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Relationships and Communication Lesson Plan

Objectives

During this session, participants will be able to do the following.

1. Understand characteristics of healthy romantic relationships
2. Demonstrate knowledge of how to apply effective communication skills to relationships and sexual activities
3. Recognize the importance of autonomous decision-making and self-advocacy in sexual and romantic relationships

Audience: 6th grade

Topic: healthy relationships and communication

Materials

- Printed Handouts
- Pencils
- Computer
- Projector

Preparation and Background Materials-

Describe what the facilitator, or educator needs to do to complete this lesson successfully.

Provide resources they need to read (books, articles, etc.) before completing the lesson.

- <http://journalofpositivesexuality.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Introducing-Multidisciplinary-Framework-of-Positive-Sexuality-Williams-Thomas-Prior-Walters.pdf>
- <http://www.teachconsent.org/#ask>
- <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/1999-04222-012>
- https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233895997_The_Joy_of_Romance_Healthy_Adolescent_Relationships_as_an_Educational_Agenda
- https://dibbleinstitute.org/Documents/research_facts_romantic_0707.pdf
- <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/component/content/585?task=view>

We suggest that the teacher who will be facilitating this lesson explore certain outside resources in order to be as prepared as possible to deliver this lesson with the appropriate tone and teaching strategy. First off, we know that approaching topics like sex and relationships from a positive perspective creates a better learning environment for all students, and produces better results. Sex

positivity in this sense refers to using affirming, empowering, and inclusive language so that students feel like active participants in learning and in their own life decisions. Research states that in an environment where risks involving sexuality are acknowledged as well as the fact that everyone has the right to their own choice and pleasure, a more positive, free space to say and ask any questions is created. (Williams, Thomas, Prior, & Walters, 2015). Our facilitator should read the article “Introducing a Multidisciplinary Framework of Positive Sexuality” so they can become better prepared to talk in a positive way about sexuality and the effects it will have on their audience.

One aspect of sexual relationships that needs to be learned and emphasized throughout a child’s youth is consent. It’s important for the facilitator of this lesson to be prepared to teach consent to adolescents in an effective way. Of middle school students, 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 7 boys will experience rape, which this website attributed to the fact that teens don’t know what consent is or how to ask for it. There is a website called Teach Consent that has a video that contains examples of how to ask for consent, how to say yes or no, and how to respond to the yes or no answer. Along with the video there is a facilitator discussion guide that gives tips to a facilitator, tells them why it’s important to teach consent, and demonstrates how to spark a discussion among the students.

It is also important to note that the purpose of this lesson is to help middle schoolers recognize and develop healthy relationships. The summary of Research Facts and Findings published by Act for Youth Center for Excellence linked above is a great resource that talks specifically about middle-school relationships (Sonerson, 2007). We also want to make sure that our facilitator is familiar with the ways that things may be unique about teaching sexuality topics to 6th graders. We recommend the Advocates For Youth newsletters to parents of 6th graders that are full of helpful tips and information about how to best engage with children of our target age group. Our facilitator should review all of these sources in order to best understand how to present to this specific audience.

- **Describe the background as to why you have developed this lesson by providing an overview of the sexuality topic, and why it is important to learn.**
 - The sexual behaviors, stages of puberty, and readiness for relationship differs individually during middle school as adolescents all enter different stages of development. Around ages 11-13, puberty and sexual development continue. As reported by Wurtele, Sandy, Kennym, & Maureen, “youth begin to engage in kissing and fondling with peers or other affectionate behavior with peers (e.g., flirting)....as tweens become aware of themselves as sexual beings and of their peers as potential partners, many start connecting romantically.” (2011). Short relationships allow adolescents to experiment with sexual behaviors, like holding

hands, hugging, and kissing, touching each other's genitals under the clothes (Wurtele, Sandy, Kennym, & Maureen, 2011). However, these short term adolescent relationships can have effects on an individual even after they have ended, including effects on self-esteem, personal values regarding romance, intimate relationships, and sexuality (Barber & Eccles, 2003). Relationship education (and sexual education) can ensure that adolescents are shown the elements of a healthy relationship. Healthy adolescent romantic relationships are characterized by open communication, high levels of trust, and partners who are relatively close in age according to Sorensen (2007). Communication is vital in the holistic approach to sexuality education. Encouraging proper communication in middle schoolers can lead to healthier relationships and sex lives. A holistic approach to sexual education that focuses on ideas like open communication, and consent can lead to healthier attitudes toward sex and relationships (Auteri, 2016). As Dr. De La Rue states it's easy to pretend that young people aren't involved in sexual relationships or behaviors, but it is crucial that educators are comfortable with having conversations about healthy sex and relationships, which in return gives students a "long-term outlook" on what healthy dating should look like. Early intervention is key (Auteri 2016). Boislard, van de Bongardt, and Blais report on research that shows that adolescent sexual activity, exploration of intimate relationships and sexual behaviors are not inherently risky behaviors, but instead are part of a normal developmental stage (2016). Acknowledging sexual behaviors during adolescence as normative while talking about healthy relationships and consent and understanding risky components of sexual behavior like STDs and unwanted pregnancy is vital for a comprehensive, effective sexual education. It is also important to take into account the possible forms in which adolescents and young adults experience and experiment, or don't, with sexuality.

