

## CHAPTER 6: INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

People begin exploring their ideas and feelings about romantic love in adolescence. They may experience infatuation, crushes, attractions, or even their first love. In many societies, the process of developing relationships that lead to marriage begins at this time as well. But few adolescents have thought clearly about the qualities that are important to them in a long-term partner or even what they would consider a healthy relationship, how to begin one, or how to get out of a relationship that is not healthy. And they usually receive very little adult guidance, even from their parents.

Some relationships are not healthy. Assessing a relationship objectively, and especially concluding that it should end, is difficult for everyone, but it can be especially confusing for teens. Young people often misinterpret or ignore signs of serious relationship problems, making them vulnerable to emotional or physical abuse or exploitation. Power imbalances frequently go unquestioned—they may even be socially sanctioned or encouraged—and very often affect young girls. In many countries, poverty leads young women to develop relationships with older men of means—so-called sugar daddies—which are usually highly unequal. In the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, older men may also seek out young girls because they believe that they are free from infection or even that sex with a virgin will cure HIV.

Unhealthy, unequal relationships put young women in particular at high risk of physical abuse, forced sex, unwanted pregnancy, and STIs, including HIV. Participants should learn how to recognize the signs of an unhealthy relationship and develop the communication skills necessary to avoid or end it.

### Teaching Tips

- Talk to adolescents and young adults about their current dating and courtship rituals. These practices are changing in many cultures. Ask participants what they want to learn and discuss, but remind them that they do not need to share personal information or respond to questions that make them uncomfortable.
- The lessons included here are from cultures in which young people form romantic relationships based on their own choice. However, much of the content is still relevant or adaptable to cultures where coupling is more formalized (for example, arranged by parents), or where there is little dating or even opportunity to meet members of the opposite sex.
- Be aware that participants are likely to have different levels of experience with romantic relationships, and that some participants may be homosexual or struggling with their identity. These lessons may be difficult for them because they may be hiding any romantic relationships they have had out of fear.
- The components of various types of loving relationships (such as friendships and family relationships) are actually not that different from romantic relationships. Therefore, much of the content can be taught based on any loving relationship.

### Content Considerations

- Many aspects of relationships can be addressed in your sessions, including expectations and desires, determining if relationships are healthy, relationship skills, and recognizing and coping with difficulties. Decide which elements are the most important for your participants based on their interests and common issues. Address all of the main elements if possible.

- Give your participants the opportunity to discuss all the different ways in which relationships form and develop in your community. Allow them to explore their feelings and values about how relationships are formed, for example, how they feel about arranged marriages versus love matches.
- Be clear about the elements or signs of both healthy and unhealthy relationships. Explore cultural sayings, beliefs, and images (including media or literary images) about love that present unrealistic or even potentially harmful notions of love.
- Help participants identify the qualities that are most important to them in a long-term partner, how they can assess whether or not a potential partner has them, and the characteristics of healthy relationships. You could, for example, ask them to consider the marriages of their parents or other couples they know who have had long-lasting partnerships, and identify positive and also negative qualities in them.
- Use stories and role playing to teach skills for starting, developing, assessing, and ending relationships. Include skills in communication, negotiation, and problem solving in different phases of relationships and types of situations.
- Help participants learn to identify dating situations that can be risky and the warning signs of serious relationship problems. Rather than telling them what to do, teach them the skills for deciding what to do if they notice problems.
- Ensure that participants know their rights and have thought about what behavior they would not tolerate in a relationship.
- Encourage both sexes to examine power issues in relationships and evaluate their impact on both partners. Discuss how they can be addressed. Stress that challenging common sources of power imbalances in relationships is essential for healthy, equal relationships.
- Emphasize realistic ideas about love and the development of loving relationships. Include the idea that maintaining love requires work from both partners and that every relationship will have some difficulties. Help participants identify what these difficulties might be. Talk about economic issues, value differences, raising children, and infidelity.
- Help participants look at the effects of gender-role stereotypes on relationships, particularly how inequality between partners decreases the possibility of a healthy, intimate relationship. Discuss the characteristics of equal relationships and how they can be established.

