

# YOUTH-FOCUSED RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

Helping Georgia's Youth Become Relationship Smart

**What is YRE?**

**Research Shows,  
YRE WORKS!**

**Why Do  
RELATIONSHIPS  
MATTER FOR  
TEENS?**

**YRE Meets  
Health Education  
Standards**

**UGA EXTENSION  
Helps Georgia's  
Youth Become  
RELATIONSHIP  
SMART**



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
**EXTENSION**



# What is Youth-focused Relationship Education (YRE)?

The general focus of YRE is to help teens:

- build knowledge on what a healthy versus unhealthy relationship looks like;
- develop skills that promote healthy dating relationships and choices;
- avoid risky behaviors that can lead to unsafe and negative consequences;
- feel empowered to have healthy relationships now and in the future.

*Youth-focused Relationship Education (YRE) can be an excellent resource for sexual risk avoidance education. YRE provides enhanced knowledge on topics like: interpersonal communication, problem-solving skills, conflict tactics, self-regulation skills, and ultimately avoiding risky behaviors such as dating violence, early onset of sex, teen pregnancy, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI).*



Please direct all questions to your UGA County Extension office. To find your county office, visit <https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices.html>

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# Why Relationships Matter for Teens

## Adolescents ARE dating.

By age 18, it is estimated that **95%** of teens will have experience in romantic relationships.<sup>1</sup>

Adolescents who are in healthy relationships are more likely to:

- feel **better** about themselves<sup>2</sup>
- have higher **self-esteem** levels<sup>2</sup>
- **achieve** more in school<sup>3</sup>
- have better relationships with their **families**<sup>3</sup>



## Romantic relationships can affect:

### School Achievement



### Career Planning



### Family Relationships



As teens transition from early to late adolescence, their interest in romantic relationships **increases** significantly.



15- to 17-year-olds are almost **twice as likely** as those ages 13 to 14 to have had some type of romantic relationship experience<sup>4</sup>



**1 out of every 3** youth said they would like to know more about how to talk to a romantic partner regarding setting sexual boundaries<sup>5</sup>

The prevalence of early **unhealthy** romantic relationships is a strong predictor of **negative** individual health, such as<sup>2</sup>:

- increased rates of depression
- lower self-esteem
- increase in likelihood of suicide attempts

Teens involved in **healthy** relationships experience **greater overall emotional well-being**. Teens who are better able to **process their emotions** are **less likely** to engage in risky sexual behaviors.<sup>6</sup>

*Youth-focused Relationship Education (YRE) teaches evidence-based relationship skills that encourage teens to make smart relationship choices that lead to healthy relationships and overall well-being.*

# Relationships are a Normative Part of Adolescence

Adolescence is one of the most rapid phases of human development. It's the time when teens learn to manage emotions and relationships, and acquire social skills and abilities that will be important for assuming adult roles. According to Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, **adolescence is when 12-18 years olds begin to develop an identity.**

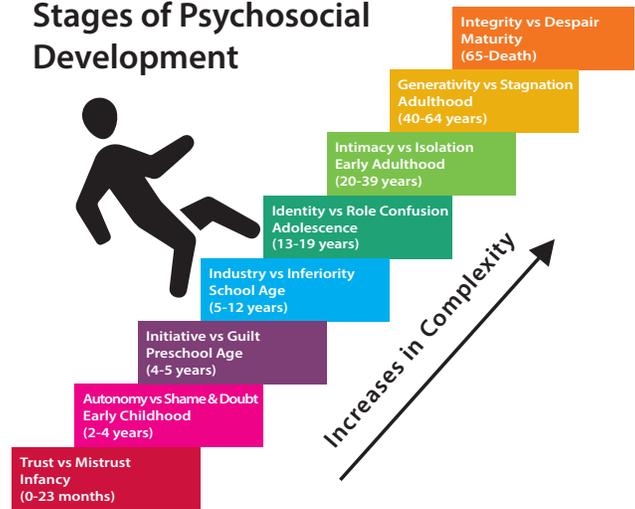
Early romantic relationships provide important learning opportunities for developing one's identity and learning interpersonal behaviors that tend to shape relational well-being in the future.<sup>7,8</sup>

**Teens who successfully develop a strong identity are more likely to form stronger intimate relationships as young adults.** In contrast, teens who struggle to find their identity are more likely to feel lonely and isolated. Erikson stated that developing a fully formed sense of self during this stage is **essential** to being able to form intimate relationships later on in life.

“  
As a teenager, you are in search of your self-worth and looking to find where you belong. I think it would be important to share what I have learned in the Relationship Smarts program, because my friends are going through the same development as I am.  
”  
UGA Extension RS+ Participant



## Stages of Psychosocial Development



Adolescence is a time marked by teens' increase in:

- the desire to be more autonomous,
- social immaturity,
- risk-taking, and
- spontaneity.

As a result, teens are more susceptible to making poor choices that could lead to sexual health risks.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, **social skills** learned from Youth-focused Relationship Education are **extremely important**. Teens who have positive social skills are more likely to:

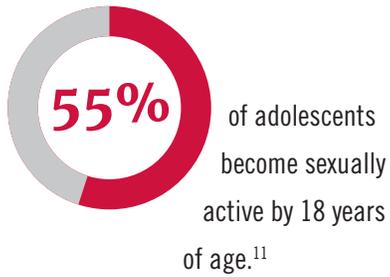
- have higher levels of **self-esteem**;
- have **success in academics**; and
- have **positive relationships** with peers.<sup>10</sup>

An increase in social skills as well as a developed sense of independence are both associated with positive later life outcomes - including successful marriages and careers.

