



Healthy Relationships

Lesson Plan

Objectives:

1. Participants will be able to identify characteristics of healthy relationships.
2. Participants will be able to recognize when a relationship is unhealthy.
3. Participants will learn the benefits of a healthy relationship and a healthy marriage for themselves as well as their children.
4. Participants will create goals for keeping their relationship healthy.
5. Participants will make a commitment to keeping their relationship healthy.
6. Participants will become familiar with resources that can help them to have and maintain healthy relationships.

Materials:

- DVD — IDEALS video clip, *Instructional Video to Accompany Love's Cradle and Mastering the Magic of Love*, "What it means to be a couple," (7:14-8:10).
- DVD player and a television or a computer with a DVD drive and a projector
- 10 Keys to a Healthy Relationship handout (for facilitator)
- Participant binder pockets with handouts:
 - 10 Keys to a Healthy Relationship handout
 - What's My Love Language? handout
 - 8 Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship handout
 - The Benefits of Marriage handout
 - Setting Goals for Healthy Relationships worksheet
 - Resource list for your area (see Preparation note #1)
- SPEAK/HEAR skills cards
- Flip chart or dry erase board
- Pens
- Attendance sheet
- Name tags
- Materials for participant tables:
 - Play dough
 - Pipe cleaners
 - Paper and markers, etc.
- Participant incentives

Session Overview:

Welcome and introductions	(10-15 minutes)
Video and discussion	(6 minutes)
Discussion and activity: What is a healthy relationship?	(35-40 minutes)
Optional activity: 4 corners	
Discussion: Unhealthy relationships	(10 minutes)
Discussion: Benefits of a healthy relationship	(7 minutes)
Activity and Discussion: Beliefs and expectations about marriage	(7-8 minute)
Discussion: What are the benefits of marriage?	(5 minutes)
Talking about it: Creating goals	(10 minutes)
Resources	(5 minutes)
Introduce take home activity	(1 minutes)
Wrap Up	(10 minutes)

<i>Session total</i>	<i>(2 hours)</i>
----------------------	------------------

Preparation:

1. This lesson includes a discussion of unhealthy relationships, as well as resources to address concerns about domestic violence. Collect any community resources available in your area to have on hand during the session.
2. Frame the discussion of abusive relationships in terms of how participants can help a friend who may be in a very unhealthy relationship. Framing the discussion in this way takes the pressure off the participants regarding their own situation. If they would like to disclose later about their own situation, or that of a friend, they should have the opportunity to do so after the session. Refer participants to professionals to discuss any domestic violence concerns.

Procedure:**1. Welcome participants to the session and reconnect (10-15 minutes).**

- Introduce yourself to the group and the title of today's lesson, "Healthy Relationships."
- Welcome participants and, especially if you have any new participants, go around the room and have everyone briefly introduce themselves.
- Ask about take home activities from the previous session (if applicable).

Note: Tell the participants at the beginning of the session that it focuses on healthy couple relationships. Although some information may not seem relevant to participants that are not currently in a relationship, it will be helpful when they enter new relationships in the future.

Say: *"We are going to talk about healthy relationships and what an unhealthy relationship may look like. First we are going to start with a short video clip."*

2. Watch video clip and discuss (6 minutes).

- Before showing the clip, ask participants to pay close attention to how the couple is interacting in the video.
- Show the *IDEALS* video clip, "What it Means to be a Couple," (7:14-8:10).

Ask: *"Does this look like a healthy relationship? Why or why not?"*

Sample responses:

- The couple is respectful of one another and they allow each other to share feelings without attacking or judging.
- The partners share what they think is positive about their relationship.
- They show that they understand by repeating what their partner says.

3. Discussion and activity: What is a healthy relationship? (35-40 minutes).

- Divide the group in half. If you have equal numbers of men and women, you may want to divide the group by gender.
- Have each group come up with a list of 10 things that they think make a healthy relationship.

- Give groups about 5 minutes to discuss, and then have each group present their lists. Write or have a person from each group write their responses on flip chart paper or a dry erase board.
- Address each item on the lists, **asking groups to explain:**
 1. *“Why did you choose this?”*
 2. *“Why might this be a good feature of a relationship?”*
- As each group explains their lists, add in the information below about the Keys to a Healthy Relationship. Write out the “10 Keys to a Healthy Relationship” for participants to see as you discuss each item. If some characteristics are not mentioned during this discussion, highlight the main points after all groups have explained their lists.
- Have participants take out their “10 Keys to a Healthy Relationship” handout and fill it out during the discussion. The participant handout has blanks under each item that participants can fill in.

