

MODULE

5

“let’s talk”

PEERS AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



LEARNING GOALS

During this module, participants will:

- Define peer influences and pressures, discuss where they occur and with whom, and consider ways to deal with them.
- Discuss qualities they seek in friendships and how these qualities may change over time.
- Discuss the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships.

DEFINE THE ISSUE

Peer and social conflict are some of the most common reasons youth contact the National Runaway Safeline. This broad category can be broken down into more specific concerns ranging from challenges with romantic relationships to problems with friends and acquaintances. For many people, their peer to peer relationships are the most important social structures in their lives, and when conflict arises at an interpersonal level it can be deeply distressing to every person involved.

We continue to see dramatic changes in the way young people think about and engage in romantic relationships over the past century, and even within the past 5 years. Our understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships is constantly being reestablished; what our parents or grandparents expected in a partnership is likely different than what is accepted today. The internet has only accelerated this change, with many people creating platonic and romantic connections online.

Despite changing norms, statistics reveal that one in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence, according to the organization *loveisrespect* (www.loveisrespect.org).

This module is designed to help participants explore the healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics among peers and romantic partners. Throughout activities in this module participants will reflect in depth about qualities they seek out in others across relationships, the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships, and how the influence of our peers impacts our behavior.

ICONS

For further details, see the Introduction Module.



MODULE ACTIVITIES



ACTIVITY	TIME	METHODOLOGY
A. Friendships	10 minutes	Activity/Discussion
B. Peer Influences and Pressure	20 minutes	Activity/Discussion
C. Healthy Relationships	15 minutes	Activity/Discussion



Total time required: **45 minutes**

MATERIALS

- Poster paper or chalk/dry-erase board
- Markers or chalk
- “Qualities in a Friend that are Important to Me” worksheet
- “Relationships” worksheet
- Relationship Situation Cards (copy and cut before distributing)



Consider showing the companion film *American Street Kid*.



Contact the NRS Prevention & Youth Engagement Specialist at **773-289-1723** or prevention@1800RUNAWAY.org for support and technical assistance.

ACTIVITY 5A

FRIENDSHIPS



10 minutes

STATE Our friends can be some of the most important people in our lives. These are usually people who we grow to confide in and trust. Friendships require consistency, understanding, and good communication.

Over time, our priorities and values change, and the people in our lives will also experience these changes. The characteristics we find important in the people we surround ourselves with will also likely change. The passing of time and the gaining of self-awareness and experience will change many aspects of our lives, including the relationships we have with others. As people learn, grow, and experience the unpredictabilities of life, relationships will change.

ASK Why do you think some friendships last a long time while others don't?

ALLOW time for participants to answer. Examples include the following:

- People moved and it became difficult to stay in touch.
- Things just changed; we started hanging out with different people.
- We used to be involved in sports and spent a lot of time together, but now we play different sports.
- We went to different schools.
- Our lives and beliefs changed.

HAND OUT "Qualities in a Friend that are Important to Me" worksheets.

STATE Think about the relationships and friendships you have in your life. Why did you become close with the people you have? Take a few minutes to list 5 qualities you look for in a friend.

ALLOW 3 minutes for participants to fill out their worksheets.

STATE Next, circle those qualities that are about someone's personality.

Now, put a square around those qualities that are about the way someone looks physically or the things they possess.

ALLOW time for participants to complete this part of the activity.

ASK In what ways do you think the qualities you identified as being important in your relationships to you now may change over time?

If your friends were to list qualities about you, what do you think they would write down?

ALLOW time for participants to answer all questions.

QUALITIES IN A FRIEND THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO ME

Circle the qualities you look for in a friend. Below the chart describe your best friend to someone who does not know them.

Demanding	Empathetic	Lazy
Insecure	Popular	Brave
Intelligent	Arrogant	Creative
Dreamer	Funny	Energetic
Gullible	Bossy	Judgmental
Aggressive	Loyal	Serious
Humorous	Careless	Adventurous
Shy	Happy	Impulsive
Greedy	Conceited	Generous
Cowardly	Thoughtful	Disciplined
Mean	Dishonest	Compassionate
Honest	Relaxed	Idealistic
Complacent	Independent	Pessimistic
Dependable	Materialistic	Passionate
Temperamental	Sincere	Reliable

ACTIVITY 5B

PEER INFLUENCES AND PRESSURE



20 minutes

STATE A peer influence or pressure is when a person close to your age shapes your decisions and actions. These influences and pressures can be both positive and negative.

ASK Who can give me an example of a positive peer influence or pressure?

ALLOW time for participants to answer. If they need assistance, use the following examples:

- A classmate edited my English paper and I got an A.
- My friend took me to a show of an artist they really like, and now we bond over their music.

ASK Who can give me an example of a negative peer influence or pressure?