## SELECTED LESSON PLAN 6.1: DATING AND COURTSHIP

### SOURCE

“Relationships, Session 3: Dating and Courtship,” by Peter Simon, *Skills for Life: A Manual for Facilitators*, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Peace Corps Mongolia, and the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture (MOSTEC), Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 2003. Reprinted with permission of UNFPA Mongolia.

### Suitable for ages 15 to 18

### Summary

Romantic relationships are a new type of social relationship for adolescents, about which they have many questions and concerns and for which they need new skills. This lesson offers a creative, interactive way for participants to think about, discuss, and practice how to begin and develop healthy dating or romantic relationships. A story involving a girl and a boy, presented from both characters’ perspectives, is interspersed with questions about what they could do or say. Participants explore one another’s ideas and reactions, and discuss interpreting nonverbal messages and issues of consent. The lesson explores gender issues and develops communication skills.

### Teaching Notes

- Each activity in this lesson is fairly similar, so if your participants get restless, keep up the pace of the lesson.
- Develop ideas about answers to the questions before teaching the lesson so that you can guide participants if necessary. When processing their responses, emphasize the importance of direct and open communication and giving clear signals in romantic relationships.

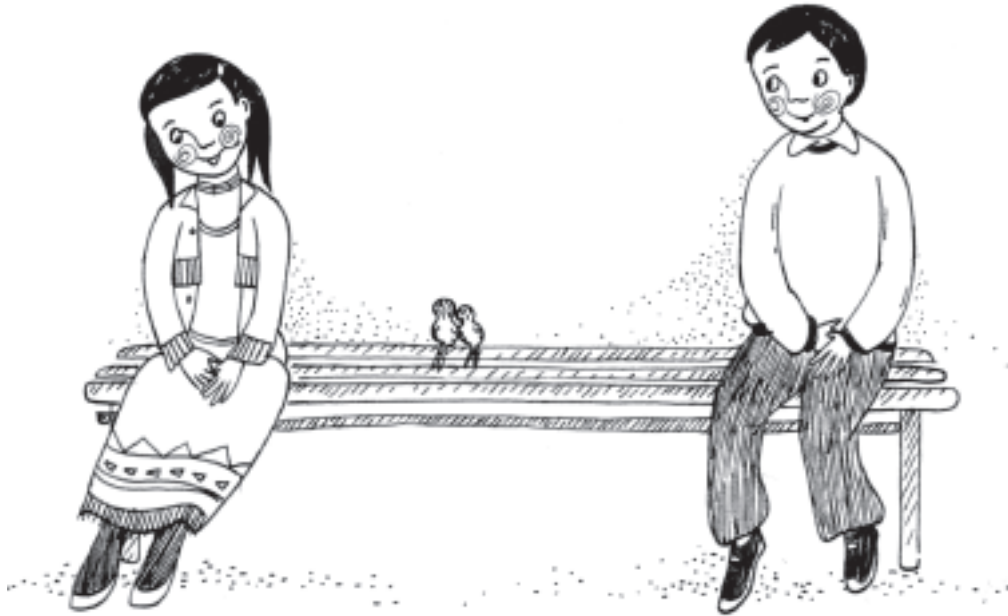
### Adapting the Lesson

- Adapt the story to the way that romantic relationships develop where you live. If you are teaching in a place where adolescents do not date, but meet once or a few times before deciding whether or not to continue the relationship in marriage, rewrite the story to reflect this, including the types of questions the person would ask, what they should notice, what they might be thinking, how they would assess the relationship after a meeting, and how they would handle situations that are likely to arise immediately after marriage.



# RELATIONSHIPS

## Session Three



### ***Dating and Courtship***



#### *INTRODUCTION*

In this session participants will discuss the progression of a romantic relationship from both the male and the female perspective. They will work as a group to generate and discuss the various ways a person can go about meeting someone they are interested in, initiating sexual contact, negotiating sexual situations, and discussing sexual intercourse in the relationship.



#### *LEARNING OBJECTIVES*

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- List two possible ways of initiating contact with a member of the opposite sex they are interested in meeting.
- List two possible ways of initiating sexual contact.
- List two possible ways of turning down a sexual advance.
- List two possible ways of responding when a sexual advance is turned down.
- Suggest a way of bringing up and talking about sexual intercourse in a relationship.



