Newly Revised!

Connections: Dating and Emotions

By: Charlene Kamper

Sample Lesson

Dating doesn't always come naturally. This newly revised 15-lesson unit helps younger teens understand the challenges that arise in early relationships - and establish a strong foundation for later life. A variety of appealing exercises teach teens how relationships develop, effective ways to communicate, awareness of destructive patterns, how to deal with emotions, and other essential skills, including PREP® concepts. Ready-to-teach curriculum includes updated lesson plans, game cards, 8 posters, and a resource CD including PowerPoint presentations and resource masters.

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Grades 8-12
15 one-hour lessons

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Sample Lesson

Connections: Dating and Emotions

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WORKBOOK ASSIGNMENT

- What Should I Say? (WB Page 21)

OVERVIEW

This lesson will introduce the concept of self-disclosure within relationship. The participants will learn about four areas of awareness and how they affect the quality of the bond that develops between people.

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will learn how four areas of self-disclosure affect relationship.
2. Participants will evaluate their own comfort levels for self-disclosure.
3. Participants will identify categories of communication within the four areas.

VOCABULARY

self-disclosure openness

KEY CONCEPTS

- Trust is the basis of self-disclosure; revealing one's true self with others comfortably.
- Friends and dating partners must be willing and able to self-disclose at the same level in order for their relationship to grow.
- Feeling comfortable with self is an important aspect of sharing with others.
- People self-disclose more easily in an emotionally safe environment in which they feel loved and valued.
- Genuine self-disclosure takes practice.
PREPARATION FOR LESSON

Instructor will need:
• Worksheet *What Should I Say?*
• 3x5 cards to distribute.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Distribute a 3x5 card to each participant and ask them to write their name on it. Then ask them to write down three things about themselves that no one else in the room is likely to know. Participants should be instructed to choose information they are comfortable sharing because the cards will be read aloud to the group. Examples of personal information can include: shoe size, favorite movie, a childhood experience, etc.

• Collect the cards and shuffle them so they are distributed randomly before reading them.

• Select a card from the stack. Read it aloud but do not say the name of the participant on the card. After reading the items listed, ask the participants to try and identify the person in the room who wrote the card. If the instructor wishes, incentives or small rewards can be given to participants who guess correctly.

• Read as many cards as the time allows before moving on to the workbook lesson.

Discussion Questions:
1. How easy was it for you to think of things to share with the group?
2. How comfortable are you with letting others know things about you that they didn’t know before?
3. Are you equally interested in getting to know more about someone else? Why might that be important for helping a relationship grow?

Slides #1-5:
• Introduce the talking point of building trust in relationship. Emphasize that this takes time to develop and is based on a mutual willingness to let the other person get to know the true self. Remind the participants that most people don’t comfortably self-disclose immediately when first in a relationship.
Slides # 6-12:

- Ask the participants to turn to the workbook page entitled What Should I Say? Tell them they will be learning about something called the Johari Window. This exercise will introduce them to four areas of self-disclosure that affect openness in a relationship. Each area is illustrated and explained on the first page of the lesson. Go over the information with the group and answer questions if they arise.

- Divide the participants into smaller working groups and ask them to decide together what kinds of personal information might be found in each of the quadrants. They can make a separate list as a group or they can write the information directly into the workbook. Allow about 15 minutes for this discussion and activity.

- Ask them to return to their individual seats to complete the rest of the assignment. They should evaluate honestly their own ability to self-disclose at the various levels in order to determine their readiness for close relationships with others. Instruct them to draw lines in the window at the bottom of WB page 22 showing the quadrants for the Johari Window as they see themselves.

Discussion Questions:
1. Why might it be important for dating partners to be able to communicate in all of the areas, rather than just one or two?
2. How might a friendship or dating relationship be affected if two people don’t match in their ability to self-disclose?

Lecture Notes

Trust between friends or dating partners is the psychological safety ground for self-disclosure, the process of allowing others to know more of one's past, inner thoughts, and feelings. But self-disclosure always involves the element of risk because there is no way to predict how others will respond to what they hear. New relationships may suffer if partners reveal too much too soon, opening the possibility that private information could become public after a break-up. Even among friends who have known each other for awhile, self-disclosure may result in disappointment or loss of respect that can influence whether the friendship continues or not. This is of real concern for teens, especially if they are involved in a friendship or deeper relationship they genuinely care about.