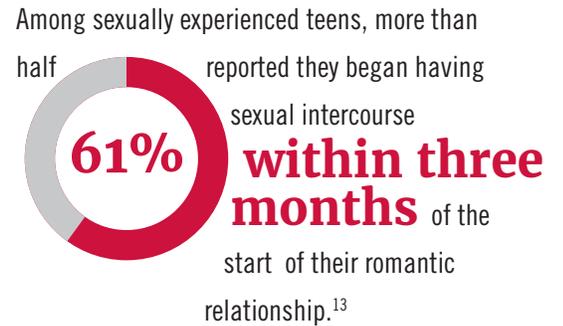
*Youth-focused Relationship Education can positively contribute to identity development and increased competence for future romantic relationships.*

# Teens Engage in Sexual Behaviors

## Teens are having sex too fast!



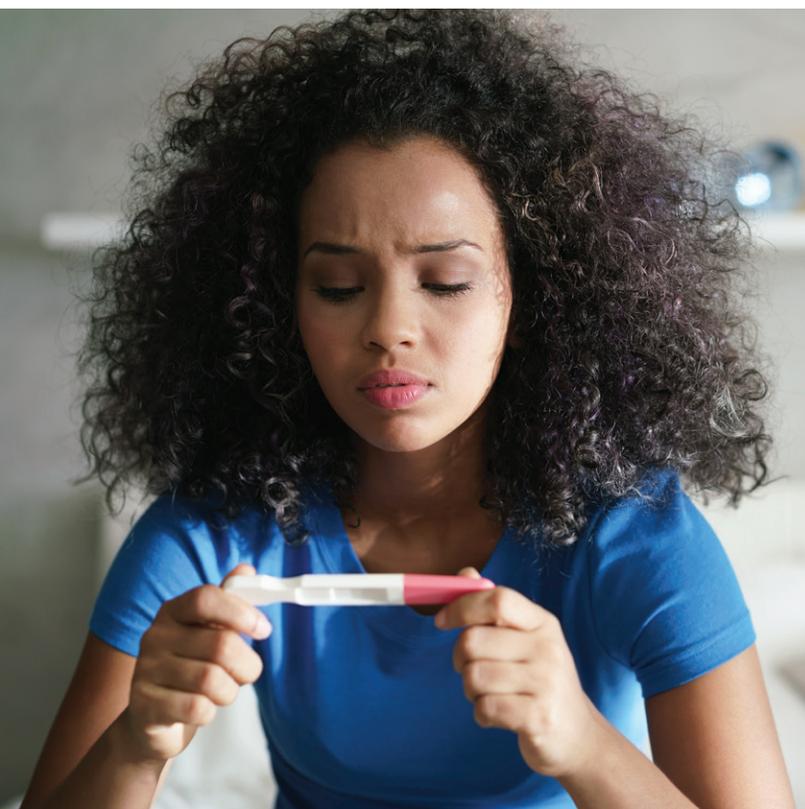
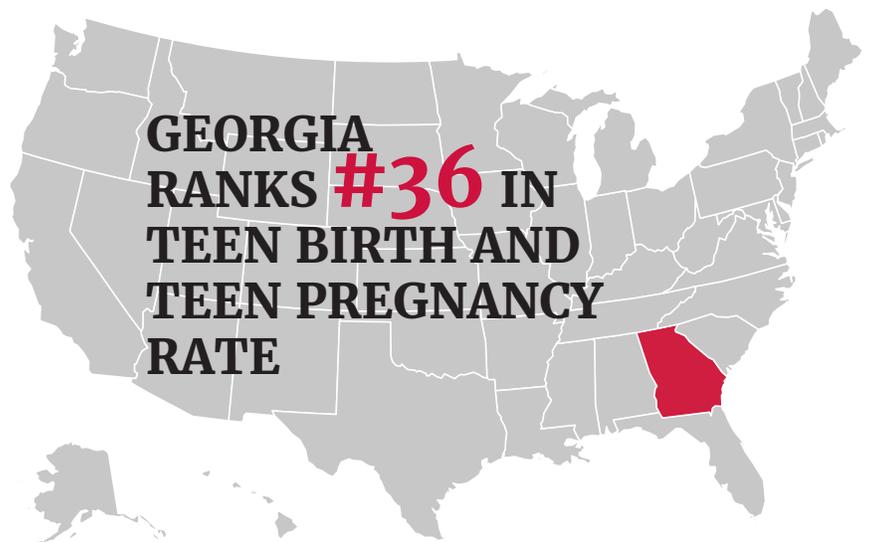
Approximately **1 in 5** 15-year-olds and **2 in 3** 18-year-olds have reported having sexual intercourse.<sup>12</sup>



## Despite drops in pregnancy numbers, teens are still getting pregnant.

Although the teen pregnancy and birth rates in Georgia have decreased during the past two decades and are at historic lows, Georgia still ranks in the **bottom 30% of all states**.<sup>14</sup>

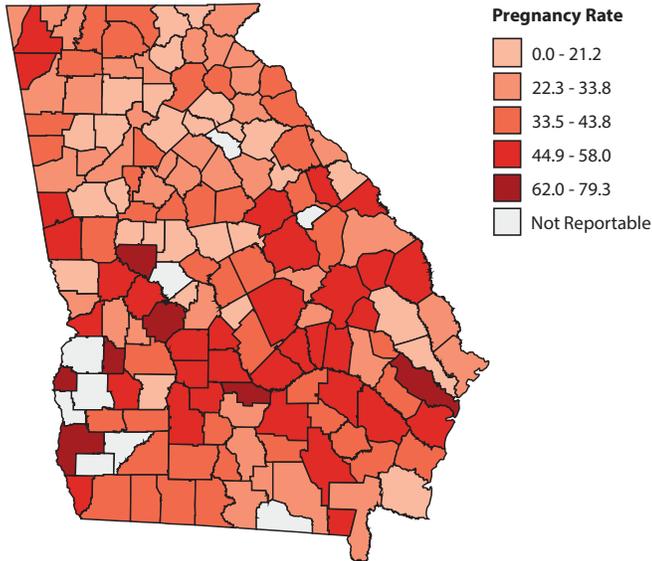
In 2018, there were **10,001** pregnancies among teens age **15 to 19** in Georgia, which translates to **28 out of every 1,000 Georgia teens**. And, **20%** of these pregnancies were repeat pregnancies.<sup>15</sup>



## What is the pregnancy rate in your county?

As illustrated in the map, nearly two-thirds of all counties across Georgia had pregnancy rates about the state average.

