

# Relationship Spectrum Activity<sup>1</sup>

## Goals:

- To discuss the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationship scenarios.
- To highlight what healthy relationships can look like.

## Have Ready:

- Relationship scenario cards (see below).

## Instructions:

- Choose which statements to use for this activity (approximately 6-12). The statements you choose will depend on how much time there is and which scenarios may be most relevant for the group. Make sure cards from each type are addressed.
- Divide youth into smaller groups and hand out scenarios asking youth to think about what type of relationship it is - healthy, unhealthy or abusive.
- Priority for each card is for youth to share their thoughts and discuss. Cards can be debriefed as necessary.

## Healthy:

*My partner is happy for me when I do the things I enjoy, even if it's not with them.*

Your partner can be supportive of your hobbies and activities by being interested, encouraging, helping out and giving you the space to pursue things that are important to you.

*You miss your partner when you go away with your family but have a really good time anyway.*

Having a good time without your partner is an okay thing to do. It can mean you have lots more to tell each other when you are together.

*My partner and I don't tell each other everything but we share lots and trust each other.*

You have enough respect for each other to understand what information should be shared – hobbies and mutual interests – and what should not be shared like passwords to social media sites and pin codes to bank accounts. You understand boundaries are helpful and necessary in a healthy relationship.

*You feel jealous sometimes in your relationship but trust your partner and know how to take care of your uncomfortable feelings.*

You understand that your feelings are yours to deal with and you do not blame your partner when you feel jealous. Instead you take time to think about where your feelings are coming from and what healthy actions you can take to get through them. It becomes abusive if someone tries to control their partner, for example, the way they dress, where they go or who they text or talk to. In healthy relationships it's important we take responsibility for our feelings and choose respectful behaviours.

## **Unhealthy:**

*I feel uncomfortable sending naked pictures to my partner.*

In a healthy relationship, your feelings and boundaries are respected. It is not okay to pressure to send or share the photos without consent. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Check out [www.thatsnotcool.com](http://www.thatsnotcool.com) for help to stop digital dating abuse. Also, it is not your fault if someone is sharing your pictures. If someone has shared your pics, talk to an adult you trust or check-out the website [www.needhelpnow.ca](http://www.needhelpnow.ca). If consent is happening (meaning both people feel comfortable) then sharing pics is okay with the understanding that they are not to be shared with anyone else.

FYI: Supreme Court of Canada decided in 2001 that young people have a right to express themselves sexually by creating and sharing sexual images of themselves as long as it is 100% consensual, the images stay private (are not shared or distributed by the person who receives them to someone else who was never supposed to see them), there is no physical or sexual assault or abuse depicted in the image or video.<sup>2</sup>

FYI: It is against the law in Canada to send sexual pictures or videos of anyone who is, or appears to be, under 18 years old. This includes taking and sending sexual pictures or videos of yourself. According to section 163.1 of the

Canadian Criminal Code, sexual pictures or videos of people under 18 years old, or who look like they are under 18 years old, are child pornography.)<sup>3</sup>

*My partner gives me too many hickies to show how much they love me.*

If hickies are being used without consent or to show that a person is “taken” or “owned” by their partner that is control and abuse, not love. As long as consent is happening meaning both people are comfortable with it, hickies are okay.

*I try to make my partner jealous.*

Jealousy is not a good way to gauge how much someone cares for us. Jealousy is a complicated emotion that is about self-esteem, past experiences, and fear of losing someone. There are healthier ways to ask for support, affection and attention from a partner. Trying to make someone jealous is not part of a healthy relationship.

*My partner texts me more than I want and gets upset if I don't respond.*

Everyone deserves space even from their partner. Feeling as though you don't have enough is a sign that your boundaries are not being respected.

*You had a really good day but don't want to share it because you know your partner won't want to hear about it.*

Feeling the need to leave things out or hide things from your partner might mean there is a lack of support. If you feel worse or “taken down” after sharing your good feelings with a partner, it might be a sign of abuse. In a healthy relationship, a partner thinks your happiness is important. A supportive partner takes the time to hear about your day.

