

Grade 9

Relationships and Dating



Learner Outcomes

W-9.12 Determine “safer” sex practices; e.g., communicate with partner

R-9.4 Analyze, evaluate and refine personal communication patterns

R-9.5 Describe and analyze factors that contribute to the development of unhealthy relationships, and develop strategies to deal with unhealthy relationships

This lesson addresses all of the specific outcomes listed above. Instruction in human sexuality (***bolded and italicized*** outcomes) requires schools to provide notice to parents about the learning outcomes, topics and resources.

How To Use

This lesson plan contains several activities to achieve the learner outcomes 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, D and F.

If you choose not to do all the activities, use your professional judgment to assess which outcomes you have covered and which may need additional activities.

Classroom Activities & Timing

See also the [Differing Abilities](#) lesson plans on [Dating and Healthy Relationships](#).

- A. Ground Rules (5-10 minutes)
- B. Factors Affecting Relationships (15-25 minutes)
- C. Healthy, Unhealthy and Abusive Relationships (10-20 minutes)
- D. Healthy or Unhealthy Song Lyrics (30-45 minutes)
- E. Building Assertive Communication Skills (20-40 minutes)
- F. Question Box (5-10 minutes)

Required Materials

CARDS: Healthy/Unhealthy/Abusive Relationships

HANDOUT: Song Lyrics: Healthy or Unhealthy?

HANDOUT or [SLIDES](#): Types of Communication

HANDOUTS: Communication Scenarios 1-5

All the diagrams/slides are also available as PDFs in [Grade 9 Diagrams](#).

Background Information for Teachers

This lesson explores healthy, unhealthy and abusive behaviours in relationships and where to go for help.

Being Prepared for Disclosures and Distress

Addressing the topic of abusive relationships may cause some students to be distressed or show other signs that they have been involved in or witnessed an abusive situation. Dealing with sensitive issues encourages students to examine their own beliefs and experiences. Teachers need to act with sensitivity and discretion when handling sensitive student information that 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](#), 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 getting 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 on reporting and responding to disclosure see the video and related materials at [A School's Role in Keeping Our Kids Safe](#)

- Reports can also be made to the **Child Abuse Hotline** at 1-800-387-5437. Abuse includes physical abuse and sexual aggression in any form.

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.

Relationships

Healthy, fulfilling relationships are needed for all people's emotional and physical well-being. Understanding the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships helps students to identify healthy and unhealthy characteristics of a student's past, present and future relationships. All people need to learn to express their emotions in a healthy way, and this learning starts in infancy. Sharing feelings can build relationships between people, strengthen build relationships between people, strengthen emotional bonds, and deal with conflicts. When sharing emotions, starting the conversation with "I feel..." and then naming the emotion, is more effective than saying "You make me feel..." or "I feel that you...".

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 specifically 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.

	Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
Disagreements	<p>Both people have equal say in the relationship.</p> <p>They show respect to each other even when they have disagreements.</p> <p>They work things out together, so they both get what they need.</p>	<p>Disagreements often turn into fights that include yelling, criticism or harsh words.</p>	<p>One person is afraid to disagree because they don't want the other to get angry or violent.</p> <p>The disagreement is used as an excuse for abuse.</p>
Intimacy and sex	<p>Both partners are honest about how they feel about being physical and having sex.</p> <p>Neither person feels pressured to do anything they don't want to do.</p>	<p>One person is embarrassed to say how they feel or what they need.</p> <p>One person may go along with things they may not be comfortable with.</p>	<p>One person ignores the other's needs and wants.</p> <p>One person may be pushed into doing things that make them feel uncomfortable, afraid or ashamed.</p>
Time alone	<p>Both people can spend time alone and think of this as a healthy part of the relationship.</p>	<p>One person thinks there may be something wrong if the other wants to do things without them.</p> <p>One person tries to keep the other to themselves.</p>	<p>One person doesn't let the other spend time doing things because it's seen as a threat to the relationship.</p> <p>One person may monitor the other person's activities and isolate them from family and friends.</p>
Verbal	<p>Both people value the differences between each other and work to be non-judgmental.</p> <p>Both partners try hard not to talk harshly to or about each other.</p>	<p>There have been a few times when harsh words were used, and one person felt at risk of harm.</p> <p>There is no clear pattern of abuse.</p>	<p>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.</p>

	Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
Violence	<p>There is no physical violence or threat of violence in the relationship.</p> <p>Neither person feels at risk of being hurt or harmed.</p> <p>Both partners behave in ways that keep the other safe (e.g. Safer sex practices)</p>	<p>There have been a few times when one person felt at risk of harm.</p> <p>There is no clear pattern of abuse or violence.</p>	<p>There is an increasing or ongoing pattern of pushing, slapping, shaking, choking, punching or forced sexual contact.</p>

Inclusive Language

Language is complex, evolving, and powerful. In these lessons, [inclusive language](#) is used to be inclusive of 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. Factors Affecting Relationships

Students will consider the common types of challenges that may occur in relationships.

