

Core knowledge content

Relationships

Relationships can develop with a number of people, family members, friends, co-workers, as well as people you decide to date. Healthy relationships are an important of growing up and can be rewarding.

Emotional, Social and Cognitive Changes

Some changes that occur during puberty you can see and others you cannot. During puberty, a child's brain is 'under construction'. Construction will not be complete until the early twenties and these changes will result in emotional, social and cognitive changes as youth mature. The changes might affect a child's relationship with others.

Students may want to make decisions quicker than before but they might not always be healthiest decisions. They often want more independence, which may influence the decisions they make about relationships, substance use, and smoking. In fact, they may assume that by making certain decisions, they would be demonstrating their "grown up" status; however, the exact opposite is happening. Students develop a greater desire to be accepted/liked by their peer group; fitting in becomes more important. Puberty is also a time when students may experience increased peer pressure and an interest in more romantic relationships. It can feel very exciting, but also confusing. These feelings are common and most students are experiencing the same thing. It is important to remind students to be true to their values and beliefs; be clear about what values are important to them; and use assertive communication.

Healthy Relationships

In a positive relationship, an individual can still be their own person, while being part of a couple. To be in a healthy relationship you need to feel good about yourself.

- Each student has the right to live in a world that is free from danger, risk or injury - a world that feels safe.
- Each student is a special person, with many talents and qualities. Believe in yourself and accept yourself for who you are – we all have faults and no one is perfect.

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- Good communication, decision-making skills, and problem solving skills are key to healthy relationships. Take the time to evaluate skills and feel free to ask for help.
- Each student has the right to seek help from a respected, trusted adult if they do not feel safe and supported.
- Each student should remember to prioritize their independence if/when in a romantic relationship

A healthy relationship makes a person feel good about themselves and their partner. They can have fun together and still be themselves. All relationships are different, but healthy relationships share at least five things in common - the **S.H.A.R.E.** qualities.

Safety: In a healthy relationship, a person feels safe. They do not have to worry that their partner will harm them physically or emotionally, and they are not tempted to harm them. A person can change their mind about something - like having sex - without being afraid of how their partner will respond.

Honesty: A person does not hide anything important from their partner, and can say what they think without fear of being ridiculed. They can admit to being wrong and working with their partner to resolve disagreements by talking honestly.

Acceptance: They accept each other as they are. They appreciate their partner's unique qualities, such as shyness or boldness, and do not try to "fix" them. If there are qualities a person does not like about their partner, then maybe they should not be with that person.

Respect: Both partners think highly of each other. They do not feel superior or inferior to their partner in important ways. They respect each other's right to have separate opinions and ideas.

Enjoyment: A good relationship is not just about how two people treat each other - it also has to be enjoyable. In a healthy relationship, they can play, laugh together and have fun.

These principals can be used in all types of relationships: relationships with friends, parents, romantic partners, and others. Having a healthy relationship with someone means knowing who they are - their good and their not-so-good qualities. It's respecting and often communicating their values, choices and feelings. This means respecting space and time - knowing that the other person is emotionally there, even when they can't be physically beside you.

Loving someone means knowing who they are (their good qualities and their not-so-good qualities). It is respecting and often communicating their values, choices and feelings. Love means being respectful and trustful – knowing that their partner is emotionally there, even when they cannot be physically beside you. A person may or may not choose to start a sexual relationship, even when they feel they love that person. Remember that there are many ways to express your affection for someone. Choosing not to have sex does not mean you do not love each other. It just means that you can and have found other ways to express your feelings. For instance, spending quality time together, hugging/kissing, words of affirmation (i.e., you look nice today, I love you, etc.), and other ways.

Qualities of a healthy relationship:

Everyone has the right to be involved in healthy relationships, and these relationships have a lot of qualities including:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Trust
- Doing things together and apart
- Intimacy
- Assertiveness
- Positive self-esteem
- Mutual as well as separate goals and interests
- Communication in all directions
- Equality: No one is the boss
- Safety - physical, sexual, and emotional
- Acts of kindness, caring and support

A bad relationship is one in which a person does not feel that they can be themselves, or when they feel pressured into doing things they are not comfortable with or that they would not normally do. To be able to know when a relationship is bad, a person needs to know who they are, what they want and what they are comfortable with.

Signs of an unhealthy relationship:

- You depend on the other person to feel important

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- Gossiping about the other partner/relationship
- Jealousy/insecurity/possessiveness, such as excessive calling, texting or emailing
- Inequality – believing one person has more rights than the other
- Constant shouting, yelling or name calling towards your partner
- Lack of communication
- Violence

One type of unhealthy relationship is an abusive relationship. Abusive relationships revolve around control, fear and lack of respect. Abusive relationships can involve threats, name-calling, blaming, guilt-tripping, jealous questioning, and violence.