### *KEY MESSAGES*

- Both men and women should work to communicate their needs and desires to their partner.
- Both men and women should work to understand and listen to their partner's needs and desires.
- Men and women are often concerned about similar things in relationships.
- Assumptions about the other person's desires or intentions are obstacles to developing and maintaining healthy relationships.



### *TIME NEEDED*

2 hours 20 minutes



### *MATERIALS*

- Flipchart or board
- Markers or chalk



### *PREPARATION*

#### **Note to Facilitator:**

1. This session works better if the group has at least three members of each sex. If you have no male or no female participants you will need to adjust the procedure slightly so that all answers are generated and discussed by the participants as a group. You might also want to do this if you have very few participants of one sex to avoid putting them in what could be an uncomfortable position.
2. This session discusses sexual behavior in an open and frank manner. It is important that young people be introduced to this information before they become sexually active, and it is recommended that the session be run without modification for participants 15 years of age or older. If your participants are younger than this, you may want to adapt or shorten the session to include those parts of the session that you feel are relevant to your participants' lives.
3. This session involves a set of quite similar steps carried out repeatedly for different scenarios. Make sure to keep the session moving along fairly quickly to prevent participants from getting bored or losing interest. Make sure the atmosphere fosters open dialogue.

## *SESSION PROCEDURE*

### **I. Checking In (10 minutes)**

Go around the group and have each participant “check in” by saying their name or nickname and sharing with the group how they are feeling. Participants should be encouraged to share what is on their minds. This can include things that are troubling them, things that are making them happy, or things that they are currently thinking about.

Participants should also be strongly encouraged to share any thoughts or observations about how life skills relate to their lives. Participants might mention instances of how they have used life skills recently, thoughts they have had connected to how a specific life skill has affected their life, or instances when they have had difficulties using a life skill.

### **II. Activities**

Introduce the session by telling the participants that today they will talk about how young people can initiate and handle different situations in a romantic relationship involving sex and sexual touch. Tell participants that even though most teenagers are not having sex, it is important for young people to talk about these issues before they become sexually active.

#### **Activity One: The Meeting (15 Minutes)**

1. Tell the participants that you are going to read a story about the relationship between Munkhuu and Oyuna from both Munkhuu’s and Oyuna’s perspectives. Parts of the stories are incomplete and the participants will get the chance to fill in the necessary details.
2. Begin by dividing the participants into single-sex groups of three or four participants. Have all the male groups sit on one side of the classroom and all the female groups sit on the other.
3. Continue by reading the beginning of the following story:

Munkhuu is in the tenth grade and lives in UB. He has been noticing Oyuna at school—she’s in the ninth grade. She seems smart, and she’s pretty, too. He is really attracted to her, and he has been thinking about how he could meet her.

One day when Munkhuu is waiting for the bus in front of Ard Cinema near where he lives, he sees Oyuna walk up to the bus stop. Munkhuu thinks, “I should try to meet her now – But what should I say?” Even though Munkhuu feels really nervous, this seems like a lucky chance. He stands there for a while, looking in another direction, getting more and more nervous. Finally, he says to himself, “Come on! She’s just a person like me...” He gathers up his courage and goes over to where she is standing.

Oyuna is a student in the ninth grade in UB. She hasn’t had a boyfriend yet, but there are a couple of guys at school who she thinks are nice. She has especially noticed a guy name Munkhuu who plays basketball. She would love to get to know him and has been wondering how she can meet him.

One day, when Oyuna gets to the bus stop on her way to visit a friend, she notices Munkhuu is waiting there, too. This seems like the perfect opportunity to meet him! But suddenly she feels nervous and pretends not to see him. She thinks to herself, “Don’t be silly, gir! Just do it!” She decides to walk up to him.