Figure 1. Pregnancy Rate by Georgia County, 15-19 Years of Age (2018)



Source: <https://oasis.state.ga.us/gis/TrendableMaps/agsPregTrend.aspx>

In 2018, of the 10,001 pregnancies among teens age 15 to 19 in Georgia, **7,365** resulted in live births, **75%** of which were to older teens age 18-19 years.<sup>15</sup>



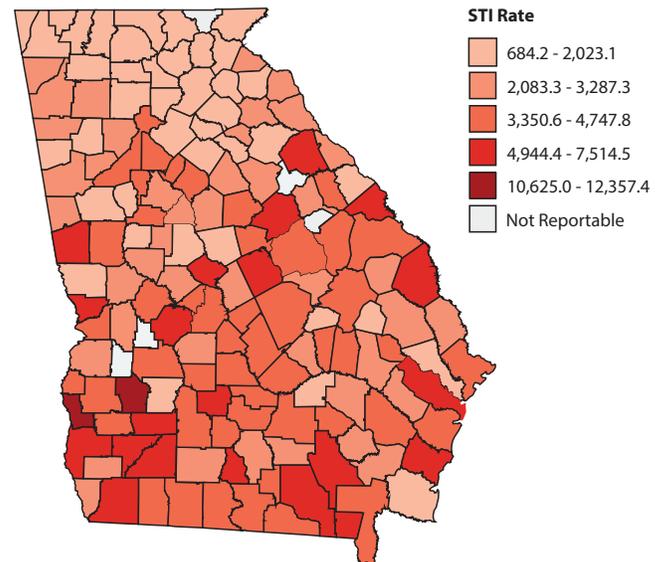
*Youth-focused Relationship Education equips teens with the skills to resist sexual pressures and make better decisions about their relationships. These skills decrease the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviors.*

## Too many teens are acquiring Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

In the United States, it is estimated that **38%** of sexually active females will acquire an STI and young people age 15 to 24 years account for 50% of all new STIs.<sup>16</sup>

In Georgia, 58% of all STIs reported in 2018 were to young people age 15 to 24. Of the **52,172** STIs reported among 15-24 year olds, **42% were to teens age 15 to 19**. As illustrated, STI rates are particularly higher in south Georgia.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 2. STI Rates by Georgia County, 15-19 Years of Age (2018)



Source: <https://oasis.state.ga.us/gis/TrendableMaps/agsSTDITrend.aspx>

Note: All STI except Congenital Syphilis

## Youth-focused Relationship Education covers:

- Sexual decision making
- Avoiding risky dating and early sexual behaviors
- Communicating with your partner to set clear boundaries and expectations
- Resisting sexual pressure

# Teens Experience Dating Violence

Dating violence includes verbal, sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.

Nationally:

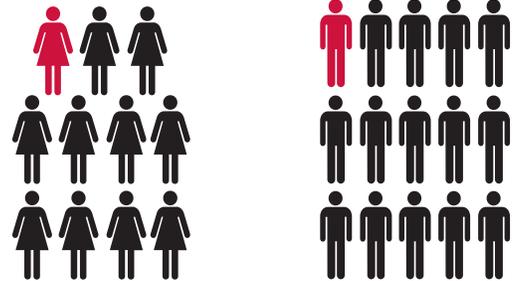
**One in three**



.....  
girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.<sup>18</sup>



Nearly **1 in 11** female & approximately **1 in 15** male



high school students report having experienced physical dating violence in the last year.<sup>19</sup>

Dating violence among adolescents begins gradually, often starting with teasing and name calling. Unfortunately, adolescents tend to think of these behaviors as “normal” in a relationship.

According to the Partnership Against Domestic Violence (PADV), Georgia’s largest nonprofit working to end domestic violence, when the following signs happen suddenly or without any explanation, there might be cause for concern:<sup>21</sup>

- Sudden changes in clothes or make-up.
- Bruises, scratches or other injuries.
- Failing grades, skipping class or dropping out of school activities.
- Avoiding friends.
- Difficulty making decisions or always relying on the decisions of others.
- Sudden changes in mood or personality, becoming anxious or depressed, acting out or being secretive.
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits, avoiding eye contact.
- Constantly thinking or worrying about their dating partner.
- Using alcohol or drugs.
- Emotional outbursts and “crying fits.”



Teens who are victims of physical dating violence are more likely to:



engage in **risky sexual behaviors**<sup>22</sup>



engage in **unhealthy diet behaviors**<sup>22</sup>



experience symptoms of **depression** and **anxiety**<sup>19, 23</sup>



**abuse substances**<sup>19, 22</sup>



**consider and attempt suicide**<sup>19, 22</sup>



These increased risks lead to unhealthy relationship expectations where the cycle of violence is likely to continue.



Among adult victims of rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, about **1 in 5 women** and nearly **1 in 7 men** first experienced some form of partner violence between 11 and 17 years of age.<sup>24</sup>

The incidence of dating violence among young adolescents is substantial and predicts future interpersonal risk for unhealthy and dangerous relationships.

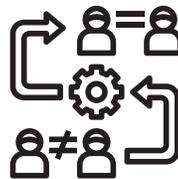
Youth-focused Relationship Education helps teens:



understand what **healthy vs. unhealthy** relationships are



recognize the **warning signs** of abusive relationships



**develop skills** to better manage conflict in safe ways



**increase self confidence levels** to leave unhealthy relationships

*Youth-focused Relationship Education can reduce the risk of teens experiencing dating violence and empower teens to seek help and leave unsafe and unhealthy relationships.*

# Unreliable Sources May Negatively Influence Teens

Adolescents may feel uncomfortable talking to their parents about sensitive subjects. As a result, teens tend to turn to the internet for dating tips and information related to sexual health, which often leads to teens making poor decisions.<sup>25</sup>

Much of the health information that teens encounter may be **too complex, inaccurate, biased, or some combination of these.**

## What they see is what they learn

Research suggests that media, including films, television shows, and social media, can **influence** sexual behaviors and attitudes, as they showcase **unrealistic expectations** of what relationships look like.<sup>26</sup>



Many youths consume media that provide **confusing** or even **harmful** messages about intimate relationships.<sup>27</sup> In turn, these will influence teens' **beliefs and attitudes** about relationships.

