

# IDENTIFYING UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

## Lesson 4

GRADE  
**CALM**

### LEARNER OUTCOME<sup>1</sup> P10:

Describe the skills, attitudes and behaviours for building, maintaining and enhancing healthy, positive relationships.

Develop strategies for identifying unhealthy relationships.

Generate a list of ways to provide support to others.

Identify strategies for dealing with significant change and loss in a relationship and for ending a relationship.

### LEARNER OUTCOME<sup>2</sup> P11

Identify expectations and commitments in various relationships.

Explain the role of trust and ways to establish trust in a relationship.

Develop strategies for dealing with jealousy.



### MATERIALS:

1. **CARDS: Relationship Statement**
2. **SLIDE: Know the Signs: Healthy Relationships**
3. **SLIDE: Know the Signs: Unhealthy Relationships**
4. **SLIDE: Know the Signs: Abusive Relationships**
5. **HANDOUT: Jen and Mark – A Case Study**



### INTRODUCTION:

For teens 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 settle for unhealthy relationships and find it difficult to communicate their concerns to their partners. This lesson encourages students to identify some of the signs of an unhealthy relationship, communication skills to help deal with the problems, and when necessary, strategies for ending relationships.



**APPROACHES/STRATEGIES:**

**A. GROUND RULES (5-10 min)**

Ensure ground rules are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can promote a successful lesson.

**B. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS – KNOWING THE SIGNS GROUP ACTIVITY<sup>3</sup> (25-30 min)**

*Students identify healthy and unhealthy characteristics of a dating relationship.*

1. Introduce the activity by stating that sometimes it is necessary to step back and evaluate our romantic relationships. Often we cannot see the unhealthy trends when we are in the relationship.
2. Place the **cards** that say **HEALTHY** and **UNHEALTHY** around the room, attaching them to the wall if possible.
3. Hand out the **Relationship Statement** cards giving one or two to each person. Ask the students to place their cards under the HEALTHY and UNHEALTHY cards around the room.
4. Lead a group discussion about the card placements using the following questions as a guide:
  - a. **What characterizes a healthy relationship?**
    - show the **Know the Signs: Healthy Relationships** slide.
  - b. **What characterizes an unhealthy relationship?**
    - show the **Know the Signs: Unhealthy Relationships** slide
  - c. **Why is it sometimes difficult for someone to acknowledge that they are in an unhealthy relationship?**
    - The expression “love is blind” is often true. Someone may feel they are so in love that they do not look deeply at the problems and stay in the relationship for the reasons below.
  - d. **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



CALM Lesson Plan 5 explores violence in relationships.



Some students may identify their own relationships as unhealthy as a result of these discussions. It is important to be sensitive towards these students and to be aware of agencies and services that you may be able to refer them to. Please refer to the [Community Resources](#) link under Resources on this website.

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.

e. **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.
- **Show Know the Signs: Abusive Relationships** slide.
- If someone feels that their relationship is unhealthy they should talk to their partner and make it clear the relationship will end unless things change. 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.



Students with differing abilities experience different types of relationships and may need to spend extra time exploring boundary setting.

**C. JEN AND MARK – A CASE STUDY**

*Students identify unhealthy aspects of relationships and explore how those relationships can be successfully ended.*

1. Give each student a copy of the **Jen and Mark–A Case Study** handout.
2. Students should work in pairs or small groups to address the questions on the handout.
3. Ask for group feedback using the following points to guide you.
  - Unhealthy or abusive behaviours Jen might be experiencing might include:
    - believing he has more rights
    - shouting or yelling
    - pouting to get what he wants
    - using the “silent treatment”
    - dominating and controlling Jen
    - trying to keep Jen away from her friends
    - name-calling and put downs
    - breaking Jen’s possessions
    - threatening harm
    - intimidating through physical abuse or destruction of property
    - extreme jealousy and possessiveness
    - pushing, hitting, biting, burning
    - restraining Jen against her will
    - using scare tactics

- forcing sexual touching
- using sexual putdowns
- forcing sex (assault)
- Other reasons a person might have for ending a relationship include:
  - no longer caring for the other person, finding someone else, having increasingly different interests, realizing their first impressions were wrong, constant fighting, parents' disapproval, having too many differences, moving away.
- Jen should end the relationship by talking in person (rather than on the phone or by writing a note);
  - choosing a comfortable, safe place; by trying not to lose her temper; stating feelings openly and honestly.
- Jen may find it difficult to end the relationship because;
  - she may still love him, she may be afraid, she may blame herself and keep trying to make things right, she may feel that she will never find someone else.
- The process of breaking up may be difficult for Jen but it is important for her to proceed because;
  - Mark is likely to continue with his abusive behaviours and over time it may escalate.
- The type of advice a friend may give to Jen will vary depending upon students' own experiences. Ask students how they would approach a friend if they felt that friend's relationship was unhealthy.

#### **D. SUMMARY (5 min)**

*Students review unhealthy relationships and safety planning in ending those relationships.*

- It is normal to have intense feelings about ending a relationship (whether it's your choice to end the relationship or not).
- As well as negative feelings, people often have positive feelings e.g. relief, sense of freedom when a relationship ends.
- Talk over your feelings and decision to break up with someone you trust beforehand e.g. a friend, parent.
- Think safety at all times. If you suspect that the other person could become aggressive break up in a public place.



#### **QUESTION BOX (10min)**

Have students fill out questions and address them next class.

