

# WHAT MAKES A RELATIONSHIP HEALTHY?

*By Melissa Keyes DiGioia, CSE and Kirsten deFur, MPH*

## Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Identify components of a healthy relationship, particularly honesty, equality, respect and responsibility.
2. Distinguish between behaviors that are healthy and unhealthy.

## Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

## Rationale

Relationships are an integral part of human existence, however in many cases young people have not had an opportunity to learn about the components of healthy relationships and how to tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy behaviors. In addition, many teens have not had positive models of healthy relationships in their lives. This lesson explores the components of a healthy relationship, examines the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and provides an opportunity to practice making that distinction.

## Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)  
Components of Healthy Relationships  
Examples of HERR  
Healthy 7 Card Game  
Conclusion

## Materials

- Blank paper
- Pens/pencils
- (Optional) Five songs related to healthy relationships and the corresponding technology to play music, e.g.:
  - "(I've Had) The Time of My Life" by Franke Previte, John DeNicola and Donald Markowitz
  - "It Had to Be You" by Isham Jones and Gus Khan
  - "So Happy Together" by The Turtles
  - "Love Me Do" by the Beatles
  - "I Got You Babe" by Sonny and Cher

- Four pieces of easel paper
- Index cards
- **Educator Resource: Healthy 7 Cards** (Copy all three pages, then cut out each card to create a deck of cards. Write "Healthy 7" on the back of each card. Make enough cards for each participant to have at least 10 cards.)

## **Procedure**

### **COMPONENTS OF HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS**

1. Begin the lesson by asking for volunteers to be scribes. Divide the participants into small groups of three or four, with a scribe for each group. Hand each group a piece of paper, and instruct groups to select one person to write, preferably someone who can write quickly.
2. Tell participants that when you start playing the song you have selected, they will work together to create a list of components of a healthy relationship. The twist to this activity is that they are competing with the other groups to see who can come up with the most words. Inform participants they will have until the song is over to develop their list. (If you do not have the capability to play music, give the participants three minutes.)
3. After the song is over, ask each group to count their words and share what their total number is. Congratulate all the groups for their ideas and validate all of the groups' participation in the activity.
4. Invite the group with the most words to share their list with the larger group. Tell the other groups to listen to the list, and note what is not shared from their own list. Ask each group to share remaining words. (Optional: Invite each group to share the five terms they believe are most important.)
5. As the groups are reading their lists aloud, listen for the following words, and write each on a separate piece of easel paper as they come up, or add them at the end if they are not shared: **HONESTY, EQUALITY, RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY**
6. Validate the words that participants share, highlighting that there are many important components of healthy relationships. In particular, honesty, equality, respect and responsibility are considered to be some of the most important.

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. How easy was it to come up with components of healthy relationships?

- b. How easy is it to actually have these components in a relationship?
- c. How often do we see these components of healthy relationships demonstrated?

## **EXAMPLES OF HERR**

1. Tell participants that in the next activity, they will think about how HERR can be demonstrated in a relationship. Divide participants into four groups. Hand each group one of the four easel papers with the labels **Honesty, Equality, Respect, Responsibility**.
2. Tell participants that their group will have the length of a song to write down examples of the component of a healthy relationship on their easel paper. Examples could include actions or words or both. (If you do not have the capability to play music, give groups three minutes.)
3. After the song is over, instruct the groups to hand their easel paper to the group on their right. They will add examples to the easel paper they received while the next song plays. Repeat until all the groups have contributed to all four easel papers.
4. After all groups have added to each easel paper, ask for a volunteer from each group to share the examples listed on the easel paper they ended the activity with.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. What was it like to come up with examples?
- b. Where did you draw examples from? Movies? TV shows? Friends' relationships? Personal relationships? Family relationships?
- c. Which was the most difficult to come up with examples for?
- d. Which examples would you like in a relationship?

## **HEALTHY 7 CARD GAME**

1. Let participants know that they will be playing a game called Healthy 7 to practice distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy characteristics of a relationship.
2. Divide participants into small groups with no more than eight people in a group. Instruct groups to select one person to serve as the "dealer" for the card game. Give a deck of Healthy 7 cards to each dealer and tell the dealer to shuffle the deck.

3. Once the deck is shuffled, instruct the dealer to give seven cards to each person in the small group, with the *Healthy 7* side on top. Tell participants to take a moment to look at the seven cards and decide which are healthy characteristics and which are not. Tell participants that the goal of the game is for all the cards in your hand to represent a characteristic of a healthy relationship.
4. The player to the left of the dealer will begin play by picking up a card from the deck and discarding a card. The card that is discarded should be a card with an unhealthy characteristic, and it should be placed in a pile with the statement side up.

**Note:** If there is a card that is difficult to decide upon, group members will need to talk about it and vote whether the characteristic is healthy or unhealthy. The decision will be made by the majority vote of group members.

5. Tell group members to continue to pick up a card and discard an “unhealthy” card at each turn until there is a winner for the group. A winner of a “Healthy Hand” is someone who has seven cards in hand with statements that describe healthy characteristics of a relationship.

**VARIATION 1**

The winner of a Healthy Hand holds seven “healthy” cards. The seven cards may contain duplicates of the *same* healthy statement.

**VARIATION 2**

The winner of a Healthy Hand holds seven “healthy” cards. The seven cards must have seven *different* healthy statements.

6. After each group has a winner, ask the following questions:

***Discussion Questions:***

- a. How did it feel to play the Healthy 7 game?
- b. Which statements were healthy? Which statements were unhealthy?
- c. Were there any cards that anyone was unsure about? How did your group resolve this?
- d. How might someone feel who’s in an unhealthy relationship?
- e. Are there qualities that you didn’t see that you would add as healthy characteristics?
- f. If you could make your own seven cards for a Healthy Hand, what would you write on the cards?

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Conclude the activity by asking each participant to share one thing they will remember about healthy relationships after participating in this lesson.

**Healthy 7 Cards**

**Sex is the most important thing.**

**You don't have to pretend to be someone you're not.**

**You feel energized being with the person.**

**You feel worn out and tired being with the person.**

**One person usually decides what to do and where to go.**

**You have fun being with the person.**

**You are constantly fighting and making up.**

**You don't spend time with your other friends anymore.**

**You're embarrassed or uncomfortable being with the person in a group.**

**Your partner accepts you  
the way you are.**

**You feel closer to the  
person as time goes on.**

**Your time with your  
partner interferes with  
your studies or work.**

**You spend time by  
yourself without the  
person.**

**You like being seen with  
the person.**

**Your partner respects  
your thoughts and feelings  
about being sexual.**

**You are not afraid to talk  
about what's bothering  
you.**

**You keep the relationship  
because it's better than  
being alone.**

**You're afraid to bring up  
the subject of birth  
control and condoms.**

**Your partner accuses you of fooling around with someone when you are not.**

**Your partner calls or turns up unexpectedly in order to check up on you.**

**Your partner occasionally cheats on you.**

**Your partner gets jealous when you talk to other guys or girls.**

**Your partner makes sure that you both want to do any physical touching.**

**You and your partner tell the truth about what you think and feel.**

**Your partner is constantly text messaging you.**

**Your partner posted pictures of you without telling you.**

**WILD CARD!**  
**(Name a healthy relationships behavior.)**



# WHO'S IN CHARGE?

## Exploring Power in Relationships

*By Sue Montfort, MAT, CHES and Peggy Brick, MEd, CSE*

### Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Describe situations of powerlessness and identify associated feelings.
2. Explain what it means to have power over someone.
3. Identify situations and relationships that make a person feel powerful or powerless.

### Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

### Rationale

Every relationship may have some imbalance of power (e.g., one person makes more money, one person is stronger), however, some power differentials are healthier than others. This lesson uses a variety of strategies to raise consciousness about the problems of power and powerlessness in relationships. During this lesson, participants reflect on what it's like to feel powerless, examine different ways that a person can have power, and consider power differentials in a variety of scenarios.

### Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

Recalling Powerlessness

Power Circles

Powerful vs. Powerless

Relationship Situations

Conclusion

### Materials

- Easel paper/whiteboard
- Pens/pencils for all of the participants

- Enough easel paper for small groups of four to five participants, prepared with one of each of these sentence stems:
  - **When people have power OVER ANOTHER PERSON they ...**
  - **When people are powerless they ...**
- Notecards
- Easel paper/whiteboard with two sentence stems written on it (include the **A.** and **B.**):
  - A. IF A PERSON LACKS POWER IN A RELATIONSHIP, I WOULD RECOMMEND ...**
  - B. IF A PERSON HAS POWER IN A RELATIONSHIP, I WOULD RECOMMEND ...**

## **Procedure**

### **RECALLING POWERLESSNESS**

1. Let the participants know that this lesson focuses on the topic of *power* in relationships. For example, who makes the decisions? Who gets listened to? Who is in charge of what happens?
2. Ask participants to think about a specific time when they felt they were *not* in charge or when someone did *not* listen to what they wanted or needed, maybe among friends or at school. Write a prompt on the easel paper/whiteboard such as “I remember a time when ...” and tell a story from your own experience that is appropriate for your audience as an example.
3. Pass out notecards and pens/pencils to all the participants. Ask participants to write their stories down on the notecards, without writing their names on the cards. Let them know their stories will be shared with the group, but no one will know whose story is whose. Ask participants to include on their cards:
  - How old they were when the incident occurred
  - Where they lived
  - Exactly what happened
4. Collect all the cards, shuffle them, and then read each card aloud (as time allows).
5. Ask participants to think about some of the *feelings* people might have in situations like these, where they have little power. List them on the easel paper/whiteboard.

### **POWER CIRCLES**

1. Tell participants they will now have a chance to imagine themselves in a variety of situations where one person often has more or less power than another. If possible, ask participants to stand in a large circle. Explain to them that, as you read each situation, each person *moves towards the center* of the circle or *stays where they are*, to show which person they would rather be. (If you do not have space, or if this activity would be too upsetting for your group, simply have

participants raise their hands.) After each question, invite several participants to give the reasons for their choices.

Would you rather be:

- The older sibling (***move center***) or the younger sibling (***stay where you are***) in a family?
- The parent (***move***) or the child (***stay***) in a family?
- The bigger (***move***) or the smaller (***stay***) of two friends?
- The boss (***move***) or the worker (***stay***)?
- The team captain (***move***) or a player (***stay***)?
- 21 years old (***move***) or 9 years old (***stay***)?
- The president of a club (***move***) or a club member (***stay***)?
- Famous (***move***) or not famous (***stay***)?

2. Ask participants to be seated and discuss the activity as a group.

***Discussion Questions:***

- a. How did you decide which role you preferred?
- b. How many of you mostly chose the role where you thought you would have more power?
- c. How many of you mostly chose the role where you thought you would have less power?
- d. Which situation was hardest to decide about? Why?

**POWERFUL vs. POWERLESS**

1. Divide participants into groups of four or five. Give each group an easel paper labeled either **WHEN PEOPLE HAVE POWER OVER ANOTHER PERSON THEY ...** or **WHEN PEOPLE ARE POWERLESS, THEY ...** Give them eight minutes to brainstorm their responses and write them on the sheet.
2. Ask each small group to select two of the most important items on their list to read to the whole group. After one person from each group has read these, ask:
  - What are the drawbacks (or advantages) to being the ***less*** powerful person?
  - What are the advantages (or drawbacks) to being the ***more*** powerful person?
3. Note the differences among many relationships where power differences may be ***necessary*** or ***helpful*** (for example, parent and child, worker and boss) and relationships where power differences may be ***destructive*** or ***harmful***. Inform participants that many people who study

*dating* or *sexual* relationships believe that one of the major qualities of a healthy and happy relationship is the *equality* in the two people's power.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What qualities or behaviors make a *dating* or *sexual* relationship equal? (Write answers on easel paper/whiteboard.)
- b. What problems can arise in *dating* or *sexual* relationships that are unequal, where one partner has much more power than the other?
- c. In a male–female relationship, who do you think *usually* has the most power? What does that power come from? (Be sure that the discussion recognizes and identifies the potential power that *both* males and females may have in a relationship.)
- d. In same-sex relationships, who has the most power? How can you tell?

## RELATIONSHIP SITUATIONS

1. Let participants know you will read several relationship situations. Instruct participants to raise their hands if they think the situation describes a relationship in which the two partners are likely to have equal power. After each, ask one or two participants to share their reasons.
  - One partner has a car; the other gets around on a bicycle.
  - One partner is very outgoing; the other is very shy.
  - One partner is very big and athletic; the other is small and flexible.
  - One partner is part of the “in” crowd at school; the other is new in town.
  - One partner has a full-time job; the other has a part-time job and goes to school.
  - One partner is 21 years old; the other is 16.
  - One partner has a lot of extracurricular activities; the other enjoys reading in their free time.
  - One partner studies very diligently; the other gets good grades without studying at all.
2. After reading all of the statements aloud, ask participants to share their reactions to the activity.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. How easy was it to decide whether the relationship would be likely to have equal power?
- b. How did you make your decision?
- c. What will you remember about this discussion about power in relationships?

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Ask participants to think about the ways that power can influence a relationship, which have been discussed throughout the lesson. Write the two sentence stems below on the easel paper/whiteboard. Pass out notecards to the participants and instruct them to write the end of the first sentence on one side of the card, and the end of the second sentence on the other side of the card. Also instruct participants to label the sides **A** and **B** to correspond with their responses.

**A. IF A PERSON LACKS POWER IN A RELATIONSHIP, I WOULD RECOMMEND ...**

**B. IF A PERSON HAS POWER IN A RELATIONSHIP, I WOULD RECOMMEND ...**

2. Collect the cards from the participants and redistribute them so everyone has a different card. Ask each participant to share what is written on the card they received.

# WHAT DOES IT TAKE ... TO GIVE SEXUAL CONSENT?

*By Sue Montfort, MAT, CHES and Peggy Brick, MEd, CSE*

## **Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. List the conditions necessary for giving consent to a sexual behavior.
2. Describe common situations that young people face, based on the conditions of consent.
3. Demonstrate their own ability to consent.

## **Audience**

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

## **Rationale**

In order to determine whether a sexual behavior is appropriate in a particular relationship, at a particular time, in a particular place, a person needs to understand the concept of consent. Consent is a particularly important idea for young people to grasp, as they make choices about their relationships. In this lesson participants practice assessing a situation for the ability of an individual to give sexual consent.

## **Lesson Outline**

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

Guidelines

Consent Situations

Would You Be Able to Consent?

Conclusion

## **Materials**

- Easel paper/whiteboard
- **Handout: Guidelines for Consent**
- Easel paper or signs, prepared with one of each of these statements:
  - **ABLE TO GIVE CONSENT**
  - **NOT ABLE TO GIVE CONSENT**

- **Educator Resource: Consent Situations** (Prepare large cards with one different situation for each pair of participants; also make a copy of all the situations for participants to read together later.)

**Note:** Most of the situations deal with sexual intercourse, because that behavior puts people at risk for pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection and abuse.

## **Procedure**

### **GUIDELINES**

1. Begin the lesson by asking, “Can anyone think of a time when you, or someone you know, agreed to do something you didn’t really want to?” You may want to give an example from your own experience. Ask for a few volunteers and jot the basics of the situation on the easel paper/whiteboard. What are some reasons why people sometimes agree to do something they don’t really want to do?
2. State that sometimes a person agrees to do something with a sexual partner that they don’t want to do. This lesson gives participants a chance to examine the conditions necessary for a person to be able to agree to freely and safely engage in **any** sexual behavior. Distribute the **Handout: Guidelines for Consent**. Review the handout, clarifying any questions participants have.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- a. How easy or difficult would it be to adhere to these guidelines?
- b. What might make it challenging to adhere to these guidelines?
- c. If one of your friends was having trouble understanding consent, what might you tell them?

