

# Youth Relationship Education Research and Practice Priorities

Highlights from the Marriage Strengthening Research and  
Dissemination Center

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- June 9, 2021

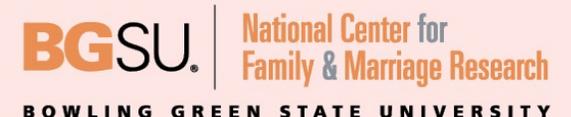
# Webinar Agenda

1. Introduce the Marriage Strengthening Research & Dissemination Center (MAST Center)
2. Describe adolescent and young adult relationship attitudes, expectations, and experiences
3. Learn about the role of positive youth development (PYD) in the design and implementation of youth relationship education programs
4. Identify priorities for future research and practice related to youth relationship education

# What is the MAST Center?

- Established in 2018 by a five-year federal grant
- Conducts research on marriage and romantic relationships in the U.S. and healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs designed to strengthen these relationship

The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



# Mast Center Objectives



Advance a  
Research  
Agenda



Build Capacity  
for Research/  
Evaluation



Strategic  
Dissemination



# MAST Center: Research Aims



Relationship Patterns and Trends



Program Implementation and Evaluation

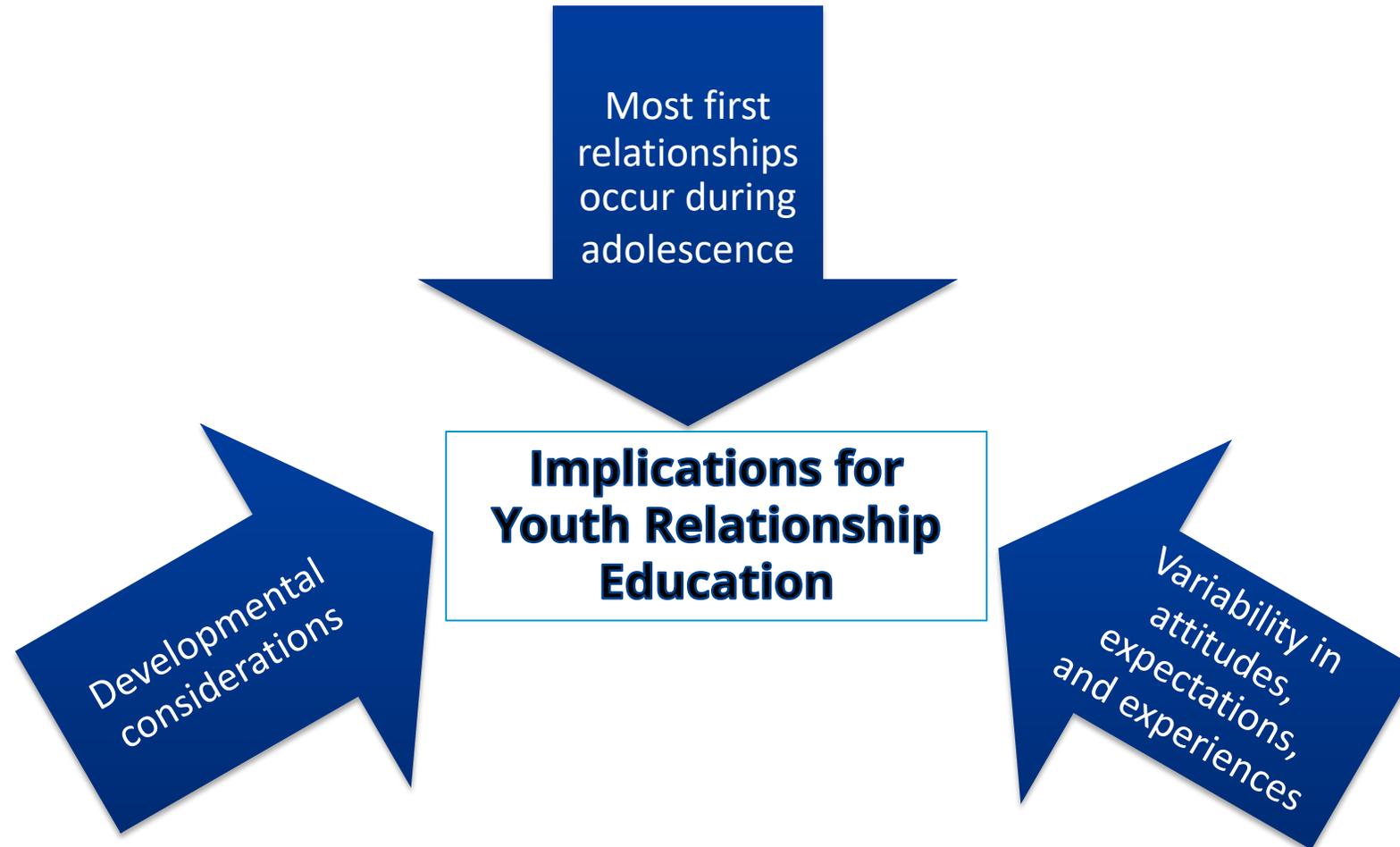