Characters in media programming act as models for behavior, resulting in a process of **observational learning** which may result in the adolescent adopting the scripts, beliefs, and/or behaviors enacted by the media they are consuming.<sup>26</sup>

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Observing behavior, good or bad, has a direct impact on teen attitudes and beliefs, and influences the behaviors that adolescents adopt.

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“  
*It is important to learn how to start good relationships and how good relationships can last. Lots of people don't know how to communicate which leads to bad relationships and people being sad or hurt. Better communication helps everyone and leads to good relationships and happy people .*  
”  
UGA Extension RS+ Participant



*Youth-focused Relationship Education that is research-based ensures that students are getting both helpful and accurate information.*

# The Impact of Unstable Role Models

The relationships that adolescents are exposed to while growing up shape their expectations for future relationships in both positive and negative ways.

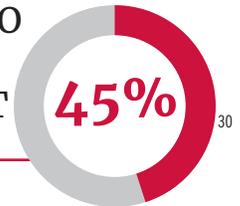


More than **1 in 5** children born to married parents and more than **half** of children born to cohabitating parents will see their parents breakup by age 9.<sup>28</sup>



Almost **1 in 4** children live in a single parent household.<sup>29</sup>

COMPARED TO ALL OTHER STATES IN THE U.S., GEORGIA HAS THE **11<sup>TH</sup>** HIGHEST PROPORTION OF BIRTHS TO UNMARRIED MOTHERS AT



## Why does this matter?

More children today than ever before are growing up in unstable households, and as such, they are more likely to:<sup>2</sup>

- grow up experiencing economic hardship,
- witness domestic violence,
- see examples of unhealthy relationships, and
- repeat the cycle of instability in their future relationships.

Importantly, growing up in a married household does not guarantee that children and teens are exposed to healthy relationships. Married parents/caregivers who engage in frequent conflict and unhealthy behaviors also create an unstable and harmful environment that impacts children's development, health, and future relationships.



## Teens aspire to marriage

More than **80%** of adolescents expect to get married in their life, and of those who expect to get married, **90%** of them expect to be married to the same person throughout their life.<sup>31</sup>



*Youth-focused Relationship Education teaches teens the skills to make positive partner choices, and to build and sustain healthy marriages in the future.*

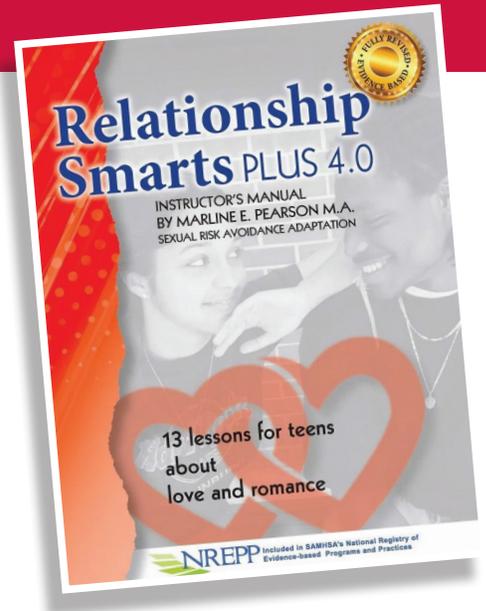
# Relationship Smarts Plus

Among the Youth-focused Relationship Education curricula available, Relationship Smarts Plus (RS+) <sup>40</sup> has been the **curriculum of choice for UGA Extension** when engaging youth through in-school and after-school programs across Georgia. <sup>33, 34</sup>

Distributed by **The Dibble Institute**, and included in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices Legacy, RS+ is a widely-used relationship education curriculum for youth. <sup>35</sup> The 13-lesson, activity-based curriculum, embodies an innovative and integrated approach designed to help youth better understand themselves, plan for the future, learn the characteristics of healthy relationships, and develop skills to form and maintain healthy relationships. <sup>36</sup>

The most current version of RS+ is a comprehensive **healthy relationship skills and sexual risk avoidance program** that addresses positive youth development, life skills, healthy relationships, communication/conflict management, dating violence, and sexual delay and risk avoidance. The curriculum:

- Builds assets and strengthens protective factors for teens as they develop healthy relationship skills.
- Appeals to teenagers' aspirations, rather than merely emphasizing what they must avoid.
- Inspires youth to learn more about themselves, such as how their past has shaped the present, how to set goals, and how to identify steps needed to move towards those goals.
- Helps young people learn how to deal with pressure situations, examine friendships and clarify values, and further their own maturity.
- Guides them in developing the ability to recognize patterns of unhealthy and abusive relationships in terms of verbal or physical aggression, controlling behavior, lack of respect between partners, and ways to exit those relationships safely.
- Empowers teens with skills and insights for building healthy relationships, including communication and conflict management skills, as well as strategies to make healthy choices that will boost sexual delay, reduce risky behaviors, resist sexual coercion, and avoid dating violence.



## RS+ LESSONS AND TOPICS

### LESSON 1:

#### WHO AM I AND WHERE AM I GOING?



- Increase self-awareness
- Identify steps to strengthen and develop positive personal qualities
- Empower with decision making skills for pressure situations
- Assess positive and negative influences of current friendships

### LESSON 2:

#### MATURITY ISSUES AND WHAT I VALUE



- Explore physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of maturity
- Discover areas of growth in one's own development of maturity
- Reflect on values and determine which ones are important to teens
- Identify personality and character qualities teens find important in others

### LESSON 3:

#### ATTRACTIONS AND INFATUATION



- Improve awareness of the building blocks and characteristics of healthy relationships
- Gain knowledge about what infatuation is and how it affects decision making
- Increase understanding of how to wisely handle attraction to develop healthier relationships

### LESSON 4:

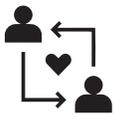
#### PRINCIPLES OF SMART RELATIONSHIPS



- Analyze smart and not-so-smart relationship attitudes, behaviors, and choices
- Apply 7 principles of smart relationships to assess one's relationship decisions
- Develop a realistic concept of love