Note: You may wish to give a small prize to a participant who fills in all of the blanks correctly.

- After this discussion, **have participants compare their lists to the handout in participant packets.**

Note that it takes a lot of work to build a healthy relationship and that everything they mentioned, whether it is on the list provided or not, is important.

10 Keys to a Healthy Relationship:

1. Commitment:

Ask: *“What do you know about commitment?”*

- **Be sure to include:**
 - Being committed is about staying together through ups and downs.
 - During conflicts, don’t threaten that you will leave.
 - Ensure that children are healthy, safe, and happy.
- 🗨️ **Say:** *“Being committed to the relationship is about staying together through ups and downs and putting time and effort into your relationship to keep it strong and healthy. If you are committed, you will be more prepared to deal with problems. You will work together to make changes when needed to keep your relationship strong. Every relationship has its ups and downs, but*

committed couples are dedicated to staying together through tough times.

Couples who use commitment as a threat during arguments are more likely to split up and less likely to be happy. They may say things like, 'I don't know why we're together in the first place,' or 'I will leave you if. . .' Be careful about using words like these because it's harmful to your relationship.

Commitment also includes commitment to the children in the relationship. In healthy relationships, both partners are committed to making sure the children are healthy, safe, and happy.

Ask: *"So what can you do to increase commitment?"*

Sample responses:

- Spend time together
- Talk together
- Set goals together for your relationship and your children
- Make each other and the relationship a priority

2. Love and Affection

 **Say:** *"Love and affection are key to healthy relationships. Partners in healthy relationships show each other love and appreciation."*

Ask: *"What does your partner do to show you that he or she loves you?"*

Sample responses:

My partner:

- Gives me hugs and kisses
- Gives me compliments
- Cares for me when I'm sick
- Buys me gifts
- Tells me he/she loves me
- Cooks dinner for me
- Listens to me

Ask: *"What do you do for your partner that shows you love him or her?"*

Say: *“Research shows that **couples that show a lot of love and affection are happier and have better mental and physical health than those where there is less affection.** Couples who have close, affectionate, and secure relationships are also better able to deal with problems or stresses that come up in the relationship.*

We all have different ways of feeling loved and showing love. Some of us feel loved when we are given gifts like flowers or candy, but others feel loved when our partner says ‘I love you’ or when our partner cooks dinner for us. Knowing what makes you feel loved as well as what makes your partner feel loved can help you strengthen your relationship.

One way to look at this is to consider something called languages of love. Gary Chapman, through his work with couples, came up with what he calls the 5 Love Languages. He believes that every person expresses love and feels love in his or her own way.”

- Have participants get out the “What’s My Love Language?” handout.
- Ask them to choose the statement that best fits (see front of handout).
- After participants have completed the front of the handout, have them turn their sheets over to see descriptions of each of the 5 Love Languages.

Say: *“According to Gary Chapman, we tend to show love the way that we would like others to show love toward us. For example, you buy flowers and gifts for your partner because that is what you would want your partner to do for you, but maybe all your partner wants is for you to say ‘I love you’ more often.”*

Ask: *“When going through the worksheet, did you learn anything about yourself or your partner that you want to share with the group?”*

3. Positivity:

- **Be sure to include:**
 - Keep interactions with your partner more positive than negative.
 - Really good and happy relationships have 20 positive interactions for every one negative interaction.

Say: *“Healthy relationships have more positives than negatives. Some of us have been in relationships where things were pretty negative and others where there were a lot more positives. Long-lasting relationships have 5 times as many positive connections as negative, and really good and happy relationships have 20 positive interactions for every one negative interaction. **It is about keeping your interactions with your partner more positive than negative.**”*

Ask: *“What are some positive interactions you might have with your partner?”*

Sample responses:

- Sharing joy
- Laughing together
- Giving flowers
- Telling your partner how nice he/she looks

Say: *“These interactions can range from very tiny things, such as a smile and a hello when you get home from work, to something much bigger.”*

Ask: *“What are some negative interactions you might have with your partner?”*

Sample responses:

- Anger
- Calling each other names
- Arguing
- Criticizing

Say: *“Being positive isn’t always easy, especially when we are dealing with everyday struggles, but research shows that it is important for developing happy, long-lasting relationships. Make an effort to have more positive interactions with your partner. Acknowledge when your partner does something positive. For example, if your partner cleans the house, does the laundry, or does something nice for you, be sure to show appreciation and say thank you.”*

4. Communication:

- **Be sure to include:**
 - How much you communicate is not as important as how well you communicate.
 - In healthy relationships, partners are able to communicate thoughts, feelings, and concerns in a respectful way.

