

Relationship Spectrum Activity Group Discussionⁱ

Recommended Age: 14+

Goals

- To provide an opportunity to define, discuss, and identify the distinctions between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationship scenarios.
- To highlight what a supportive relationship can look like.

Have Ready

- Relationship scenario cards (see below).

Activity Introduction

- Ask youth, **“Why do people start dating in the first place?”** Want to have someone to hang out with (companionship), are attracted to them, like each other, etc. **“What is good about relationships?”** Having fun, spending time with someone, having someone to trust, having support (someone who is there for you), affection, being respected, they are exciting, etc. **Relationships are defined as healthy when they include things like equality, respect, assertive communication, trust, and feeling accepted for who you are.**
- **If things like trust or respect are missing, then we would define that as an unhealthy relationship. On a more extreme end, if there is an element of fear or violence, we would call that an abusive relationship. Abuse is always a choice.**
- **Provide a disclaimer, mentioning these issues can be hard to talk about and that it is okay for them to ‘zone out,’ draw, etc.**
- Tell youth that for this next activity, we’re going to look at different scenarios that could play out in a relationship. We have to decide and discuss which category we believe the relationship goes into and why. The categories are Healthy, Unhealthy, and Abusive. We’ll hear from the group with the card first, then we’ll open up the discussion to the rest of the group.

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 of 2-3 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.

The things you enjoy should be important to your partner, even if they are different from what they enjoy or if they can't be there. Your partner can be supportive of your hobbies and activities by being interested, encouraging, helping, and giving you the space to pursue things that are important to you.

My partner and I are comfortable sending naked pictures to each other.

If consent is happening, then sharing pics is okay, with the understanding that they are not to be shared with anyone else. It would not be okay if one person was pressuring their partner or sending or sharing the photos without consent. Consent can be withdrawn at any time, including if the relationship ends.

Check out thatsnotcool.com for help to stop digital dating abuse. Also, it is not your fault if someone is sharing your pictures. Talk to an adult you trust if your pics are being seen without your consent or check out the website needhelpnow.ca.

Some ways to be safer with sexting are: not including your face or distinguishing features in the photo, using apps where the picture is only temporary, not sharing someone's photo, turning your location services off, etc.

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. However, the 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), it falls within the ages of consent, and there is no physical or sexual assault or abuse depicted in the image or video.ⁱⁱ

You and your partner miss each other, but enjoy spending time apart.

Having a good time without your partner is an okay thing to do. We still get alone time, time with friends, and time with family. It can even mean you have lots more to tell each other when you are together.

You and your partner don't tell each other everything, but you share a lot 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 necessary for a healthy relationship.

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

*Do people feel jealous sometimes? Yes. In healthy relationships, it's important to take responsibility for our feelings. **Healthy ways of dealing with jealousy are recognizing it is a normal emotion and understanding we are capable of healthy and respectful reactions no matter what the situation.** If our partner is trying to make us jealous, that is unhealthy and not okay to do, but we can still choose to deal with our feelings in a healthy way. Sometimes, giving ourselves time and space is a good idea. We may need time to calm down and to let go of the fear or insecurities we are feeling. Things to do can be taking a walk, going for a ride, listening to music that is soothing, and talking it through with someone we trust. **Sometimes in relationships, we find our feelings of jealousy are because of actual things our partner has done, like cheating or not telling us the truth. We might have to decide if the relationship is still the one for us.** If it's not, that is an okay choice, and we may have other relationships in the future. **However, if we are choosing to stay in a relationship that brings up our feelings of jealousy, we need to figure out ways to handle those feelings in a healthy and respectful way.***

Unhealthy

I try to make my partner jealous to see if they care about me.

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.

Your partner texts you a lot during the day and gets mad if you don't

answer. *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. People don't owe us responses to our messages. Our partners don't have to respond right away; they may be busy and that's okay.*

You had a really good day, but don't tell your partner because you know they 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, your partner thinks your happiness is important. A supportive partner takes the time to hear about your day.