# Poll

- What types of research would be most useful for informing and improving future relationship education for youth?
  - Analysis of trends in youth relationship formation
  - Analysis of youth attitudes, expectations, and experiences
  - New data on youth attitudes, expectations, and experiences
  - Research on HMRE program design and implementation
  - Research on HMRE program effectiveness (evaluation)



# MAST Center Research: Relationship Patterns and Trends

# Relationship Patterns and Trends: A Focus on Youth



# Youth Relationship Attitudes and Experiences

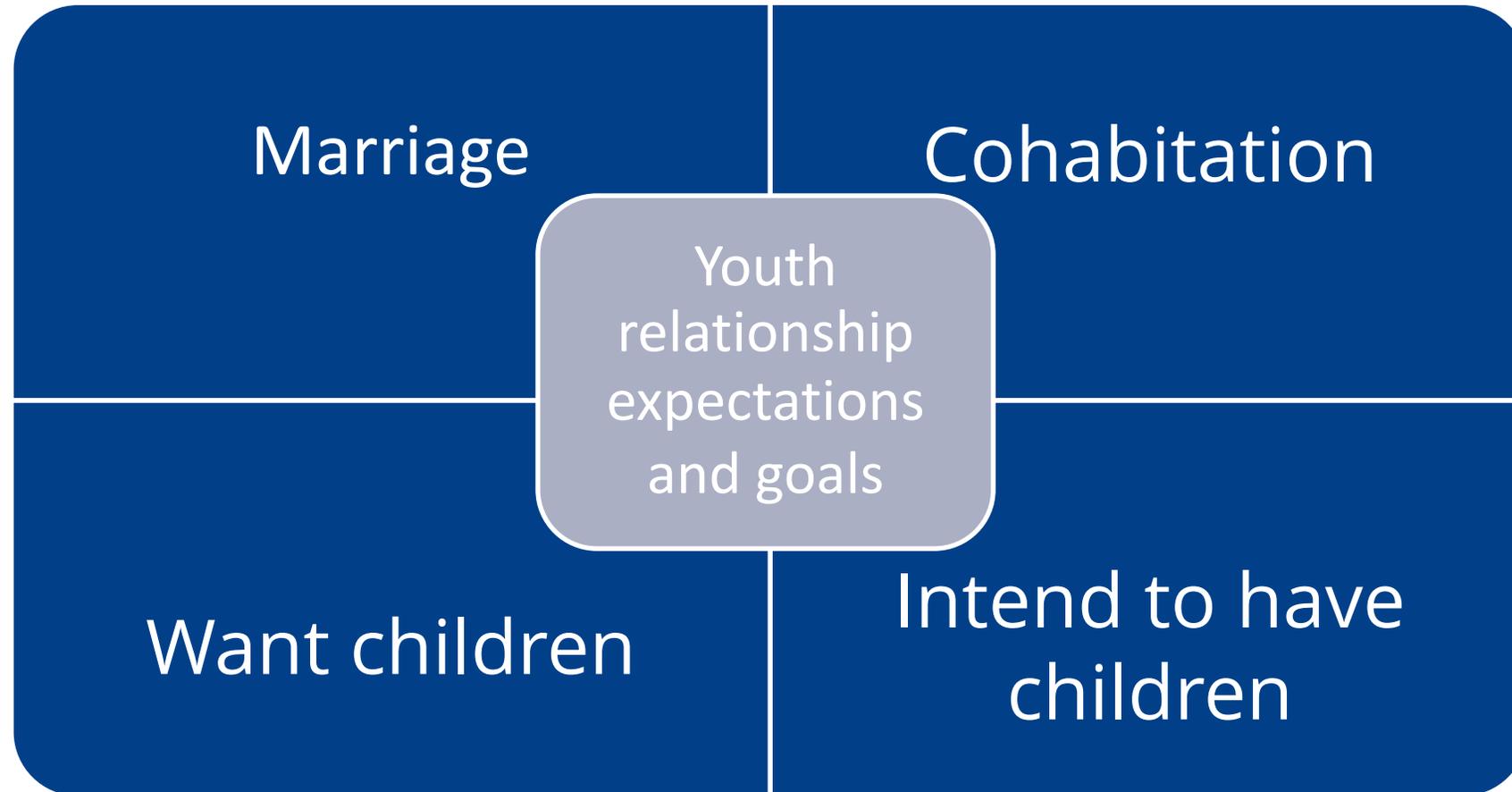
For adolescence:  
Emphasize exploratory  
dating, less long-term  
commitment or  
stability