- **This needs to include specific examples from your novel and empirical research that has identified an area of need.**

Katherine and Michael's communication throughout their relationship was positive and open, leading to a healthy relationship. From the very first interaction that Michael and Katherine had, Michael was very upfront and communicative with Katherine, "I came over here because I wanted to see you again" (Blume, 1975, 6). He was the first to admit his feelings for her, he asked for her permission to kiss her, and always accepted her "no's" when things started to become intimate. The couple was able to have a very open dialogue when it came to sex as well, as their relationship progressed. Michael openly asked Katherine if she was a virgin which opened up conversation about her wishes to wait and his acceptance of her preference. There was one instance of poor communication at the beginning of Michael and Katherine's relationship that created some turmoil.

Katherine was not honest with Michael about how she felt about Michael's actions towards his ex and used passive aggressiveness. Ultimately, the couple had a conversation about the event and decided that honesty and communication was needed from there on out. Katherine's Grandmother was another character in the book that was able to facilitate open communication. She first approached the topic of sex when warning Katherine about pregnancy and "venereal disease". By having an open conversation about sex, Katherine's Grandmother was warning her about the risks of sex like unwanted pregnancies and STI's. Katherine admitted that she was glad that her grandmother was open and accepting about sex, and she felt like she could talk about it (Blume, 1975). Her Grandmother's display of positive sexuality in the long-run will help Katherine have a healthy sex life and be more mature about her sexuality.

- **Define all terms that you will include in your lesson plan and provide in-text citations for each term.**
 1. Healthy Relationship- requires communication as a key component as well as respect and healthy boundaries (Healthy Relationship Educators Toolkit, 2017, p.4).
 2. Unhealthy Relationship- a relationship that is "based on power and control, not equality and respect" (Healthy Relationship Educators Toolkit, 2017, p.5).
 3. Consent- "education about consent that teaches "yes means yes" versus "no means no"" in regard to sexual experiences especially sex (Auteri, 2016, p.1).
 4. Risky sexual behavior- "sexual behavior that can lead to unwanted pregnancy and STIs" (Sorensen, 2007, p.2).
 5. Sex- Positivity recognizes "risks and concerns yet also emphasize the importance of sexual pleasure, freedom, and diversity" (Williams et. al., 2015 p.6).
 6. Dating Abuse- "a pattern of destructive behaviors used to exert power and control over a dating partner" (Healthy Relationship Educators Toolkit, 2017, p.5).

Instructions and Content Specifics

- Our visual will be a powerpoint presentation that aids the progression of the teacher's script. The visual will provide definitions and give an overview of the main points taken from research, with citations. Any videos used will be shown during the powerpoint and will be linked for easy access. Using the visual we want to present our findings about

what an age-appropriate (middle-school) healthy relationship looks like, and how good communication and decision-making skills can help create and maintain healthy relationships.

- Our handout is going to be a resource guide that includes, warning signs and indicators of different types of relationships, communication tips and resources for more information. The warning signs and indicators as well as the communication tips sections will be a basic overview of the findings of our research about what makes a good relationship, with resources linked to more information about specific issues like dating violence, and consent.
- The activity will be a handout quiz that asks questions about healthy vs. unhealthy relationships. Questions will be framed around our healthy and unhealthy relationship characteristics. We will ask the students to fill out the relationship quiz based on a hypothetical relationship we present to them. After the students fill out the quiz individually, we will go over the answers and discuss the answers as a class.

Lesson Plan:

1. Introduce yourself
2. Address class confidentiality and identity classroom as a safe space to share also disclaimer that we are talking about unhealthy relationships

“The topics that we will discuss today involve somewhat personal and sensitive issues. Because of the nature of these topics, we are going to establish this classroom as a safe space to communicate about our own experiences, ask questions, and be honest. While participation is encouraged, we will not be pressuring anyone to talk about anything that they do not choose to. We want everyone to be respectful of what your classmates may or may not share, and avoid making distracting and inappropriate comments or gestures. We will also be discussing aspects of unhealthy relationships, like abuse, that might be disturbing to some of you, just so you are aware. If there is anything that we talk about today that you would like to discuss further with a teacher or counselor for any reason, please feel free to do so.”