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## 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?

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## STUDENT ASSESSMENT

During the lesson, did students:

### Knowledge:

- Describe how relationships progress and change over time?
- Identify unhealthy characteristics of relationships?

### Skills:

- Develop strategies for identifying unhealthy relationships?
- Identify strategies for ending relationships

### Attitudes:

- Discuss the reasons teens may stay in relationships and accept that unhealthy relationships can be damaging?
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1. Alberta Education. (2002). *Career and Life Management Guide to Implementation*. Retrieved from: [http://education.alberta.ca/media/313521/calm\\_pos.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/313521/calm_pos.pdf)
2. Alberta Education. (2002). *Career and Life Management Guide to Implementation*. Retrieved from: [http://education.alberta.ca/media/313521/calm\\_pos.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/313521/calm_pos.pdf)
3. Adapted from Canadian Federation for Sexual Health. (2005). *Beyond the Basics: A Source book on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*

# HEALTHY

# UNHEALTHY

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It is okay with you when your partner spends time alone with friends or family.

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It is okay with your partner when you spend time alone with friends or family.

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Your partner likes the way you look and act and tells you so.

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You both decide how you spend your time together.

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Your partner has the power to make you feel bad and uses it.

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Your partner pressures you to do sexual acts you don't want to do.

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When you refuse to do certain sexual acts, your partner puts you down.

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Your partner has threatened to hurt you or has hurt you.

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You usually feel happy in this relationship.

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You are afraid of your partner's temper, so you avoid making him/her angry.

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Your partner scares you by driving fast, drinking too much or doing other risky things.

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Your partner says, “I can’t live without you” and it scares you that it might be true.

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You worry that the relationship might end and s/he would do anything to keep it going.

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You think you can make your partner’s problems go away.

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Your partner believes that jealousy is a sign of love.

You have both agreed that you are a couple and trust each other to stick to it.

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You can both be honest about your feelings and talk about them freely.

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You and your partner are safe from sexually transmitted infections (STI) and/or unintended pregnancy

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## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CHECKLIST

People in healthy relationships have the following characteristics:

- listen to you and take your feelings and ideas seriously
- talk openly and honestly with you about what matters to them
- never use threats of harm, violence or suicide to get his/her own way
- never hit, punch, kick, bite, slap, push or otherwise strike out in anger or jealousy
- not try to control what you do, where you go or who you talk to
- respect you, and say good things to you and about you
- enjoy spending time with you, and show it whether alone with you or in a group
- trust you, and earn your trust by keeping your confidences
- allow you to enjoy the activities and people that matter to you
- accepts your limits about sexual activity, every time.

Adapted from Canadian Red Cross. (2011). *RespectED violence prevention: Healthy relationship checklist*. Retrieved from: <http://www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=506&tid=030>

## UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CHECKLIST

People in unhealthy relationships have the following characteristics:

- Believing one person has more rights than the other.
- Shouting or yelling when you are angry at your partner.
- Using the silent treatment.
- Pestering your partner until you get what you want.
- Pouting to get what you want.
- Excessive calling, texting or emailing.

Adapted from National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline (2010). *Love is respect*. Retrieved from <http://www.loveisrespect.org>

## QUESTIONS THAT MAY HELP IDENTIFY AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

- Are you frightened by your partner's temper?
- Are you afraid to disagree?
- Are you constantly apologizing for your partner's behaviour, especially when they treated you badly?
- Do you have to justify everything you do, every place you go, or every person you see to avoid your partner's anger?
- Does your partner put you down, but then tell you that s/he loves you?
- Have you ever been hit, kicked, shoved, or had things thrown at you?
- Do you not see friends or family because of your partner's jealousy?
- Have you been forced into having sex when you didn't want to?
- Are you afraid to break up because your partner has threatened to hurt you or themselves?

Canadian Red Cross. (2011). *RespectED violence prevention*: <http://www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=30602&tid=001>

## JEN & MARK: A CASE STUDY

Jen and Mark met for the first time in their Block 1 art class. As they worked together on art projects they began to know each other better and started to talk about more personal things. As their friendship grew they started to realize that they were increasingly attracted to each other. They started to date and spend more and more time together and found that they could communicate openly and honestly. But several months later, it became apparent to Jen that Mark was changing. His way of talking to her, his treatment of her (not only when they were alone but also around their other friends) and even the physical aspects of their relationship were all taking what might be called an unhealthy direction. Jen, and several of her other friends were starting to realize that she might have to end this relationship.

### **1. What are some of the unhealthy or even abusive behaviours that Jen might be seeing in Mark?**

Jen decided to give Mark a while longer to change his behaviours and even told him how she felt when he said and did some of the things that were a problem for her. Mark said that he was sorry and began telling her that he could not imagine life without her. Things did not change and in fact Mark became increasingly more controlling, insisting that she not spend time with her friends and pressuring her to have sex. So Jen decided that she could no longer remain in the relationship. One or two of her friends who had been urging her to break up with mark were relieved. They offered to help her find the “best way” to end the relationship.

- 2. Jen has decided to end the relationship because it is becoming abusive.**
- 3. What other reasons might a person have for ending a relationship/friendship?**
- 4. Describe how Jen should end the relationship.**
- 5. Why might she find it difficult to easily end this relationship?**
- 6. Despite how difficult the breaking up process might be, why is it important that she proceed with it?**
- 7. If you were one of Jen’s friends, what advice would you give to her about handling the break-up?**