Fundamentals of Teaching Relationships & Consent Core Concept

Relationships are multi-faceted and unique to the people in them. Important skills for relationships include communication, navigating boundaries and consent, and identifying supportive, unsupportive, and potentially abusive behaviors.

RATIONALE

How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?

- It is important for teens to identify characteristics of supportive, unsupportive and abusive behaviors in relationships, and to be able to distinguish between them.
- Many young people have experienced or observed violence and trauma in relationships. We must actively create lessons that avoid inadvertently retraumatizing or triggering these youth.
- Using terms like “healthy” and “unhealthy” may alienate some students who have primarily seen or experienced “unhealthy” behaviors.
- It is essential to identify and confront victim blaming when discussing abusive relationships.
- Relationship education should include the following topics: seeking and giving consent, communication, negotiation, boundary-setting, conflict management and resolution, and accessing accurate information and resources.
- Everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

TALKING POINTS

What do we say?

- Consent is when all partners agree to engage in any kind of sexual activity. Consent can be communicated with words and body language.
- Consent is a requirement for all sexual activity. This is true regardless of relationship status. For example, consent is still required between people in long-term relationships.
- Most relationship behaviors exist on a spectrum between supportive and unsupportive.[1]
- Established boundaries, mutual respect, and good communication are components of supportive relationships. [2]
- It is important to be able to identify abusive behaviors in relationships.
- Abuse is not just physical. It can be verbal, emotional, psychological or financial. Warning signs of an abusive relationship can include insults, possessiveness, pressure, jealousy, or verbal, emotional, or physical abuse.
- People can experience violence or trauma in any relationship at any point in their lives, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, race, or relationships status (including married people).

KNOW THE FACTS

FACT: Nearly one in 12 adolescents in the US is a victim of physical, emotional, or sexual violence from a dating partner.[3]

FACT: A supportive relationship can have unsupportive behaviors, and an unsupportive relationship can have supportive behaviors.

FACT: Consent to one activity does not equal consent to another activity, or to the same activity at a different time.

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COMMONLY ASEKD QUESTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS & CONSENT

I'm worried my friend is in an abusive relationship, but I'm afraid to talk to anyone about it. What should I do?

- This is a great question and a very common one. It can feel vulnerable or scary to talk about dating abuse, and some folks worry that whomever they are talking to will be judgmental, or just not understand. However, if you are concerned about your friend's relationship, it is important to talk to someone you can trust. If you are not sure if you have someone that you know, there are places in this community where you can talk to a person who will be helpful and not judgmental. One resource is Loveisrespect.org and they are available 24/7. You can also talk to your school counselor or another trusted adult.

How can I figure out if my relationship is abusive?

- Relationships are complicated and it can be hard to tell whether a relationship is abusive. A supportive relationship is marked by things like mutual respect, honesty, support, trust, and good communication. Some warning signs of an abusive relationship are insults, put downs, possessiveness, pressure to do something you don't want to do, extreme jealousy, and of course verbal, emotional or physical abuse. If you have doubts about your relationship, it's important to talk to someone who can help you. One great resources is Loveisrespect.org and they are available 24/7.

To learn more, take the

Spark*ED Teaching Relationships & Consent self-paced course

[1,2] Healthy Relationship High School Educators Toolkit. Love is Respect.

[3] About Teen Dating Violence, CDC's 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

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