### **CONSENT SITUATIONS**

1. Note that free, knowledgeable and unpressured consent is important for many shared behaviors and activities and in **all** relationships. This next activity will give participants a chance to examine these consent guidelines in real life situations. Explain that although about half of adolescents do not have sexual intercourse, many of the situations in this lesson involve intercourse because of the importance of being very clear about what consent means with this particular behavior.
2. Post the easel paper or signs prepared with the statements **ABLE TO GIVE CONSENT** and **NOT ABLE TO GIVE CONSENT**. Distribute one card each from the **Educator Resource: Consent Situations** to pairs or small groups of participants. Ask them to identify, based on the limited information given, **one** way the person on their card seems either **able** or **not able** to give consent, and **why**.

3. Now, distribute copies of the complete **Educator Resource: Consent Situations** so participants can follow all the situations more easily. Ask one person from each pair or group to post their card under the **ABLE** or **NOT ABLE** signs, read the situation aloud, and tell why they decided to place their person where they did. With each situation, ask the other participants:

- Do you agree or disagree with the placement, or the reasons? Why?
- What questions would you ask the person in the situation to determine how able they are to give voluntary informed consent?

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What reactions do you have to the consent situations?
- b. What other situations can you think of where consent may be in question?
- c. How can reviewing these situations help you in the future?

**WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO GIVE CONSENT?**

1. Ask participants to turn back to the **Handout: Guidelines for Consent**. Invite them to reflect on the guidelines, and think about them as if they are a checklist for engaging in sexual activity. Ask participants to share ideas on how they would change each guideline into a question to ask oneself when considering engaging in a sexual activity with a particular person, at a particular time, in a particular place.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. How helpful can these guidelines be for somebody who is thinking about engaging in a sexual behavior? Explain.
- b. If someone looking at this list realizes they are not able to give voluntary, informed consent, what could that person do?
- c. If a person does not know what a sexual behavior involves, how to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, or which sexual relationships are illegal in their state, how can that person find out this information?

**CONCLUSION**

1. Distribute notecards to all of the participants. Conclude the lesson by asking participants to complete the following sentence, writing their response down on a notecard:

***The most important thing about consent is ...***



2. Collect all of the cards and either read all of them aloud yourself, or redistribute to the participants and ask them to read the card they receive aloud.

## **Guidelines for Consent**

To be able to *freely* and *safely* consent to a sexual behavior, a person needs to:

1. **Know** exactly what the sexual behavior involves.
2. **Be able to decide** whether or not to engage in that sexual behavior, with that partner, at that time, at that place.
3. **Understand their own feelings** about engaging in that sexual behavior, with that partner, at that time, at that place.
4. **Talk with their partner** about their feelings and decisions.
5. **Decide with their partner what methods to use** to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.
6. **Know** the local law regarding age of consent.
7. **Be able to identify** when a situation may be harmful.
8. **Recognize** warning signs of abuse or being controlled.

**Note:** This handout does not intend to suggest that the responsibility for sexual assault belongs to anyone except the person committing the abusive behavior.

**Source:** Taverner, W. J. & DeMarco, C. (2006). Verbal informed sexual consent assessment tool (VISCAT). For further information contact [Taverner@ptd.net](mailto:Taverner@ptd.net).

## Consent Situations

1. **Angelina** is in love. She has been going out with her boyfriend for six months. They both want to start having sexual intercourse. Angelina has never done this before. She is afraid that it will hurt and she is not sure exactly where the penis goes.
2. **Lynn**, 15, has been with her boyfriend Sam for almost a year. Recently, he has become very demanding, dictating everything from what she should wear to when and how they have sexual intercourse. Though Lynn generally likes it when Sam touches her, she does not like being forced to do it, and some positions are uncomfortable. Sam has threatened to break up with her if she protests.
3. **Steve** has made out with girls, and he's had a hand job before, but never had sex. He has lied to his friends and to his new girlfriend about this fact. She says she's "done it" before and expects it in this relationship too. Steve is worried that his girlfriend will think his penis is too small. He is also afraid that he won't know what to do.
4. **Seo Hee** wants to "do it" with an older guy she has danced with a few times at parties. She is worried about getting pregnant or getting a sexually transmitted infection — the teachers at school said that having sex is too risky for teenagers. But she figures she is safe because she is using the contraceptive patch.
5. Pedro and **John** are going out together. Both are at a party. They have had oral sex once before and Pedro wants John to do it now in an upstairs bedroom. John is not sure he wants to. He feels uncomfortable doing this at a party.
6. **Shannon** used to feel comfortable with Tyrone, but lately she feels embarrassed because he has started trying to "feel her up" under her clothes in public places. She's never said anything to him, and is a little afraid to do so. She sort of hopes he will just stop doing it soon.

7. **Latoya** is 15. Everyone considers her mature — her parents, teachers and friends. She even looks 18 or 19. Her new boyfriend is 20 years old. He wants to have sexual intercourse, but she tells him that a guy can get in trouble with the law if he has sex with someone who is too young.

8. **Maria** has been going out with her cousin's friend, Theresa. Theresa has been hinting that she would like to be "with" Maria, sexually. Maria doesn't feel she can say no because Theresa has been so good to her. She has introduced her to the lesbian community, taken her so many places, and given her such beautiful jewelry.

9. Mike and **Jessica** love and trust each other. They both want to have "P-in-V" (penis in vagina) sex but Jessica is afraid of getting pregnant. She talks to Mike about her concerns. He listens carefully, and says he understands her feelings, and says that if they use the pill and condoms correctly every time, the risk is lower.

10. **Natasha's** senior prom is next week. She and her boyfriend have never had sex but she knows he expects to the night of the prom. She wants to tell him how nervous she is and that maybe she doesn't want to do it that particular night. She doesn't know how to bring the subject up and is afraid that he will break up with her if she backs out.

11. **Amber** has been dating Andy, who just turned 21. Lately, sex has been the topic of conversation and Amber knows that Andy is tired of waiting. However, she also knows that she is not ready. One night, Amber goes over to Andy's apartment and he hands her an open can of beer. Though she is not in the mood to drink, she drinks the beer at Andy's urging.

12. **Lisa** is at a party. She wants to go home, but the friend she came with does not want to leave yet. An older guy at the party overhears their conversation and offers her a ride. She knows it is risky to go alone in a car with someone she doesn't know, but she's very tired and just ready to go. She calls her older brother to pick her up.

# TALK IT OUT TO WORK IT OUT

By Tanya Bass, MS, CHES and Lolita Smith-Moore, MA

## Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Define the term *negotiation*.
2. Identify and practice using assertive communication skills.

## Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

## Rationale

Being able to negotiate with assertiveness is a necessary and healthy communication skill. Being assertive demonstrates to others that we have control and a clear understanding of what we want to happen in our lives. Assertive communication skills not only improve our interpersonal communication skills within relationships with peers and partners, but also increase our self-esteem by showing others that we can express our feelings with respect, which sequentially builds confidence in oneself.<sup>1</sup> In this lesson participants will learn how to define *negotiation*, *assertiveness* and *assertive communication skills*, assess their own level of assertiveness, and practice using negotiation skills through a scenario activity that demonstrates responsibility and how assertiveness plays a role in being responsible.

## Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

Negotiate What?

“Being Responsible” Role-Plays

Conclusion

## Materials

- Easel paper
- Markers
- **Educator Resource: “Being Responsible” Scenarios** (Cut scenarios into pieces, enough for each pair of participants to have one scenario.)

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<sup>1</sup> The Nemours Foundation (n. d.). TeensHealth: Assertiveness. Retrieved from [http://kidshealth.org/teen/school\\_jobs/bullying/assertive.html#](http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/bullying/assertive.html#)

## **Procedure**

### **NEGOTIATE WHAT?**

1. Inform participants that this activity will help them identify pressures they face and how to negotiate with those pressuring them. Ask participants to name some of the pressures facing them on a daily basis. Write responses on easel paper. Possible answers might include: smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, having sex or some other sexual activity, skipping school, lying to parents or other adults, getting good grades, being responsible, going to church, getting involved in activities in school and in the community.
2. If participants do not include any or very many positive pressures, ask participants to think about pressures that could have a good influence.
3. Ask participants to share their ideas on what the term *negotiation* means. Write their responses on the easel paper/whiteboard. Read aloud the following definition from the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*:

***Negotiate:*** *To discuss something formally in order to make an agreement.*

4. Ask participants to turn to a neighbor and list at least three situations someone may face where they may see differently from someone else and may need to be able to negotiate a decision. For example, think of when you've had to make a decision but other people involved had different views from you.
5. Ask each pair to share one or two of the situations they came up with.