4. Tell the male groups to write several options for what Munkhuu could say to Oyuna. Tell the female groups write several options for what Oyuna could say to Munkhuu. After they have finished, each group should pick what they think are the two best ways.
5. Start with Oyuna's perspective. Have the female groups give their best options and the reasons that they like these options. Write them on one side of the board.
6. Ask the boys the following questions:
  - What do you think of the girls' suggestions?
  - How do you think Munkhuu would react?
  - Could this way of meeting someone be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?
7. Now move on to Munkhuu's perspective. Have the male groups give their best options and the reasons that they like these options. Write them on the board next to the girls' options.
8. Ask the girls the following questions:
  - What do you think of the boys' suggestions?
  - How do you think Oyuna would react?
  - Could this way of meeting someone be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?
9. After you have heard from both the female and male groups, ask them to compare the responses for Munkhuu and for Oyuna and ask them the following questions:
  - Are the responses similar or different? Why?
  - If they are different, should they be different?
  - What are some other ways Munkhuu and Oyuna might have met if they hadn't bumped into each other at the bus stop?
    - ↳ Answers include:
      - Try to show up wherever the person is.
      - Approach the other person directly in school.
      - Have a friend introduce them.
      - Have a friend arrange a group activity and invite both of them.
  - What will happen if both of them are too shy and do nothing?
    - ↳ Answers include:
      - They may never meet each other and then would never know if they both like each other and want to go out together.
      - They miss out getting to know a person they might have really liked.
      - They may regret it.
10. Finally, ask the whole group: What would NOT be good things for Munkhuu or Oyuna to say in this situation? Why?

**Note to facilitator:** Make sure you get examples from both girls and boys.

### **Activity Two: Reading Reactions (20 Minutes)**

1. Continue by reading the next part of the story:  
Munkhuu decides to pay attention to Oyuna's reaction to what he says to see if she might be interested in getting to know him too.

Oyuna also decides to pay attention to Munkhuu's reaction to what she says to see if he might be interested in getting to know her too.

2. This time tell the male groups to list all the possible reactions Oyuna might have and to categorize them as (positive, negative, and neutral). Positive reactions indicate that Oyuna is interested in getting to know Munkhuu better, negative reactions indicate that she is not interested, and neutral reactions don't send a clear message in one direction or another.

Tell the female groups to do the same for Munkhuu's reactions.

Divide the board into three columns with two vertical lines while participants are working. Label the first column "Positive," the second column "Negative" and the last column "Neutral."

3. Begin with Munkhuu's perspective and have the male participants read their lists of positive signs and list them on the board. Follow the same process for negative signs and for neutral signs.
4. Now ask the girls if they agree with the boys' interpretations of the ways that Oyuna could react. Discuss anything they disagree with and why. Move the reactions from column to column until everyone agrees.
5. Follow the same procedure for the female groups: have them provide their list of positive, negative and neutral reactions (draw a line under the boys' list on the board and write the girls' suggestions underneath them) and then let the boys comment on them and discuss.
6. Now ask the group the following questions:
  - Did you notice any differences in the interpretations of Munkhuu's reactions and of Oyuna's reactions?
  - If Oyuna or Munkhuu IS interested, what would be the clearest way for them to communicate that interest?
  - If they are NOT interested, what would be the clearest way for them to communicate their lack of interest?
  - What would NOT be good choices in this situation? Why?

**Note to facilitator:** Make sure you get examples from both girls and boys.

- If one of them is not sure if the other is interested or not, what should they do?

### **Activity Three: Setting a Date (15 Minutes)**

1. Continue by reading the next part of the story:

Now that they have met, Oyuna figures out ways to run into Munkhuu at school. Over the past six weeks, they have been chatting often. She thinks he is a really great guy and would love to go out with him. She feels silly waiting to see if he will ask her out – what if he is too shy? So even though she wonders if he will think she is too aggressive, she decides to ask him out.

Now that they have met, Munkhuu goes out of his way at school to run into Oyuna and chat with her. He really, really likes her. He keeps thinking about asking her to go out on a date with him, and decides he might as well do it!

2. Ask the female groups to brainstorm a list of what Oyuna might say when she asks Munkhuu out and have each group pick their best option. Ask the male groups to do the same for Munkhuu.
3. Begin with Oyuna's perspective and ask the female groups to give their best options and their reasons for selecting them. List them on one side of the board.
4. Now ask the boys the following questions:
  - What do you think about the options that the girls came up with?
  - How do you think Munkhuu would react to these options?
  - Could this way of asking someone out be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable



situation? If so, how could this be avoided?

5. Now have the male groups give their best options and write them on the board next to the girls' options.

6. Ask the girls the following questions:

- What do you think about the options that the boys came up with?
- How do you think Oyuna would react to these options?
- Could this way of asking someone out be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?