ALLOW time for participants to answer. If they need assistance, use the following examples:

- A classmate keeps trying to get me to drink even though they know I'm not comfortable with it.
- My friend tried to get me to lie to my parents about where we were going last Friday night.

STATE The people around us intentionally or unintentionally have the ability to influence our behavior. It's important for us to know how to deal with these influences and pressures from our peers, and to make healthy decisions for ourselves and others.

ASK Why might we sometimes be influenced by our peers?

ALLOW time for participants to respond. Make sure the following points are covered:

- To be liked
- To fit in
- To avoid being made fun of
- Out of curiosity
- To try something new
- Because everyone else is doing it
- Out of fear

ASK What are some of the consequences of both positive and negative peer pressure?

ALLOW 1-2 minutes for participants to answer.

ACTIVITY 5B →

STATE Now we know the differences between positive and negative peer influence and pressure, some reasons why we might give in to peer pressure, and some consequences of peer pressure. Now, let's talk about WHERE peer pressure, both positive and negative, happens.

ASK Where are some places or situations where peer pressure might occur?

ALLOW time for participants to answer. If they need assistance, use the following examples:

- Among friends
- Between couples, people who like each other, in romantic relationships
- At school
- While hanging out or playing sports
- At a party

STATE Great! Now we're going to do an activity as a group.

ASK for a participant to volunteer. Have that volunteer step outside of the room so they cannot hear the directions or group discussion. Divide the rest of the participants into two groups.

STATE We're going to do an activity where we try to persuade a person to "take our side." One group is going to take one side of the argument and the second group is going to take the other. You all are going to try to work together to persuade our volunteer to take your group's side.

I have a list of potential topics. You may select one of them, or the group can select a topic of its own.

LEAD the group in a discussion to select a topic. Topics might include one of the following:

- Studying versus going to a party
- Going to class versus skipping school to hang out with friends
- Coming home on time versus staying out late or past curfew

When the group has selected a topic, **ASSIGN** each group a side of the argument. For example, one group will argue for studying and the other group will argue for going to a party instead of studying.

STATE Now that we have our topic and what side each group is taking, you have 3 minutes for your group to come up with ways to pressure or influence your peer into taking your side.

ALLOW 3 minutes for the groups to organize their arguments.

CALL IN the volunteer.

ALLOW the two groups to present their arguments for their sides. Make sure that each side has equal time.

HAVE the volunteer pick one side.

ACTIVITY 5B CONTINUED

ASK Thanks for being the volunteer. How did being put on the spot to make a decision in front of your peers make you feel?

ALLOW time for a response.

ASK Now, for the groups—how did pressuring a peer into taking your side make you feel?

DISCUSS responses.

ACTIVITY 5C

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



15 minutes

This activity discusses intimate partner violence; please speak with your class prior to facilitation about what to do if this conversation is triggering to them.

STATE Everyone deserves to have safe, happy, and healthy relationships. In this activity we will time identifying characteristics of healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships. As we have learned already, the influential people in our lives can impact our ideas, our actions, and beliefs. We will discuss how this concept extends to intimate partner relationships, and build our knowledge of what a healthy relationship looks like. Statistics show us that one in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner. This activity aims to help us identify and support those around us who might be experiencing an unhealthy or abusive relationship.

INSTRUCT participants to find a partner to work with on the activity.

DISTRIBUTE the “Relationships” handout and a set of situation cards to each pair of participants.

STATE The situation cards I just handed out exemplify characteristics of relationships that are either healthy, unhealthy, or abusive. Work with your partner to place the cards along the spectrum where you think they fit best. If you feel like the situation falls in between and is unhealthy, place the characteristic in that category. You have two minutes to complete this activity with your partner.

ALLOW 2 minutes for the participants to complete the activity.

STATE Healthy relationships are based on honesty, respect, and trust, which means you make decisions together and can openly discuss relationship problems and life choices. In a healthy relationship, you should enjoy spending time together, but can be happy and supportive of one another when you are apart. Abusive relationships are based on imbalance of power and control, where one person tries to make most of the decisions in the relationship, or control aspects of the other partner’s time, friends, body, or finances. While an obvious form of abuse may be physical, as we see from this activity, power and control can be exerted in more subtle ways as well.

ASK What situations did you identify as healthy relationships? Is there anything you would change after hearing this?

ALLOW time for responses.

ASK What situations did you identify as unhealthy or abusive relationships? Is there anything you would change at this point in the activity?

DISCUSS responses. Answers could include:

- Pressures me to do things I am uncomfortable with
- Makes me feel like I can't do anything right
- Tries to control who I hang out with
- Humiliates me in front of others
- Gets jealous or makes me feel bad when I hang out with other people
- Threatens me
- Tries to tell me what to do
- Texts or calls me all the time
- Does not respect my personal boundaries

ASK Can you think of any other abusive relationship characteristics or situations that we haven't talked about?

ALLOW time for responses.