# RS+ LESSONS AND TOPICS

## LESSON 5: IS IT A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP?



- Learn to use a 3-question guide to decide if a relationship is healthy or unhealthy
- Understand what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like in the real world
- Develop language to assert one's opinions and discuss healthy relationships
- Generate a list of fun activities for relationships

## LESSON 6: BREAKING UP AND DATING VIOLENCE - PARTS 1 & 2



- Understand when it is time to end a relationship
- Identify better and worse ways to break-up with someone
- Learn how to deal with break-ups in a healthy way
- Raise awareness of early warning signs and behaviors of abuse and issues of consent and sexual assault
- Practice setting boundaries at the first sign of disrespectful behavior
- Understand the consequences of dating abuse
- Understand the importance of reaching out for help from parents and caring adults

## LESSON 7: DECIDE, DON'T SLIDE!



- Learn the difference between a high-risk "sliding" vs. a low-risk "deciding" approach to developing relationships
- Gain insight about what's important to learn about another person and oneself when developing a romantic relationship
- Build awareness of how past and present experiences and behaviors can create barriers to healthy relationships and reaching goals
- Become familiar with the Success Sequence for reducing one's chances of living in poverty

## LESSON 8: COMMUNICATION AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



- Understand how communication and conflict management skills impact relationships, regardless of the nature of the relationship
- Examine family of origin communication patterns and identify patterns youth want to work toward in their future
- Identify patterns that are most damaging to relationships
- Gain practice with the Time-Out Skill and the Speaker-Listener Technique

## LESSON 9: COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND MORE SKILLS



- Recognize that hidden issues often underlie ongoing arguments
- Demonstrate the use of a simple problem-solving model
- Create awareness of the need to nurture and care for relationships with regular appreciations

## LESSON 10: SEXUAL DECISION-MAKING



- Increase awareness of the benefits of making clear decisions about sex versus sliding
- Gain deeper understanding of dimensions of intimacy and how it develops
- Define sexual values and identify boundary lines and pacing of physical intimacy aligned with those values
- Consider risks and benefits of chosen boundary lines

## LESSON 11: PREGNANCY, STIS AND HIV



- Gain medically accurate information on sexual risk avoidance and reduction to dispel myths about pregnancy, STIs and HIV
- Understand how alcohol and drugs increase risks for sexual assault, pregnancy, STIs, and regrets
- Develop a personal plan for one's sexual decisions

## LESSON 12: UNPLANNED PREGNANCY THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD



- Examine unplanned pregnancy through the eyes of a child
- Consider ways in which a healthy, stable relationship helps parents do the job of parenting
- Analyze the role of fathers in family formation and key barriers for father involvement
- Learn from former teen parents about decisions and steps young parents can make to ensure bright futures for themselves and their child

## LESSON 13: TEENS, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA



- Understand the impact of digital technology on relationships and social life, as well as emotional and mental health, including the risks of engaging in sexting, cyber-bullying, internet porn, etc.
- Examine what social and emotional skills are gained and lost through our highly wired, connected lives

# YRE Meets Health Education Standards

In Georgia, health education aims to address the six priority adolescent risk behaviors identified by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Alcohol and other Drug Use, Injury and Violence (including Suicide), Tobacco Use, Poor Nutrition, Inadequate Physical Activity, and Risky Sexual Behavior.

The **Georgia Performance Standards for Health Education** provide a framework for designing or selecting curricula, allocating instructional resources, and assessing student achievement and progress that are appropriate for state and local needs. Georgia Performance Standards for Health Education are **based on the eight National Health Education Standards (NHES)** that were developed to establish, promote, and support health-enhancing behaviors for students in all grade levels. These standards provide students, families and communities with concrete expectations for health education. By following these standards, it is hoped that Georgia teens will develop skills and knowledge to become healthy in all facets of their life and reduce their risk-taking behaviors.

## National and Georgia Health Education Standards

- 1. Core Concept.** Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- 2. Analyzing Influences.** Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.
- 3. Accessing Information.** Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health.
- 4. Interpersonal Communication.** Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- 5. Decision-Making.** Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- 6. Goal-Setting.** Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.
- 7. Self-Management.** Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.
- 8. Advocacy.** Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

## How RS+ Lessons Align with Health Education Standards.

Relations Smarts Plus Lessons	Health Education Standards							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
LESSON 1: Who Am I and Where Am I Going?	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
LESSON 2: Maturity Issues and What I Value	X	X			X	X	X	X
LESSON 3: Attraction and Infatuation		X					X	
LESSON 4: Principles of Smart Relationships					X	X	X	X
LESSON 5: Is It a Healthy Relationship?	X	X	X		X		X	X
LESSON 6: Breaking Up and Dating Violence		X		X	X		X	X
LESSON 7: Decide, Don't Slide!		X		X	X		X	
LESSON 8: Communication & Healthy Relationships		X		X	X	X	X	X
LESSON 9: Communication Challenges and More Skills				X	X		X	
LESSON 10: Sexual Decision Making	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
LESSON 11: Pregnancy, STIs and HIV	X		X		X		X	X
LESSON 12: Unplanned Pregnancy Through the Eyes of a Child	X				X			X
LESSON 13: Teens, Technology, and Social Media		X					X	X

For more information on the National Health Education Standards, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sher/standards/index.htm>

For more information about the Georgia Performance Standards for Health Education, visit: <https://www.georgiastandards.org/Standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/HealthEd.aspx>

# National Report on School Health Policies and Practices

The **CDC's School Health Profiles** provide biannual survey data used to assess school health policies and practices in middle and high schools throughout the United States. The School Health Profiles are used to monitor school health education and content, physical education and activity, bullying and sexual harassment policies and practices, tobacco use and nutrition policies, school-based health services, family and community involvement, and school health coordination.

The findings in the 2018 School Health Profile report show more schools across states are providing students health education on topics related to suicide and violence prevention. Also, more schools are creating safe and supportive environments for students, particularly students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ), by putting policies and practices in place that protect them from a variety of health risks, and help students feel connected to the school. While the report shows progress in some school and health policies and practices, there are still areas that need improvement in order to better meet the needs of students.

