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Is It a Healthy Relationship?

Overview

This lesson offers guidance on how to tell if a relationship is healthy. Utilizing a clear three-question framework that defines six types of relationships, participants will create sculptures to analyze what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like in the real world. The goal is for participants to deepen their awareness and to develop a language for discussing and asserting expectations for healthy relationships. A self-assessment exercise in the workbook helps participants examine their own relationships.

The lesson also points out that unmet needs can sometimes lie behind unhealthy relationships. It reinforces an earlier lesson, which emphasized that healthy relationships start with the individual taking his or her own growth and development seriously.

The importance of fun in keeping healthy relationships alive and well will also be explored. Youth will be encouraged to generate a list of fun activities to do with friends or partners.

Goals

- Analyze the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Develop a language for discussing healthy relationships and asserting one’s expectations.
- Assess a relationship using a three-question framework.
- Generate a list of fun activities for relationships.
Lesson at a Glance

5.1 How Can You Tell? (35 minutes)
   Activities: Relationship Sculptures; Words that Tell; Assessing My Relationship

5.2 Unmet Needs and Unhealthy Relationships (5 minutes)
   Activity: Read aloud Brad’s Story

5.3 Having Fun (10 minutes)
   Activity: Fun Brainstorm

5.4 Tips to Teens (5-10 minutes)
   Parent-Teen Connection Activity

Materials Checklist

Resources Found at End of Lesson:
5c. 14 Tips for Teens Handout
5d. Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships Handout (Duplicate, one per person)

Activity Cards Located in Back of the Manual:
5a. Six Types of Relationships Activity Cards—Class Set (Locate colored cards in back of manual.) Cut six cards and laminate.
5b. Healthy or Unhealthy? Flashcards (Locate colored cards in back of manual.) Cut cards.

Workbook:
• Is It a Healthy Relationship? pg. 12

Materials:
• Sculpting materials
  • Play-Doh: six containers (more if tiny ones)
  • Pipe cleaners
  • Popsicle/craft sticks
  • Miniature marshmallows or sugar spice drop candy
  • Toothpicks
• How Healthy Is this Relationship? Poster (Locate in pocket of manual.)
• Flipchart or board
• 4x6 index cards (one per teen)
• Music and equipment to play

Downloadable Resources Located at DibbleInstitute.org/downloads
• Lesson Five PowerPoint Presentation
• Duplicate Masters for Handouts and Activity Cards
Preparation

☐ Read through the lesson to be familiar with the three-question guide utilized for gauging the health of relationships.

☐ Preview the Lesson Five PowerPoint Presentation—especially to see pictures and descriptions of sculptures constructed by past groups.

☐ Locate colored *Six Types of Relationships Activity Cards* (Resource 5a) colored activity cards in back of manual. Cut out cards.

☐ Gather sculpting materials. (Materials are reusable)

☐ Locate colored *Healthy or Unhealthy Flashcards* (Resource 5b) colored activity cards in back of manual. Cut out cards.

☐ Review the workbook application *Is It a Healthy Relationship?* (pg. 12)

☐ Review and then duplicate *14 Tips for Teens Handout* (Resource 5c)

☐ Optional: Duplicate *Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships Handout* (Resource 5d)

☐ Display the poster: *How Healthy Is This Relationship?*

☐ Choose a song to play before class begins and as students enter. Consider playing music while they do the sculptures. Any music works.
5.1 How Can You Tell?

(35 minutes)

Material Checklist:
Sculpting materials: Play-Doh, pipe cleaners, craft sticks (Popsicle sticks), toothpicks, spice drops or mini-marshmallows
Music/equipment to play
Resource 5a. Six Types of Relationships Activity Cards
Resource 5b. Healthy or Unhealthy Flashcards
Workbook: Is It a Healthy Relationship?, pg. 12

This Section offers participants a clear three-question framework to utilize in determining whether a relationship is healthy or unhealthy. A fun sculpting activity based on the three questions will help participants explore more deeply what a healthy relationship is and what it is not. The sculpting activity, along with a brief “words that tell” activity, enhance language skills for discussing healthy relationships. Finally, participants use a self-assessment exercise to analyze their own relationships. (PP 1)

Begin this Section with these points:

❖ Today we’re going to explore the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships a little more deeply.

