

Category 3:
Building Positive Relationships

Meeting 5

Dating, Relating

Background

Adolescence is a time of amazing growth and development, emotionally, physically, and sexually. There is an increased emphasis on the importance of both friendships and dating relationships, with teens relying more on their peer group to define what's "normal" and accepted. Although some students may not yet be dating nor have an interest in dating, teenagers can benefit from understanding how healthy dating relationships are most often based on the same key elements as healthy friendships. This class meeting explores the elements of safe, healthy, caring dating relationships and provides a framework for students to discuss some common difficulties that can arise between dating partners, including the parallels between dating abuse and bullying. There are two activities, which will likely stretch across two sessions.

Learner Outcomes


By the end of this session, students will be able to

- identify qualities of a safe, healthy dating relationship
- discuss ways in which important features of a dating partner may also be important features in healthy friendships
- discuss parallels between dating abuse and bullying behavior
- consider difficulties that can occur in a dating relationship and ways to address them


This class meeting is adapted from *Safe Dates: An Adolescent Dating Abuse Prevention Curriculum*, second edition, by V. Foshee and S. Langwick (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2010).

Materials Needed

Activity 1:

- Dating, Relating Top Five, one per student 

Activity 2:

- Dating Scenarios, one per student 
- Pencils; colored pens or pencils

Preparation Needed

Activity 1:

- Print Dating, Relating Top Five from the CD-ROM. Each student will need a copy (plus three extra copies for the class tally).

Activity 2:

- Print Dating Scenarios from the CD-ROM. Each student will need a copy.

Class Meeting Outline

Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Some students begin dating in high school, some earlier, and some later. Dating relationships are personal, so it's not always easy to talk openly about them. Like many of the other discussions we've had about the importance of how people treat each other at school, it's also important to think about how people interact within healthy, caring, respectful dating relationships, even if you're not yet in a dating situation.
2. The word "dating" may mean different things to different people. Let's first discuss what we mean by "dating." Ask students for activities that are examples of dating. Include situations like groups of boys and girls doing an activity together, or two people taking a walk, or simply "hanging out" together. Ask what language teens use to describe dating and dating partners. You may use their terminology (if appropriate) or state that you'll be using the words "dating relationship" and "dating partner" during discussion.

3. For this class meeting, "dating" will be defined as any situation where you are doing an activity with someone with whom you have a mutual romantic interest.
4. Each of you will have an opportunity to think about important qualities of a dating partner.

Activity 1 (10 minutes)

1. Give each student a copy of Dating, Relating Top Five.
2. Take a few minutes to circle the five traits that are most important to you in a dating relationship. Then take a few minutes and put an X through five traits that you most dislike in a dating partner.
3. There are no right or wrong answers. Do this individually and don't talk with others while you're working. Don't put your name on this paper—it's anonymous—but do check your gender at the top.
4. We'll tally the results to come up with the top five characteristics for boys, girls, and our class as a whole. We'll also look at the qualities you feel are least desirable in a dating relationship.
5. Allow 5 to 10 minutes for students to select their top five traits and bottom five traits on their worksheet. Collect the sheets and ask two student volunteers to tally results for boys and for girls on blank sheets of paper, using hatch marks. They should use different colored pens or pencils to distinguish most liked and least liked. Have them also combine boy-girl responses on a third sheet for a whole class tally.
6. When everyone has finished, move to the meeting circle while the student volunteers complete the tallies. The student volunteers will then write the top five and bottom five responses for boys, girls, and the whole class on the board.



Activity 1 Discussion Questions (20 minutes)

1. Was it easy or difficult to choose your top five features? Why?
2. Was it harder to pick the top five or the bottom five? Why?
3. If the student volunteers are still tallying, ask the group: **What do you think the top five features selected by our class might be?** Compare student assumptions to actual tallies.
4. Were there certain characteristics listed that you would definitely *not* want in a dating partner? Which ones? Why? Discuss ways these can be potential "red flags" for a relationship that is unhealthy or not a good match for them.

5. What were the differences and similarities between the ways boys and girls responded? Why do you think that is so?
6. What role do these top five traits play in helping build a healthy dating relationship?
7. How do the top five traits compare to traits you'd also value in a good friend? Ask students which traits they look for in a close friend. Highlight the importance of genuine friendship between dating partners. When dating someone, you might ask yourself, "Is my partner truly my friend?"

Activity 2 (15 minutes)

1. One important feature of a caring relationship is that the other person tries to help you feel good about yourself. Think of caring people in your own life (perhaps family members, friends, a special adult) who've helped you feel good about yourself. Think of the ways they treated you.
2. Dating relationships involve caring for another person. But sometimes, even though someone says they care about us, their actions might be sending another message. It's normal for relationships to have difficulties at some time or another—so it's important to talk about and practice how we might deal with problems when they happen.
3. Let's look at two different dating situations. We'll consider which aspects of each situation are working and which aren't.
4. Distribute the Dating Scenarios handout to each student. Use the text below to read each scenario, and process using the accompanying questions.

Teacher Tip



Students may feel more comfortable if they first pair with the person next to them for a 1–2 minute conversation before processing with the large group.

Scenario 1

Sierra and Manny have been going out for four months, and they've been having a terrific time together. Manny has his driver's license and often borrows his mom's car so he can be with Sierra, at least every other evening. During the past few weeks, Manny's been arriving about a half-hour later than the time he'd told Sierra he'd be over. Sierra is getting frustrated with Manny, and wonders why he can't just show up when he says he will. Manny feels Sierra is overreacting.