**The CDC identified the following 11 health topics as needing improvement:**

1. How to create and sustain healthy and respectful relationships.
2. Influences of family, peers, media, technology, and other factors on sexual risk behavior.
3. Benefits of being sexually abstinent.
4. Communication, conflict management, and negotiation skills.
5. Goal-setting and decision-making skills.
6. How HIV and other STDs are transmitted.
7. Health consequences of HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy.
8. Influencing and supporting others to avoid or reduce sexual risk behaviors.
9. Importance of not rushing into sex.
10. How to access valid and reliable information, products, and services related to HIV, STDs, and pregnancy.
11. Preventive care that is necessary to maintain reproductive and sexual health.



## How RS+ Lessons Address These Health Topics.

Relations Smarts Plus Lessons	CDC Common Health Topics										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>LESSON 1:</b> Who Am I and Where Am I Going?	X	X			X			X			
<b>LESSON 2:</b> Maturity Issues and What I Value	X	X	X		X			X	X		
<b>LESSON 3:</b> Attraction and Infatuation	X								X		
<b>LESSON 4:</b> Principles of Smart Relationships	X		X					X	X	X	
<b>LESSON 5:</b> Is It a Healthy Relationship?	X							X	X	X	X
<b>LESSON 6:</b> Breaking Up and Dating Violence				X							
<b>LESSON 7:</b> Decide, Don't Slide!	X	X		X	X			X	X		
<b>LESSON 8:</b> Communication & Healthy Relationships	X	X		X	X			X			
<b>LESSON 9:</b> Communication Challenges and More Skills	X	X		X	X			X			
<b>LESSON 10:</b> Sexual Decision Making	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
<b>LESSON 11:</b> Pregnancy, STI and HIV			X		X	X	X		X	X	X
<b>LESSON 12:</b> Unplanned Pregnancy Through the Eyes of a Child			X				X		X		
<b>LESSON 13:</b> Teens, Technology, and Social Media	X	X			X			X			

For more information about the CDC School Health Profiles, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/profiles/index.htm>

# YRE Meets Sex Education Standards

Since 2018, school boards in Georgia have been required to “develop and implement an accurate, comprehensive health and physical education program.” According to the **Georgia Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Program Plan**, Sex Education/AIDS Education is expected to be part of each school’s comprehensive health program, and should include instruction on “handling of peer pressure, promotion of high self-esteem, local community values, and abstinence from sexual activity as an effective method of preventing acquired immune deficiency syndrome and the only sure method of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.” It is also expected that this instruction should emphasize abstaining until marriage and fidelity in marriage as an important personal goal. It is at the discretion of each local board of education to approve the sex/AIDS instructional materials for each age/grade level use. *Still, there is little specific guidance provided by the state regarding the standards that should inform these decisions.*

The **National Sexuality Education Standards (NSES)**,<sup>37</sup> originally published in 2012 and recently updated in 2020, were developed to address the inconsistent implementation of sexuality education nationwide and the limited time allocated to teaching the topic. The NSES is heavily based on the *National Health Education Standards* (NHES; described on [page 13](#)) as well as research on the **characteristics of effective comprehensive sex education** (see [page 16](#) for a summary). The NSES outlines **seven topics** that are deemed as essential, minimum, core content and skills needed for sex education that is age-appropriate for students in grades K-12 to be effective. Each topic, described on [page 15](#), includes a set of **standards**, or learning goals, associated with the NHES that represent the content and skills students should be able to demonstrate as a result of that instruction.

The **Relationship Smarts Plus** curriculum addresses six of the seven NSES topics, with the exception of “Anatomy and Physiology” which focuses on the functional knowledge students need to understand basic human functioning; this is typically covered in health science courses. The table on [page 15](#) provides a description of the six topics, along with examples of the standards associated with each topic; see the full report for a more detailed breakdown of the standards by topic and grade level. The specific curriculum lessons that align with each topic are also listed.

“*What I liked best about the program is learning not to start a relationship with sex and get to know each other before you start getting romantic and having intimacy.*”  
UGA Extension RS+ Participant



UGA Extension Relationship Smart Participants, Crisp County

National Sex Education Topics (RS+ Lesson Alignment)	Example Standards
<p><b>Consent and Healthy Relationships.</b> Offers guidance to successfully navigate changing relationships among family, peers, and partners. Special emphasis is given to personal boundaries, bodily autonomy, sexual agency and consent, and the increasing use and impact of technology within relationships. (RS+ Lessons 2-11 &amp; 13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrate communication skills that will support healthy relationships.</li> <li>▪ Compare and contrast characteristics of healthy and unhealthy romantic and/ or sexual relationships.</li> <li>▪ Develop a plan to get out of an unsafe or unhealthy relationship.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Puberty and Adolescent Sexual Development.</b> Addresses the pivotal milestones for every person that impact physical, social, and emotional development, and reinforces that sexual development is normal and healthy. (RS+ Lessons 1, 2, 10 &amp; 11)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe the cognitive, social, and emotional changes of adolescence and early adulthood</li> <li>▪ Analyze how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence self- concept, body image, and self- esteem.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gender Identity and Expression.</b> Addresses the fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are as it relates to gender, gender identity, gender roles, and gender expression. (RS+ Lessons 1, 4, 6 &amp; 7)</p> <p><b>Sexual Orientation and Identity.</b> Addresses the fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are as it relates to sexual orientation and identity. (RS+ Lesson 1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrate ways to communicate respectfully with and about people of all gender identities (and sexual orientations).</li> <li>▪ Analyze how peers, media, family, society, culture, and a person's intersecting identities can influence attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about gender, gender identity, gender roles, and gender expression (and sexual orientation and sexual identity)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sexual Health.</b> Outlines the functional knowledge and essentials skills needed to understand STDs and HIV, including how they are prevented and transmitted, their signs and symptoms, and testing and treatment; how pregnancy happens, decision-making to avoid a pregnancy, and pregnancy prevention and options; and the personal and societal factors that influence sexual health decision-making and outcomes. (RS+ Lessons 3, 5, &amp; 7-12)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify factors that are important in deciding whether and when to engage in sexual behaviors.</li> <li>▪ Analyze how alcohol and other substances can influence sexual decision-making</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate ways to communicate decisions about whether or when to engage in sexual behaviors and how to reduce or eliminate risk for pregnancy and/or STDs (including HIV)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Interpersonal Violence.</b> Facilitates an understanding of interpersonal and sexual violence, including prevention, intervention, resources, and local services; emphasizes the need for a growing awareness, creation, and maintenance of safe school and community environments for all students. (RS+ Lessons 4-11 &amp; 13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe the types of abuse (e.g., physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual) and the cycle of violence as it relates to sexual abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and gender-based violence</li> <li>▪ Demonstrate ways to support a fellow student who is being sexually harassed or abused, or is perpetuating unhealthy or coercive behaviors</li> </ul>