Another concern related to the issue of self-disclosure is that partners may find they are not able to share meaningfully at the same level. As suggested in the
previous lesson, when people get to know each other better they change the types of activities they engage in and the level of caring between them. If a relationship is going to deepen along the way, the partners must be able to communicate personally and effectively about important things. But many relationships struggle with balance in this area. When friends or dating partners have different disclosure skills, one or both may feel pressured, vulnerable, or distanced if the other is unwilling or unable to self-disclose in the same way.

The Johari Window was developed by Joseph Luft to illustrate awareness in human relationships. The lesson in the workbook was adapted from *Group Processes: An Introduction to Group Dynamics Third Edition*. This communication model is based on a concept of four quadrants that represent different areas of self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships. Although it is a simplified visual for describing actual information sharing between people, it does offer a structure for recognizing aspects of knowledge that can either help partners understand each other better or lead to problems in relationships if mishandled.

**Quadrant I – OPEN**, is the area that represents general information known to self and others. This information is easily accessible to everyone and involves the least risk. For instance: one's name, age, school, friendships, etc. This information is the most comfortable to talk about, is usually non-threatening to share, and opens the door for relationship to begin.

**Quadrant II – BLIND**, is the area of knowledge in which others see things about the person but the individual is less aware of them. Things people tend to be blind to within themselves may include: personal habits, personality idiosyncrasies, or body language that are evident to others. Individuals may not be able to discuss these issues readily because they do not recognize them within themselves.

**Quadrant III – HIDDEN**, is the area of information known exclusively by the individual but is not accessible to others. Unless this knowledge is shared, others have no way of knowing it. These things might include: childhood or recent experiences, family issues, future goals, etc. People are often less willing to share at this level because it involves more emotional risk.

**Quadrant IV – MYSTERY**, is an area of functioning that neither the individual nor others are openly aware of. Generally these are internal motivators that may have been present for a long time that guide behaviors. These areas might include: family communication patterns, cultural influences, birth order traits, emotions, or unidentified expectations about relationships. It may also include belief systems such as denial, prejudice, or low self-esteem that are not initially obvious but do have an influence on the relationship.
Communication is a key factor at all levels of relationship. How well two people are able to comfortably share thoughts and feelings, problem-solve together, and validate one another in meaningful ways does influence the quality of the relationship. But boys and girls approach dating from different vantage points, with girls having a slight edge when it comes to verbal skills and identifying emotions. As many teens know from their early dating experiences, learning how to negotiate plans and accurately interpret what another person is saying within a relationship takes practice.

In this exercise the participants are asked to determine what areas of the Johari Window are most evident in their personal self-disclosure patterns. When they draw in their lines, the sizes of the quadrants will be different for different people. For some, Quadrant I – OPEN is where they like to communicate best and in fact is where most relationships start. It is the least threatening area; the information is at a surface level and does not involve much personal investment. However, if a relationship continues to develop, there will likely be problems for the couple if the communication between them exclusively stays at this level for very long.

When people get to know each other better there is an expected shift in the various areas. For example, as Quadrant I – OPEN gets larger, Quadrant III – HIDDEN should get smaller. The two areas of communication that require more effort and maturity to understand are Quadrant II – HIDDEN and Quadrant IV – MYSTERY. Relationships that develop a strong trust between people can begin exploring these deeper issues. Within the context of emotional safety, people tend to be more willing to self-explore. An important element for healthy relationship development, however, is helping people learn to self-disclose in relatively similar ways.
Building Trust

Trust is the basis for self-disclosure: revealing your true self to others comfortably.

Building Trust

Friends and dating partners must be willing to self-disclose at the same level in order for their relationship to grow.

Building Trust

Feeling comfortable with yourself is an important aspect of sharing your true self with others.

Building Trust

People self-disclose more easily in an emotionally safe environment in which they feel loved and valued.

Genuine self-disclosure takes practice!

Understanding how self-disclosure works

The Johari Window: Four levels of communication.
The Johari Window

**OPEN**
Area of least risk that includes general information known to self and others.

**BLIND**
Area of knowledge in which others see things about the person but the individual is less aware of them.

**HIDDEN**
Area that represents information that we know about ourselves but is not accessible to others unless we tell them.

**MYSTERY**
Area is motivated by internal factors such as deep emotions, expectations, or family patterns that influence behavior.
What should I say?