7. Ask the groups to compare the responses of the female and male groups and ask them the following questions:

- Are they similar or different?
- If different, why do you think that is? Should they be different?
- Do you think Munkhuu and Oyuna should go out alone (just the two of them) or together but in a group for their first date? Why? Explore risks.

8. Finally, ask the group: What would NOT be good choices in this situation? Why?

**Note to facilitator:** Make sure you get examples from both girls and boys.



#### Activity Four: First Kiss (15 Minutes)

1. Continue by reading the next part of the story:

Munkhuu and Oyuna go with some friends of both of theirs to the river to fish and have a picnic on Saturday. Munkhuu has a really nice time. A couple of times Oyuna seemed quiet, but overall he thought she had enjoyed herself. Now Munkhuu is walking Oyuna home and he takes her hand. She doesn't pull away. As they get closer to her apartment building, he starts thinking about kissing Oyuna. He wonders what he should do.

On Friday night Oyuna had been feeling a bit tense about how the picnic would go, but they had a great time. When they got back to town, Munkhuu offered to walk her home. What a nice guy! He takes her hand as they walk. As they near her building, she thinks that she really wants to kiss him. She wonders what he would think if **she** kissed **him**?

2. Tell the male groups to come up with a list of ideas for what Munkhuu should do. Tell the female groups to come up with a list of ideas for what Oyuna should do. Have each group pick their two best options.

3. Begin with Munkhuu's perspective and have the male groups give their best options and the reasons that they like these options. Write them on one side of the board.

4. Ask the girls the following questions:

- What do you think of the boys' suggestions?
- How do you think Oyuna would react?
- Could this behavior be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?

5. Now have the girls share their best options with the group. Write them on the board next to the boys' options.

6. Ask the boys the following questions:

- What do you think of the girls' suggestions?
  - How do you think Munkhuu would react?
  - Could this behavior be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?
7. Ask the groups to compare the responses of the female and male groups and ask them the following questions:
    - Are they similar or different?
    - If different, why do you think that is? Should they be different?
  8. Now ask both the male and female groups to share some of the ideas they had that they thought would not be good and explain why. Ask the others if they agree.



**Activity Five: Sexual Advances (15 Minutes)**

1. Continue by reading the next part of the story:
 

After that day, Munkhuu and Oyuna start hanging out together more and going out on dates. They both feel comfortable being themselves around each other, they love to talk about everything and have shared things they've never told anyone else before. They like each other more and more.

A few months pass and one day, when they go out to the mountains to pick berries with some friends, they sneak off into the forest—just the two of them. When they are alone, they start kissing. Munkhuu is feeling really turned on. He is caressing Oyuna's back, but he really wants to touch her breasts. He moves his hand under her shirt. She doesn't stop him so he feels encouraged, but when he tries to touch one of her breasts, she puts her hand on his and stops him. Munkhuu feels uncertain. What should he do?

When they are kissing, Oyuna feels really excited and happy. Munkhuu caresses her back and it feels good when he touches her under her shirt. But when he touches her breast, she starts to feel uncomfortable. She isn't sure that she is ready for that yet and is worried that things could go too far. What should she do?
2. Tell the female groups to come up with a list of all the things that Oyuna could do in response to Munkhuu's sexual advance. They should list all their options, not just the one described in the story. Tell the male groups to come up with a list of all the things that Munkhuu could do in response to Oyuna's reaction as described in the story. When they have finished each group should select the two options that they think are best.
3. Begin with Oyuna's perspective and ask the female groups to share their two options and write them on the board.
4. Ask the boys the following questions:
  - What do you think of the girls' suggestions?
  - How do you think Munkhuu would react?
  - Could any of these choices be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?
5. Now have the male groups share their two best options and write them on the board.
6. Ask the girls the following questions:

- What do you think of the boys' suggestions?
- How do you think Oyuna would react?
- Could any of these choices be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?



7. Ask the group which options would be most likely to help Munkhuu and Oyuna understand each other clearly and feel good about their relationship.

**Note to facilitator:** Make sure that participants identify direct and honest communication about their feelings as one of the best choices.