Relationship Skills:

Communication

The ability to communicate effectively is an important skill for students to have. Communication is the exchange of thoughts, ideas and feelings with others, between two or more people. It is a basic component of human relationships. Communication is a two way process involving the sending and the receiving of a message.

Effective communication includes active listening, choosing our words carefully and matching them with our body language. It should be emphasized that listening is just as important as expressing one's ideas when interacting with someone. Active listening sends the message that they want the other person to understand what is being said and that the person they are speaking to is important to them. Being a good listener builds healthy relationships.

People communicate nonverbally (facial expressions, posture, hand movements) and verbally (talking). Listening is just as important as expressing ideas when interacting with someone. A healthy relationship takes work and communication.

Open communication is very important for setting limits and boundaries on what is or is not acceptable behaviour. Having conversations like this might be a little embarrassing at first, but if an individual does not discuss their limits and comfort level, they will not be able to make the best decisions for their relationship.

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Boundaries

Everyone has boundaries. Boundaries are the rules and limits we set in our lives. This could be as simple as saying 'yes' or 'no' to certain activities, commitments, or other actions. Boundaries are there to help keep us safe and comfortable, but these are different for everyone.

Boundaries might include how one balances their time at work, at home, with friends, and/or even with family. For some people, setting boundaries can be challenging, especially when they involve other people that we care for.

It is never acceptable to push someone else's boundaries, just as it is never okay for someone to push your boundaries. Your boundaries must be respected and you must respect others' boundaries. Remember, boundaries and consent are not one in the same. However, when talking about consent, boundaries should be discussed, especially in emotional, physical, and sexually intimate relationships.

For more information about boundaries and tips on expressing boundaries, check out the following: Doin' It. Understanding Ourselves – Boundaries.

<https://www.doinit.ca/relationships/boundaries/>.

Consent

Consent is giving permission for something to happen or entering into an agreement to do something.

- Consent for any sexual activity must be freely given
- Consent is not considered to be freely given if it follows from threats to personal safety, or threats to harm others.
- Consent cannot be given by someone who is intoxicated, unconscious, or otherwise considered incapable of giving their consent.
- The age of consent in Canada is 16; however, there are close in age expectations for 14 or 15 year olds and 12 or 13 year olds
 - A 14 or 15 year old can consent to sexual activity as long as the partner is **less than five years older** and there is no relationship of trust, authority or dependency or any other exploitation of the young person. This means that if

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- the partner is 5 years or older than the 14 or 15 year old, any sexual activity is a criminal offence.
- There is also a "close in age" exception for 12 and 13 year olds. A 12 or 13 year old can consent to sexual activity with a partner as long as the partner is **less than two years older** and there is no relationship of trust, authority or dependency or any other exploitation of the young person. This means that if the partner is 2 years or older than the 12 or 13 year old, any sexual activity is a criminal offence.
- Once sexual activity has begun, consent can be withdrawn at any time, and this can be indicated with either words or actions.

The age of consent refers to the age at which people are able to make their own decisions about sexual activity.

No always means no, even if the person has initially agreed to sexual activity.

Decision-making

When making a decision it is always important to be aware of all the possible consequences. A person then needs to consider what can be done to prevent negative consequences. Only after investigating all of this, can a person make a wise, informed decision. It is important to recognize that different cultures and religions support various values that influence our individual decisions.

Students need guidance as their brains develop, especially in the realm of controlling emotional impulses in order to make rational decisions. Their brains are "under construction" during adolescence. When it comes to deciding whether to ride in a car driven by an intoxicated friend, an adult can usually put aside their desire to conform and is more likely to make the rational decision against drunk driving. However, a teenager may not be capable of such a rational approach, and the emotional feelings of friendship may be likely to win the battle.

I.D.E.A.L. model

People make decisions all the time, including when you are in a relationship. When making a decision it is always important to be aware of all the possible consequences and ways to

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avoid negative consequences. Below are a few of the possible consequences that might occur.

Physical consequences of sexual activity may include pregnancy, sexual transmitted infections (STIs), and the increased risk of other diseases such as Human Papillomavirus (HPV).

Relationship consequences may mean that the relationship changes. A couple may spend less time talking, building mutual interests, and sharing good times with friends in favour of sexual activity. Relationships with friends and family may also be affected. One partner may enjoy or want to be physical more than the other is, so the balance of power in the relationship may change.