3. Present powerpoint- slide 1: define relationship using above definition

“Intro: Today we will be talking about a few different aspects of healthy and unhealthy relationships as they relate to communication about sexual activity. For starters, does anyone have any ideas about what a healthy relationship is? How about an unhealthy relationship?”

4. Powerpoint slide 2: a table showing characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships

“Some of you mentioned a lot of these things already, but here are some that we know to be supported by research to describe healthy and unhealthy relationships. Healthy relationships for people your age are usually characterised by open communication (emotional support), high levels of trust, and partners who are relatively close in age. While unhealthy relationships can be characterized by things like controlling behavior, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, and risky sexual behaviors. Things like these can make for some negative and possibly dangerous experiences, but there are ways to avoid them!”

5. Powerpoint slide 3: communication and consent

“The key to any relationship is the ability to have open communication, honesty and respect between each person. If something your partner is doing makes you uncomfortable for any reason, you should be able to talk to them about it and see a change in their actions. Consent is something that you communicate with your partner that is giving permission for something to happen or the agreement of doing something. Consent is a process and a conversation that you have with your partner that is a clear and obvious “yes I want this to happen”. It’s important to know that consent can be withdrawn if you change your mind about how comfortable you are with your partner’s actions and it’s important to communicate with them if this is the case.”

6. Slide 4: abuse

“Relationship abuse is not an easy thing to talk about, but can take many forms during a relationship. An unhealthy relationship that involves abuse can include possessiveness, insults, jealousy, and most often stems from wanting more power in a relationship. Physical abuse can involve hitting or pushing while emotional and verbal abuse can be putting you down and not being supportive, embarrassing you in public (including on the internet), or telling you what to do. Pressuring or forcing anyone to participate in any sexual activity can be labeled as sexual abuse. All forms of abuse are very serious, and if partner communication fails, you should never be afraid to communicate with your parents, friends or teachers if you are feeling uncomfortable in a relationship.”

7. In-class activity quiz- Administer quiz about healthy relationships

“We are going to complete this quiz individually answering the questions about healthy relationships based off two different hypothetical relationships. This quiz will test your knowledge and give us an opportunity to talk about what we have learned about today using real life situations.

The first couple you will answer questions about is Caroline and John. Caroline and John have just started dating after talking for a long time. John is always looking at Caroline's Instagram and gets made when she likes or follows another guy; when they are together John is always asking to look at Caroline's phone, wanting to read her texts. Caroline and John have only kissed but every time they spend time together John pressures Caroline into going further, calling Caroline a prude when she refuses. John spends a lot of time with his friends, and only hangs out with Caroline when it fits his schedule. All of these circumstances make Caroline feel upset and anxious, but she likes dating John because he's "popular." When Caroline tried talking to John about looking at her phone and not wanting to do anything except kiss, he admitted that he had been pushy and protective but only because he really liked her and got jealous. After their talk John continued his actions.

The second couple is Mary and Ben. They have been good friends for a while now, and have decided mutually that they would like to date. Mary and Ben have similar interests and enjoy doing things together like going to the movies and listening to the same kinds of music. They also have different interests though, and hang out with their own friends. Both Mary and Ben are very comfortable with talking to each other about their feelings. This has strengthened their relationship greatly. The only instance of conflict that Mary and Ben have encountered was when Mary and Ben were at a party and Ben's ex was there as well. Mary felt very uncomfortable with the situation and was indirect and closed off towards Ben because of it. They acknowledged what the problem was and agreed moving forward that they are going to be honest with each other in any type of situation to avoid conflict in the future."

8. Class Discussion: Go over Answers to relationship quiz and discuss which relationship was healthy and which wasn't healthy.

9. Give out resource guide handout

"This handout can be used as a reminder of some of the indicators of healthy and unhealthy relationships we talked about today. Also included are some communication tips and resources for more information about healthy relationships, consent, and abuse."

10. Close lesson

"Communication is the essential foundation to any relationship. This includes openness and honesty no matter what stage of a relationship you are in. It is extremely important that you and your partner are on the same page. Being comfortable and feeling good in your relationship is another important aspect. With the tools that we have provided you to spot the differences between an unhealthy and healthy relationship, we hope that you can now feel confident in your relationships. Open communication is not only limited to romantic relationships, but also your relationships with your friends and family members. All of these new topics that start to come up

as you mature and change are not always easy to talk about, but starting up conversations with the people closest to you will help you greatly. If you are not yet comfortable talking to someone about a relationship, this resource guide is the perfect tool for you to access everything you need to know about consent, abuse, and signs of good/bad relationships.”

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