For young adults:  
Emphasize  
communicating  
relationship needs and  
expectations

For all youth:  
Emphasize knowing  
when to end a  
relationship, why, and  
how

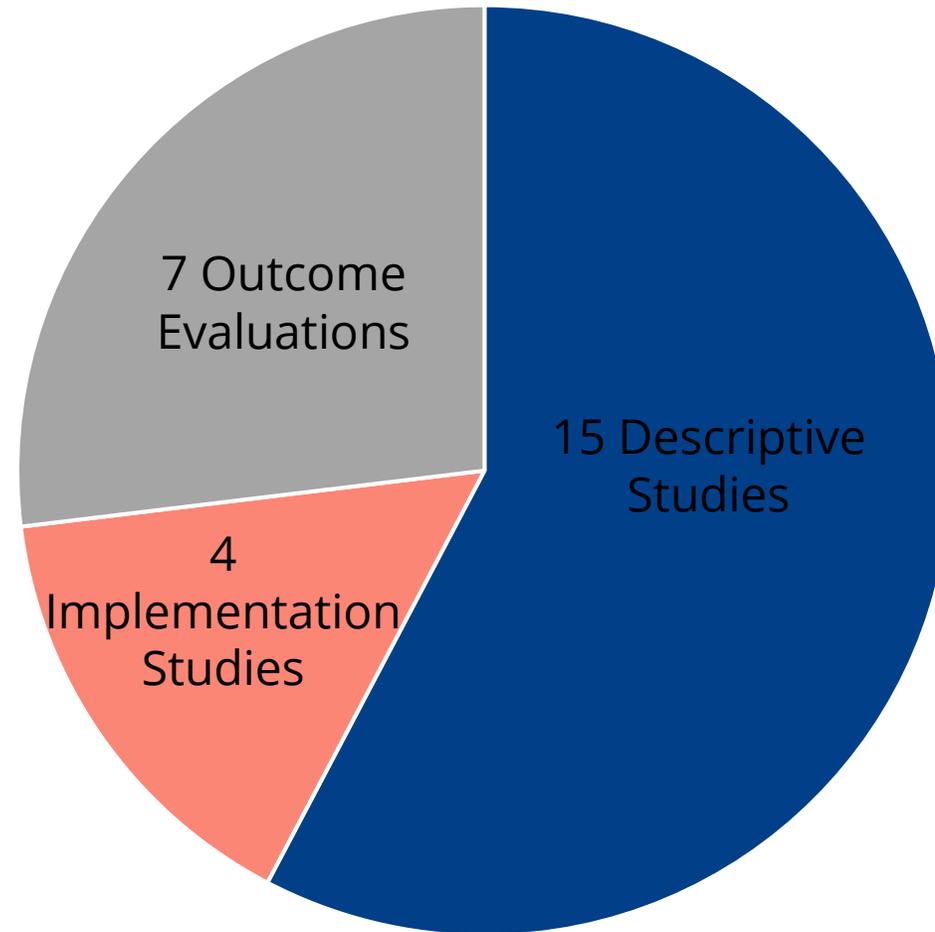
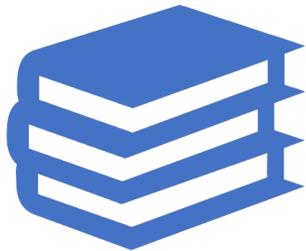
Source: [Relationship Quality and its Measurement Among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Review of the Literature](#)