1. Introduce the activity by pointing out that people experience problems in all kinds of relationships. In dating relationships, there are predictable factors that lead to conflict, and if they remain unresolved can lead to break-ups.
2. Ask students to give an example of a conflict in a dating relationship. In order to respect the privacy of their family and friends, ask them to respond with examples from their imagination or relationships they have seen in TV/movies/books, not personal experience.
3. On separate pieces of flipchart paper, write these four headings:
 - **Practical/Logistical Challenges**
 - **Compatibility Challenges**
 - **Commitment Challenges**
 - **Affection/Intimacy Challenges**
4. Post the flipchart papers around the room.
5. Divide students into four groups. Assign each group to one flipchart paper.
6. Give the students a few minutes to brainstorm and write down their ideas of problems that could occur in dating relationships in the category on the paper.
7. Ask each group to rotate around the room to the next flipchart, and add at least one idea to the next flipchart.
8. Repeat until each group has visited all four papers.

Some sample answers:

Practical/Logistical Issues	Compatibility Issues	Commitment Issues	Affection/Intimacy Issues
Partner moves to another town	Family does not approve of partner	Too busy with other activities or people	Poor communication between partners
Partner doesn't go to same school	Big age gap	One partner is not interested in exclusivity	One partner is uncomfortable with public displays of affection
Partner doesn't have their own phone/computer	Different values or beliefs	One partner cheats	Jealousy
Work/school/extra-curricular activities leave little time for partner	Different religion or ethnic background		Emotional or physical abuse
One partner is not allowed to date	Different life goals		

9. Debrief by asking the class to discuss these questions:

- **Which headings were the easiest and hardest to identify examples for?**
- **Do any of the challenges seem easy to solve? Which seem the hardest to solve?**
- **Is there a category that seems to have more problematic examples?**
- **What role do a person's values play in relationship problems?**

C. Healthy, Unhealthy and Abusive Relationships

It is important for all people to know the difference between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships.

1. Put up three headings on the board to make three columns:
 - **Healthy Relationships**
 - **Unhealthy Relationships**
 - **Abusive Relationships**
2. Explain that many people have trouble deciding whether or not a relationship is good for them. It can be difficult to tell the difference between a healthy and an unhealthy relationship, and between an unhealthy and an abusive relationship. In this activity students will identify the qualities of healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships.

The distinction between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships applies to all sorts of relationships, not only sexual/intimate relationships.

3. Divide the class into small groups.
4. Give each group one or more **Healthy/Unhealthy/Abusive Relationship** card(s) until all cards are distributed. Have the group discuss each card and decide if it describes a healthy, an unhealthy, or an abusive relationship.
5. When the group has made a decision, have them place the card under the appropriate heading at the front of the class.
6. When all groups have placed their cards, discuss the cards together and move any cards as needed to the correct column.

Answers

Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
Talking about your feelings	Believing one partner has more rights than the other	Controlling the other person's relationships/friends/activities
Respecting the other person's friends and activities	Shouting or yelling when you are angry with the other person	Name-calling (putdowns)
Considering the other person's opinions and feelings	Using the silent treatment	Threatening harm
Respecting differences in other people	Pestering the other person until you get what you want	Intimidating by threatening/ destroying property
Stating differences of opinion	Pouting to get what you want	Being extremely jealous and possessive of the other person
Having an equal say in the relationship		Pushing, hitting, or holding the other person against their will
Figuring out a solution that is good for both of you		

7. Debrief this activity using the following questions:
 - How do you think people feel when they are in a healthy relationship? In an unhealthy relationship? In an abusive relationship?
 - Is it possible that what one person believes is appropriate behaviour might actually be inappropriate or abusive?
 - Who decides what is respectful and what is abusive?

8. Conclude by providing students with the information below on how to access help for any type of unhealthy or abusive relationship. Encourage them to consider how they may need the information in the future or for a friend, even if they themselves are never in an abusive relationship.

Where To Go For Help

For Students:

If you are in immediate danger call 911

If you are affected by any form of abuse or if you suspect someone you know may be, you can talk to a trusted adult like a parent, teacher or guidance counsellor.

