

MORE THAN FRIENDS - DATING AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Lesson 9

Differing Abilities

LEARNER OUTCOME ¹ W-4.3:

Examine various attitudes, values and behaviours for developing meaningful interpersonal relationships¹



MATERIALS

1. Safe Dating Checklist Handout
2. Unhealthy Dates – Know the Signs Handout



INTRODUCTION

This lesson will encourage students to think about being involved in a dating relationship. Students will identify qualities to look for in a boyfriend or girlfriend, what couples do when they are dating, and how to communicate with someone you are close to. They will also discuss what to do if a date is not healthy and how to seek help if they are experiencing a relationship that is not safe.



This session is best suited to students who are ready to talk about being involved in a dating relationship. It follows on from Lesson 8 Friendships.

Discussions in this session may lead to questions about consent to sexual activity, birth control and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Lesson 10 Decision-Making: Creating Safe Sexual Relationships gives students the opportunity to explore this information further.



APPROACHES/STRATEGIES

A. GROUND RULES

- Ensure that ground rules are established before starting your classes. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can promote a successful lesson.
- You should be prepared for giggles in your class. Try to acknowledge students' reactions to the subject of dating, that it can be exciting to talk about but it's ok to feel a bit uncomfortable.

B. INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

1. Introduce the topic by asking students some questions about having relationships.

a. What is a relationship?

A relationship means being connected to someone e.g., by kin such as family, by interests such as friends or common goal such as work colleague, by romance such as boy/girl friend.

b. Who do we have relationships with?

Mother, father, brother, sister, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, team mates, neighbours, coaches, teachers, care giver/aide, work colleagues, boyfriends, girlfriends and even pets!

c. A type of relationship that sometimes develops from a friendship is a boyfriend or girlfriend relationship. How is this different from just being friends?

Having a boyfriend or girlfriend is different because the person is more than a friend. You develop strong feelings and attraction for that person and they are very special to you. You may feel that you want to spend all of your time just with that one person.

d. How do we learn about relationships?

By watching family and friends, TV relationships, movies, listening to the lyrics of songs, books.



Sexual health education occurs most effectively in a classroom where there is a mutual feeling of trust, safety and comfort. Having Ground Rules in place can be a very successful way to facilitate a positive classroom environment. Click [here](#) for more information on how to set up ground rules.

e. Do you need to have a boyfriend or girlfriend to be in a relationship?

- Absolutely not. Some people may not be involved in an intimate relationship ever in their life – they are happy to be around family and friends.
- Sometimes someone may choose to spend time outside of an intimate relationship, particularly if they have been involved in a bad relationship before.
- It is common to feel pressure to have a boyfriend/girlfriend from friends, family or even the media.
- It is important that you always do what is right for you and do not jump into or stay in a relationship that is uncomfortable or unsafe for you.

C. HEALTHY OR UNHEALTHY?

This activity encourages students to identify the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

1. To help students understand the concept of healthy and unhealthy talk about healthy and unhealthy foods. Ask students for examples of healthy snacks e.g., fruit, yogurt, cheese – these foods are good for us and make us feel good. Then discuss unhealthy snacks such as chips, ice cream and candy are not good for us and if we have too much can make us sick.
2. Write the topics “healthy relationships” and “unhealthy relationships” on a board/piece of newsprint (you can draw a picture of a happy/sad face as a visual).
3. Brainstorm as a group, characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. You may need to provide examples for students to get this activity started. Try using sticky post-it notes – students can write responses or even draw pictures to represent the characteristics. Students could also cut pictures from magazines.

The list may include the following:



For this activity you may want to refer back to the Lesson 8 Friendships, in particular the activity about what makes a good friend.

Healthy Relationships	Unhealthy Relationships
Happiness	No trust
Trust	No respect
Love	Jealousy
Respect	Abuse – emotional, physical, sexual
Friendship	Lack of understanding
Laughter	Bad/no communication
Common Interests	Low self-esteem
Fair arguments	Power issues
Acceptance	Unfair fights
Kindness	Other person tries to change you
Strong self-esteem	Lies
Humour / Fun	Controlling
Communicate well	No fun
Honesty	Fear
Can be you	
No fear of other person	
Still independent people	

4. How do good relationships make you feel? What about bad relationships?

Healthy relationships make us feel happy and good about ourselves. The other person likes and respects you for who you are.

Unhealthy relationships make us feel sad, stressed and give us poor self-esteem.

It is important to be in a relationship because you want to be and it feels good. As soon as a relationship starts to make you feel bad that relationship is not healthy. For discussion about ending relationships see section I below.

