



Respectful Futures

Shaping Healthy Relationships

Module 5

Understanding the Impacts of Unhealthy Relationships

Abstract

The goals of Module 5 are:

- To enable students to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships
- To provide opportunities for them to analyze and improve how they behave with others

Our culture abounds with mistaken beliefs about what a relationship is, how it works, and what we can expect from it. We refer to these mistaken beliefs as relationship myths. These myths are widely held in various cultures and have many sources, including family and friends; religious, spiritual, ethnic, and political associations; and media (TV, movies, music, books, magazines, and the Internet).

Having examined many of the factors that contribute to healthy, respectful relationships, students are invited in this module to deconstruct the beliefs and behaviours that may keep people stuck in unhealthy relationships, including abusive behaviours on the part of friends, family, or partner. (In the context of this module, “abuse” is defined as any form of behaviour that a person uses to harm, frighten, control, coerce, manipulate, or humiliate another person.)

Big Ideas

Personal happiness is determined to a great extent by our ability to form supportive, mutually respectful, and honest relationships with others.

Conflict is a natural part of being in relationship with others; how we deal with conflict determines whether a relationship is positive or negative, supportive or unsupportive.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Identify and discuss different forms of abuse: physical, emotional, property, spiritual, verbal, sexual, and online
- Understand the concept of jealousy as an abusive behaviour that never meets our need for safety, trust, and security

- Recognize the warning signs of abusive behaviour
- Understand what constitutes consent

Learning Activities and Resources

1. Stopping the Cycle of Jealousy
2. Brainstorm and Scribe Exercise: Defining Unhealthy Relationships
3. Consent in Relationships

For Facilitators

Many people are confused by the difference between a healthy relationship and an unhealthy one. We are constantly bombarded with and influenced by media representations that, at best, send unclear messages and at worst, send unhealthy or even dangerous messages. TV shows, song lyrics, movies, and social media are full of stories about people caught up in the drama of unhealthy relationships. It is the drama that keeps us coming back. If you took all the unhealthy relationships out of “reality” TV shows, nobody would watch them. For the most part, healthy relationships don’t make good entertainment because there is very little drama.

While dramatic but abusive or damaging relationships may be good for ratings, they are not good for promoting respectful, supportive, and caring relationships. They present youth with a false sense of what is to be emulated in personal relationships. They create a warped perspective from which people can give themselves permission to behave badly. Just because the drama makes unhealthy relationships appear to be common occurrences and possibly even the norm, it does not mean that this is healthy or acceptable. Unhealthy relationships are not satisfying and mutual; they are frustrating, confusing, and painful.

We have been talking about drama in relationships. Another way of describing what is going on in many relationships is the term “abuse.” Although there may be varying definitions of this term, we define abuse as any form of behaviour that a person uses to harm, frighten, control, coerce, manipulate, or humiliate another person.

Unhealthy relationships exist on a continuum. On the lower end of the continuum, the unhealthiness may be less consequential but on the higher end, it may become abusive. Paying attention to our behaviours at the lower end of the continuum may prevent us from moving into more toxic, abusive behaviours at a later date.

When we talk about abuse, we are talking about abusive *behaviours*, not abusive *people*. Nobody behaves in that manner all the time. Everyone has good qualities as well as areas that need improvement. People are not ever always and only abusive. Very often, it is the good in someone that keeps us stuck in a relationship that is not supportive, kind, respectful, or caring. No wonder we can get confused.

Intimacy in a relationship leads to the sharing of private information, which creates vulnerability. In a healthy relationship, a vulnerable person is supported by their partners and friends. In an unhealthy relationship, others exploit that intimate knowledge. For example, if I call you “stupid” and you let me know that this is really hurtful to you, in a healthy relationship, I will pay particular attention to not doing so again. In an unhealthy relationship, I will use it as a weapon. When we fall and bruise the outside of our body, the body will heal in a matter of days. If we are bruised emotionally, it can take years to heal (if it ever does). Repeated emotional bruising can cause profound wounds from which we may never heal.

Let's get started

The following facilitation notes provide context and strategies that instructors can rely on during their delivery of the resources. PowerPoints have been developed and a small number of short videos have been selected to correspond with the module's materials. Those are located on the Respectful Futures site.

Facilitation Notes

Types of Unhealthy Behaviours

1. Before distributing the worksheet, you may wish to have students brainstorm some types of relationships that can “feel bad” (unhealthy relationships). They should not identify individuals in the examples nor do they need to personalize them.
2. Collect their ideas without judgment and then distribute the handout.
3. Ask students to match the examples they have provided with the categories on the handout. Are there any that do not fit? (There should not be!)

