

Grade 8

Abuse



Learner Outcomes

W-8.7 Determine the signs, methods and consequences of various types of abuse (e.g., neglect, physical, emotional, sexual abuse)

How To Use

This lesson plan contains several activities to achieve the learner outcome above. You may choose to do some or all of the activities, based on the needs of your students and the time available. Some of the activities build on the ones that come before them, but all can be used alone.

For a quick lesson, combine activities A, C and F.

Classroom Activities & Timing

- A. Ground Rules (5-10 minutes)
- B. Discussing Abuse (20-30 minutes)
- C. Abusive Situations Scenarios (15-20 minutes)
- D. Okay, Not Okay and Confusing Touch (15-20 minutes)
- E. Dear Alex Letters (40-50 minutes)
- F. Question Box (5-10 minutes)

Required Materials

HANDOUTS: Types of Abuse, Cycle of Abuse

HANDOUTS: Abusive Scenarios 1,2,3,4

HANDOUTS: Choosing to Disclose, Supporting a Friend

CARDS: Touchy Situations

HANDOUTS: Dear Alex, Dear Alex Response and Sample Letter

Background Information for Teachers

Knowing the signs, methods and consequences of various types of abuse can help those in abusive situations recognize how and when to get help. Others can use this information to help friends or family in abusive situations seek help. This lesson focuses on identifying various types of abuse, signs of abuse, the impact of abuse, protective factors, choosing to disclose and supporting those who disclose abuse.

It is important to use gender neutral language when discussing abuse. People of any gender can be abusers or be abused. Using gendered language when talking about consent and sexual assault reinforces unhealthy stereotypes, discourages men and boys who have been sexually assaulted from accessing services, and inaccurately suggests that women do not commit sexual assault.

Relationships

People have different kinds of relationships throughout their lives, including relationships with family, friends, classmates, and teammates. As students get older, this can include sexual or intimate relationships.

For teens to develop positive, healthy relationships, they need to identify when relationships are healthy, unhealthy or abusive. Problems may begin with what seem to be 'innocent' issues and can eventually lead to abuse and violence. Teens may experience unhealthy relationships and find it difficult to communicate their concerns to their partners. Teens are vulnerable to abuse in their relationships due partly to inexperience and myths that include viewing violence as an act of love. Studies show that between 10-25% of teens experience physical and verbal aggression in their dating relationships, and 9% have experienced physical violence. Students need to develop the skills to identify signs of an unhealthy or abusive relationships, communication skills to help deal with the problems, and when necessary, strategies for ending relationships.

Understanding the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships is important for all students. Below are the traits of healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships. Most of these traits can relate to any kind of relationship, but a few deal with romantic or intimate relationships.

	Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
Sharing Feelings	Both people feel safe, comfortable and strong enough to tell each other how they really feel.	One person feels uncomfortable telling the other how they really feel.	One person feels afraid to tell the other how they really feel. They are scared of being rejected, abandoned, getting 'put down' or being threatened.
Communicating	Both partners listen to and respect each other's point of view. They make decisions together.	One person ignores the other and does not respect their opinions.	One person treats the other with disrespect. One person ignores the other's ideas and feelings or makes fun of them.
Disagreements	Both people have equal say in the relationship. They show respect to each other even when they have disagreements. They work things out together, so they both get what they need.	Disagreements often turn into fights that include yelling, criticism or harsh words.	One person is afraid to disagree because they don't want the other to get angry or violent. The disagreement is used as an excuse for abuse.
Intimacy and sex	Both partners are honest about how they feel about being physical and having sex. Neither person feels pressured to do anything they don't want to do.	One person is embarrassed to say how they feel or what they need. One person may go along with things they may not be comfortable with.	One person ignores the other's needs and wants. One person may be pushed into doing things that make them feel uncomfortable, afraid or ashamed.
Time alone	Both people can spend time alone and think of this as a healthy part of the relationship.	One person thinks there may be something wrong if the other wants to do things without them. One person tries to keep the other to themselves.	One person doesn't let the other spend time doing things because it's seen as a threat to the relationship. One person may monitor the other