❖ Sometimes the differences may not be clear. If you haven’t seen many good models of healthy relationships it would be hard to know if it is healthy or unhealthy.

❖ So, how can one tell if a relationship is healthy and worth staying in?

❖ There are three questions you can ask to determine if a relationship is healthy. The three questions are simple but important, and have to be answered honestly. If you do, you will know if the relationship is healthy or not. These questions can apply to romantic relationships and friendships.

Direct attention to the How Healthy Is This Relationship? poster. Alternately, use the PowerPoint slides or write the following on a flipchart/board: (PP 2)
### HOW DOES IT FEEL? THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNHEALTHY</th>
<th>HEALTHY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conditional? OR Unconditional?</td>
<td>OR Unconditional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling? Disrespectful? OR</td>
<td>Equal, Respectful, and Supportive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Sexual/Material? OR</td>
<td>Attraction on Many Levels?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ACTIVITY

**Relationship Sculptures**

Announce they will now do a fun activity to explore six different types of relationships. The six types of relationships are *Conditional; Unconditional; Controlling or Disrespectful; Respectful, Equal and Supportive; Mostly about Sex or Material Things/Selfish; and Attraction on Many Levels/Giving*.

Divide participants into six groups and distribute one of the *Six Types of Relationships Activity Cards* (Resource 5a) to each group. Each card describes one of the relationship types listed on the slide/board. Have sculpting supplies in a central area for the group to use. If you have a very small group, three groups can do two sculptures—one for each of the contrasting relationship types.

Give directions: **(PP 3)**

- Each group has a card that describes one of the six types of relationships. Three are healthy and three unhealthy. Have one person in each group read the card aloud and then discuss:
  - Have any of you ever seen a relationship like this? If so, what behaviors did you see? If not, what behaviors do you think you would see?
  - What is it like/would it be like, to be around this couple?
  - If you were in that type of relationship, how would it feel?
  - After a short discussion, get materials (Play-Doh, pipe cleaners, craft sticks, toothpicks, and spice drops) and make a sculpture that represents that relationship.
  - Have fun. This isn’t about great art or making things look real. Use your imagination. Think about symbols and images. Let me give you an example of what some past groups have done.
For the “Controlling/Disrespectful” relationship, one group sculpted a dog out of Play-Doh, and then made a collar and leash out of pipe cleaners connected to a remote control (also out of Play-Doh) held by a large pipe cleaner stick figure.

For the “Equal and Supportive” relationship, one group made a bridge. Two pipe cleaner people were on it. The different colored planks in the bridge represented the unique things each one brought to the relationship. They were used to construct a safe structure for them to walk together on. It symbolized a healthy mix of individualism and togetherness, and support for each other.

**Note:** Or, quickly show one or more examples from the PowerPoint slides. (PP 4-6) Show quickly and do not leave slides up. We want the groups to use their own imagination to make their sculptures. (More examples at the end of the slide show could be substituted.)

Let them know they will have 8-10 minutes to work. Play music while they work. Call a five-minute and then a one-minute warning to keep them on track.

**Processing the activity:**

When finished, the entire group should get up from their seats and travel from sculpture to sculpture.

1. Ask each group to first identify the kind of relationship they have (i.e. Conditional or Unconditional; Controlling or Supportive and Equal; Mostly Material/Sexual or Attraction on Many Levels) and ask a member to read aloud the description on their card to everyone gathered around their sculpture (or the instructor can read the card). This way everyone will get the benefit of hearing the descriptors for each type.