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. What are some of the things a person might negotiate?
- b. What are some of the things people do and say while negotiating?
- c. What strategies are important to keep in mind when negotiating with a friend or partner?
- d. When you negotiate, do you change your mind and agree with them, or do you try to persuade them to go along with your ideas?
- e. What are some things you would never negotiate?

6. Remind participants that negotiation means having the discussion to reach an agreement that leads to common ground for all people involved.

### **“BEING RESPONSIBLE” ROLE-PLAYS**

1. Tell participants that being prepared and practicing what to say can help them negotiate decisions. Ask participants to share some ideas of qualities of effective communication while negotiating. Write their ideas down on the easel paper/white board. Some responses may include:
  - Honest
  - Straightforward or upfront
  - Clear
  - Calm
  - Respectful
  - Assertive
2. Review the list, adding *assertive* if participants have not shared this quality. Highlight that being assertive is a critical step to healthy communication, and that many of the qualities they listed are all components of assertive communication. Tell participants that assertive communication demonstrates that “I count, and you count too.”
3. Divide the participants into small groups and distribute one scenario from the **Educator Resource: “Being Responsible” Scenarios** to each group. Instruct the pairs to prepare a role-play demonstrating the scenario they received, considering some of the tools already discussed. One person in the pair will start by acting out the person described in the scenario; the other person will start by acting out the partner or friend.
4. Allow six minutes for the first group to conduct their role-play, allowing a few more minutes if necessary. Signal when the pairs should switch roles.

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. How did you feel about this activity? How did you feel negotiating?
- b. What happened in the scenario? Did this scenario remind you of any conversations you have had in “real life” that are similar?
- c. What strategies worked? What didn’t work?
- d. How did your values fit in when you were coming up with a response?

- e. How can being assertive help improve negotiation?

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Conclude the lesson by asking participants a few final discussion questions.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. How can you build negotiation skills?
- b. What will you remember about negotiating with others?
- c. What do you think are the key takeaways from this lesson?



### **“Being Responsible” Scenarios**

My boyfriend and I aren't getting along. He's been cutting classes a lot and hanging out at his friend's house with older guys. And he's trying to get me to skip school and go with him. I hate to miss school and my mom would kill me if she caught me cutting, but I really like my boyfriend and I don't want us to fight all the time.

Every time I go over to my friend's house, they want to get high. I've tried it a few times, but I really don't like it and I especially don't like how they act when they are high. I want to spend time with my friend, but I don't know how to get them to stop without risking our friendship.

My girlfriend is always talking about sex, and wants to have sex every single time we get together. Sometimes it's complicated, because we don't always have much privacy, but she's always obsessed with making it happen, even if it's not easy to find a place to go. I like the sex, but it's annoying having to worry so much about where we go to do it.

I met this older guy. He's 19 and I'm 15. I really like him a lot. He is not like guys my age. He even has his own car so we can go out together. I'm not going to lie; sometimes I get worried because he is older and more experienced than me. My mom says that I can't date until I am 16, but I feel I am ready now. This guy says that I can trust him and that he wants to take care of me and make me happy.

I'm 15 years old. My best friend is pregnant. She hasn't told anyone but me. I'm not sure how to help her — she doesn't know whether to tell her parents, and she said she might get an abortion so no one will know.

# WHAT'S UP, DOC?

## Understanding Styles of Communication

*By Tanya Bass, MS, CHES and Kirsten deFur, MPH*

### **Objectives**

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Describe four different styles of communication.
2. Identify the most effective style of communication as assertive communication.
3. Describe at least two influences on making decisions.

### **Audience**

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

### **Rationale**

Between the ages of 14 and 17, adolescents participate in a range of personal, romantic and sexual relationships. During these times adolescents and young adults are building self-esteem, self-confidence and self-awareness. This process often continues into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Communication with family, friends, peers and partners is very important in relationship-building. Good, clear and assertive communication has been identified as a valuable characteristic in establishing and maintaining relationships.<sup>2</sup> However, other styles of communication, such as passive, passive-aggressive and aggressive communication, often dominate conversations, and can be destructive to relationships. This lesson helps participants recognize the different styles of communication and gives them an opportunity to create assertive messages.

### **Lesson Outline**

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

Styles of Communication

The Benefits of Assertive Communication

Three-Part Assertive Message

Practicing Assertive Messages

Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Child Trends Databank. (2014). Dating. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=dating>

<sup>2</sup> Crooks, R., & Baur, K. (2014). *Our sexuality, 12th ed.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

## Materials

- **Handout: Styles of Communication**
- **Educator Resource: Conversation Topics** (copied and cut out)
- Four sheets of easel paper, prepared with one of each of the following terms and posted in different places around the room: **PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE, ASSERTIVE**
- Easel paper/whiteboard
- Markers
- Easel paper with “JORDAN AND HIS MOM” example written out (see step 2 in the “Three-Part Assertive Message” activity)
- **Handout: Assertive Message Board**

## Procedure

### STYLES OF COMMUNICATION

1. Begin the lesson by distributing the **Handout: Styles of Communication** and quickly reviewing the information about passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive communicators.
2. Point out the four easel sheets throughout the room that have been pre-labeled with the four types of communication. Divide the group into four small groups and give each group a marker. Assign each group to one of the four categories listed on the easel sheets. Instruct the groups to write down as many fictional characters as possible that communicate most often using the communication style represented on the easel paper. For example, participants could write Darth Vader in the aggressive category, Squidward in the passive-aggressive category, and Hermoine Granger in the assertive category. Give the groups one or two minutes, and then call time. (If time allows, have the groups rotate through all four sheets, so they can add to every category.)
3. Review each list. Ask participants to make observations about what category has the most characters listed, which category was most difficult, and which category was easiest.
4. Instruct the groups to reconvene, and select two characters from their list. Tell the groups to develop a role-play demonstrating a conversation between those characters, demonstrating the style of communication. Give each group a topic from the **Educator Resource: Conversation Topics**. Tell groups they have about five minutes to develop their role-play and they will be asked to demonstrate their role-play for the larger group.
5. Ask each group to perform their role-play for the larger group. After each role-play, ask the group what characterized the communication demonstrated.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. Which styles of communication do you think are most common among your peers? In the media?
- b. Which style of communication is the most effective style? Why?
- c. What styles of communication do you think are most often used in unhealthy relationships? Healthy relationships?
- d. How does examining different styles of communication help our understanding of relationships?

## **THE BENEFITS OF ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION**

1. Discuss the importance of communicating effectively. Ask participants to list qualities of good, effective communication, and write them on easel paper or whiteboard. Highlight again that assertive communication is one of the most effective styles of communicating, especially in relationships.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What does being assertive mean to you?
  - b. How does being assertive feel?
  - c. How would someone else know when you are being assertive — what are you saying or doing?
  - d. Think about a time when you were being assertive. What were you doing or saying? What were the results of being assertive?
2. Instruct participants to turn to a neighbor and talk briefly about the benefits of assertive communication. After a few minutes, ask participants to share some of the highlights of their conversations.

## **THREE-PART ASSERTIVE MESSAGE**

1. Ask participants to think about a time they wanted to let someone know they were doing something they didn't like, but decided not to because they were afraid of how the other person might react. Did they feel that they may come across as ineffective or feel awkward? Point out that sometimes it helps to practice what you want to say and how you want to say it.

2. Introduce the participants to the “three-part assertive message” format, using the **JORDAN AND HIS MOM** example written on easel paper.

<b>JORDAN AND HIS MOM</b>		
<b>Behavior</b>	Jordan states what his mom is doing without sounding judgmental.	“When you leave out my medications for everyone to see every day.”
<b>Feelings</b>	Jordan shares what he is feeling.	“I feel angry.”
<b>Effects</b>	Jordan tells her how what she is doing affects his life.	“Because it is a reminder to everyone that I am different or they think of me as sick.”