It Depends

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

There are many ways to show love that do not include physical markings. If hickies are being used to show that a person is 'taken' or 'owned' by their partner, that is control and abuse, not love. If someone enjoys hickies and gives consent, then this can be healthy. One part of this card that sounds like a warning flag is the 'to show how much they love me' bit. Are hickies a practical way to show love or care? (No.) What is a much easier way to show love? (With our words.)

My partner doesn't participate in my spirituality with me.

Everyone has a right to their own spirituality. That also means that no one should be forced to participate in a religion or spirituality if they don't want to. In some relationships, partners practice different religions or spiritualities and are totally okay with that.

But if someone is put down because of their beliefs, feels like they can't practice their spirituality because of their relationship, or their partner is using religion or spirituality to control or manipulate them, it is abuse. In a healthy relationship, people feel free to practice their beliefs, even if they are different from their partner's.

On a larger scale, Residential Schools on this land were examples of spiritual abuse. These were places where Indigenous children and youth were forced to go by the Canadian government. The goal was to assimilate the children into white Christian culture, and in the process, have them not be 'Indian' anymore. There were many ways the government tried to do this, and we still see this racist idea existing in our society, often showing itself in the news/media and commonly through Canadians' opinions in social media.

Abusive

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

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.

It can help to think of anger as a secondary emotion. A primary feeling is what is felt right before we feel angry. We always feel something else first before we get angry. We might first feel afraid, attacked, offended, disrespected, forced, trapped, or pressured. If any of these feelings are intense enough, we think of the emotion as anger. In a healthy relationship, people still get angry, but find ways to take responsibility for their feelings that don't scare their partner. Developing a relationship with oneself can help us to learn how to manage our feelings.

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

Not returning the money that has been lent to them is also financial abuse. You have no obligation to lend or give money to anyone if you don't want to, your partner included. Financial abuse is using money to control another person. In a healthy relationship, partners understand their money is their own and don't feel guilt or pressure to 'share' it.

FYI: If someone is doing sex work, they have rights too. People under 18, by law, are not allowed to sell sex (for money, drugs, food, protection, etc.). Not only

would this fall under sexual and financial abuse, but partners or other people involved are guilty of sexual exploitation if this is happening.ⁱⁱⁱ

My partner makes fun of my job and makes me feel bad for working weekends.

Everyone has the right to work and earn money if they want to. If a partner is making you feel bad for working or intentionally trying to ruin your experience or reputation, then it would be considered financial abuse.

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

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. In a way, it's deciding that only one partner gets to be mad. This is abuse. In a healthy relationship, if there are disagreements, people often let their partner know they need to 'take time' to cool down. That way, they are more able to find solutions.

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 abuse.

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, taking time and cooling down can help people come back together in a clearer headspace to work things out.

FYI: Canada's Criminal Code section 279 (2) defines forcible confinement as everyone who, without lawful authority, confines, imprisons or forcibly seizes another person.^{iv}

Debrief

- Sometimes different types of abuse happen at the same time, and this can make it hard to tell which type of abuse is happening.
- Trusting ourselves, our instincts, and our 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, in that situation, sometimes ending a relationship is the healthiest choice we can make.** If people recognize they are using abuse, it's 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

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

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You and your partner don't tell each other everything but you share a lot and trust each other.

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

I try to make my partner jealous to see if they care about me.

Your partner texts you a lot during the day and gets mad if you don't answer.

My partner doesn't participate in my spirituality with me.

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

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

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

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

My partner makes fun of my job and makes me feel bad for working weekends.

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

My partner refuses to wear a condom.

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

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- ⁱ Love Is Respect. (n.d.). *Relationship spectrum*. Love Is Respect. Retrieved August 23, 2021, from <https://www.loveisrespect.org/everyone-deserves-a-healthy-relationship/relationship-spectrum/>
- ⁱⁱ Slane, A. (2013). Sexting and the law in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 22(3), 117–122.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Government of Manitoba. (n.d.). Families | Province of Manitoba. Retrieved June 24, 2021, from Province of Manitoba: Families website: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/traciustrust/index.html>
- ^{iv} Legislative Services Branch. (2019). *Criminal Code*. Justice.gc.ca. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/section-279.html>