Jealousy

It is important that students understand that feelings of jealousy are unfounded and exist only when one makes assumptions about the other person in the relationship. Jealousy is harmful and can destroy relationships when the parties are reacting to unproven conjecture. Jealousy is not the same as betrayal. Betrayal is not assumed – it is actual, it happened. Betrayal may lead to the end of a relationship for a good reason. Jealousy is not actual; it is imagined and can lead to the end of a relationship for no reason.

1. Have students read the handout and talk about the distinctions they see between jealousy and betrayal.
2. Have them connect types of unhealthy relationships to jealousy by answering the following question: *How can jealousy lead to unhealthy relationships?*
3. Distribute the Cycle of Jealousy diagram.
4. Ask students to provide examples and details for each part of the cycle (in effect, building a story based on the parts).
5. Pose the following questions: *What event could lead to jealousy?* (Remember that the jealousy is not warranted.) *How would the person feel?* Focus on the cyclic nature of jealousy – it simply continues without end unless there is an intervention at some point in the cycle.

Stopping the Cycle of Jealousy

1. Before distributing any of the materials, ask students to focus on one of the examples they mentioned earlier.
2. Ask them to suggest ways of breaking the cycle of jealousy at each stage of the cycle. Pose the following questions: *What could you do if you were the person who is jealous? What could the other person in the relationship do to support or help you?* (It is important to discuss both sides.)
3. Distribute the materials and have students read them.
4. Based on the information in the handouts, facilitate a discussion on what more could be done in that sample situation.

Web Resources

The resources listed below are particularly helpful. Be sure to review them ahead of time and consider where and if/how they would best fit into the students' work on jealousy:

- WikiHow, "Three Ways to Handle Jealousy" at <http://www.wikihow.com/Handle-Jealousy> (Use Part 1, *Handling Your Own Jealousy*, and Part 2, *Handling Another's Jealousy*.)

- Matthew Hussey, “Jealousy – How to Take Back Control” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMMUfCTdxFo>

Defining Unhealthy Relationships

At this point, have students pull together the work they have been doing in Module 5 to create a succinct definition of “unhealthy relationships.”

1. Ask students to list behaviours that might fit a definition of unhealthy or abusive relationships. This list should include: blaming, name-calling, shoving, criticizing, lying, bullying, cheating, not respecting privacy, intentionally breaking things, and threatening to harm themselves or others.
2. When the list has been generated, facilitate a discussion on the following:
 - a. Why these behaviours are harmful
 - b. The consequence of these behaviours for each person in the relationship
3. Ask students to define “unhealthy relationships” by capturing these ideas in a concise statement.

Consent in Relationships

The topic of consent is one which should be approached with discretion based on a number of factors, including the age and maturity of students and the policies of the school or district. However, it is a very important concept for teens to understand. It also aligns with Green thinking of I count – you count.

The information listed below will be useful in addressing this topic with students or if they raise the issue themselves:

- Any sexual activity requires explicit consent.
- Not saying “no” does not constitute consent. Not saying anything does not constitute consent. Having said “yes” previously does not constitute consent.
- Consent involves both people saying “yes” in the present moment.
- Each person needs to agree freely, without intimidation or coercion, knowing that it is all right to withdraw consent at any time.
- Even if you have agreed to something, it is your right and responsibility to speak up and say “no” if what is going on no longer feels safe or comfortable.
- In a healthy, respectful relationship, consent may be withdrawn at any time without fear of reprisal.

During this section:

1. Have students watch the YouTube video and discuss what consent is and what it is not. (YouTube video and discussion: “Tea Consent” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGoWLS4-kU>)
2. Have the students develop a do/don’t list related to consent.

Replay/Assessment

Here are a few ideas for wrapping up this session. Feel free to choose from among them, depending upon the flow of the class and/or students' preferences.

- Have students work individually or in small groups to design and make a poster that pulls all of the concepts in this module together.
- Ask students to write on the following:
 - What are two or three things you learned today? Why is this learning important to you?
 - What are you prepared to use in your relationships and why?
 - What do you need more information about? Do some research to provide further information that answers your questions.
 - How do unhealthy relationships develop?
 - How do the concepts of jealousy and betrayal play a role in our close relationships?
 - Think about a really good relationship that you are in or have been in. Identify the ways in which this relationship matches the information you learned in this module.
 - How does knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships allow us to better follow the Me+You+Us Model?
 - How does knowledge of healthy and unhealthy relationships help us to make good use of the ABCDE Model and the concept of positive self-talk?
 - How have your ideas shifted or changed as we have learned more about ourselves and our relationships?
 - How is the difference between healthy and unhealthy in relationships becoming clearer for you?

In Conclusion

This module has focused on unhealthy relationships: what an unhealthy relationship is and is not, and how to use this knowledge and learnings from previous modules (e.g., self-talk and anger management) to reduce the unhealthy relationships in our lives.

The exercises help students to connect anger and anger management to Me+You+Us, ABCDE, and self-talk, which are tools for improving the health of relationships.