5. To conclude this discussion ask students to think about what they would like to see in a best friend. When someone becomes your boyfriend or girlfriend they need to be a very special friend. Some key qualities may include:

- Having a good sense of humour – someone who can make you laugh
- Being a good listener
- Being honest
- Being supportive
- Has good hygiene – smells good!
- The list may be different for everyone – you may decide that the other person needs to love the hockey team you support! It is important to really think about what you want from a boyfriend or girlfriend so that your relationship is healthy and happy.

D. MORE THAN FRIENDS?

This activity helps students understand the difference between friends and when a friend turns into a boyfriend or girlfriend. Dating usually refers to a couple who start to go out regularly. The relationship may become romantic.

1. Make a list of activities that friends might do together e.g., go to the movies, watch a DVD, play computer games, go for a walk, go to a hockey game, talk on the phone.
2. The person who becomes your boyfriend or girlfriend may be someone who you already know as a friend but who you want to spend more and more time with. You may feel excited to be with the person and find every opportunity you can to spend time and be alone with them. Before long you may start to feel that you are ‘more than just friends’ telling people that you have a girl or boy friend.
3. When you start to spend more time with someone and to date you will probably do lots of the same things as friends. Now think of some of the other things you might do only with a boyfriend or girlfriend e.g., romantic walks, holding hands, kissing, touching, sexual activities.
4. What does “having a crush” mean?
 - It is common for teens to have a “crush” on another person which means that you really like that person and have strong romantic feelings for that person. Sometimes your heart will race and you may feel like you have butterflies when you see that person and you may spend time daydreaming about what it would be like to have a relationship with them.
 - It is possible to have a celebrity crush, someone on TV or a singer that you do not know in your everyday life. Or it could be someone you know at school or in your community.
 - Crushes sometimes do not last very long. You can have a crush and no-one needs to know. You do not have to tell the person but if you do this may be the start of a relationship. If they tell you that they do not feel the same way back it is time to move on and accept that you will not have a relationship. You may feel sad about this but it is a choice that the other person has the right to make. If someone tells you they have a crush on you, you do not have to have a relationship if you do not want to.



Dating relationships usually mean two people spending time together in a close relationship. These relationships can be complex, and usually develop over time and may consist of friendship, romantic love and/or intimacy involving sexual activity.

E. DATING FOR REAL

Asking someone out on a date can be difficult but with some practice can be fun.

1. List the ways that you might ask someone special out for a date e.g., on the telephone, in person, a friend on your behalf.
2. How does it feel to ask someone out? Nervous, scary, exciting, fear of rejection. It is always important to remember that the person you ask may say no. How might this feel?
3. As a group, make a script someone may use to ask out a date.
4. If your group is able, act out the script to give students practice.



Encourage your students to talk with their family about dating to find out if they have rules or cultural expectations that are important to them e.g., some students may know that their family has rules about how old they should be before they date or there may be a rule that dating is not allowed before marriage. Talking with a parent or a trusted adult will help to avoid misunderstandings and can provide support to the student to navigate the dating process. To reach a Kids Help Phone professional counsellor, kids, teens and young adults can call or go online 24 hours a day.

F. HEALTHY DATING LOOKS LIKE....

As a group talk about what a healthy dating relationship looks like. Refer back to the healthy vs. unhealthy relationships activity above. Encourage students to talk about successful, positive relationships that they have been involved with and how it made them feel. Pay particular attention to highlight communication skills e.g., listening, being open, giving feedback.

Choose one or more of the following extension activities to best suit the level and needs of your students.

G. EXTENSION ACTIVITY: SAFE DATING CHECKLIST

Going on a date with someone should feel new and exciting but most importantly, safe. Using the Safe Dating Checklist, work as a group to make a checklist of ground rules for safe dating. Your checklist should include the following:

- At first consider dating in groups
- Always let someone know where you are going, who you are with and what time you will be back
- Make decisions together
- At first, when you do not know the other person well, be sure to date in a public place e.g., the movies, the mall
- Take a cell phone if you have one
- Avoid use of alcohol or drugs
- Do not get into another person's car if you are concerned that they may have been using alcohol or drugs



For teens and young adults to develop positive, healthy relationships they need to be able to identify when relationships are unhealthy and damaging. Problems may begin with what seem to be “innocent” issues and can eventually lead to abuse and violence. Many teens and young adults settle for unhealthy relationships and find it difficult to communicate their concerns to their partners.