The following resources are also available:

- **Alberta's One Line for Sexual Violence** Provides support in over 200 languages, 7 days a week
 - Text or call 1-866-403-8000
- **Association of Alberta Sexual Assault Services** If you have been affected by sexual violence, contact the nearest sexual assault centre for help and information.
 - Visit the website: <https://aasas.ca/get-help/>
- **Bullying Helpline** If you are a victim of bullying or abuse. Online chats and calls to the helpline are anonymous.
 - Call the toll free 24/7 Helpline: 1-888-456-2323. The helpline offers help in more than 170 languages.
 - Chat online (noon to 8 pm, 7 days/week) in English only
- **Kids Help Phone** Counsellors are available to talk confidentially 24/7.
 - Visit the website: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>
 - Call: 1-800-668-6868
- **Connect family & sexual abuse network** support line available 24/7.
 - Visit the website: <http://www.connectnetwork.ca/>
 - Call: 1-877-237-5888
- **Health Link** Health advice from a registered nurse available 24/7.
 - Call: 811

For Teachers:

Please see the **Background Information** above for information regarding disclosures and reporting abuse.

More complete information about sexual assault, including how to support a friend, can be found in the Consent lessons.

D. Healthy or Unhealthy Songs Lyrics

Students will analyze the messages in pop culture regarding healthy and unhealthy relationships.

1. Introduce the activity by pointing out that we spend a lot of time listening to music but often don't pay close attention to the words or think deeply about their meaning. Many popular songs are about relationships. Ask students to give some current examples to check that they understand the connection to this lesson.
2. Divide students into pairs or small groups.
3. Distribute the **Song Lyrics** handout to each group.
4. Give each group time to choose a song to analyze. They will need to find the lyrics to their song and hand them in with their completed handout.
5. Ask each group to complete the questions on the handout.
6. For evaluation, you could collect the handouts or ask each group to present their song and share their answers to the questions with the class.

Although assertiveness is regarded as the healthiest and most direct form of communication, in some situations it could put the person at risk (i.e. in a culture where the female is taught to accept unconditionally the authority of the male or the parent). Students should understand they need to choose the style that is best for them in any particular situation.

E. Building Assertive Communication Skills

Students identify passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive and assertive communication, and practice assertive communication skills.

People across and within different races and cultures communicate differently. There are people who naturally speak loudly, without intending to be rude, disrespectful, or aggressive. Many Indigenous, Black and People of Colour have sadly been accused of being aggressive when they speak passionately or assertively. The content in this lesson plan is not meant to reinforce this negative pattern of false accusations or stereotyping based on race and culture. This content aims to educate students on the different types of communication and give students opportunities to practice communicating effectively.

It is important to weigh other factors before stating that a person is communicating aggressively. For example, "Is this how they regularly speak?" "What is their body language saying outside the tone of their voice?" "What else is happening in the interaction? Consider place, time, event and previous interactions.

Comprehensive sexual health education should also be anti-racist. Create a safe and affirming space in the classroom for open dialogue about racism, its impacts on sexual and reproductive health and how to promote respect and equity among all students.

1. Display the **Types of Communications** slide or provide the **Types of Communication** handout to each student.
2. Discuss the four types of communication styles with students, and ask them to provide examples of passive, passive-aggressive, assertive and aggressive communication behaviours.
3. Point out that people do not communicate using just one of these styles. They can combine or change styles depending on the situation and/or person that they are interacting with. For example, a person can be assertive with their best friend whom they are very comfortable with, but they may be aggressive with someone that they do not like or respect.
4. Divide the class into groups of 2-3 students.
5. Give each group a **Communication Scenario (1-5)** handout.
6. Instruct groups to read the scenario and provide a written answer to the questions provided. Students may find this sentence starter helpful when writing their assertive responses: "I feel _____ when _____ and I want _____."
7. Have each group pair up with another group.
8. Ask each combined group to share their scenarios and answers with each other.
9. Give groups time to practice assertive behaviour. They can use the assertive communication responses that have been written to role play conversations with each other.
10. Debrief using the following questions:
 - **What type of communication is most effective in solving difficulties within relationships?**
 - **Why don't the other forms of communication work as well?**
 - **What are the best examples of assertive communication from each combined group? (Have students read the scenario and the response.)**

Encourage students to reflect upon the type of communication that best represents their own behaviour and think about ways to use assertive communication within their relationships.

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:

- identify passive, aggressive and assertive communication?

Skills:

- practice assertive communication skills to deal with difficulties in relationships?

Attitudes:

- accept the benefits of using assertive communication?



