



Lesson 3: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

Lesson Introduction

Relationships are a fundamental part of being human. During adolescence, individuals begin to become more aware of and question the kinds of relationships they have in their lives, and to explore new types of relationships. For example, as a result of growing maturity, youth are ready to deepen friendships and embark on romantic relationships.

Relationships can be complex and confusing to navigate, and so the ability to establish clear boundaries and recognize when relationships are becoming unhealthy is an important skill. Academic research generally recommends that education about healthy relationships start early, preferably before or just at the onset of dating (Schubert, 2015; Wolfe, et al., 2009). Research also shows that youth who received education about healthy and unhealthy relationships reported significant gains in relationship knowledge and communication and conflict resolution skills, and were much less likely to tolerate dating violence (Antle, et al., 2011). Effective education supports youth to identify what makes relationships healthy or unhealthy, to set healthy boundaries, to effectively resolve conflicts through clear communication, and to respond and get help if they find themselves in an unhealthy relationship.

In this lesson, youth will learn about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as strategies for maintaining healthy relationships, ending unhealthy relationships, and navigating the power dynamics within relationships.

Key Themes

1. As human beings we are involved in all kinds of relationships, whether they are at home, at school, in our extracurricular activities, or at a workplace.
2. Healthy relationships are based on mutual respect. This refers to relationships with adults, as well as with our peers and friends.
3. Unhealthy relationships are based on power and control. This includes relationships with adults, as well as those with our peers and our friends.
4. The golden rule with relationships: treat others the way you want to be treated.
5. All people deserve respect. This includes people who have different identities or abilities or who come from different backgrounds and communities than your own.
6. If you do not respect yourself first, it is harder to respect others.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships and learn strategies to set boundaries in relationships.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships
2. Identify how to set healthy boundaries in relationships
3. Increase awareness of different types of relationships
4. Identify ways to maintain healthy relationships
5. Increase awareness of power and boundaries in relationships

Introduction Discussion Questions

1. What does a healthy relationship look like?
 - *A healthy relationship includes respect, honesty, trust, compromise, respect for personal rights and boundaries, clear communication, privacy, etc.*
 - *People in the relationship can express themselves freely and feel safe to share their thoughts and ideas, etc.*
 - *In a healthy relationship race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, and religion are respected*
2. What does an unhealthy relationship look like?
 - *An unhealthy relationship is dishonest, lacking in trust, uncompromising, disrespectful, and includes mean behaviours*
 - *An unhealthy relationship is one where someone is made to feel bad because of their race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, or religion*
 - *People in unhealthy relationships do not always trust each other and the relationship does not always feel fair or equal. They can manipulate each other, isolate a person from their friends or family, or tell another person how to dress or speak. This is a form of emotional abuse known as coercive control.*
3. Healthy relationships are based on respect. Can you think of some examples of behaviours that show the relationship is healthy?
 - *There is respect for and interest in someone's identity and choices*
 - *There is respect for someone's family and friends*
 - *Each individual learns from their mistakes and tries to work on the relationship*
 - *Clear boundaries are communicated and respected*
 - *Individuals solve problems by listening and communicating without making the other person feel ashamed, guilty, afraid, or alone*
 - *A person's position of power is not used to make others feel disrespected or unsafe*

4. Unhealthy relationships are based on one person having power and control, or there being struggle with regards to power and control. Can you think of some examples of behaviours that show the relationship is unhealthy?

- *Boundaries are not respected*
- *Communication is disrespectful, including about an individual's race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, culture, language, or religion*
- *There is manipulative behaviour, including isolating a person from their friends or family or telling another person how to dress or speak*
- *Communication is often ineffective and the individual with more power or control may be unwilling to listen*
- *When one person has the power or control in the relationship, they may limit the other person in the relationship from doing the things they want to do*
- *One person in the relationship may be trying hard to work on the problems in the relationship, but the person with the power or control may not take responsibility*

5. How can you set healthy boundaries in relationships?

- *Be self-aware about what makes you feel comfortable and uncomfortable with someone else's behaviour*
- *Communicate clearly to others when something makes you uncomfortable*
- *Initiate conversations so you can come to a mutual understanding of each other's boundaries and the importance of respecting each other's boundaries*

Activity

- [Link to Activity: Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships Scenario Swaps, Role Playing Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships](#)

Relevant Ontario Curriculum Expectations

Grade 7:

Health and Physical Education:

Strand A Social-Emotional Learning Skills Specific Expectations

- A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6

Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations

- D1.1, D1.3, D1.4, D1.5, D2.2, D2.4, D3.2, D3.3

Grade 8:

Health and Physical Education:

Strand A Social-Emotional Learning Skills Specific Expectations

- A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4, A1.5, A1.6

Strand D Healthy Living Specific Expectations

- D1.2, D1.4, D1.5, D2.2, D2.3, D2.4, D3.2, D3.3, D3.4

Grade 9:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C1.2, C1.4, C1.5, C2.2, C2.3, C3.2, C3.3

Grade 10:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C1.1, C2.3, C2.4, C2.5, C3.2, C3.4, C3.5

Grade 11:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C1.2, C2.1, C2.3, C3.2, C3.3, C3.4

Grade 12:

Health and Physical Education:

Healthy Living Strand

- C1.1, C1.3, C2.2, C2.3, C3.2, C3.4

References

1. Antle, B.F., Sullivan, D.J., Dryden, A., Karam, E.A., & Barbee, A.P. (2011). Healthy relationship education for dating violence prevention among high-risk youth. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*, 173-179.
2. Schubert, K. (2015). Building a culture of health: Promoting healthy relationships and reducing teen dating violence. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 56*, S3-S4.
3. Wolfe, D.A., Crooks, C.C., Chiodo, D., & Jaffe, P. (2009). Child maltreatment, bullying, gender-based harassment, and adolescent dating violence: Making the connections. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 33*, 21-24.