2. Then, have the group interpret their sculpture and describe how its features represent that kind of relationship.

3. Use their interpretations of their sculptures as a springboard for discussion. As you go from group to group, here are some discussion extenders after each group has presented their sculpture:

   - Without naming names, have any of you seen a relationship like that in real life? Or in a movie? **Note:** Anyone from the larger group can chime in, not just that group.

   - How does or would it feel to be in that type of relationship? Can you think of a popular song that captures the feelings?

   - What is it like (or what would it be like) to be around a couple in that type of relationship? If healthy, how would it influence you or impact you? If unhealthy, what would you do?
When you get to controlling or disrespectful, be sure to add these points:

❖ Controlling relationships can evolve into abusive ones. Everyone should be on the lookout for danger signs, or “red flags” if a relationship feels controlling or disrespectful in any way.

❖ It is not okay for a boyfriend or girlfriend to make you feel bad, call you names, put you down, or disrespect you. A healthy relationship means the other person makes you feel good about who you are. We’ll be talking more in a later lesson about dating violence.

When the discussion is finished ask each group to jot down interpretations of their sculptures. Ask them to briefly describe what the symbols or scene represent. As they are doing this, go around and take a photograph of each sculpture. Include the group’s brief description of their sculpture and a copy of the corresponding Healthy or Unhealthy card by each photo. Consider printing the photos of their sculptures (in color) and making a large poster for public display. Give it a title such as, “Is it a Healthy Relationship?” Include the group’s brief description of their sculpture and a copy of the corresponding Healthy or Unhealthy card by each photo. Post it in your room or a public place to serve as an important reminder and to honor their work and creativity. Note: You can also insert these photos into your PowerPoint slide show.

ACTIVITY
Words that Tell

The goal of this brief activity is to continue to build vocabulary for talking about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Shuffle the colored flashcards Healthy or Unhealthy? (Resource 5b) found in the back of the manual. Take only two to three minutes. (PP 7)

❖ I’m holding a stack of cards with a word on each one.

❖ As I say the word, and hold up the card, I’d like you to shout out if you think it goes in the healthy or unhealthy relationship pile.

ACTIVITY
Assessing Relationships

Ask participants to locate Is It a Healthy Relationship? on workbook pages 12-13. Introduce:

❖ In this exercise you will have the opportunity to assess your relationship.
For those not in a relationship, you can either assess a past relationship or a relationship of someone you know well.

Either way, it will offer you insights and help you think more about the behaviors that represent a healthy relationship.

Instruct participants to read the introduction and then to notice the three continuums (scales) after each set of questions. After reading each set of questions, they are to mark an “X” on each scale to indicate where the relationship falls (or fell) in that category. After they finish the assessment, instruct them to describe three behaviors in the workbook that are personally important and which place a relationship firmly in the healthy zone. Note: The assessment can be assigned as homework to save time.

5.2 Unmet Needs and Unhealthy Relationships

(20 minutes)

Materials: Board or flipchart paper

This Section begins with a very brief presentation describing four basic human needs, and how these needs, if they are not met in healthy ways, can lead to poor relationship and sexual choices. Introduce with the following points:

- There are a number of reasons and pressures that help explain why some people engage in risky behavior and find themselves in unhealthy relationships.

- Some people may have unmet needs. Let’s take a look at the kind of unmet needs that might lie behind unhealthy relationships.

- First let’s establish that everyone is born with four basic human needs. Note: Instructor can draw a circle divided into four quadrants labeled as listed below to aid this mini-presentation, or use the PowerPoint provided: (PP 9)
1. **PHYSICAL NEEDS:** There is a basic human need for positive physical touch. For example, babies who are neglected—not cuddled and held—can become sick and fail to grow. We don’t outgrow our need for physical touch and physical affection. A hand on the shoulder, a hug, a shoulder massage, a kiss from your mom, and the physical affection of romantic love are all ways we meet our basic need for physical touch.

