anyone, because she doesn't want to

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betray Meg's trust. Cristina offers to go with Meg to tell the school counselor, who seems nice, but Meg becomes upset and reminds her of her promise. **What, of the following, should Cristina do?**

A. Honor her friend by keeping the information a secret. A promise is a promise, and that's what good friends do; they keep secrets secret.
B. Honor her friend by getting the information to a safe adult who can help, despite promising not to say anything. That's what friends do; they help each other get the help they need to keep them safe.
C. Keep quiet for now, and wait for an opportunity to try and convince her friend to talk to someone who can help.
D. None of these options.

- **Answer**: Honor her friend by getting the information to a safe adult who can help, despite promising not to say anything. That's what friends do; they help each other get the help they need to keep them safe.
- **Explanation**: A common question surrounds whether to promise confidentiality when it comes to hearing about abuse. Friends cannot promise complete confidentiality when hearing about abuse, because there may come a time where one will need to communicate with a safe adult on their behalf, to protect them. This is what it means to be friend…

  So, even if you've already promised to keep it a secret, you should still share the information with the right person who can help. Does sharing it betray the person and their confidence? No. It's helping them, especially when they can't get the help they need themselves. That's being a good friend, even if it doesn't feel like it, because you are watching out for someone else's safety.

7. **Case Study:** Let's imagine you are a minor who has been working a few hours each week in the organization's office. For this scenario, you also participate in youth activities on behalf of the organization.

   Jessica is a youth minister employee, who doesn't seem to have the strongest boundaries. She is always texting youth late at night, is "friends" with them using her personal social media account, has inside jokes with one person in particular, etc., and one time, you heard her say that something was a secret. You're feeling uncomfortable with how she's interacting with one youth in particular.

   Jessica is the "boss" of this youth ministry program. While she has oversight through a larger organization, she's in charge of this section-and she's supposed to be doing the right thing. She's supposed to follow the rules, and no one else seems to be concerned with her behavior. There's a safe environment office in the administrative offices of the whole organization, but you don't know if it's that big of a deal. You don't want to cause issues, but you also know there are at least some warning signs of a potential issue here, and you aren't quite sure of where to go. **What is an appropriate action for you to do, in this scenario?**

   A. Wait and see if anything else happens that is more concerning, then communicate to a safe adult once it becomes really obvious that there is an issue.
   B. Communicate to Jessica that her behavior isn't the best. If she continues to do the behavior, no big deal; at least you have told her that what she is doing isn't ok, and you don't need to do anything else.
   C. Communicate your concerns to a different person in the organization, who has authority, such as Jessica's boss. You can share your concerns, or, ask for their advice.
   D. Communicate to someone, if applicable, within the overarching organization, and let them know of your concerns, or, ask for their advice.

   - **Answer**: Either communicate your concerns to a different person in the organization, who has authority, such as Jessica's boss. You can share your concerns, or, ask for their advice. OR communicate to someone, if applicable, within the overarching organization, and let them know of your concerns, or, ask for their advice.
   - **Explanation**: When you feel uncomfortable over another person's behavior, it could be an indicator of an issue. You might even notice that other youth feel uncomfortable or uneasy when around these individuals.

     Specific examples of inappropriate behavior include behavior on behalf of adults or older teens, where other employees/volunteers are discouraged from participating or attending, where there's favoritism, individual specialized gifts given without proper oversight or permission, people who ask youth to keep things "secret" or "just between them." Additionally, people who go overboard touching or tickling, or touch children in places that are sensitive or private; they might invite kids to sit on their laps, who tell crude jokes, use sexually explicit language, talk about private parts, or talk about sexual matters-and who show others pornographic images or material (this behavior may also actually be illegal).

     Each of these examples (at the very least) are warning signs that the individual is overstepping proper boundaries.

     If people are exhibiting these warning signs, or other inappropriate behavior, it does not always mean that they are grooming or abusing a child. But, suspicions, concerns or gut feelings all need to be communicated to someone who can help. It's not appropriate to "wait and see"-it's not your role to "investigate" or wait and see. If you're aware of any

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concerning or red-flag type of behavior, whether from an adult or child, it's important to communicate your concerns to a safe adult. Remember, a safe adult is one who prioritizes safety. If you have already communicated and nothing seems to have happened, or if you feel uncomfortable with the adult that's supposed to be a safe adult, you can speak to their supervisor, or someone outside of the organization, too.

Concluding thoughts to express to the youth:

You have a right to be safe. If you're in a situation where you don't feel right, or you feel scared or uncomfortable, or confused (or nervous, anxious, humiliated or embarrassed) listen to your intuition!

If someone is asking you to do something you don't like or know to be "unsafe," it is ALWAYS OK to say "no" at any point. Then, try to get away and tell a safe adult as soon as you can.

If your friend is showing or saying that they feel this way because of something that is happening to them, communicate that information to a safe adult, too!

End the lesson with a prayer

The Lesson Leader may invite the youth to create their own prayer, he/she may lead a prayer, or may use the suggested prayer below.

Dear God,
Thank you for the gift of relationships and for those we love and care for in our lives. Please help us to maintain healthy relationships, and for the courage to communicate when we may be in an unhealthy one. Thank you for helping us to stay safe. Amen.

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