3. As a group review the parts of the message. Ask if anyone can identify the issue Jordan is facing, the feelings that Jordan has and what affect this issue has on Jordan.
4. Share another example of a three-part message:  
**Behavior:** “When you tell me to come home before my friends’ curfew.”  
**Feelings:** “I feel frustrated.”  
**Effects:** “It seems like I have no power in the decisions being made about my life.”
5. Review components of effective communication, such as use of “I” statements, clear description of feelings instead of “you make me feel ...,” and the effects of the issue.
6. Write this sentence stem on easel paper:

**ASSERTIVE MESSAGES HELP RELATIONSHIPS BY ...**

7. Ask participants to turn to a neighbor and work together to finish the sentence, coming up with at least two examples of the impact of assertive messages. After a few minutes, invite participants to share some of their ideas, listing them on easel paper. Make sure the following points are listed:
  - Focusing the issue on behaviors that are problematic, rather than saying the person is bad.
  - Lowering the chance that you will violate the other person’s rights.
  - Lowering the risk of really damaging the relationship.

## **PRACTICING ASSERTIVE MESSAGES**

1. Ask participants to reconvene their groups from the first activity and work together to use the three-part assertive message format to change their previous conversation among fictional characters into an assertive conversation. (One group that originally had the assertive communication category will just create another conversation that is assertive, using the message board.) Distribute the **Handout: Assertive Message Board**, which they can use to develop their messages.
2. Invite groups to share their messages and how they handled responses during their role-plays.

### *Discussion Questions:*

- a. How did it feel to use the three-part message?
- b. How did you handle a negative response?
- c. What are some ideas for when someone doesn't listen?
- d. How can you use the three-part assertive message at home? With your friends? With your partners?

## **CONCLUSION**

1. Conclude the lesson by highlighting common themes and unique points in the discussion. Ask participants to share one thing they discussed they think will be useful in the future.

## **Styles of Communication**

### **Passive Communicators ...**

- Fail to assert themselves.
- Ignore grievances or annoyances.
- Fail to express their feelings, needs or opinions.
- Speak softly or apologetically.
- Exhibit poor eye contact and slumped body language.

### **Aggressive Communicators ...**

- Try to dominate others.
- Use humiliation to control others and criticize, blame or attack others.
- Speak in a loud, demanding and overbearing voice.
- Interrupt frequently.
- Have overbearing or intimidating posture.

### **Passive-Aggressive Communicators ...**

- Appear cooperative while purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt.
- Use subtle sabotage to get even.
- Use sarcasm.
- Deny there is a problem and have difficulty acknowledging their anger.
- Use facial expressions that don't match how they feel.

### **Assertive Communicators ...**

- State needs, wants and feelings clearly, appropriately and respectfully.
- Use "I" statements.
- Listen well without interrupting.
- Communicate respect for others while standing up for their own rights.
- Speak in a calm and clear tone of voice with a relaxed body posture and good eye contact.

**Source:** Adapted from University of Kentucky Violence Intervention and Prevention Center. (n.d.). The four basic styles of communication. Retrieved from [http://www.uky.edu/hr/sites/www.uky.edu.hr/files/wellness/images/Conf14\\_FourCommStyles.pdf](http://www.uky.edu/hr/sites/www.uky.edu.hr/files/wellness/images/Conf14_FourCommStyles.pdf)

### Conversation Topics

**Directions:** Cut out and distribute one topic to each group.

One person wants the other to change their relationship status on Facebook. The other doesn't want to.

One person sees that almost all the photos posted on their partners' page are liked by some other hottie. The other person says it's no big deal.

One person asks the other for their email password. The other person wants to keep it private.

One person is texting the other constantly. The other person is irritated with all the texting.



## Assertive Message Board

**Directions:** Use the chart below to develop an assertive message.

	What's happening?	What do you say?
Behavior		
Feelings		
Effects		

### Tips for Creating a Three-Part Assertive Message

- Describe the behavior in specific rather than vague terms. Keep it brief.
- Limit yourself to describing behavior. Do not try to guess the other person's motives, attitudes, character and so on.
- Make your behavior statement a description, not a judgment. Assertive messages avoid name-calling, insults, cursing or judgmental words, for example, "you **waste** our money ..."
- Stick to the real issue. If there is a bigger issue that needs addressing, deal with it.
- It's important that your posture and body language show strength as well — stand or sit straight, maintain eye contact (if culturally appropriate) and speak clearly.
- Focus on a solution that both of you can agree to and accept.

### Key Points about Communication

- **Be intentional about your communication.** Speaking to be understood means saying things in a way so that people will listen.
- **Practice active listening.** Listening to understand means to listen in a way that is receptive, not judging, and not reacting to what is being said. It often means trying on another person's point of view or understanding how they might feel about something.
- **Use assertive communication.** Assertiveness means to stand up for yourself with confidence and be clear with yourself and others about what you want.
- **Work together to solve problems.** Problem solving includes these steps:
  - Identify the problem
  - Identify possible solutions
  - Evaluate possible solutions and choose one
  - Identify possible roadblocks or challenges
  - Identify ways to handle the roadblocks or challenges

# WHAT DO I DO?

## Supporting a Friend with Relationship Issues

*By Kirsten deFur, MPH*

### Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. List three ways to support a friend who is trying to leave an unhealthy relationship.
2. Describe words, phrases or actions that may not be very helpful to a friend who is in an unhealthy relationship.
3. Demonstrate supportive ways to talk to a friend about a relationship problem.

### Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

### Rationale

Friends may be in an important and critical position to help support someone who is having issues with a relationship, or even in an unhealthy relationship. There are some key considerations to keep in mind when in this role, including some things that many people do with good intentions, however are not very supportive. This lesson outlines what friends can do to support someone, and things to avoid doing, and provides an opportunity to role-play their skills.

**Note:** Review the resource **How to Use Role Play** (on p. xxvii) prior to facilitating this lesson.

### Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

The DOs and DON'Ts of Supporting a Friend

Helping a Friend Role-Play

Conclusion

### Materials

- Blank paper
- Pens/pencils for all participants
- Easel paper
- Markers
- **Handout: DOs and DON'Ts of Supporting a Friend**

- **Educator Resource: How to Use Role-Play** (See p. xxvii)
- **Educator Resource: Helping a Friend Role-Play Situations** (cut into separate pieces)

## **Procedure**

### **THE DOS AND DON'TS OF SUPPORTING A FRIEND**

1. Begin the lesson by asking participants to think of a time that they wanted support from a friend because they were having a bad day or dealing with an issue. Ask participants to write down a few notes about that incident.
2. Instruct participants to list a few ways that their friend(s) either was helpful, or not helpful. Ask participants to turn to a neighbor and talk about how their friend was or was not helpful.
3. After a few minutes, invite participants to share a few points that they discussed together. As participants share, write down their responses on easel paper either under a column labeled **DO** or a column labeled **DON'T**.

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. How often do friends support us in the ways we would like them to?
  - b. How does it feel when a friend does something that isn't very helpful or supportive?
  - c. How can these DOs and DON'Ts help when supporting a friend who is in an unhealthy relationship?
4. Distribute the **Handout: DOs and DON'Ts of Supporting a Friend** and review the information listed, allowing participants to ask questions as needed.

### **HELPING A FRIEND ROLE-PLAY**

1. Let participants know that in the next activity, they will practice supporting a friend or family member who is having some relationship problems. Instruct participants to pair up with a neighbor. Tell participants to both pick a number one through ten. Whoever is closer to number one will be the first person listed in the scenario, and the other person will be the second person listed.
2. Give each pair one of the situations in the **Educator Resource: Helping a Friend Role-Play Situations**, and tell participants to take a few minutes and role-play the conversation

based on the situation they are given. Let them know that situations two and four are about siblings, which may be a little different from a friend-relationship, but may be a realistic situation nonetheless. If time allows, have the participants switch roles and have another conversation.

***Discussion Questions:***

- a. For people playing the supportive role, what worked well in the conversation?
- b. For people playing the role with the relationship problem, what did the other person say or do that you thought was supportive?
- c. What was it like to practice talking to someone having relationship issues?
- d. Were all of the situations unhealthy? If it was an unhealthy situation, how did you know?
- e. What happened during the role-plays that was useful for the person having relationship problems?
- f. What would you do differently if the problem or issue was more serious in nature?