2. **EMOTIONAL NEEDS:** Everyone wants to feel loved, and everyone has a need for security. We all need to know that someone is there to love us, no matter what. Another way of saying this is that everyone has a need for unconditional love from family, friends, or other caring adults.

3. **MENTAL NEEDS:** This need is about how you see yourself and how you want others to think about you. Most of us care about what others think of us, and we want others to see us in a positive light. We all want to count, to be noticed, to “be somebody.” We all have a basic need for acceptance and respect.

4. **SOCIAL NEEDS:** This need involves a desire to belong. Everyone wants to feel that he or she belongs. Everybody wants to belong to a “family” or with friends. Eventually, most people want to belong to a romantic love relationship.

❖ Some people may not have had these basic needs met within their families in healthy ways. We call that having “unmet needs.”

❖ Unmet needs can motivate people to try to get these needs met in unhealthy ways. It’s natural to try to get these basic needs met.

❖ For example, a teen who feels abandoned or neglected by a parent might seek to meet the emotional need for love and security in unwise and hasty relationship choices. It is like the saying, “Looking for love in all the wrong places.”

❖ Sometimes to get acceptance or approval from other people—to satisfy mental needs—a person might do things to win acceptance, recognition or to look good. But these may be behaviors that break the law or get them in trouble.

❖ At times a person might go along with the group to fit in or engage in certain behaviors to meet the social need to belong. But they aren’t being true to themselves. They are just desperately trying to fit in.

❖ Sadly, some kids have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused by those who are supposed to love and protect them. As a teenager, he or she may have a hard time knowing if a relationship is healthy or if a person is safe.

❖ The main point for our discussion today is that people can get involved in unhealthy relationships or friendships in order to get these needs met. Some of those relationships and behaviors can have real problems.
READ ALOUD
Brad’s Story

Read aloud the very short, but engaging, *Brad’s Story*. It is a short reflection by a 21 year-old male looking back on how he tried to meet his unmet needs with girls who, in turn, had their own unmet needs. (PP 10)

❖ I would like to read a quote from 21-year-old guy named Brad:

**Brad Looking Back:** I’m in a relationship right now that is probably the best one I’ve had so far. I’ve had a lot of messed-up relationships in the past. Before asking Chelsea out, I had taken off a couple of years from girls—from dating—to re-examine my priorities. I think that this extended period of reflection helped me recognize the reasons I became attracted to certain types of girls. It helped me figure out what good traits I wanted in women. Before re-examining my priorities, I would exclusively pick girls who appeared promiscuous and troubled, just like me. I had lots of baggage myself—some of it related to the fact I moved seven times as a kid and had to deal with my mom’s abusive boyfriends.

Anyway, with all my previous relationships, I believed that I was there for sex with a “throw-away” girl, and would have no trouble dropping her if the relationship got to be trouble or too taxing. What would always happen is that I would feel like I had “fallen in love” with them, and they would manipulate me into a wretched lump—seeing they were better at the “mind games.” They were generally pretty troubled and had rough childhood experiences, including divorce and sexual abuse.

The promiscuity, I’m guessing, was a way to get attention. I picked up on this, not wanting to wait more than one date for the sex, and went for whichever girl seemed to be the fastest way to the bedroom. The sex—a contributing factor was our young, high school age—was almost always disappointing and extremely sketchy. Since I had no good experience to compare it to, I guess I was just there for the “points.” Happy, normal girls never really caught my eye. I assumed that they were boring, would not wear exciting underwear, and would want me to wait for sex. The memory of my old behavior makes me cringe nowadays…

Ask the group for their reaction. Add:

❖ This young guy has really given himself some time to reflect on his past. He’s taken a break from relationships to focus on his own development as a person.

❖ It’s made him a lot clearer in his head about what he really wants and what is really important to him.

Announce to the group that if this discussion has raised issues anyone would like to talk about that you are available. Be sure to have appropriate referral resources. (Note: Lesson Six will be dealing with the issue of “baggage” from the past in an upbeat and empowering way.)
In this very brief Section, participants will learn that having fun and continuing to have fun is actually pretty important to successful and healthy relationships. Participants will brainstorm and share ideas for fun.