			person's activities and isolate them from family and friends.
Trust	Both people trust each other. Both people are comfortable with each other spending time with other people.	One person feels jealous when the other person talks to or spends time with someone else.	One person accuses the other of flirting or having an affair. One person orders the other not to talk to other people.
Verbal	Both people value the differences between each other and work to be non-judgmental. Both partners try hard not to talk harshly to or about each other.	There have been a few times when harsh words were used, and one person felt at risk of harm. There is no clear pattern of abuse.	There is a pattern of increasing or ongoing verbal or psychological abuse. This may include damaging belongings, name-calling, and threats to hurt or kill the other person, a family member or a pet.
Violence	There is no physical violence or threat of violence in the relationship. Neither person feels at risk of being hurt or harmed. Both partners behave in ways that keep the other safe (e.g. Safer sex practices)	There have been a few times when one person felt at risk of harm. There is no clear pattern of abuse or violence.	There is an increasing or ongoing pattern of pushing, slapping, shaking, choking, punching or forced sexual contact.

Consent

Consent means people agree to participate in an activity and understand what they are agreeing to. Consent is the foundation of sexual relationships and is needed for every sexual activity, every time. The legal age of consent is 16 in Canada (with exemptions for [peers close in age](#)).

- Consent is voluntary, affirmative, enthusiastic, freely given and part of an ongoing conversation about mutual agreement to do something.
- Consent cannot be assumed or implied by silence, previous sexual history or clothing.

Information about reporting a sexual assault, dealing with a past sexual assault, or responding to a sexual assault disclosure can be found in the [Consent](#) section.

- Permission to do any type of sexual activity needs to be asked for and clearly given before proceeding.
- A person can only consent to activities if they are aware of the risks. If the risks are hidden, a person cannot consent as they don't have all the information.
- Sex without consent is sexual assault. Any sexual activity without consent is sexual assault.
- Sexual assault can happen to anyone of any gender or age and be committed by anyone of any gender or age.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is when someone in a position of power or authority (such as a parent, teacher or coach) takes advantage of a person's trust and respect to get them to take part in sexual activity. Sexual abuse may happen over and over or it may happen one time. It can involve any type of behavior or act that is a sexual assault. Sexual abuse also includes forcing a person to:

- look at a naked body or naked genital area
- show their own naked body
- watch or look or take part in sexual pictures or movies
- watch a sexual act, such as masturbation
- touch or be touched (fondled)

Abuse can happen to anyone. Sexual abuse is **never** the victim's fault. The only way to prevent abuse is for offenders not to commit abuse.

Protective Factors

Part of being in a healthy relationship means that people need to talk about how intimate they want to be and don't feel pressure to do something they don't want to do. Students should:

- ask for and receive consent
- respect the boundaries of others who say 'no' to touch

Things students can learn that make them less vulnerable to sexual abuse include:

- the correct names of body parts, particularly genitals
- consent and bodily autonomy- they are the boss of their body and they can determine who does and does not touch them
- the difference between okay and not okay or unwanted touches

Being Prepared for Disclosures and Distress

Addressing the topic of abusive relationships may cause some students to be distressed or show other signs they are or have somehow been involved in or witnessed an abusive situation. Dealing with controversial issues encourages students to examine

For more information on reporting and responding to disclosure see the video and related materials at [A School's Role in Keeping Our Kids Safe](#)

their own beliefs and experiences. Teachers need to act with sensitivity and discretion when handling individual student information that is sensitive or could cause embarrassment or distress to the student or family.

To maintain both student safety and engagement, it is helpful to be familiar with [trauma informed practice](#), to use inclusive language and to acknowledge feelings and stories. It is also important to strongly emphasize a respect for confidentiality among all class members.

- Respect and reinforce confidentiality and sensitivity in the classroom.
- Anticipate where discussions will lead in order to protect students from revealing inappropriate personal information.
- Before starting these lessons, talk to the school counsellors so they are aware there may be disclosures of abuse.
- Ensure your students understand that disclosures of abuse cannot be kept confidential. Disclosures are the first step to get help for a student who is experiencing abuse.
- Share with students what they can expect if they disclose abuse, e.g., acknowledgement, honouring their disclosure, redirection to discuss further outside of class and assurance of connecting them with support.
- The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act requires you to report the abuse of a young person to Child and Family Services or Delegated First Nation Agencies. You can locate your local office by visiting <https://www.alberta.ca/childrens-services-offices.aspx>

For more information review [Responding to Child Abuse: A Handbook](#), published by the Government of Alberta or visit [How to Help and Report Child Abuse, Neglect and Sexual Exploitation](#)

Refer to your school division's guidelines about disclosures and reporting.