**CONCLUSION**

1. Conclude the lesson by stating that it can be very hard to help a friend through a difficult relationship, and there may be a time when they might want to give up that supportive role. Ask participants to share one thing they will remember in case they find themselves in this situation.

### DOs and DON'Ts of Supporting a Friend

DO	DON'T
✓ Tell them you're concerned.	✗ Minimize the issue or make it seem like not a big deal.
✓ Be supportive and listen patiently.	✗ Interrupt or get distracted during the conversation.
✓ Acknowledge and validate their feelings.	✗ Tell them what they need to be feeling.
✓ Respect their decisions.	✗ Tell them what to do.
✓ Help your friend explore their options.	✗ Pressure your friend to break-up with their partner.
✓ Keep the conversation about your friend and what they are experiencing and feeling.	✗ Make the conversation about you and your experiences/feelings/needs.
✓ Ask what help they would like from you.	✗ Give advice that's not asked for.
✓ Focus on your friend, not the partner.	✗ Trash-talk the partner.
✓ Continue to offer support no matter what.	✗ Contact or confront an abusive partner.
✓ Help them feel safe.	✗ Overlook the need for safety in both the short and long term.
✓ Connect your friend to appropriate resources.	✗ Ignore the issue.

**Source:** loveisrespect. (n.d.). Get help for someone else: Help a friend. Retrieved from <http://www.loveisrespect.org/for-someone-else/help-a-friend/>

## **Helping a Friend Role-Play Situations**

**Directions:** Give one scenario to each pair of participants and instruct them to role-play a conversation between the two people in the situation.

Two friends are talking about their long-term relationships. Logan is concerned about Charlotte's relationship because Charlotte's partner, who is in college, was bragging about getting away with cheating on her while at school.

Two brothers, Ben and Owen, are joking around about sex, and Owen is proud that he's having sex all the time, and Owen says that he would do anything to "get some" from his girlfriend, because she isn't putting out right now.

Wyatt and Mia are talking after school, and Wyatt is glad to see Mia on her own for once, since Mia's girlfriend is always around and always calling and texting to find out what Mia is doing. Wyatt thinks that they are glued at the hip, and not in a good way.

Two sisters, Elizabeth and Sofia, are catching up, since Elizabeth has been away at school. Sofia says things have been rough at home because their parents fight all the time, and she might move out and live with her girlfriend, who says that she'll take care of everything, Sofia doesn't have to work or anything.

Two friends, Matt and Victoria, are talking about sex, and Matt shares with Victoria that Matt's partner doesn't always pay attention when he says he's not in the mood. Matt says he usually just goes along with it in order to "keep the peace."

Two friends, Nora and Layla, are talking about their partners, comparing how they are treated. Nora says that it's upsetting that her partner is easily angered and sometimes calls her nasty names, but it's not like her partner is hitting her, like her ex did. Layla is worried that it's only a matter of time before Nora's relationship gets physically abusive.

# WHAT ABOUT A DIFFERENCE IN AGE?

*By Sue Montfort, MAT, CHES and Peggy Brick, MEd, CSE*

## Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Examine their attitudes regarding relationships between couples in which there is a significant difference in age.
2. Describe the reasons why someone may be interested in someone older or younger.
3. Identify what advice they would give to someone involved in an adult–teen relationship.

## Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

## Rationale

Relationships between people of different ages can develop at any point, including among teens and adults. These relationships, while not inherently problematic, may be particularly vulnerable to power differentials, resulting in unhealthy dynamics. Teens need an opportunity to reflect on their values about relationships in which there is a difference in age, and consider how to recognize unhealthy behaviors that may be happening. This lesson asks participants to examine their values about relationships between people of different ages, explore reasons someone may be interested in an older or younger partner, and practice giving advice to a friend who is having relationship issues due to a difference in age.

## Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

What's Your Opinion?

Why the Difference

What's Your Advice?

Conclusion

## Materials

- Notecards (one for each participant)
- Pens/pencils
- **Handout: What's Your Opinion?**
- Five signs, prepared with one of each of the following: **STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, NOT SURE, DISAGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE**

- Easel paper
- Markers
- Four pieces of easel paper, prepared with one of each of the statements below:
  - WHY TEENS ARE INTERESTED IN OLDER PARTNERS
  - WHY OLDER PARTNERS ARE INTERESTED IN DATING A TEEN
  - WHY PEOPLE WORRY WHEN TEENS GO OUT WITH OLDER PARTNERS
  - WHAT SOCIETY THINKS ABOUT A DIFFERENCE IN AGE AMONG PARTNERS
- **Handout: Be the Relationship Expert! What's Your Advice ...**

## **Procedure**

### **WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?**

1. Tell the participants that they are going to have a chance to think about their opinions about sexual relationships between people of different ages. Before starting the activity, hand each participant a notecard and ask participants to write down their response to the following:

**Do you think relationships between people of different ages are a good idea? A bad idea? Or are you unsure?**

2. Tell participants to hold on to their notecards until later in the lesson.
3. Tape the signs that read **STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, NOT SURE, DISAGREE, STRONGLY DISAGREE** on the floor or wall, spread out as much as possible in the space you have. Explain that you will read a statement and that participants are to stand near the sign that most accurately describes their opinion about the statement.
4. Read the first statement on the **Handout: What's Your Opinion?** Tell the participants to take their positions and then discuss with others near the same sign why they hold that opinion.
5. After a minute or so, ask one or two people from each group to summarize the reasons individuals in their group took that position. As they do this, facilitate discussion. Tell them that if anyone is convinced by the reasoning from another group, they may move!
6. Continue the process as you read several of the questions and the participants take new positions. Keep the discussion moving; the exercise should take no more than 15 minutes.
7. Ask the participants to return to their seats and then distribute the **Handout: What's Your Opinion?** Divide the participants into small groups of three to six each, and ask each group to select one statement to discuss.



8. Give each group a piece of easel paper and a marker. Ask the group to discuss and list:
  - The **facts** they would like to have in order to have a more informed opinion about the issue.
  - All the reasons a person might **agree** with the statement.
  - All the reasons a person might **disagree** with the statement.
9. Ask each group to present their easel paper, noting similarities and differences.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What was it like to think about these statements?
- b. What are some of the issues that these statements raise?
- c. What do you think general society's opinion is about relationships between people with a big age difference?
- d. What could make a relationship between people of different ages healthy? Unhealthy?

**WHY THE DIFFERENCE**

1. Divide the participants into four groups and give each group a sheet of easel paper with one of the prepared statements. Instruct each group to list **all** the reasons they can think of in response to the statement on their sheet.
2. After ten minutes, ask the groups to post their sheets and present the lists they developed.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What observations can you make from viewing these lists?
- b. Why might people be concerned about relationships with a big age difference? Explain.
- c. What might you tell someone who is dating someone much older than them? Younger?

**WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE?**

1. Ask participants what they think of seeking advice from a relationship expert. Invite a few people to share their responses. Let participants know that sometimes when individuals want advice about a relationship issue, they might reach out to columnists and describe their situation, and the columnist provides a response in a newspaper, magazine or online. Note that some

columnists have expertise based on professional training, and some columnists rely on their own opinions and life experiences to give advice. Invite participants to share the names of columnists they have heard of.

2. Depending on your group, ask the participants to work again in their small groups, in pairs or individually. Distribute equally among participants the **Handout: Be the Relationship Expert! What's Your Advice ...** and assign each group one letter. Tell participants to work together to write out a response.
3. Ask each group to share their response. After each group shares, invite the other participants to reflect on whether that advice would be helpful or not.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What were some of your gut reactions to the letter your group was assigned?
  - b. How helpful would it be to act on your gut reactions? Are gut reactions always the best approaches to helping someone out?
  - c. What were some of the key points discussed as you crafted a response?
  - d. What were some of the challenges that you faced in writing a response?
  - e. What did age have to do with the situation that each person faced?
  - f. How might you respond if someone presented an issue like this one in person? How might it be similar or different to a response from an advice columnist?
  - g. What are important things to keep in mind when giving someone advice about their relationship?
4. Let participants know that when talking to someone who is in an unhealthy relationship, it's important not to give advice unless it's asked for. If it's not asked for, it could be perceived as being judgmental, and potentially push someone away, despite good intentions of helping.