**Talking about your
feelings**

**Respecting the other
person's friends and
activities**

**Considering the other
person's opinions and
feelings**



**Respecting differences in
other people**

**Stating differences of
opinion**

**Having an equal say in the
relationship**



**Figuring out a solution
that is good for
both of you**

**Believing one partner has
more rights
than the other**

**Shouting or yelling when
you are angry with the
other person**



Using the silent treatment

**Pestering the other
person until you get
what you want**

**Pouting to get
what you want**



Controlling the other person's relationships/friends/ activities

**Name-calling
(putdowns)**

Threatening harm

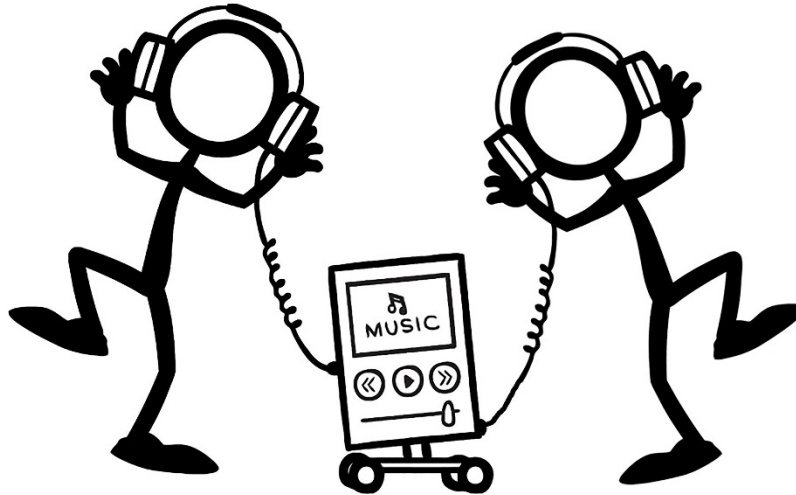


**Intimidating by
threatening/ destroying
property**

**Being extremely jealous
and possessive of the
other person**

**Pushing, hitting, or
holding the other person
against their will**

Song Lyrics: Healthy or Unhealthy?



1. As a group, choose a song about a relationship between two people. Print the lyrics and attach them to this page.

Song Title:

Artist:

2. What is the song about?

3. Describe the relationship between the two people in the song.

Name: _____

4. Is the relationship healthy or unhealthy? Give an example that supports your opinion.

5. What lyrics, if any, might suggest an unhealthy or abusive relationship?

6. Do the lyrics suggest violent solutions to problems? If so, what do you think about the suggested solutions?

7. What would be a healthier way to relate?

Types of Communication

Assertive:

- stand up for their rights without denying other people theirs
- respect themselves as well as others
- ask for what they want in a straightforward manner
- express their emotions (both positive and negative) in a healthy way

Passive:

- give in and say yes even when they don't want to
- put the feelings and concerns of others before their own
- keep their concerns to themselves

Aggressive:

- think of themselves first, at the expense of others
- dominate others
- use threats or force

Passive-aggressive:

- may seem to agree to avoid confrontation (passive) but will manipulate others to say things for them, or say things behind someone's back (aggressive)

Communication Scenario 1

Corey wants to spend a quiet evening watching movies alone with Tendai. Tendai has decided to spend the evening out with friends. Corey is very disappointed at the thought of spending this Saturday evening without Tendai.

How could Corey express their disappointment to Tendai using:

Passive communication?

Aggressive communication?

Assertive communication?

Communication Scenario 2

Campbell has had a crush on Tebogo for several weeks. Campbell finds Tebogo very good looking as well as friendly and sociable. Every day they travel to school together. Campbell would like to ask Tebogo out.

How could Campbell do this using:

Passive communication?

Aggressive communication?

Assertive communication?

Communication Scenario 3

Morgan and Rowan are dating. Morgan decides to wear shorts on a hot summer day. Rowan thinks they are too short and tells Morgan to change.

How could Morgan respond to Rowan using:

Passive communication?

Aggressive communication?

Assertive communication?

Communication Scenario 4

River and Amari have been going out for several months. They are talking about the day they plan to have sex for the first time. River explains that they will have to use a condom. Amari insists that there is no danger of any sexually transmitted infections, so they don't need to.

How could River react to this using:

Passive communication?

Aggressive communication?

Assertive communication?

Communication Scenario 5

Spencer and Jaden have been going out for a few weeks. Jaden is constantly trying to kiss and touch Spencer in public. Spencer feels uncomfortable and wants Jaden to stop.

How might Spencer talk to Jaden about their feelings using:

Passive communication?

Aggressive communication?

Assertive communication?