(PP 11)

Introduce the idea of why fun is so important to healthy relationships:

❖ Having fun, believe it or not, is very, very important to a satisfying long-term relationship. Doing enjoyable things together helps two people feel connected to each other.

❖ Happy experiences create a positive bond, making it easier to tackle the problems of everyday life and cope with irritation and stress.

Explain what often happens to fun in long-term relationships or marriages:

❖ So, what happens to fun in a long-term relationship, marriage or committed union? Most couples start with fun as part of the relationship. As life gets busy, couples often let time for fun slip away.

❖ It can be tough to find free time with work, school, and other responsibilities.

❖ When there is free time, it is easy to slide into watching a lot of TV shows, playing computer games, or checking Facebook. A decision could be made to spend some of that precious time having fun with a partner, child, friends, or family.

❖ There is nothing bad about TV or computer games, or even Facebook, but it can be awfully easy to make them the major thing we do.

❖ Did you know research shows people are happiest when they are out doing things, spending time with others or working on some hobby or interest?

❖ Those couples that make the effort to do fun things together, no matter how busy life gets, are rewarded. Over time, the couples that keep fun alive have more satisfying relationships.

❖ Research on happiness and fun also tells us it is important to do different things from time to time. A great idea is to try out new activities for keeping fun alive.
ACTIVITY

Fun Brainstorm

(PP 12) Divide in groups of three or four and announce there will be a three-minute competition with prizes. Each group is to brainstorm a list of ideas of fun things to do with a partner or friend according to two criteria: cost and time. Some ideas should be free, some should cost just a little, and others can cost more. Regarding time, some fun ideas should take less than a half hour, an evening, all afternoon, the whole day or longer. Tell them to mix it up and strive for variety, fun, and creativity. But they all must come up with a few fun ideas that are free.

When time is up, give prizes/candy to the group with the longest list. Have each group read off their lists. As groups report out their ideas for fun, instruct participants to jot down the ones they like (and their own) on their index card. Suggest they tape the list in their locker or notebook to remind them of things to do for fun.

Ask the group if they want to vote again on the list with the most creative or different ideas. Give that group prizes/candy. Suggest they tape the list on their refrigerator to remind them of a variety of things to do for fun.

Suggestion: Play *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* (Cindy Lauper), or a similar song while they brainstorm.

5.4 Tips for Teens

(5-10 minutes)

Materials: Resource 5c. 14 Tips for Teens Handout (one per student)

ACTIVITY

Tips for Teens Discussion

Distribute the 14 Tips for Teens Handout (Resource 5c). Point out to the teens that these tips were gathered from conversations with older teens and young adults in their twenties, and represent some of the things they wished they had known when they were younger. These tips touch on many of the key points from the lessons so far.
Ask the teens to read through the tips (in class or at home). To facilitate discussion (or even turn this into a short writing assignment), ask them to star three or four tips they feel could be most useful and explain why. Use as directed below for the Parent-Teen Connection activity.

**Parent-Teen Connection**

(PP 13-14) Have the teens take 14 Tips for Teens Handout (Resource 5c) home. They are to ask their parent or trusted adult to look over the list and star the four they think most important and explain why. Teen and parent or trusted adult should compare and discuss why each chose the ones they did. In the next session, when they bring their connection sheet back, discuss their choices and how they differed or agreed with their parent’s or trusted adult’s top four.

Optional: Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships Handout (Resource 5d). This is an optional handout for teens and can also be used as a parent-teen connection activity. If the latter, teens are to ask their parent or trusted adult if they think these three questions are good ones to ask in judging a relationship. They should also ask the parent or adult which question they feel is most important and whether they have another question to suggest.
14 Tips for Teens

1. Develop yourself, forge your own identity, and pursue your interests. In the long run, the best relationships are made of two people who have a positive sense of self and some direction in life. And, don’t ignore your friends after starting a romantic relationship.