The next module will focus on self-esteem and self-compassion – what they look like and how the information and skills that have been learned so far depend on our

feelings about our own self-worth. It will provide information on how we can enhance our self-esteem to improve our relationships and our lives.

The following pages are the handouts and resources to be provided to learners.

Types of Unhealthy Behaviours

- *Online*
Insisting on reading someone else’s private accounts (phone, email, computer); cyberbullying (the act of harming or harassing another person via social media; examples of cyberbullying include trash-talking someone on Facebook or sharing compromising pictures of someone)
- *Emotional*
Using words or actions to hurt the other person’s feelings; breaking down their self-confidence or damaging their self-esteem (“You look stupid in that outfit”; making comments about their weight; comparing them unfavourably to other people)
- *Spiritual/cultural*
Denying somebody the right to express themselves, their beliefs, or faith in a way that is meaningful and important to them (making fun of their faith or religion; not allowing them to attend temple, services, sweat lodge, synagogue, talking circles, church, meeting)
- *Verbal*
One of the most common forms of unhealthy relationships involves the way in which people communicate. In terms of speaking, it might involve name-calling, put-downs, arguing, judging, criticizing, discounting their opinions, or sarcasm. In terms of listening, abuse might take the form of refusing to listen or pay attention to what the other person has to say.
- *Property*
Taking away your possessions, hitting and damaging a wall, breaking your possessions, throwing your possessions away
- *Physical*
Pushing, shoving, slapping, confining, using physical size to overpower or intimidate
- *Sexual*
Using coercion or force to make you do something or watch something that makes you feel uncomfortable; engaging in any form of unwanted sexual touch. Only you get to determine what your comfort level is and no one else can make that determination for you. You have the right and responsibility to set the boundaries for yourself.

Jealousy

For the purpose of understanding healthy relationships, we are making an important distinction between jealousy and betrayal. Jealousy is based on a fear of what *might* happen. Betrayal is based on facts, not fear. Betrayal is about an event that *has* happened.

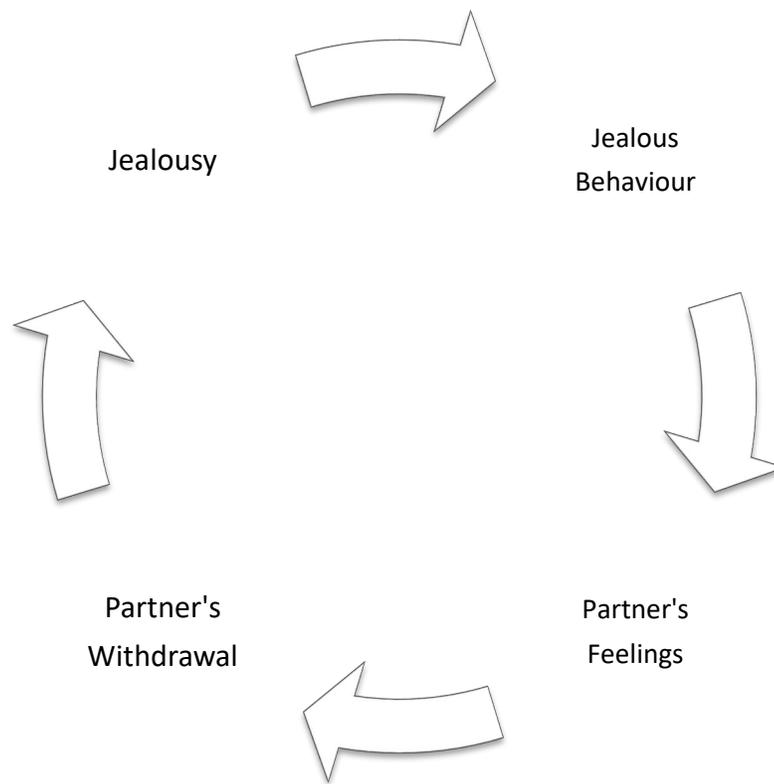
Jealousy is a very uncomfortable, insecure, and/or angry feeling caused by the fear that someone you care about (friend or partner) likes or is liked by someone else. Shakespeare was the first to coin the phrase that refers to jealousy as the “green-eyed monster,” and a monster it can be, attacking the very foundations of trust, safety, and security in a relationship. Jealousy most often affects people who lack self-esteem or self-confidence, people who feel inadequate and insecure. These individuals are looking to someone else to feel better about themselves.

Jealousy is not a measure of love. It is the unfounded fear that someone we care about will leave us for someone else or exclude us. The feelings of jealousy lead to jealous behaviour: accusing your friends or partner; controlling their social life; demanding explanations of where they were, what they did, and who they saw or talked to. The cycle of jealousy is like a dog chasing its tail – around and around it goes, never finding a satisfactory conclusion.