Emotional consequences and psychological impact of becoming physically intimate with another person needs to be highlighted. Someone may have decided to be abstinent until recently and may feel guilty or disappointed after the first sexual experience. They may feel that they have betrayed their values or beliefs. If pregnancy or sexual transmitted infections (STIs) occur, the emotional consequences may be far reaching.

I	Identify the problem.
D	Describe all the possible solutions and gather information using people, books and other resources or reflect on past experiences, etc.
E	Evaluate the consequences of each solution (pros and cons).
A	Act – Choose a solution and try it!
L	Learn – Did it work? Why? Why not? If it does not work, start process again, keep “DEAL”ing.

Once students have made their decision, they need to communicate that decision effectively to others.

IDEAL Example

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Holly is in Grade 7 and her best friend is Deedee. They do everything together and Holly spends a lot of time over at Deedee's house. Deedee has an older brother Nick, who is in high school. Nick is always teasing Deedee and Holly about the changes their bodies are going through. Holly is feeling uncomfortable with the attention she is receiving from Nick.

I (Identify the problem): The problem is Nick is making comments about Holly and Deedee's changing bodies and Holly feels uncomfortable.

D (Describe all the possible solutions and gather information): Holly could tell Nick that she doesn't feel comfortable that he is making these comments. Holly could tell Deedee that she doesn't appreciate her older brother (Nick) making those comments. If Holly does tell Nick and/or Deedee and nothing changes, she should reach out to a trusted adult (i.e., parent) and tell them.

E (Evaluate the consequences of each solution):

Pros to telling Nick: He might stop making the uncomfortable comments and unwanted remarks.

Cons to telling Nick: It might make the situation worse and he could continue making the comments.

Pros to telling a trusted adult: The adult is in a position of trust, authority and power, so they will be able to put an end to Nick's comment.

Cons to telling a trusted adult: Since Holly told an adult, if the trusted adult says something to Nick it might actually make the situation worse.

A (Act – Choose a solution and try it!): *This step would need to be completed with the students.*

L (Learn – Did it work? Why? Why not?): *This step would need to be completed with the students.*

Sources of support

- Parents/guardian, other trusted adult family member (e.g. aunt, uncle, grandparent, godparent, step-parent)
- Teachers, counselors, child youth workers, school nurse, religious leader

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- Health care providers (Doctors, nurse practitioners, pharmacist, nurse)
- [Niagara Region Sexual Health Centres](#)
- [Kids Help Phone](#) 1-800-668-6868; Youth Line LGBTQ: 1-800-268-9688
- [The Niagara Sexual Assault Centre \(CARSA\)](#) (niagarasexualassaultcentre.com)

Abuse

There are many different types of abuse. They can be broken down to include neglect, which can be further broken down to either physical which is a failure to meet the child's physical needs (adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, health care and safety) or it can be emotional, which is a failure to meet the child's emotional needs (affection and belonging).

Physical abuse is any act that results in physical trauma or injury to any part of a child's body (hitting, burning or shaking). It may happen once or many times. Emotional abuse is attacking the child's self-concept and self-worth, which will interfere with healthy child development. It may take various forms including but not limited to: verbal attacks, threats, humiliation, unrealistic expectations, rejection, inappropriate accusations, corruption (allowing a child to use alcohol or drugs, participate in criminal activity), being ignored, isolated or restrained, exposure to violence or severe conflict and chronic exposure to alcohol/drug abuse.

Sexual abuse is an inappropriate exposure of a child to sexual contact, activity or behaviour caused by anyone, including a parent, relative, friend, or stranger. It can take on many various forms including any sexual touching or intercourse, obscene phone calls or e-mails, exposure to pornography or flashing, sexual exploitation (engaging a child in sexual activities for exchange of money, gifts, shelter, food, etc.; using a child in pornography; luring a child via the internet for sexual purposes).

Signs of 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

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- 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

It is important for students to be able to identify what they consider to be healthy and unhealthy characteristics of a relationship. Students may define what they perceive to be healthy or unhealthy characteristics based on their own values, beliefs and relationship experiences.

Resources

[Alberta Health Services. Teaching Sexual Health](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca) (www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

[Kids Help Phone](tel:18006686868) (1-800-668-6868)

[Niagara Region Sexual Health Centers](#)

[Physical & Health Education Canada. Always Changing.](http://www.phecanada.ca/alwayschanging)
([http://www.phecanada.ca/alwayschanging.](http://www.phecanada.ca/alwayschanging))

[Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, Sex & U](http://www.sexandu.ca) (<http://www.sexandu.ca>)