**CONCLUSION**

1. Ask participants to reflect on their initial reactions to the question asked at the beginning of the lesson, "Do you think relationships between people of different ages are a good or a bad idea?" and check in with themselves about their response to that question now that they've gone through the lesson.

2. Invite participants to think about how they would fill in the blanks in the statement below, and invite a few people to share:

***Before I thought \_\_\_\_\_, and now I know \_\_\_\_\_.***

### **What's Your Opinion?**

1. If a teen gets sexually involved with an adult, the younger person knows the relationship is likely to cause problems.
2. States should have strict laws against sexual relationships between adults and young people under 16.
3. I don't have a problem with an adult–young teen relationship as long as the adult male supports any child that results.
4. I don't have a problem with a relationship between a 16-year-old male and a 21-year-old male.
5. Teens and adults who have babies together should be encouraged to marry.
6. It's OK for a 25-year-old male to have an intimate relationship with a 50-year-old female.
7. If my good friend were in a sexual relationship with someone five or more years older, I would consider it my responsibility to talk with my friend about it.
8. If a teen appears to be older than they actually are, you can't blame an adult for starting a sexual relationship with the teen.
9. Difference in age doesn't matter as long as the relationship is based on honesty, equality, respect and responsibility.
10. There's no way a relationship between a 16-year-old and a 22-year-old could be healthy.

## Be the Relationship Expert! What's Your Advice ...

### ... to "GIRL IN LOVE"?

I'm 16 and I'm going out with a 21-year-old man. I think he loves me, and I *know* I really love him. He treats me really nice. But my parents don't want me to go out with him — just because he's older! They want me to stop seeing him. What should I do?

—Girl in Love

Dear Girl in Love,

### ... to "MY FRIEND'S FRIEND"?

My roommate is dating a 17-year-old girl. It makes me very uncomfortable because he's 20. I don't know if they are having sex, but I know that would be illegal. Anyway, I don't know what he sees in such a young kid. Do you think there's something wrong with him? Should I do anything about this?

—My Friend's Friend

Dear My Friend's Friend,

**... to “CONFUSED”?**

I’m 15, almost 16. One of my older sister’s close friends is coming on to me all the time. She has always been a close friend of the family and I like her a lot ... but is this normal? I’m very confused, and my sister doesn’t even seem to notice.

—Confused

Dear Confused,

**... to “STAY OR GO”?**

I’m 15 years old, and my parents kicked me out when I told them I was gay. Now I am living with my 20-year-old boyfriend. He takes care of me, but a lot of times he gets pushy and demanding. I think I should leave him, but I don’t know where to go.

—Stay or Go?

Dear Stay or Go,

# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS FOR ALL

*By Bill Taverner, MA, CSE and Sue Montfort, MAT, CHES*

## Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Identify the reasons younger people of any sexual orientation might choose to have a relationship with an older partner, and examine the healthiness of these reasons.
2. List challenges that may occur in relationships between younger and older partners.
3. Distinguish healthy from unhealthy aspects of relationships.

## Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

## Rationale

Young people of *all* sexual orientations, as well as those who are uncertain about their orientation, may find themselves attracted to, or attractive to, older individuals. Should a relationship ensue, it may come with significant challenges, especially when the older partner is controlling the terms of the relationship, as the imbalance of power may impact the health and safety of the younger partner. This lesson examines reasons someone may be interested in an older partner, evaluates the impact of power on particular relationship scenarios, and gives participants an opportunity to evaluate relationships using the *Unequal Partners'* HERR model of healthy relationships: honest, equal, responsible and respectful.

**Note:** This lesson plan assumes that participants already have a strong understanding of sexual orientation.

## Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

What's So Great about an Older Date?

What's Power Got to Do with It?

Healthy or Not?

Conclusion

## Materials

- Notecards (three for each participant)
- Pens/pencils
- Tape

- **Handout: Why Do Young People Sometimes Go for Older Partners?**
- **Educator Resource: What's Power Got to Do with It?**
- **Educator Resource: Healthy or Not? Relationship Scenarios** (Affix each scenario to a different card.)
- **Handout: Honesty, Equality, Respect and Responsibility**
- **Finding Help: A Resource List** (See p. 217)

## **Procedure**

### **WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT AN OLDER DATE?**

1. To begin the lesson, note that it is important for **young people of all sexual orientations** to examine the health of their relationships. Some young people may find themselves attracted to older individuals. Hand each participant two or three notecards, and instruct participants to write down responses to the question, "What's so great about an older date?" Tell participants to write down reasons on separate notecards. Encourage participants to write any and all reasons, healthy or not.
2. Post two signs, one labeled + (plus/positive) and the other labeled - (minus/negative), stating that some things that people think are great about older dates may not be very positive in a relationship. Ask participants to tape their notecards underneath the plus sign or the minus sign.
3. Ask for a volunteer to read each list aloud.

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

- a. Are there more responses on the positive list or the negative list?
  - b. What are the common trends on the two lists?
  - c. What does this list tell us about dating older partners?
4. Distribute the **Handout: Why Do Young People Sometimes Go for Older Partners?** Ask participants to look over the reasons researchers have found that younger people say they are interested in dating older people. Ask participants to turn to a neighbor and together underline any reasons that are different from the ones that the whole group just suggested in the previous activity.
  5. Invite participants to share which reasons they underlined. Ask participants what they think of these reasons.



**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What does maturity have to do with dating an older or younger partner?
- b. What does it mean to be more mature? How can you tell how mature someone is?
- c. What does it mean to be comfortable with someone else in a relationship?

**WHAT'S POWER GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

1. Explain that relationships involving teens and adults often have particular challenges. Divide participants into small groups of four or five. Give each group one card from the **Educator Resource: What's Power Got to Do with It?** and ask them to complete the sentence stem on their cards with as many ideas as they can.
2. Ask each group to share one way "their" relationship might be impacted by power. Continue gathering responses until the groups no longer have different responses to share.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What are your reactions to this activity?
- b. Which relationship do you think may be the most impacted by an imbalance of power?
- c. Which ways that relationships can be affected by power do you think are the most serious? Why?

**HEALTHY OR NOT?**

1. Remind participants that no matter who is in a relationship, it is important that every relationship is healthy. Many researchers describe healthy relationships as those that are **honest, equal, responsible** and **respectful**. Write these words on easel paper. Ask participants for some behaviors that demonstrate each of these four qualities.
2. Tell participants that in the next activity, they will look at descriptions of different types of relationships and evaluate how healthy they are, in terms of the relationship qualities on the easel paper/whiteboard.
3. Keeping participants in their same small groups, give each group one card from the **Educator Resource: Healthy or Not? Relationship Scenarios**. Ask participants in each group to

read their cards and discuss how *healthy* that relationship seems, considering its degree of honesty, equality, respect and responsibility. Allow about five minutes.

4. Ask participants to switch their cards with another group, and assess this different relationship, again keeping in mind the qualities on the easel paper/whiteboard. After a few more minutes, allow them to switch cards one more time so that each group has the opportunity to discuss three different relationships. As they examine their last relationship cards, distribute the **Handout: Honesty, Equality, Respect and Responsibility** and ask groups to complete the handout with respect to this relationship.

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. What in these relationships seemed *healthy* for the younger partners? What seemed *unhealthy*? Why?
- b. Which relationship(s) seemed *unsafe*? Why?
- c. Which of these relationships would be *illegal* in our state?
- d. What advice would you give to *any* of these teens about their relationships?

**CONCLUSION**

1. Conclude by distributing copies of **Finding Help: A Resource List** and ask participants which resources might be helpful in any of the relationship scenarios they reviewed.

## **Why Do Young People Go for Older Partners?**

They *think* older partners will ...