Inclusive Language

Language is complex, evolving, and powerful. In these lessons, [inclusive language](#) is used to include all students, including those with diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. This includes the use of 'they' as a singular gender-neutral pronoun.

A person's sex can be assigned at birth as male or female. Some people are intersex (the reproductive, sexual, or genetic biology of a person is unclear, not exclusively male or female or otherwise does not fit within traditional definitions of male or female). Assigned sex is independent of gender.

Gender identity is a person's internal sense of identity as girl/woman, boy/man, fluid among genders or no gender (regardless of what sex they were assigned at birth).

For many people, their gender is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (cisgender). For some, their gender identity is different from the sex

they were assigned at birth. They may use terms like transgender, trans, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, agender or others, to describe their gender identity. The umbrella term ‘trans’ is primarily used here, to describe people whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth differ. While this umbrella term does not fit everyone, the intention is to be inclusive as possible.

A. Ground Rules

Ensure [ground rules](#) are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can help ensure a successful lesson.

B. Discussing Abuse

Students become familiar with various types of abuse and the abuse cycle.

- As a class, brainstorm various types of abuse. Write the answers up on the board. Ensure these answers are included:
 - Neglect
 - Physical abuse
 - Emotional abuse
 - Sexual abuse
- Review the definitions and signs of different forms of abuse using the **Types of Abuse** handout.
- Discuss how abusive situations may fluctuate using the **Cycle of Abuse** handout.
- Ask students to think about what the effects and consequences of abuse might be, both for the abuser and abused person.
- Discuss the **Consequences of Abuse** slides. You may wish to create a chart like the one below to discuss the consequences of abuse for people who are abused and people who engage in abusive behaviour.

Outcomes of abuse	Abusive person	Abused person
Legal		
Emotional		
Social		
Physical/Medical		

Some examples of information that could go in the chart include:

- Legal consequences for the abuser include being charged with assault, having a criminal record, and possibly facing time in jail. Outcomes for the abused person could include deciding to make a police complaint or facing the abuser in court.
- Emotional consequences for the abuser may include feelings of shame, regret and guilt. Outcomes for the abused person may include lower achievement in school, feelings of shame, low self-esteem, anxiety or depression.
- Social consequences for the abuser (if the abuse is disclosed) may include embarrassment facing friends, family and future relationships, difficulty getting a job or getting into post-secondary schools because of a criminal record. Outcomes for the abused person may include lower learning ability, achievement in school, language development, difficulty in future relationships or anxiety.
- Physical/medical outcomes for the abused may include impaired brain development, physical injury, and higher risk of heart, lung and liver diseases, mental health issues, smoking, alcoholism and drug abuse.

C. Abusive Situations Scenarios

Students explore abuse scenarios to learn ways to find and offer help.

1. Divide the class into small groups.
2. Give each group one of the handouts **Abuse Scenario** (1, 2, 3 or 4). Ensure each group has the **Types of Abuse** handout for reference.
3. Give groups time to read the scenarios and discuss the answers to the questions on each handout. Have one person per group record the answers.
4. Debrief this activity using the **Choosing to Disclose** and **Supporting a Friend** handouts to aid in the discussion of the following questions:
 - How do you think a person who has been abused feels?
 - What could you do if a person is treating you in an abusive way?
 - What might make it hard for a person experiencing abuse to do something to address it?
 - What can you do if you suspect or know someone is being abused?

The names used in the scenarios are all intentionally gender-neutral, as abuse can happen to anyone.

D. Okay, Not Okay and Confusing Touch

Students explore types of touch and what to do if they experience touch that makes them uncomfortable.