2. Keep your eyes on what is important. Is this someone you’d choose as a best friend? Do you have some common interests? Do you find him or her fun and interesting?

3. Remember the seven principles of smart relationships. Sometimes people lower their standards for how they should be treated just to hold on to a relationship. Some people try to change themselves or ignore value differences just to keep a relationship.


5. Look for a person with character and integrity. Have a vision of the kind of relationship and partner you want, and let that vision guide your relationship choices.

6. Slow down your emotional desire to be in a serious relationship—to be part of an “us” too soon. (Remember—those love chemicals can fool you!) Enjoy your teenage years—get to know and/or date a variety of people.

7. Make clear, definite decisions. Don’t “slide” when in comes to relationships. Handle your attractions with your brain turned on and eyes wide open. Give it time.

8. Have a clear boundary—a stopping point in your mind—before you’re with a partner. It’s hard to stop after a certain point of physical affection. Talk about your sexual values and agree on boundaries sooner rather than later.

9. Teens will have sexual fantasies. As one young man said, “As a teenager, you think of sex about every 10 minutes.” It’s normal and natural.

10. Always remember that it’s easy to be “blinded,” even fooled, by the “love chemicals.”

11. Remember that (heterosexual) sex can create a child. Ask yourself if you are ready (emotionally and financially) to marry/commit to a future together and be a good parent. Children deserve committed parents who are ready and able to parent together. If you are not, your child could pay a price.

12. Good sex tends to go with good relationships that have matured (like a healthy marriage/committed union). It takes self-development, growth, and maturity to have those kinds of relationships. They usually don’t happen until your twenties.

13. In order to have a great relationship someday, you yourself need to grow and figure out how to be yourself with a partner who is your equal and whom you find attractive in many ways—not just in a physical sense.

14. Even when pregnancy is not an issue in a relationship, the emotional and health risks of sex-too-soon can be high. No matter what one’s sexual orientation, all of these tips apply to everyone.
Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships

IS IT CONDITIONAL? You worry about not being “good enough.” Your partner makes you feel little. You feel like you have to have a lot of money, or be or look a certain way, in order to keep his or her attention or love. You worry a lot about being dumped. You can’t be the real you. You have to wear a “mask.” There is little trust or security.

CONTROLLING or DISRESPECTFUL? One partner needs to be the “boss.” He or she ridicules the words and actions of the other and shows little interest in his or her feelings. The controlled person worries about upsetting his or her partner and often avoids saying or doing things. The controller does not support his or her partner, and in fact often tries to hold him or her back. One partner thinks he or she is entitled to express his or her anger in any way he or she chooses.

MOSTLY SEXUAL OR MATERIAL? This relationship is either based almost exclusively on sex, status, or the material things one gets out of the relationship. Without one or more of these elements, there would not be much there. There is not a lot of fun or deeper getting-to-know each other.

UNCONDITIONAL? You both feel appreciated for who you really are. You don’t have to pretend or play games. You do not have to be perfect. You can tell each other about behaviors in each other that you don’t like. You support each other in making changes that you each decide to work on. You each show you genuinely care about the other.

EQUAL, RESPECTFUL, and SUPPORTIVE? Both partners treat each other well. Neither dominates or consistently “gives in.” Both partners feel respected. Each partner feels his or her thoughts, feelings, and needs are important to the other. They know differences and disagreements are inevitable in relationships and do not put each other down when these occur. Both partners feel encouraged by the other to develop and better him/herself.

ATTRACTION ON MANY LEVELS? This couple has chemistry, but they also enjoy talking and getting to know each other. They have fun doing things based on shared interests and are open to trying new activities that the other person values. They balance time together, apart, and with friends. This relationship is based on a lot more than looks, status, or material things.

Parent or Trusted Adult: Read the above and offer your reactions and ideas on what makes a healthy relationship and/or what signals an unhealthy relationship:
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