## **Abusive:**

*When my partner gets angry around me they hit the wall and/or throw things.*

It is not okay for a partner to use intimidation, even if they are angry and you are in a disagreement. Whether the anger is directed at you or not anger should not be scary. This is abuse because it feels scary and sends the message that more abuse could follow. In a healthy relationship, people get angry and find ways of dealing with feelings that do not scare their partner.

*My partner makes fun of my spiritual practices and beliefs.*

If someone is put down because of their beliefs, or feels like they can't practice their spirituality because of their relationship, it is abuse. In a healthy relationship, people feel free to practice their beliefs even if they are different from their partners.

*When there is a disagreement, your partner uses the silent treatment or blocks you on social media.*

In a healthy relationship, if there is a disagreement people often let their partner know they need to "take time" to cool down. That way they are more able to find solutions, not so they can control their partner. The silent treatment sends the message that the partner it's used on is not even worth talking to (dehumanizing) and leaves them with no option of a solution. It is used as a method of control and for one person to have power over their partner. This is abuse.

*My partner refuses to wear a condom.*

Everyone has the right to be safer and use protection when having sex. If one partner wants to use a condom, not using one, or pressuring them not to, is sexual assault.

*When we have an argument my partner hides my stuff so I can't leave.*

If someone is keeping you somewhere against your will it is abuse. We have a right to leave a situation safely. In a healthy relationship it can actually work out for people to take time and cool down so they can come back together in a clearer headspace to work things out.

FYI: Canada's Criminal Code section 279 (2) defines forcible confinement as "every one who, without lawful authority, confines, imprisons or forcibly seizes another person."

*My partner asks to borrow money all the time and doesn't pay me back.*

Not returning the money and breaking the agreement is financial abuse. You have no obligation to lend or give money to anyone if you don't want to, your partner included. In healthy relationships partners understand their money is their own and don't feel guilt or pressure to "share" it.

## Debrief:

- Trusting ourselves, our instincts and feelings can help us figure out where we are on the relationship spectrum. **No matter where we land we can all work at building healthier relationships, keeping in mind abuse is a choice and sometimes ending a relationship is the healthiest choice we can make.** If people recognize they are using abuse it's actually a good thing because then we can choose to change our behaviour and learn to become supportive partners. **We are all deserving of having healthy boundaries, support and respect in our relationships.**

## Additional Activities:

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

- Action Planning Activity
- Qualities of a Healthy Relationship Brainstorm
- Fun and Single Relay Race



## Relationship Activity Spectrum Cards

**When there is a disagreement, my partner uses the silent treatment or blocks me on social media.**

**My partner is happy for me when I do the things I enjoy, even if it's not with them.**

**My partner refuses to wear a condom.**

**I miss my partner when I go away with my family but I have a really good time anyway.**

**My partner texts me more than I want and gets angry if I don't respond.**



**My partner makes fun of my spiritual practices and beliefs.**

**My partner likes to give me too many hickies to show how much they love me.**

**My partner and I don't tell each other everything but we share a lot and trust each other.**

**I feel pressure to share nudes (naked pics) with my partner.**

**I feel jealous sometimes in my relationship but trust my partner and know how take care of my uncomfortable feelings.**



**I had a really good day but don't want to share it with my partner because I know they won't want to hear about it.**

**I try to make my partner jealous.**

**When we have an argument, my partner hides my stuff so I can't leave.**

**My partner hits the wall and/or throws things when they get angry.**

**My partner asks to borrow money all the time and doesn't pay me back.**



# Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Relationship Spectrum from [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org), accessed June 16, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> [www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/cndii-cdncii/p6.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/other-autre/cndii-cdncii/p6.html), accessed October 3, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> [www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-163.1.html](http://www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-46/section-163.1.html), accessed October 3, 2016.