1. Post the following titles on the board:
 - **Okay Touch**
 - **Not Okay/Unwanted Touch**
 - **Confusing Touch**
2. Distribute the **Touchy Situations** cards, one to each student, or have students take a card from a pile.
3. Have students discuss their card with a neighbour, and then place each card under the title that best fits the situation outlined.
4. As a class, review the card placements, and make any changes. Be sure to confirm that appropriate touch depends on the student's feelings, and that it can depend on the situation whether or not touch is appropriate. Not okay or unwanted touch is anything that makes you immediately or eventually uncomfortable.
5. Debrief this activity using the following questions:

What could you do if a person touched you in an unwanted, not okay or confusing way?

- Tell the person you don't like it.
- Leave the situation if possible. Sometimes resistance or leaving are not possible or safe in the moment.
- Try to avoid being with that person.
- Remember that the person doing the inappropriate touching (or asking for inappropriate touch) is doing something wrong, not you! You can tell someone even if the abuse is a 'secret' and even if you are afraid.
- Speak to an adult you trust. If nothing happens, speak to another adult you trust.
- Keep telling until you get help.

Who are people you could go to if you needed help or if a friend needed help?

- A trusted adult (a teacher, parent, a friend's parent, guidance counsellor, coach, relative, neighbour, or someone else you trust).
- If you feel you are in immediate danger, contact the police or call 911.
- Have students write the names of three adults in their lives that they could go to if they needed help.

E. Dear Alex Letters

It may feel safer or be easier for some students (especially high risk students or those with differing abilities) to be provided with a generic letter outlining an abusive situation. A sample letter is provided in the handouts section. You may wish to create additional pre-written letters for students to respond to.

Students practice providing support to someone who has experienced abuse. Ensure that students know before they begin writing that the letters will be shared with their classmates, so that they do not write anything that could identify them personally. Be aware that some students who have experienced abuse may write a story similar to their own to see what the response is.

1. Distribute the handout **Dear Alex** to each student.
2. Ask each student to write a 'Dear Alex' letter describing an imaginary situation that involves a potential dilemma or ongoing abuse that is happening to a friend. Have them sign the letter 'A Worried Friend'.
3. Collect the letters and re-distribute them to different students.
4. Display or distribute the **Types of Abuse**, **Choosing to Disclose** and **Supporting a Friend** handouts for students to refer to when writing their responses.
5. Have each student respond to the letter as a 'Dear Alex' columnist. The responses must include:
 - Explaining the type of abuse portrayed in the letter.
 - Expressing an understanding of the feelings experienced by the letter writer.
 - Describing the actions the letter writer can take to address the abuse and promote the well-being of their friend.
6. Debrief this activity using the following questions:
 - What feelings were expressed in the letters outlining the abuse?
 - What feelings did you experience when trying to provide support to the survivor?
 - How can you help someone who is being abused?
7. Collect responses and ensure answers have correct information before handing back to original author.

After each lesson, encourage students who are feeling confused or upset to talk to a teacher or school counsellor.

F. Question Box

Answer any questions from the [question box](#) in the previous lesson. Have students submit any new questions and address them next class.

Addressing the questions at the next class allows you time to review the questions and prepare responses.

Self-Reflection

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:

- describe the four types of abuse?
- list ways they can support a person they suspect is being abused?
- identify support people an abused person can access for help?
- describe what an abused person can do to disclose the abuse?
- recognize the signs of abuse?
- distinguish between okay, not okay and confusing touch?
- identify ways to deal with a person touching them in an not okay/unwanted or confusing way?
- identify support people when needing help?

Skills:

- practice providing support to someone experiencing abuse?

Attitudes:

- understand the impact of abuse that an abused person goes through?
- understand the feelings experienced by someone who is abused or who encounters someone who is abused?

Types of Abuse

Abuse is any behaviour used to control another person's actions. It can affect your thoughts or emotions; it can also be physical or even dangerous to your life.

Abuse can take many forms. Some examples are:

Physical abuse includes pushing, shaking, hitting, shoving, choking, punching or restraining. Any physical contact that leads to pain (soreness, discomfort), injury (bruises, bleeding) or impairment (limping, hard to speak or eat).