🗨️ **Say:** *“Healthy relationships have good communication. The most important thing to remember about communication is that **it’s not how much you communicate with your partner, but rather how well you communicate.**”*

Ask: *“Why do you think good communication is so important?”*

🗨️ **Say:** *“Couples in healthy relationships talk with each other and listen to each other. Partners feel safe telling one another their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. In another session, Couple Communication, we focus more on building communication skills for couple relationships.”*

5. Shared activities:

- **Be sure to include:**
 - Find activities you and your partner can do together.
 - It doesn’t matter what you do, as long as you are doing it together.

🗨️ **Say:** *“Spending time doing things together is a key part of building and maintaining a healthy relationship with your partner. **Find activities that you and your partner can do together.** This can range from folding laundry together, to cooking dinner together at home, to going for a walk. The purpose is to strengthen your relationship by spending that time together.*

***It’s not what you do together, but the fact that you do things together and that you share in each others’ interests that are important.** In healthy relationships, partners spend quality time together, which helps keep the relationship strong. Having positive interactions and enjoying your time doing things together is what is most important.”*

Ask: *“What kinds of activities do you and your partner do together? If you*

do not currently have a partner, think about the kinds of activities you enjoyed doing with a partner or that you would like to do with a partner in the future.” “What are some activities that you would like to do together with your partner?”

Optional activity if you have couples: 4 corners activity

- Have participants think about the kinds of activities they like to do.
- Assign a type of activity to all 4 corners of the room.
- Have participants go to the corner of the room that best fits the activity they most like to do.
- Ask participants if they prefer to do activities that are:
 - 1) Outside in nature
 - 2) Adventurous
 - 3) With big groups of people
 - 4) One on one

Ask: *“If you stand in the same corner as your partner, what do you think that might mean for your relationship?” “What about if you stand in different corners – what does that mean for your relationship?”*

Say: *“It’s okay for you and your partner to do different things at times and to have different interests, but it’s also important to nurture your relationship and find things that you can do together. If you and your partner usually like to do different things, try to find some things that you both enjoy and can do together.”*

6. Friendship:

- **Be sure to include:**
 - Healthy relationships are based on a strong friendship.
 - Show interest in your partner’s activities.
 - Keep up with what’s going on in your partner’s life.
 - Take time to build your friendship with your partner.

Say: ***“Healthy relationships are based on a strong friendship. Partners respect each other, enjoy spending time with one another, and keep up with what is going on in each other’s lives. They check in with each other after a long day and know what makes their partner sad and what makes him or her happy. Couples who have a strong friendship are also better able to deal with conflicts and stresses that come up in their relationship. Think about other friendships that you have now or that you had growing up.”***

Ask: “What made those friendships so special?”

Sample responses:

- We could talk about anything.
- We enjoyed spending time together.
- We knew when each other was feeling sad or angry and knew what to do to make things better.

Say: “Friends support one another and are there for each other. In couple relationships, **friendship is the foundation for building intimacy and connection with your partner.** In healthy relationships, individuals put their partner’s needs first and they work to build and maintain a healthy friendship. Make time for your friendship with your partner, even through all the stresses of life.”

Ask: “How has being a friend with your partner made your relationship stronger?”

7. Healthy conflict resolution:

- **Be sure to include:**
 - All relationships have conflict.
 - How you deal with conflict is what is important.
 - Conflict can be good for relationships if it is dealt with respectfully and if it solves problems.
 - Children can benefit from seeing adults manage conflict well and solve problems through conflicts.

Ask: “Do healthy relationships have conflict?”

Say: “All relationships have some conflict. What is important is how we deal with conflict. In healthy relationships, partners are able to solve problems that come up and work together to resolve conflicts.

Conflict can be good for relationships. **If conflict is dealt with respectfully and if it helps to solve problems, it can strengthen your relationship.** Although it’s important to not have heated arguments in front of your children, letting children see how you solve a problem can be good for your children, as long as they also

see how you resolve the conflict. It can be healthy for your children because it helps them learn how to solve their own problems.