8. Finally, ask the group to share some of the ideas they had that they thought would not be good and explain why.
  - Poor options for Oyuna include:
    - Not doing or saying anything (being passive).
    - Being violent or mean (acting aggressively).
    - Not telling Munkhuu the truth about how she feels and why she reacted as she did.
    - Sending an unclear message and not making it more clear or direct if Munkhuu seems to not understand.
  - Poor options for Munkhuu include:
    - Ignoring Oyuna's response.
    - Assuming Oyuna doesn't mean what she communicates (verbally or non-verbally).
    - Get angry or act aggressively.
    - Not asking Oyuna how she feels or what she is thinking.

### Activity Six: Talking about Sex (15 Minutes)

1. Continue by reading the next part of the story:

Sometimes Munkhuu's friends talk about having sex, and lately Munkhuu has been thinking more about having sex with Oyuna. He really loves her and he doesn't want her to feel like he is putting pressure on her or like she should do it to make him happy. He wonders how she feels about it. Munkhuu decides that the best thing for them to do is to talk about it.

At the same time, making out with Munkhuu has made Oyuna start thinking about sex. Sometimes she wonders what it would be like, but she feels confused. On the one hand, she loves Munkhuu, which makes her feel like she wants to do it, but she's also feeling kind of scared. It might change their relationship. Munkhuu might leave her. And she knows that having sex carries risks too. After some time, Oyuna thinks that she and Munkhuu should discuss sex before they get carried away. She wonders how he will react if she brings it up, but it is too important not to talk about it.

2. Tell the male groups to come up with several sentences that Munkhuu could use to start a conversation with Oyuna about sex and how he is feeling. Tell the female groups to come up with several sentences that Oyuna could use to start a conversation with Munkhuu about sex and how she is feeling. After they have finished, ask each group to select their best idea.
3. Begin with Munkhuu's perspective and ask the male groups to share their best ideas and write them on one side of the board.

4. Ask the girls the following questions:
  - What do you think of the boys' suggestions?
  - How do you think Oyuna would react?
  - Could this way of bringing up the topic of sex be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?
5. Now have the female groups share their best ideas and write them on the board next to the boys' options.
6. Ask the boys the following questions:
  - What do you think of the girls' suggestions?
  - How do you think Munkhuu would react?
  - Could this way of bringing up the topic of sex be misunderstood or put someone in an uncomfortable situation? If so, how could this be avoided?
7. Ask the groups to compare the responses of the female and male groups and ask them the following questions:
  - Are they similar or different?
  - If different, why do you think that is? Should they be different?
  - Which options would be most likely to help them to understand each other clearly and feel good about their relationship?

**Note to facilitator:** Make sure that participants identify direct and honest communication about their feelings as one of the best choices.
8. Tell participants that unlike Oyuna or Munkhuu many people decide NOT to talk about sex and just "play it by ear." Ask the group the following questions:
  - Why do people often not want to talk about sex with their partners?
    - ↳ Answers include:
      - They are embarrassed.
      - It is difficult to talk about sex.
      - They might think it kills the romance.
  - What are the problems that can arise if a couple has not clearly talked about sex?
    - ↳ Answers include:
      - Sexual situations can become uncomfortable or tense.
      - It leaves the door open for miscommunication.
      - The consent of both partners may not be clear; date rape could happen.
      - There is a danger that one of them will do something they might regret.
      - It makes it more difficult to plan for or engage in safe sex.
      - It makes it more difficult to use contraception.

### III. Conclusion (25 minutes)

Conclude the session by asking the participants the following questions:

- What was it like to discuss these topics in the class?
- Was it useful or not? In what way?
- Why was it useful to hear the comments made by participants of the opposite sex?

- How different were the responses of the female participants and male participants? What was different? Why?
- Were there any responses made by participants of the opposite sex that surprised you? Which responses?
- What was one important thing that you learned from thinking about Munkhuu and Oyuna's story?
- People often assume men and women want completely different things in relationships. What do you think about this idea after talking about today's story?
  - ↳ Answer: The things they wanted were not so different in many instances.
- What are some possible difficulties or problems that might arise from men thinking they know what women want (and don't want) and vice versa?
  - ↳ Answers:
    - It makes it unlikely that each will be able to give the other what they really want.
    - If you assume you know, you will never ask. Each person is different.
    - If you assume you know, you might not listen actively to your partner.
- People often expect men to "make the moves" and women to respond. What are some problems associated with this idea?
  - ↳ Answers:
    - Women might want to initiate intimate contact, but feel that they shouldn't.
    - This puts a lot of pressure on the man.
    - If the man is shy, nothing will happen regardless of what either the man or woman wants.
    - It promotes the idea that women should be passive, and this might be carried over into other parts of the relationship.
- What are some advantages of women also "making the moves?"
  - ↳ Answers:
    - Frees women to show romantic or sexual interest when they want to.
    - Takes pressure off the man.
    - Allows for the possibility of greater equality.
- How do the male participants feel about the idea of women "making on the moves?" Why?
- How do the female participants feel about this? Why?