Emotional abuse includes name calling, shouting, constant criticism, refusing to talk to or limiting contact with friends or family. Emotional abuse includes threats to hurt or kill a person, their parent, a pet or someone in their extended family (like a sibling, cousin or grandparent), a partner acting overly jealous or accusing a person of cheating.

Sexual abuse includes any unwanted sexual activity, threats of violence or sexual activity without consent. Sexual abuse also includes obscene phone calls, texts or emails, exposure to pornography or flashing and sexual exploitation (engaging a child in sexual activities for exchange of money, gifts, shelter, food, etc., using a child in pornography, or luring a child via the internet for sexual purposes).

Neglect is a failure to meet a child's physical needs (adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and safety) or emotional needs (affection and belonging).

Signs that a person is experiencing abuse may include:

- Hinting or talking directly about abuse
- Unexplained and/or repeated bruises or injuries in places not normally injured
- Burns that leave a pattern outlining the object used to make the burn (iron, rope)
- Being continually hungry, unsuitably dressed for the weather and/or always dirty
- Being left alone often as a young child
- Being aggressive, angry, hostile, withdrawn or afraid
- Difficulties concentrating
- Refusing to participate or dress appropriately for physical activities
- Showing unusual knowledge of sexual matters or acting out sexually
- Repeatedly running away from home
- Poor school attendance

Cycle of Abuse

Cycle of Abuse

Tension building

- minor incidents of physical/emotional abuse
- victim feels growing tension
- victim tries to control situation to avoid violence
- 'walking on egg shells' victim cannot control abuser
- longest phase

Minimizing the abuse or acting as if it did not happen.

Denial keeps the cycle going.

Denial

Perpetrators, victims, and society at large minimize abuse in relationships.

Honeymoon Phase

- abuser sorry and apologetic
- abuser makes promises
- 'hearts and flowers'
- idealized and romantic
- this phase often disappears with time

Explosion

The actual abuse is:

- physical
- sexual
- emotional
- verbal
- financial

Abuse Scenario 1

Peyton is in grade eight. A year ago, Peyton started seeing Jordan, who is 17 and lives alone. A few months ago, Jordan began pressuring Peyton to have sex. Peyton wasn't sure, but Jordan said "If you loved me, you would want to have sex". Sometimes Jordan drinks too much and calls Peyton frigid. Last week, Peyton decided to go ahead and do it.

Now Peyton is not sure they did the right thing because Jordan wants to have sex all the time. Jordan never wants to go out any more, but instead tells Peyton to come over to the apartment. Peyton knows Jordan expects sex whenever they are together.

Peyton is afraid to talk to anyone about this because Peyton's family and friends never really liked Jordan. Peyton lies to their parent and says they are going out with friends when they are really going to Jordan's place. Peyton doesn't talk to their friends about Jordan because their friends don't like Jordan. Peyton loves Jordan, and doesn't want to hear the bad things that are said about Jordan.

- 1. What type of abuse is this? Explain.**

- 2. How do you think Peyton feels? Explain.**

- 3. Does Jordan have the right to treat Peyton this way? Why or why not?**

- 4. What advice would you give Peyton?**

Abuse Scenario 3

Joey lives with their mom. No one knew where their dad was. Joey and their mom move around a lot. Most of the time, Joey's mom had a boyfriend but he never stayed with them for very long. Each time a new boyfriend started to come over, Joey's mom would ask Joey to go away. Whenever a boyfriend left, Joey's mom would lay on the couch and cry in front of the TV all day and all night.

Whether there was a boyfriend on the scene or not, Joey was the one left to ensure that there was food to eat in the cupboards and clothes to wear. If it was during the school year, it was up to Joey to set an alarm clock and get to school on time. Because they moved a lot, Joey was always starting at a new school. Paying attention in class and doing homework wasn't difficult, and Joey usually maintained a pretty good average. Still, sometimes the stress got to Joey and they would sleep in and miss school. Sometimes Joey would try to find odd jobs to help with rent or grocery money, and would have to miss school because of that. Joey was beginning to think that they might as well quit school, move out and get a job.