ASK Did you place any situations in the middle, feeling that they were in between and weren't abusive, but may not have seemed healthy?

DISCUSS responses.

STATE Unhealthy relationships are based on attempts to control the other person, where one person tries to make most of the decisions. They may pressure their partner, refuse to see how their actions can hurt, or might not prioritize the needs that their partner has in their relationship.

Ask as many discussion questions as time allows.

ASK the group the following questions for discussion:

- Were there any situations that you would change if it was a peer or romantic relationship? For example, something that is okay for a friend to do, but not a romantic partner, or vice versa. If so, why?
- Can you provide an example of a healthy relationship that might have an unhealthy behavior?
- Does love always mean you are in a healthy relationship?
- What are some examples you have seen depicting healthy, unhealthy, or abusive relationships?
- What qualities do you look for in a romantic relationship?
- Think about yourself. What qualities do you bring to your relationships?
- Think about the qualities you look for in a friend. Are these the same qualities you look for in a romantic relationship?

ALLOW time for responses.

ASK What questions do you have?

STATE Today we identified healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships. If what we talked about today reminds you of a relationship you are in, or a relationship of someone you know, we encourage you to reach out to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-779-SAFE, or visit their website at <https://www.thehotline.org/>. love is respect is also a helpful resource to learn about the differences between healthy, unhealthy and abusive relationships. love is respect can be reached at 1-866-331-9474 or at <https://www.loveisrespect.org/>.

If you are worried about a relationship, there is help. You can connect with someone at the National Runaway Safeline at 1-800-RUNAWAY or 1800RUNAWAY.org.

RELATIONSHIPS

Directions: Determine if the information on the card represents a characteristic of a healthy, unhealthy, or abusive relationship, then place the card under the corresponding heading.

Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
<p>A healthy relationship means both you and partner are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicating• Respectful• Trusting• Honest• Enjoying personal time away from each other• Making mutual choices• Economic/financial partners	<p>You can be in an unhealthy relationship if your partner is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not communicating• Disrespectful• Not trusting• Dishonest• Trying to take control• Not allowing you to spend time apart• Pressuring you into activities• Unequal economically	<p>Abuse may be occurring in a relationship when one partner is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicating in a hurtful or threatening way• Mistreating• Accusing the other of cheating when it's untrue• Denying their actions are abusive• Controlling• Isolating their partner from others

RELATIONSHIP SITUATION CARDS

Is supportive of my choices	Texts or calls me all the time	Tries to control who I hang out with
Listens to me when I have something on my mind	Allows me to make my own choices	Humiliates me in front of others
Is someone I can trust	Pressures me to do things I am uncomfortable with	Gets jealous when I hang out with other people
Is honest about how they feel	Makes me feel like I can't do anything right	Threatens me
Encourages me to try new things	Considers my feelings	Tries to tell me what to do

Content from loveisrespect.org. "Healthy Relationships Quiz."

ACTIVITY 5

SUMMARY

- STATE**
- Our friends are among the most important people in our lives. Friendships can range anywhere from a best friend to an acquaintance.
 - We all have different qualities we look for in friends.
 - A peer is a person close to your age who has an effect on your decisions and actions. Peer influences and pressure can be both positive and negative.
 - Peer pressure can be direct, such as when friends ask us to do something with them, or indirect, such as when we act one way with one group of friends and differently with another group.
 - Cliques and crowds are groups that have exclusive members. They can be hard to handle if we feel excluded from a group we'd like to join.
 - Recognizing healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationship characteristics is important in both peer and romantic relationships.

HANDOUTS AND WORKSHEETS

- A. Qualities in a Friend that are Important to Me
- B. Relationships
- C. Relationship Situation Cards

REFERENCES

Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs (ASPA). (2020, September 15). *What Is Bullying*. StopBullying.gov. <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/what-is-bullying> .

Everyone deserves a healthy relationship - is yours? love is respect. (2020, November 23). <https://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships> .

Learning for Justice. (2005). Getting Started. Retrieved 2021 from <https://www.learningforjustice.org/mix-it-up/activities>

RESOURCES

Stopbullying.gov offers comprehensive information about bullying nationwide (<http://www.stopbullying.gov/>).

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center provides resources for students, parents, educators, and others. It recognizes bullying as a serious community issue that impacts education, physical and emotional health, and the safety and well-being of students (<http://www.pacer.org/bullying/about/>).

Break the Cycle empowers youth to end domestic violence (<http://www.breakthecycle.org/>).

love is respect offers information for fostering healthy dating attitudes and relationships (<http://www.loveisrespect.org/>).

National Runaway Safeline (NRS), the federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth, provides crisis intervention through its 1-800-RUNAWAY hotline and 1800RUNAWAY.org online services. NRS is available to youth and families in crisis with support and access to resources 24 hours a day, 365 days a year (<http://www.1800RUNAWAY.org>).