# Youth Relationship Expectations and Goals



# Youth Relationship Education Research and Practice – Working with Diverse Youth Populations

- Annotated Bibliography
- Priority youth populations

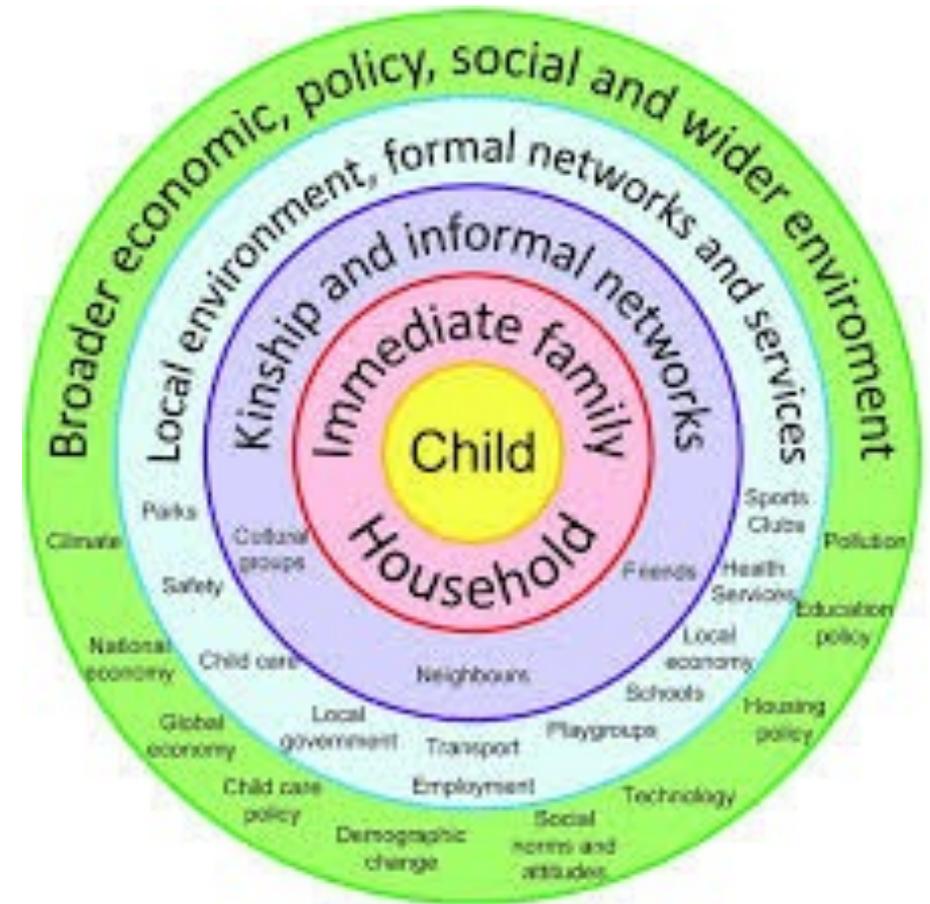




# MAST Center Research: HMRE Program Implementation and Evaluation A Focus on Positive Youth Development

# What is Positive Youth Development?

- An evidence-informed strengths-based developmental approach that:
  - Positively engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families
  - Provides opportunities for leadership, fosters positive relationships, and builds skills and competencies



# How is PYD Different From Traditional Youth Services?

## Paradigm Shift

### Traditional Youth Services

- Fixing Problems
- Reactive
- Troubled Youth
- Youth as Recipients
- Programs
- Professional Work

### Positive Youth Development

- Building on strengths
- Pro-active
- All youth
- Youth as Participants/Resources
- Relationships
- Everyone's Work

Adapted from Search Institute. 2001.  
Old Attitudes/New Attitudes. Speaking of Developmental Assets.

# Poll

- From your experience, which areas of programming might benefit the most from a PYD approach?
  - Recruitment
  - Curriculum Content
  - Curriculum Delivery
  - Youth Engagement
  - Youth Needs

# How Can PYD Inform HMRE Programming?

## Recruitment

- Message in ways that resonate with youth's "culture"

## Curriculum Content

- Relevant to youth interests
- Responsive to their preferences

## Curriculum Delivery

- Intentional skill-building approach
- Build a "safe" learning environment

## Youth Engagement

- Invest in relationship with facilitator
- Connect to their lived experience

## Youth Needs

- Recognize and build from strengths
- Leverage family and community assets



# Integrating Positive Youth Development and Youth Relationship Education – an Application

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# Be Calm Connections

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- Federal grant funded by the Office of Family Assistance
- Reflects federal priority to help youth build relationship skills, support positive development, and promote successful transitions to young adulthood

## **Short-term Goals:**

Build students' skills in managing emotions and stress, positive and effective communication strategies, and conflict resolution

## **Long-term Goals:**

Improve students' mental and emotional wellbeing and their ability to engage in compassionate and affirming relationships at home, school, and with friends

# Be CALM Program Background

## A Mindfulness-Based Self-Regulation Program

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- Developed for middle schoolers 2017-2020
  - Targeted impulse control and decision-making
- Delivered to 2,000+ students across 4 districts in NC
- Small RCT showed promising effects on health/PE teachers
  - Decreased stress, increased teaching mindfulness, observed co-regulation
- Qualitative student data suggested
  - Decreased emotional reactivity, better coping/conflict resolution, and application to interpersonal interactions
- Teacher report showed
  - Greatest improvement in the area of prosocial skills