“  
*One important lesson I learned is to always know the red flags of a relationship. You should know when your relationship is heading downhill. You should never let anyone run over you in a relationship.*  
”

For more information about Georgia's Comprehensive Health and Physical Education Program Plan, visit: <https://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of-Education/SBOE%20Rules/160-4-2-.12.pdf>

For more information about the National Sexuality Education Standards, visit: <https://siecus.org/resources/national-sexuality-education-standards/>

# Characteristics of an Effective Health Education Curriculum

Characteristics of Effective Curricula	How Relationship Smarts Meets the Standard
Is <b>research-based</b> and <b>theory-driven</b>	RS+ is grounded in research and includes instructional strategies and learning experiences built on theoretical approaches that influence health-related behaviors among youth.
Focus on <b>specific behavioral outcomes</b>	RS+ goes beyond the cognitive level and addresses health determinants, social factors, attitudes, values, norms, and skills that influence specific health-related behaviors.
Address <b>individual values</b> and <b>group norms</b> that support <b>health-enhancing behaviors</b>	Lessons 1 and 2 provide time for youth to reflect on their own values and who they are. Lessons 6, 7, 8, and 10 address group norms for middle and high school students and positive ways to handle situations that are common for their age in this day in time.
Focus on <b>reinforcing protective factors</b> and <b>increasing personal perceptions</b> of risk and harmfulness of engaging in specific health risk behaviors	Lessons 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13 provide many examples of harmful behaviors that can lead to health risks whether it be violence, cyberbullying, pregnancy, STIs, or HIV. In each of these lessons, teens are encouraged and given an opportunity to reflect on their own protective factors and plan to stay safe.
Address <b>social pressures</b> and <b>influences</b>	Each lesson helps teens identify influences on their behavior and choices. For example, lesson 10 focuses on forming one's own sexual decision-making process and lesson 13 describes social influences from social media and how to make safe decisions with technology.
Build <b>personal</b> and <b>social competence</b> as well as <b>self-efficacy</b> by addressing skills	All RS+ lessons work on personal development of the teen. For example, lessons 8 and 9 focus on building social skills and conflict resolution strategies.
Provide <b>functional knowledge</b> that is basic, accurate, and directly contributes to <b>health-promoting decisions</b> and <b>behaviors</b>	Each RS+ lesson includes the most recent statistics as well as resources for teens. Updates are regularly provided by The Dibble Institute.
Use strategies designed to <b>personalize information</b> and <b>engage students</b>	Each student completes workbook pages that coincide with every lesson and provide an opportunity for personal reflection. Also, each lesson has engaging activities and discussions.
Provide <b>age- and developmentally-appropriate</b> information, learning strategies, teaching methods and materials	RS+ incorporates technology through engaging videos as well as songs that are relevant to middle and high school students. Information about safety with technology as well as discovering identities is weaved in every lesson, which makes it appropriate for this age group.
Incorporate learning strategies, teaching methods and materials that are <b>culturally inclusive</b>	Multiple different perspectives are presented in each lesson and different cultures and backgrounds are represented in examples as well as videos throughout the lessons.
Provide <b>adequate time</b> for <b>instruction</b> and <b>learning</b>	Each RS+ lesson can range from 45 to 90 minutes in length. Some lessons can be edited to fit within the time range desired.
Provide <b>opportunities</b> to <b>reinforce skills</b> and <b>positive health behaviors</b>	Activities, discussions, reflections, and sometimes homework go along with each lesson. Students can complete this in their own workbook in order to look back on it at a later date.
Provide opportunities to <b>make connections</b> with other influential persons	Group activities provide time with peers to discuss topics and the teacher discusses topics open and honestly to provide a positive adult influence.
Include <b>teacher information</b> and plan for <b>professional development</b> and <b>training</b> to enhance effectiveness of instruction and student learning	The RS+ curriculum includes a guide to help teachers understand and implement the lessons. The Dibble Institute also offers resources on their website, and <b>UGA Extension is also available to support GA schools</b> by providing training and/or coming into schools to teach RS+.

For more information regarding these standards, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sher/characteristics/index.htm>

# Relationship Education Works!

YRE increases knowledge and self-efficacy related to identifying healthy versus unhealthy relationship patterns and practices as well as using positive communication and conflict management skills to avoid risky dating and sexual behaviors. YRE can help correct unhealthy attitudes about dating relationships and improve essential social competencies that are needed for maintaining healthy romantic relationships.

## A growing body of research confirm that YRE programs really work!<sup>38</sup>

Students who participate in YRE programs report:

 <p><b>A decrease in:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ use of negative conflict resolution strategies<sup>39</sup></li> <li>▪ avoidance patterns of communication<sup>40</sup></li> <li>▪ verbal aggression towards dating partner<sup>41</sup></li> <li>▪ violence perpetration and victimization<sup>40</sup></li> </ul>	 <p><b>An increase in:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ability to communicate with parents<sup>39</sup></li> <li>▪ confidence to apply interpersonal skills learned<sup>33</sup></li> <li>▪ ability to resist sexual pressure<sup>42</sup></li> <li>▪ understanding about the risks of sex<sup>41</sup></li> <li>▪ willingness to wait before sex<sup>41</sup></li> <li>▪ perceived ability to resist sexual pressure<sup>42</sup></li> <li>▪ confidence in their ability to maintain a healthy relationship<sup>34</sup></li> </ul>
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## Why is YRE effective?