However, **be very careful about the kind of conflict that you have around your children.** It is not healthy for children to see their parents yelling at one another because it can be scary for them.”

Ask: “What are some positive ways that you deal with conflicts in your relationships?”

8. Support:

- **Be sure to include:**

- Support your partner by giving encouragement and showing support.

 **Say:** “The next characteristic of a healthy relationship is support. In healthy relationships, **partners are supportive of one another and show their partners that they love and care for them.** Support your partner’s needs, hopes, dreams, and decisions. **You can support your partner through your words and through your actions.**”

Ask: “How do you show your partner that you support him or her?” “What else can you do to show your support for your partner?” “How would you like your partner to be supportive of you?”

9. Empathy:

- **Be sure to include:**

- Think about how your partner might be feeling.
- Show your partner that you care about his or her feelings.

Ask: “What does it mean to show understanding or empathy toward your partner?”

 **Say:** “Having empathy is about putting yourself in your partner’s shoes and trying to imagine how he or she might be feeling. It means showing your partner that you understand his or her point of view and that you respect your partner’s feelings as being real even if they are different from your own.

You might ask your partner, ‘How did that make you feel?’ or you might say, ‘I can see that it made you upset.’ These phrases show your partner that you care and want to understand his or her feelings.”

Ask: “How has your partner shown empathy?”

10. Trust:

○ **Be sure to include:**

- Trust takes a lot of time and effort to build.
- Be honest with one another.
- Follow through on promises you make.
- Infidelity can be a sign that the relationship is not going well.

Say: “Trust is a big issue for many couples. You can’t have a healthy relationship if you do not trust one another. Trust builds over time and it takes a lot of effort. Trusting your partner is about feeling like you can depend on him or her and that you are there to support one another.

Ask: “How can you build trust in relationships?”

Say: “To build trust, communicate honestly with your partner and follow through on promises that you make. If you tell your partner that you will do something, do it! Be someone your partner can depend on and confide in. It takes work to build trust in your relationship.”

○ **Discuss infidelity.**

Say: “Trust is big for relationships. One big issue relating to trust is infidelity, or cheating. This can be a sign that there are problems with the relationship.

Sometimes when partners have negative feelings and avoid talking about conflicts, it can lead partners to not feel as close to one another as they once did. When this happens, partners may go outside of the relationship to try to find that sense of closeness. When one partner is not faithful, it can be devastating for the relationship. Trust in the relationship is often broken.

If infidelity is an issue in your relationship, be open and honest with your partner and talk about the situation. Everyone has their own ability to cope with things. Some people can work through trust issues in relationships, but it may be more difficult for others.”

4. Discussion: Unhealthy relationships (10 minutes).

Say: “We just talked about some things that make a healthy relationship.”

Ask: “How do you know when a relationship is unhealthy?”

Say: “A relationship can be unhealthy if we are missing any of the 10 characteristics we just talked about. It can also be unhealthy if we don’t feel safe. A relationship is unhealthy if:

- You can’t trust each other.
- You have to hide things.
- You don’t feel comfortable making big decisions with your partner.
- You feel afraid or scared of your partner.
- One partner controls what the other does, where that partner goes, who that partner sees.

As we talk about unhealthy relationships, it is important to note that there are different levels of unhealthy relationships. A relationship can be unhealthy if partners do not trust each other or if partners are very negative with one another. It is also unhealthy if one partner is controlling of the other or if one partner feels afraid or unsafe in the relationship.

I hope none of you have experienced domestic violence, but I imagine that some of you know someone who has. I want to take a few minutes to talk about some behaviors that are abusive and very unhealthy for relationships.”

Important Note: Frame this discussion as “here is some information about what abusive relationships look like, in case you know of a friend who may be in an abusive relationship.”

- Note the handout in participant packets, “Eight Signs of an Unhealthy Relationship.”
- Briefly read through the handout.

- Note that abusive relationships are not just about physical violence but also include things like threats, intimidation, or isolation.

Say: *“We talk about commitment and sticking together through the ups and downs, but there is a point when the downs are low enough that it’s no longer healthy to stay in the relationship. We are encouraging you to make a commitment to get through the small ups and downs in your relationships, but it’s important to know to get away when the relationship is abusive.”*

Abusive relationships can happen to anyone. If you know of someone who might be in an abusive relationship, you can call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), or your local domestic violence shelter.”