# Be CALM Connections Adaptations

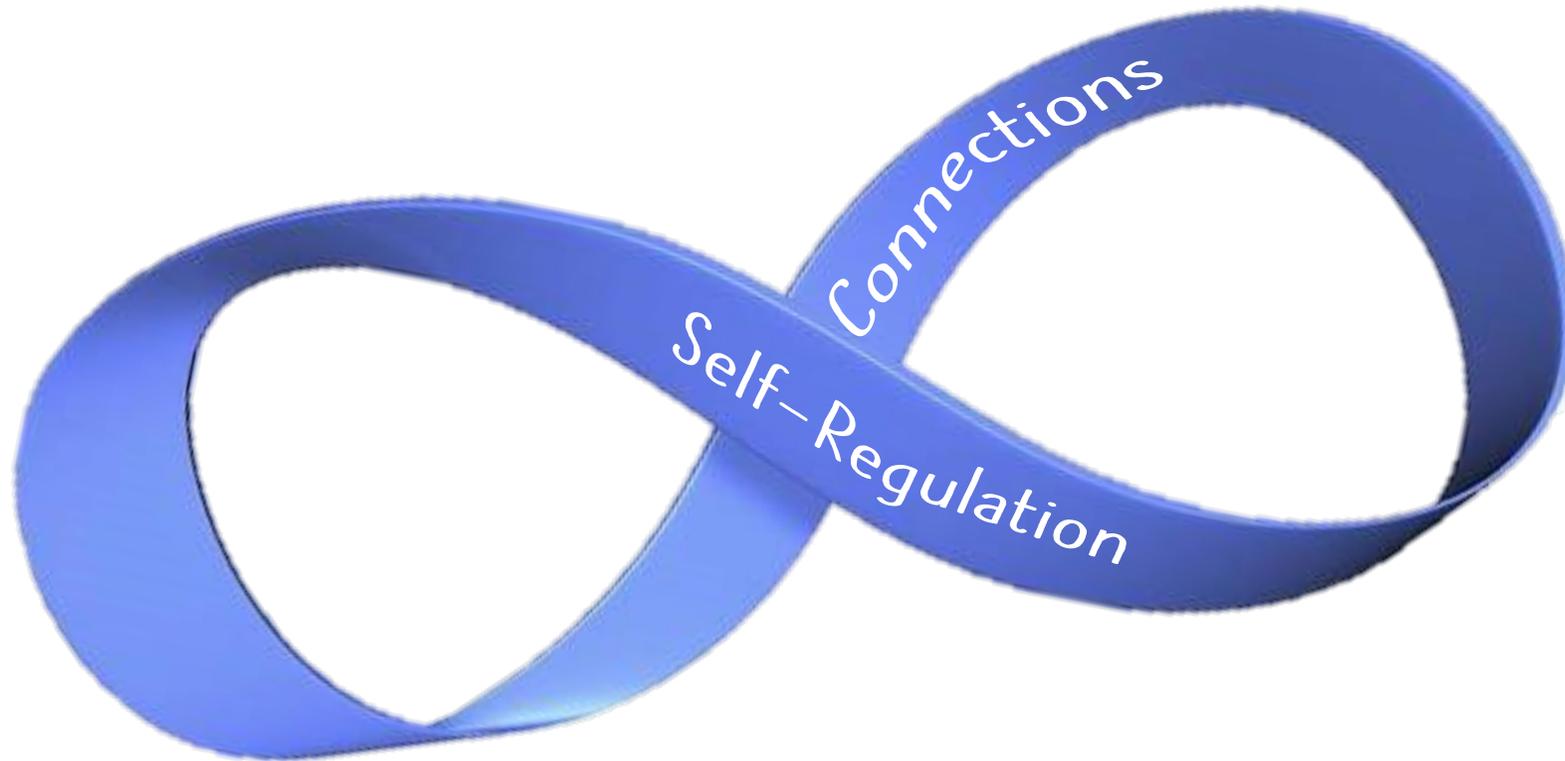
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- Adaptations for 9<sup>th</sup> grade
- Explicit focus on interpersonal interactions
- Embed within AVID elective to enhance fidelity
- Greater focus on building a sense of agency and belonging
- Promoting cultural relevance of the curriculum
- Integrating expertise from local mental health specialists



# Self-Regulation is Foundational for Positive Youth Development

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# Be CALM Connections Program Goals

C is for  
COOL

Managing thoughts and strong emotions in healthy ways when dealing with stress and conflict.

A is for  
ATTENTIVE

Being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, especially when communicating.

L is for  
LOGICAL

Considering and making sense of my own and other's perspectives and experiences.

M is for  
MATURE

Working out problems with others to support healthy connections.

# Mindfulness is...

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**Pressing the  
Pause**, on  
purpose and



**Tuning In** to the  
present moment,



with a **Curious**



**Kind** attitude.

The practice of mindfulness cultivates a kind and curious awareness that we can bring to interactions with others.

# How Mindfulness Can Enhance Relationships

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**Q&A**