#### IV. Homework

Write in your journal about a time you were interested in someone but did nothing. Use the following questions to guide you:

- Why didn't you do anything?
- How do you feel about it now?
- Do you think it's possible that if you had acted on your interest something positive might have come out of it?
- If you could go back, what would you do differently?
- Imagine you had decided to do something about your interest. What could you have done?

## SELECTED LESSON PLAN 6.2: RECOGNIZING AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

### SOURCE

“Warning Signals: Recognizing Clues to an Unhealthy Relationship,” by Sue Montfort and Peggy Brick. *Unequal Partners: Teaching About Power and Consent in Adult-Teen and Other Relationships, 2nd Ed.* ©2000 by Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey and reprinted with permission. All rights reserved. [www.ppgnnj.org](http://www.ppgnnj.org)

### Suitable for ages 12 to 18

### Summary

This lesson uses a combination of methods to help adolescents develop the ability to recognize behaviors that indicate serious problems in a relationship and confront them effectively. Participants are given the opportunity to consider how they would react to specific unhealthy behaviors and what behaviors would make them end a relationship. After a discussion, the lesson clearly defines certain behaviors as serious warning signs. Participants discuss the difficulties in ending relationships, the skills needed, and helpful strategies. Role plays of helping a friend decide to get out of a relationship reinforce the importance of ending unhealthy relationships and ideas about how to do so.

### Teaching Notes

- In step 5, consider having participants brainstorm ideas about how one could end a relationship, and then select the best ideas.
- If you have limited time, have participants role-play ending a relationship rather than simply advising a friend.
- If certain unhealthy practices (such as wife beating or infidelity) are common or widely accepted where you live, consider spending more time discussing them. Ask participants to compare how they would handle the situation if it occurred during dating or after marriage, and the implications for selecting a life partner.
- If you have a mixed gender group, consider comparing male and female answers and discussing the possible reasons for any differences.
- Some warning signals are quite dangerous to the person in the relationship. Ask participants which of the warning signs, such as hitting and then promising not to do it again, indicate a dangerous situation if repeated. Alternatively, ask them which could be precursors to a violent relationship, to one that might result in stalking (constant threatening or menacing behavior), or to other dangerous or even lethal situations that occur where you live.

### Adapting the Lesson

- Review the worksheet Warning Signals and add any common behaviors that should ring alarm bells.
- Draw the worksheet on the board if you can't photocopy it.
- Adapt the role-play situations to your own context.
- For cultures in which dating is not common or is very brief, these situations could still arise, possibly during courtship or, more likely and more problematically, after marriage. Although difficult, it would be useful to discuss these issues in the context of marriage. To follow up, ask participants to talk to their parents about how they would react if told about such a situation in a marriage and what they would expect their children to do.

# **WARNING SIGNALS**

## **Recognizing Clues to An Unhealthy Relationship**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

Students will:

1. identify common behaviors that signal a relationship is not honest, equal, respectful, and/or responsible.
2. determine what they would do if they were confronted with a partner's behaviors that warn of problems in the relationship.
3. practice skills for helping a friend end an unhealthy relationship.

### **RATIONALE:**

People of all ages continue relationships even when there are clear signs that their partner does not respect them and the relationship is damaging to the person's emotional and/or physical health. Often individuals deny the seriousness of the situation or minimize the extent to which their own needs or wishes are being discounted by their partner. In this lesson students examine some common warning signs and decide when and how they might end a relationship that signals trouble.