Remember, jealousy always ends in lousy!

JEA_LOUSY

Cycle of Jealousy



Jealous behaviour makes the friend/partner feel that there is no trust. When people are not trusted, over time they tend to withdraw. The more a person withdraws, the more the jealous person feels insecure until finally the friend/partner leaves the relationship. Trust builds up the relationship, while jealousy tears it down.

It is important to distinguish between jealousy and betrayal. When we are jealous, we do not have real evidence to base it on, just our own feelings of insecurity and fear. If a friend/ partner is hurtful, rather than being afraid of what might be happening, we need to deal with what really is happening. We need to talk with the friend/partner to ensure that our understanding is correct, and if it is, deal with it. This may mean the loss of the friendship or a partner, and usually means going through the stages of grief, which can include shock, anger, sadness, and acceptance.

Unlike grief, there are no stages to go through with jealousy. It simply goes on and on as a continuous state of anxiety. It does not result from something that happened to us which we can't control (for example, our friend/partner betrays us); rather, it is the result of something going on inside us that we choose not to control. People

who are jealous are looking for an external solution to an internal problem. The problem is insecurity and dependency. Without trust the cycle builds and the relationship crumbles.

Stopping the Cycle of Jealousy

Part 1: Handling Your Own Jealousy

- *Understand the emotion of jealousy*
Jealousy is an emotion that includes many others, like fear, loss, and anger. Spend some time sorting through your emotions, and notice which of those emotions you are feeling.
- *Tackle your feelings*
When you question what makes you feel jealous, you can begin to take positive steps to manage the feelings underneath the jealousy.
- *Get to the root of your jealousy*
Be kind and honest with yourself. Ask yourself why you are feeling each emotion underneath the jealousy. Avoid blaming. Are there any memories aggravating these feelings?
- *Choose to believe*
Decide to trust the people you love. Unless you have hard evidence that someone is dishonest, trust them.
- *Apologize and explain*
Let the other person know that you behaved the way you did because you were feeling insecure, that you do trust them, and that you'll try to be more open about what you are going through.
- *Open up about your jealousy*
Share your true feelings with your friend or partner. Avoid blaming the other person. Use "I" statements. Be aware that how you perceive situations may be different from how everyone else perceives them. Commit to listening even when you disagree.
- *Get help*
If you have harmed a friend or partner or been harmed by them, get professional help immediately (e.g., doctor, counsellor, support group, workshop, crisis line, police, as appropriate).

Part 2: Handling Another's Jealousy

- *Learn the difference between love and jealousy*
Feeling jealous does not mean you love someone. Draw boundaries with a jealous partner or friend. Do not answer questions you feel uncomfortable with. Do not cancel plans with friends or cut off contact with someone because of your partner's jealousy.
- *Don't accept abuse*
Do not accept blame or responsibility for the other person's jealous feelings. **If**

your friend or partner is threatening or abusive, or if you feel you are in danger, get out of the situation and get help immediately.

Defining Unhealthy Relationships

What you may be experiencing if you are in an unhealthy or abusive relationship:

- *Fear*
“I am afraid to speak up.” “I’m scared to set boundaries.” “I’m scared to leave.”
- *Confusion*
“I don’t know whether my friend/partner is right when they say it is my fault.”
- *Trapped*
“I don’t know how to get out of this situation.”
- *Embarrassed*
“I am becoming the person I said I would never be.” “I am making up excuses for their behaviour.”
- *Helpless*
“Jealousy is ruining our relationship/friendship and making me feel bad about myself.”
- *Frustrated*
“Constant blaming makes it impossible to resolve our difficulties together.”
- *Hurt*
“I spend more time feeling hurt than feeling connected.”
- *Unhappy*
“I’m complaining to other people about our relationship.”
- *Anxious*
“I’m terrified the relationship/friendship is going to end.”
- *Uncertain*
“My trust is eroded because my partner/friend says one thing and does another.”

In previous modules, we took a look at and challenged some of the beliefs we have about relationships. Through the ABCDE Model, we examined the links between thinking, feeling, and behaving. We began to understand how our communication styles affect our relationships and how to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively in situations. In this module, we are looking at unhealthy relationships.

Consent in Relationships

Green thinking (I count – you count) is a common occurrence in healthy relationships. This also aligns with consent. Any sexual activity requires explicit consent. Not saying “no” does not constitute consent. Not saying anything does not constitute consent. Having said “yes” previously does not constitute consent.

Consent involves both people saying “yes” in the present moment. Each person needs to agree freely, without intimidation or coercion, knowing that it is all right to withdraw consent at any time. Even if you have agreed to something, it is your right and responsibility to speak up and say “no” if what is going on no longer feels safe or comfortable. In a healthy, respectful relationship, consent may be withdrawn at any time without fear of reprisal.