H. EXTENSION ACTIVITY: UNHEALTHY DATES – KNOW THE SIGNS

Read the scenarios listed in the Unhealthy Dates – Know the Signs handout to your students and debrief with the questions that follow the scenario. Scenarios can be changed to reflect the level/age of the group or to address a specific need or concern in the group.



Some students may identify their own relationships as unhealthy as a result of these discussions. It is important to be sensitive to these students and to be aware of school or community resources that you may be able to refer them to.

I. EXTENSION ACTIVITY: WHEN RELATIONSHIPS END

Developing healthy relationships and ending relationships are skills that students learn over time. Identifying when a relationship is unhealthy can be difficult. Students may need extra support to leave an unhealthy relationship and some situations can be complex. For more detailed material about healthy and unhealthy relationships please see CALM lesson plans.

1. Why do people stay in unhealthy relationships?

- People who are in unhealthy relationships often believe things will get better, the problems are just a phase or that they can change their partner. Sometimes they will have seen this type of behaviour in another relationship, for example at home and not realize that the characteristics are unhealthy.
- Teens may feel that having a boy/girl friend is more important than getting out of an unhealthy relationship. They may be scared to break it off either because they feel they cannot cope without the other person or the other person may be abusive or violent towards them.

2. If someone is in an unhealthy relationship what can s/he do about it?

- It is important to acknowledge unhealthy characteristics in a relationship before they become abusive characteristics. Emotional abuse such as verbal attacks may eventually turn into physical or sexual abuse.
- Talking to friends or others they trust is important – often friends can provide some insight by letting you know how they see the relationship. If violence and abuse are present in the relationship then talking to a counsellor may help.



QUESTION BOX

Have students fill out questions and address them next class.



The process of asking questions is an important learning activity that helps students clarify and validate information being presented. Question Box is a method of individualized instruction which has been proven to enhance learning. Click [here](#) for more information on how to use the question box.



SELF RELECTION

During the lesson, were:

- Ground rules being followed?
- Good practices established regarding group work and discussion?

What will you change for future classes with this group?

What will you change for future use of this lesson?



STUDENT ASSESSMENT

During the lesson, did students:

Knowledge:

- Define the term 'dating relationship'?
- Identify positive elements of relationships (e.g. trust, integrity, respect, responsibility)?
- Identify the qualities they might look for in a dating partner?

Skills:

- Develop the skills to stay safe when dating?

Attitudes:

- Recognize that dating should happen at an individual's own pace?

¹ Alberta Education. (2002). *Health and life skills guide to implementation: Kindergarten to grade 9*. Retrieved from <http://education.alberta.ca/media/352993/pos.pdf>

Safe Dating Checklist

Work as a group to make a checklist of ground rules for safe dating.

Unhealthy Dates – Know the Signs

Read the following scenarios together as a group and discuss the questions that follow.

Sam and Aisha are going on their third date, a trip to the zoo. Aisha wants to date with another couple but Sam tells her that unless they go to the zoo just the two of them, the date is off.

Why do you think that Aisha wants to date with another couple?

Why do you think Sam wants to be alone with Aisha?

What should Aisha do? Go to the zoo with Sam without the other couple or accept that the date is off?

Kelly and Joe have been dating for 3 months now. Joe starts to realize that Kelly always chooses where they go – which movie to watch, which mall to go shopping in, where to eat etc. Joe is beginning to feel that Kelly does not listen to her suggestions.

Why is Joe upset about not choosing where to go on a date?

Look back at the list of unhealthy characteristics of a relationship. Can you choose some words that describe this situation?

What can Joe do?

Megan and Jake have been dating for 4 months. Megan has recently joined a wheelchair basketball team and has made lots of new friends. Jake has told her that he does not like her spending so much time with the friends from the team and that she has to choose – the team or him.

Is it a good idea for Megan to be dating and also have lots of other friends?

Why might Jake feel jealous about Megan?

What should Megan do?

Cori and Jordan were supposed to go on a date together last night but Jordan did not show up. Cori calls to ask why and Jordan says that he was with his family at a birthday meal. Cori is shocked to hear this because a posting on a social networking site from another friend said that Jordan had been seen at the movie theatre!

Should Cori believe that Jordan has lied?

How do you think Cori feels being lied to?

What should Cori do?

Terri and Cal have been dating for about a year. Terri tells a friend (you) that last night during an argument they started to fight and some slapping and pushing happened.

Did Terri do the right thing telling her friend about the incident?

What advise could you give Terri?

Where could Terri go for help?

Should Terri end the relationship?