Transition:

Say: *“Today we have been focusing on building healthy relationships because research shows that individuals are happier when they are in relationships that are healthy. We hope this information will help you be able to have the skills that you need to have healthy relationships.”*

5. Discussion: What are the benefits of a healthy relationship? (7 minutes)

Ask: *“What are the benefits of a healthy relationship?”*

Say: *“Healthy couple relationships have many benefits for parents and children. People in healthy relationships are happier and more satisfied with their relationships.”*

Ask: *“How might your healthy relationships benefit your children?”*

Say: *“You are a role model for your children. They are watching and learning from your relationships. **If children see you in a healthy relationship, they are more likely to have healthy relationships themselves.** Your children are learning what it takes to have a healthy relationship as well as seeing the positive things it can do for you and your partner.”*

6. Activity and Discussion: Beliefs and expectations about marriage (10 minutes).

Note: For this discussion, there are two options. Option A is to have a discussion using the questions below to guide participants. Option B is to do an Agree/Disagree activity using the statements listed under Option B.

Option A:

Ask: *“What do you see as good and bad about marriage?” “What do you expect from marriage?” “Why do you think people sometimes wait to get married?” “Do you think you should wait for certain things before getting married?” “Why or why not?” “Do you want to get married some day? Why or why not?”*

Option B:

- Assign one side of the room as “strongly agree” and the other side as “strongly disagree” and have participants stand at the end of the room (or anywhere in the middle) that represents how they feel about the statement.
- Let participants discuss their beliefs and expectations about marriage before moving on to the next statement.
 1. It’s important to have your own home and a good job before you get married.
 2. It’s important to be financially stable before getting married.
 3. It’s my partner’s job to make me happy.
 4. It’s important to know what my partner expects out of marriage.
 5. It’s important to know what I expect out of marriage.
 6. If there is something I don’t like about my partner now, I can change him or her after we are married.
 7. Married people have less satisfying sex, and less sex, than single people.
 - **Research shows that married people actually have more sex than single people, and it is reported to be more satisfying, physically and emotionally.
- **Be sure to mention:**
 - *** *“Marriage is a very individual choice. We want everyone to make the best choice for themselves and their families. We will not tell you what to do; we want to let you know what research says about marriage.”* ***

7. Discussion: Benefits of marriage (5 minutes).

🗨️ Say: *“Marriage has many benefits. Today, we are going to talk about what researchers say about the benefits of marriage. We are not trying to tell you what you should or shouldn’t do.”*

Ask: *“How can a healthy marriage can benefit you and your partner?”*

Say: *“Research has found many benefits of healthy marriages for both men and women. Studies have found that (compared to single people or those living with a partner), married men and women:*

- *Live longer*
- *Have better mental and physical health*
- *Are happier*
- *Are less likely to commit crimes and to be victims of crimes*
- *Have sex more often and enjoy sex more, physically and emotionally*
- *Save more money*
- *Receive more financial help from extended family*
- *Have better relationships with their children*

For women in particular, studies have found that marriage was related to having higher quality relationships (including more support and less conflict in relationships).”

8. Talking about it: Creating goals (10 minutes).

- Have participants break into groups of 2 or 3 to talk about goals for having healthy relationships (using the discussion skills on the SPEAK/HEAR skills card).
- Have participants look at the “Setting Goals for Healthy Relationships” worksheet in their packets.
- Distribute the SPEAK/HEAR skills cards for participants to use during the dialogue. Some participants may be familiar with these skills from attending a previous session. However, the skills may be new to some participants.
- Briefly read through the skills listed on the SPEAK/HEAR skills card, then allow participants time to talk with their partners.

Say: *“Think about the things we talked about today that make relationships healthy. Make it your goal to work with your partner to keep your relationship healthy. As we talked about before, all relationships require continuous attention to keep them healthy.”*

9. Resources (5 minutes).

- Briefly go over the resource list for your area in participant packets and any other relationship education resources in your area.

10. Introduce the take home activity (1 minute).

 **Say:** *“Work on meeting your goals for keeping your relationships healthy. As we talked about today, although healthy relationships have great benefits, relationships take work and constant attention.”*

11. Wrap up the session and give out incentives (10 minutes).

- Ask if anyone has any general questions.
- Tell participants that they can visit NCSU extension for community resources.
- Thank participants for coming and participating in the lesson.
- Make sure everyone knows the day and location of the next session.

This lesson was possible thanks to a grant from ACF