Building a relationship with another person requires both individuals to self-disclose. This can be difficult initially because there is always a threat that the other person may not like what is revealed and then reject us. For every person there is a PERSONAL side and a PRIVATE side. Being willing to show others who you really are takes courage and practice.

The Johari Window is sometimes used to illustrate how individuals interact with one another. Notice that four areas make up the diagram.

Quadrant I – OPEN
Area of least risk that includes information known to self and others.

Quadrant II – BLIND
Area of knowledge in which others see things about the person but the individual is less aware of them.

Quadrant III – HIDDEN
Area that represents things that we know about ourselves but are not accessible to others.

Quadrant IV – MYSTERY
Area is motivated by internal factors such as deep emotions, expectations, or personal habits that influence behavior.

Exercise: Working together as a group, list categories of information that might be found in each of the quadrant areas.

Instructions: In real-life relationships, the four quadrants are not always divided equally. In order to increase the OPEN area, one must be willing to decrease the HIDDEN area. Increasing the OPEN area will create the opportunity for closer relationships with others. Using the box below, decide how you would divide the four areas to best describe your own ability to self-disclose to others.
Evaluation

Connections: Dating and Emotions
by Scott Gardner, Ph.D.

Executive Summary
The Connections: Dating and Emotions (Connections) curriculum was evaluated in 10 high schools across the United States with over 500 students during the 2003-2004 school year. The sample contained an ethnically diverse cross-section of the country. Students both in the Connections class as well as a comparative Non-Connections class were surveyed both before and after the curriculum was taught. It is important to note that in the results discussed below, while the Connections students improved in the area in question, the Non-Connections students either did not improve or in many areas showed some deterioration. The results of the evaluation suggest that the Connections curriculum is particularly effective in improving students’ ability to resist sexual pressure. Additionally, the curriculum also appears to benefit students behaviorally by decreasing their negative behaviors in school, at home as well as in relationships with other students. Lastly, there are also some positive impacts on student attitudes toward positive relationship formation.

Knowledge
The Connections curriculum does appear to be effective in increasing the knowledge of key healthy relationship concepts.

Behaviors
The Connections curriculum is effective as a teen pregnancy prevention curriculum. Students improved significantly in their perceived ability to resist sexual pressure while those students not taking the curriculum remained unchanged. Students are more likely to communicate with their parents after taking the curriculum which further strengthens their likelihood of avoiding risky sexual activity.

Students taking the curriculum also decrease their use of violence with their boyfriend or girlfriend, decrease their use of verbal aggression in the relationship, and decrease how often they get into trouble in school, and at home. Additionally, students report a significantly decreased acceptance of dating violence. These findings suggest that Connections may also be an effective violence prevention curriculum particularly in the area of boyfriend - girlfriend relationships.

Attitudes
The Connections curriculum is effective in terms of improving attitudes. The curriculum has a significant and strong impact on student attitudes toward positive relationship formation. Students taking the Connections curriculum become much more likely to say they will take advantage of marriage preparation classes in the future, marriage enrichment classes after marriage, and marriage counseling if their marriage is in trouble. Students not taking this course remain unchanged in their likelihood of participating in such effective preventative interventions. The Connections students also seemed to remain unchanged in their level of self-esteem while the Non-Connections students significantly decreased in their levels of self-esteem over the same time period.

In summary, the Connections: Dating and Emotions curriculum is effective as a teen pregnancy prevention curriculum. Additionally, the curriculum is effective at preventing future relationship and marriage difficulties by improving key attitudes that should lead to students participating in behaviors and activities which are protective against future marital distress, domestic violence and divorce. The curriculum also shows promise in reducing violence in relationships and negative behaviors at school and at home.
About The Dibble Institute

Founded in 1996, The Dibble Institute is an independent, non-profit organization that equips young people with the skills and knowledge they need to develop healthy romantic relationships now and in the future. The Dibble Institute fulfills its mission by:

- Raising awareness of the needs for and benefits of helping young people learn the skills needed to navigate their romantic lives;
- Educating opinion leaders and policy makers;
- Training teachers and youth instructors;
- Developing, producing, and disseminating evidence based, best practices, developmentally appropriate, evaluated, and easy to teach relationship skills materials; and
- Serving as a clearinghouse to collect and disseminate timely and relevant research and other evidence of the benefits of youth relationship education.

The Dibble Institute programs are used in all 50 states and around the world in thousands of schools, youth agencies, and other youth programs impacting tens of thousands of young people. For more information, please visit www.DibbleInstitute.org.