Teacher Tip

Have students think of the top five features of a dating partner to see whether those are related to their feelings about the scenario.

Teacher Tip

When students raise the issue of communication between partners, ask them to explore the elements of good communication: staying calm, keeping a respectful tone of voice, being honest, sharing feelings openly, starting with "I feel" rather than "you . . .," listening attentively while the other person is speaking, asking questions to understand the other person's point of view, being specific, suggesting possible solutions that are reasonable for both people.

Scenario 1 Questions

What are the issues here?

What may have been the reason Manny was late? How does it make Sierra feel when Manny does something different than what he says he's going to do?

What are some ways to address the concerns in this situation?

Scenario 2

Chris and Taylor have just started dating. They've been out a few times over the past two weeks and Chris now sees their relationship as "exclusive," meaning they will only date each other, but they've never discussed this. Taylor hasn't been in an exclusive relationship before and believes that high school isn't a time to get serious with someone. Taylor thinks it's fine to see someone else if the opportunity is there. Taylor's attitude is: Why not date around? Besides, there's really no time for a serious relationship, especially with all the other commitments, including schoolwork, sports, and close friends to hang out with.

Scenario 2 Questions

How usual is this kind of situation? What do you think needs to happen in order to avoid confusion, misunderstandings, and hurt feelings?

What are your thoughts about more serious, exclusive relationships for students your age? Remind students that people can have different needs and values, and what's "right" for one person may not be "right" for another, depending on their needs, circumstances, interests, and age.

What are advantages and disadvantages to being part of an exclusive couple versus dating around or not dating at all?

Activity 2 Discussion Questions (20 minutes)

1. What do caring people do that help make us feel good about ourselves? List students' ideas on the board or on a chart. (*They respect me, trust me, listen to me, spend time with me, help me during hard times,*

- believe in me, respect my opinion, encourage me to succeed, accept me for who I am.)*
2. How are these examples of ways people care also important in healthy dating relationships?
 3. What things can go wrong within dating relationships? What are common concerns? *(Disagreements, lack of trust, jealousy, different needs or values, unclear communication, one person wants to become more seriously involved than the other, not having much in common, spending all their time together, ignoring good friends, pressure to become sexually involved, pressure to use alcohol or drugs, one person wants to control the other, the relationship becomes abusive.)*
 4. What are some "red flags" that might indicate that a dating relationship may be unhealthy or the wrong choice for us? *(When someone is physically hurt, threatened, put down, disrespected, manipulated, feels afraid, feels isolated from friends; one partner is jealous or tries to control the other.)* How are these situations similar to bullying situations?
 5. What can you do if you feel that a relationship is unhealthy or the wrong match for you? Discuss tactful and respectful ways to break up or make changes in the relationship. Students may need to role-play these situations.
 6. Red flags tell us to trust one's instincts: if something seems wrong, it probably is. Dating abuse is a very serious and important topic that we'll discuss in more detail in another class meeting. Refer to curriculum materials such as Hazelden's *Safe Dates* for more guidance on how to have these conversations with students.
 7. Good relationships are built with good communication. Whether you are communicating with parents, teachers, friends, your boss, or a date, good communication skills, including listening with your full attention, are important for building mutual trust and respect. What are some examples of good communication skills? Talk about specific examples of open, effective, and respectful communication.

Wrap-Up

1. We've considered the kinds of traits that are important in a healthy dating relationship. We know that there will be some difficulties and challenges in any caring relationship from time to time.
2. Be thinking about how you want to be treated by a dating partner, or even by a good friend. You have the right to decide how you'll allow

others to treat you, and if you're not getting your Top Five, the things that are really important to you, you can make choices about whether to stay in a relationship. Being healthy depends on having healthy relationships with others. And friendship may just be the foundation for healthy dating.

Curriculum Connections

Health/Physical Education/Sexuality Education:

- Invite a representative from a community health center or domestic violence agency to speak to the class about healthy teen dating relationships, communication, and setting boundaries in intimate relationships.
Have students research and report on teen sexual behavior, from 1950 to the present.

Psychology/Social Sciences:

- Have students research gender stereotypes and their potential impact on dating relationships. Expand on the topics of verbal and nonverbal communication and the importance of effective communication skills. Allow students to role-play various communication styles, practices, and skills.

Dating, Relating Top Five

I am: _____ male _____ female

Instructions:

1. Circle your five most-liked traits in a dating partner.
2. Cross out your five least-liked traits in a dating partner.

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Good sense of humor | Jealous |
| Right age | Understands me |
| Kind to you/others | Outgoing |
| Adventurous | Unique |
| Considerate | Nice dresser |
| Athletic | The right height (tall, short, same height as me) |
| Independent | Same interests as me |
| Likes my friends | Strong |
| Smart | Good student |
| Confident | Energetic |
| Trusting | Affectionate |
| Takes charge | Committed |
| Romantic | Keeps secrets |
| Bossy | Reliable |
| Good listener | Intimidating |
| Dependent on me | Attractive |
| Open communicator | Tells me the truth |
| Popular | Demanding |
| Shows feelings | Quiet |
| Puts me on a pedestal | Gives me space |
| Rich | Adventurous |
| Opinionated | |
| Honest | |

Dating Scenarios

Scenario 1

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Scenario 2

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