YRE programs that lead to positive outcomes for youth follow best-practices related to both curriculum content and the attributes and skills of the facilitator.<sup>43</sup>

	
<p><b>Curriculum Content</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Has clear goals</li> <li>⇒ Is logically sequenced</li> <li>⇒ Is relevant for the target population</li> <li>⇒ Is evidence-based or evidence-informed</li> <li>⇒ Is delivered with high fidelity</li> </ul> 	<p><b>Facilitator Attributes/Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Interacts with youth in a respectful manner</li> <li>⇒ Creates a welcoming environment for all youth</li> <li>⇒ Trained in the curriculum content</li> <li>⇒ Comfortable discussing sensitive content</li> <li>⇒ Able to establish professional boundaries with youth</li> </ul> 

*Youth-focused Relationship Education increases the likelihood that adolescents will be prepared to make wise relationship decisions and to handle relationship challenges effectively.*

# UGA Extension is Here to Help!

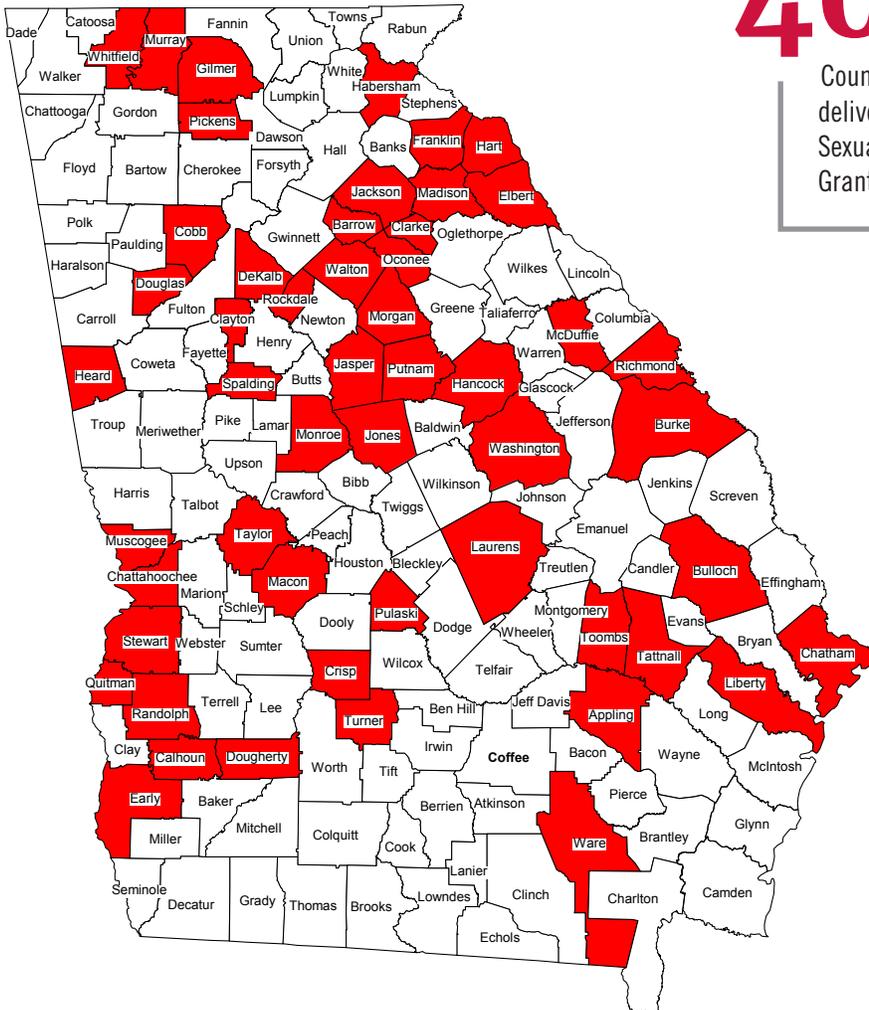
The University of Georgia (UGA) Extension System works in partnership with school districts and community agencies all across Georgia to help our youth become *relationship smart*.

UGA Extension has a county delivery model where Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) and/or 4-H County Extension Agents, who are public service faculty members, are the primary resource for local communities. Extension agents have access to a variety of subject matter state specialists at UGA who provide them training and support in delivering evidence-informed programs. In turn, county agents help keep state specialists apprised of the latest information and needs of their schools and communities.



Since 2008, FACS and 4-H agents across Georgia have delivered the RS+ curriculum to nearly 15,000 youth across 76 counties through in-school and after-school programs!

## Where UGA Extension Has Helped Youth Become Relationship Smart To Date:



40

Counties where UGA Extension has delivered RS+ as part of Georgia's Title V Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) Grant Program, since 2017.

76

Counties where UGA Extension has delivered RS+, since 2008.

6,753

Youth reached through SRAE program, since 2017.

14,814

Youth completed RS+ program, since 2008.



# UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA EXTENSION

*The stuff we learned is stuff that sometimes we don't really talk about in schools and at other places and so sometimes the stuff like being abused is new information. So I know that I can be aware of my relationships and be smart about things.*

**80%** Found the program helpful.

*This program helps build up confidence and helps you get through certain obstacles in friendship and relationships.*

**78%** Felt more confident in forming healthy relationships and applying the interpersonal skills learned.

*I feel like this program guided me to be a better person. Also, it showed me how a healthy relationship can benefit you. The program also created a mindset to where I didn't always need to present anger.*

**73%** Felt better about themselves.

*I've been in a relationship where all my partner wanted was sexual activities, but now I know that wasn't right. What I liked best about the program is learning not to start a relationship with sex and get to know each other before you start getting romantic and having intimacy.*

UGA Extension RS+ Participant

**77%** Reported they will use the skills learned.



Watch this video to see how UGA Extension is impacting youth in Washington County. [https://youtu.be/v\\_RPn41ZwUs](https://youtu.be/v_RPn41ZwUs)



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To learn more about how UGA Extension can support youth  
in your school and county, visit:  
<https://www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/family-healthy-relationships-teen-relationships>

Want to contact your local UGA Extension office?  
Call 1-800-ASK-UGA1  
or browse for the office in your county at  
<https://extension.uga.edu/county-offices.html>



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