### **MATERIALS:**

- *Worksheet: WARNING SIGNALS*

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Introduce the lesson by noting that sometimes people find themselves in an intimate relationship that is not good for them. Sometimes these relationships are damaging to their emotional and/or physical health, but for a variety of reasons the individual continues the unhealthy relationship. Ask for volunteers to name some behaviors that are unhealthy in a relationship, without naming names. Quickly jot some of these on the board/easel.

2. Distribute the **Worksheet: WARNING SIGNALS**. Review the instructions, asking students to use their imaginations and decide what they would probably do in each situation.
3. As students complete their **Worksheets**, ask them to pair up with another student and compare their answers. Then bring the whole group together for discussion. (At the end of the discussion, stress that **all** of these behaviors are negative signs in a relationship.)

**Discussion Questions:**

- a. How did you decide which box to check?
  - b. If you checked the middle column for the behavior, whose behavior were you trying to change?
  - c. How did your responses compare with the responses of your discussion partner's?
  - d. What might be the consequences of ignoring one of these behaviors?
  - e. What behaviors were clear signals to you that it was time to end a relationship?
  - f. What tips would you give someone for discussing these behaviors with a partner?
4. Note that sometimes people know they should get out of a relationship, but do not do it. Ask them what the reasons might be. List them on the board/easel.
  5. Now ask students to think of someone they know who overcame the barriers and successfully ended an unhealthy relationship. Without naming names, ask them to describe how the person did this. List these strategies on the board/easel.
  6. Explain that they will now have a chance to role-play a situation where friends or family members are helping someone get out of a relationship. Depending on the abilities of your students, ask three volunteers to role-play in front of the whole group OR divide students into teams of three and have the teams do the role-play simultaneously.

**Possible Role-Play Situations:** (or use some suggested by students earlier)

- a. **The situation:** A 15-year-old high school female has been in a relationship with a 20-year-old college student for five months. Last night he made a crack about her being young and revealed he's cheating on her at college.

**The characters:** the 15-year-old girl and two high school friends



b. **The situation:** A 16-year-old high school junior is telling his 18-year-old brother and 22-year-old sister about his relationship with a 35-year-old married woman who is a waitress at the restaurant where he works weekends.

**The characters:** the 16-year-old, his 18-year-old brother, and his 22-year-old sister

c. **The situation:** A 17-year-old girl is telling her 18-year-old cousin and 36-year-old aunt about the 18-year-old guy she is dating. He demands to know where she is all the time and yells at her whenever he finds her talking with other guys.

**The characters:** the 17-year-old girl, her 18-year-old cousin, and her 36-year-old-aunt

d. **The situation:** A 17-year-old guy met a 44-year-old man at a gay bar 4 months ago. This man is very popular, handsome, and has a reputation for hitting on young men. He has just asked the 17-year-old to come live with him.

**The characters:** the 17-year-old guy and two other gay friends

7. **Discussion Questions**, to conclude:

- a. What did role-players do that was useful to the person in a likely unhealthy relationship?
- b. If you had a friend in a situation similar to one of these, how would you decide whether to encourage your friend to **change** or **end** the relationship?

## **Worksheet: WARNING SIGNALS**

**Directions:** A healthy relationship is *honest, equal, respectful, and responsible*. Some people have identified the behaviors listed in the chart below as *warning signs* that a relationship is *not* honest, equal, respectful, and responsible. Check what *you* would probably do in each of the following situations.

<b>IMAGINE YOUR PARTNER:</b>	<b>YOU WOULD PROBABLY:</b>		
	<b>Do nothing</b>	<b>Discuss relationship/try to change behavior</b>	<b>End relationship</b>
1. Makes negative comments about your clothes, body, or hair.			
2. Reveals there is a much greater age difference between you than you had been led to believe.			
3. Always decides where you will go together.			
4. Makes you hide things from your friends.			
5. Puts you down in public.			
6. Accuses you of fooling around with someone when you are not.			
7. Calls and turns up unexpectedly in order to check up on you.			
8. Ignores what you want to do.			
9. Lays a guilt trip on you when you go out with friends or family.			
10. Keeps you away from your family.			
11. Hits you and then apologizes.			
12. Refuses to use a condom.			
13. Will not let you get or use protection.			
14. Demands you have intercourse when you do not want to.			
15. Refuses to get tested for a sexually transmitted infection.			

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