- 1. What type of abuse is this? Explain.**
- 2. How do you think Joey feels? Explain.**
- 3. Does Joey's mom have the right to treat Joey this way? Why or why not?**
- 4. What advice would you give Joey?**

Abuse Scenario 4

Emerson was a straight A student. School didn't always come easy, but Emerson would work as hard as possible to make sure that assignments were done to perfection and that they were totally ready for any test. Emerson was on the honour roll, secretary of the student council, a member of the school band and on the basketball team. Emerson seemed to love everyone and everyone seemed to love Emerson. At school, it looked as if Emerson had a perfect life.

Things were a bit different at home. No matter how high Emerson's grades were or how many awards they won or activities they were involved with, their parents were never satisfied. They would call Emerson stupid if they came home with a grade of less than 90%. The parents would attend a band concert or basketball game and then spend the entire car ride home picking apart Emerson's performance and suggesting how they could have done better. During the school year, Emerson would have to come right home after school and spend the entire night sitting at their desk in the study. If Emerson was over fifteen minutes late, they weren't allowed to eat supper.

It wasn't as if Emerson didn't like school. Emerson did, but life was stressful. Sometimes, Emerson thought it would be easier if life could just stop.

- 1. What type of abuse is this? Explain.**

- 2. How do you think Emerson feels? Explain.**

- 3. Do Emerson's parents have the right to treat them this way? Why or why not?**

- 4. What advice would you give Emerson?**

Choosing to Disclose

When to Tell

- It is never too late to **tell someone**. You can disclose when you are ready.
- Remember, the abuse is **NEVER** your fault. Abuse is **NEVER** okay.
- There are people who can help.
- Be persistent, keep telling.

Who to Tell

- A close friend.
- A trusted adult (a teacher, parent, a friend's parent, guidance counsellor, coach, relative, neighbour, or someone else you trust).
- If you feel you are in immediate danger, contact the police or call 911.

What Will Happen?

- The person you tell should listen to you and believe you and want to help you right away.

Supporting a Friend

What you can say to support your friend

- It's not your fault
- I believe you
- I'm sorry that happened to you
- I'm glad you told me
- I understand that telling is difficult to do and am proud of you for asking for help
- I'll help you to get help

What you can do to support your friend

- Encourage your friend to tell a trusted adult and offer to help your friend tell
- Respect your friend's privacy. **DO NOT** tell other friends about the abuse
- Tell a trusted adult about the disclosure
- If nothing happens, tell another trusted adult

A friend hugs you

**Your teacher gives you a
kiss for doing a good job**

**A family friend shakes
your hand**

**Your grandmother kisses
you hello**

**Your uncle asks you
to sit on his lap
at a family gathering**

**Your mother's boyfriend
holds your hand**

**Your tutor rubs your leg
during homework help**

**Your mother pats you
on the behind**

**Your older brother
tickles you**

**Your doctor examines
you when you are
completely undressed**

**A family friend
pats your head**

**Your best friend sleeps in
the same bed as you
during a sleepover**

**Your friend links arms
with you**

Your parent hugs you

**Your cousin asks you
to touch their penis**

**A family friend rubs your
shoulder and back**

**Your bus driver
tickles you**

**Your coach
'high fives' you**

**Your coach
slaps your bum**

Dear Alex

Instructions:

1. Write a letter to an advice column describing a situation that involves a potential dilemma or ongoing abuse that is happening to a friend.
2. Sign the letter "A Worried Friend".

Dear Alex,

Dear Alex Sample Letter

Dear Alex,

A friend of mine told me that when she stays at her Grandma's for the weekend her uncle is always there. Sometimes her Grandma has to go out and she is left with her uncle.

He is always staring at her and saying weird things like "You are so gorgeous I can't wait to see you in your bathing suit this summer" and "You are filling out really nice".

She tells me how much she doesn't like it and that it makes her feel really weird. How can she make this stop? Is this normal?

***From,
A Worried Friend***

Dear Alex Response

Instructions:

1. Respond to the letter you were given, as if you are the 'Dear Alex' columnist.
2. Refer to the **Types of Abuse**, **Choosing to Disclose**, and **Supporting a Friend** handouts for help.
3. Your response must:
 - Explain the type of abuse in the letter.
 - Express an understanding of the feelings experienced by the letter writer.
 - Describe the actions the letter writer can take to address the abuse and help their friend.

Dear Worried Friend,