1. Be more mature, or that they, themselves, are more mature for their own age.
2. Be more stable and protecting, and will take care of them.
3. Be more confident, experienced with relationships, and comfortable with their bodies.
4. Be more attentive, sensitive, patient, romantic or passionate, and treat them better than partners their own age.
5. Be like teachers — people who can answer their questions and help them sort things out.
6. Make them feel better about themselves, and more powerful.
7. Give them access to places to have intimacy or private time together, like in a car or in the older person's apartment.
8. Get them into clubs, or will spend money on them.
9. Impress their friends.
10. Be helpful if pregnancy occurs and/or provide support for a child.

### **Sources:**

- Adam, B. (2000). Age preferences among gay and bisexual men. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 6(3): 413-433.
- Phillips, L. M. (1997). *Unequal partners: Exploring power and consent in adult-teen relationships*. Morristown, NJ: Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey.



## Healthy or Not? Relationship Scenarios

A. Fifteen-year-old **Laura** has been going out with her dance instructor, 21-year-old **Jolene**. During class, Jolene has said — more than once, in front of everybody — that Laura is a clumsy, slow learner. But, Jolene has taken Laura to various places where she has met other lesbian women. Jolene brags to her friends about *her* Laura, her new young girlfriend. She's even taken Laura to some concerts where they've been using Ecstasy. Laura has fun with Jolene. She is excited to have her first girlfriend, and thinks this is "it."

Recently, Jolene's been picking Laura up every day and gets angry if Laura wants to spend any time with her school friends. Jolene always says, "You're the only one I want to spend *my* time with!" Jolene is also pressuring Laura to do more physical touching than Laura is comfortable with.

B. Seventeen-year-old **Josh** met **Michael** because their parents set them up after a PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) meeting. At 21, Michael had a good job, was kind, funny and very respectful.

Josh and Michael hit it off. They dated regularly until Josh went to college and continued their relationship long distance. One night, Josh hooked up with another guy at college. He felt bad about betraying Michael, and told Michael about it. Michael was hurt, but he also admired Josh's honesty. They agreed to date other people for a while and decide later if they could get back together again. While they were on a break, Michael had a scare when another guy pressured him to have sex and refused to wear a condom.

Several months later, to the delight of their parents, Josh and Michael decided to date again. They both got tested, and neither was infected. They are very much in love, and have talked about getting married someday.

**C. Janice**, a 17-year-old lesbian woman, met **Emily**, a warm, smart, 21-year-old bisexual woman, at a community support group. Janice asked Emily about the group's Gay Pride marches and other events, and the two began to spend more time together. They share many interests, but also encourage each other's separate activities and friendships. They have talked about their past relationships and have promised as a couple to be faithful.

Although Emily's former boyfriend Max has been trying to get back together with Emily, she has made it clear to him that she is not interested and would never be with two partners at the same time. Janice really appreciates that Emily told Janice about Max and her response to him.

Both Janice and Emily have told their families and friends about their plan to live together when they finish with their education.

**D. Fourteen-year-old Sarah** met **Jason**, her brother's college friend, at a party. Sarah thought Jason was hot, so she told Jason she was 16, figuring he'd never be interested otherwise. Jason did ask her out, and before long they agreed not to date anyone else. Sarah thought it was great dating an older guy. But it was kind of hard to keep dressing and acting older than she was.

At a recent college party, Jason and Sarah were on the same team in a drinking game. Sarah acted like she knew what she was doing, but after a few rounds, told Jason she felt sick. Jason, laughing with his buddies, told her to deal with it. Pretty soon Sarah needed help getting upstairs, where she stumbled onto Jason's bed and fell into a drunken sleep. Instead of staying to look after her, Jason went back to the party.

Sarah woke the next morning to find Liz, one of Jason's friends, in the common area, wearing Jason's shirt. Jason was still asleep on the pull-out couch.

E. Seventeen-year-old **Jamal** was kicked out of his home when he told his parents he was gay. He found shelter at a gay and lesbian center, where he met 22-year-old **Adam**, who volunteered there. Adam let Jamal move in with him, and said he would help Jamal meet other people who are gay. He took Jamal out to clubs, and gave him a cellphone so that they could always keep in touch.

Jamal got a part-time job and started saving for a car. But with all the time at work — and clubbing with Adam — Jamal's grades began to slip. One night, Jamal refused to go out; he wanted to catch up on schoolwork and see his old friends. Adam was furious and got on Jamal's case about all he had done for him. He made Jamal quit his job, saying, "From now on, I'm gonna be in charge of your money."

Adam's demands grew. Physically, things became more than what was comfortable for Jamal. And Adam started accusing Jamal of cheating whenever he didn't answer his calls. Adam's behavior frightens Jamal. He feels trapped in the relationship because he doesn't know where else he can go.

F. **Nick** has always loved cooking, and at 16 he could finally enroll in a culinary night school. At his first lesson, Nick shared a cooking station with **Samantha**. He could tell she was older than any of the girls he'd dated from high school, but she was easier to talk to, and she laughed at his jokes. During the lesson Samantha told him that she was 20 years old and she had always dreamed of opening her own restaurant.

Nick and Samantha worked together at every class, sharing the different tasks. Soon they began practicing together outside of class at Samantha's apartment, and it turned into a romantic relationship. Nick loved spending every minute with Samantha, and they told each other, "I love you." Nick wanted to begin a sexual relationship, but Samantha said she wanted to hold off until he was a little bit older.

The couple continued to support each other's goals, and after finishing the class, Nick began to help Samantha plan her restaurant. They dream of one day running it together once Nick has graduated.

**G.** When *Tracey* was 15, she told her closest friend, Maureen, that she was pretty sure she was a lesbian. Maureen helped her find a gay and lesbian center for teens and young adults that wasn't too far away.

At the center, Tracy met 19-year-old *Andrea*, and the two became friends. Andrea talked with Tracey about how confused she was in the beginning, what her own "coming out" experiences were like, and what being a lesbian means to her now. Andrea has introduced Tracey to her family and friends. Gradually, Tracey has begun to "be herself" more openly.

Their friendship has developed into a romantic relationship. They've been together for almost a year now. They talk about everything — their joys and their worries, their hopes for the future, and what they both want from a relationship sexually and emotionally.

**H.** Seventeen-year-old *Ramón* knows he's attracted to both guys and girls. This summer he met *Ken*, a handsome 22-year-old lifeguard.

As the pool closed one evening, Ken asked Ramón if he'd like to go get something to eat. Soon they started dating, with Ken always deciding where they'd go and what they'd do since he always paid. Ken began to tell Ramón that he should work out, so his body would look buff. Ramón wasn't much interested in changing his body, but he agreed to give it a shot when Ken said he would sneak him into his gym. At the gym, the manager asked Ramón for his membership card. Ramón turned to Ken, who looked away and pretended he didn't know him.

By the time school started, Ramón was getting tired of Ken's self-centered behavior, so he stopped seeing him.

Soon after, Ken posted pics of the two of them kissing on his Instagram account, with the message, "Watch out, girls! Ramón goes both ways!"



## Honesty, Equality, Respect and Responsibility

**Directions:** Read the story of the relationship on your group's card. Next, decide together how healthy or unhealthy the relationship seems, circling the appropriate number on the rating scale in each of the boxes below. Then write your reasons for your rating.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HONESTY</b></p> <p><i>This relationship seems ...</i></p> <hr/> <p>1            2            3            4            5  Dishonest                      Not Sure                      Honest</p> <p>Explain:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>EQUALITY</b></p> <p><i>This relationship seems ...</i></p> <hr/> <p>1            2            3            4            5  Unequal                      Not Sure                      Equal</p> <p>Explain:</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESPECT</b></p> <p><i>This relationship seems ...</i></p> <hr/> <p>1            2            3            4            5  Disrespectful                      Not Sure                      Respectful</p> <p>Explain:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESPONSIBILITY</b></p> <p><i>This relationship seems ...</i></p> <hr/> <p>1            2            3            4            5  Irresponsible                      Not Sure                      Responsible</p> <p>Explain:</p>

Overall, would you consider the relationship to be **HEALTHY** or **UNHEALTHY**? Explain.

Does the relationship seem *safe* or *unsafe*? Explain.

Imagine one of the partners in the relationship was your friend. What advice would you give to them?