Welcome to the Head Start Healthy Relationships online course.

Relationships are the foundation of families and society. For decades, scientists have studied the impact that relationships have on health and emotional well-being. Numerous studies reveal that healthy relationships, in the end, provide protection against anxiety, consequently lowering the risk of heart disease, depression, addiction, and cancer. In contrast, an unhealthy relationship is a source of strain that causes emotional insecurity and stress. It is well documented that long-term stressors negatively affect behavioral and emotional well-being. So, what makes a healthy relationship?

This course reviews some of the major components that comprise a healthy relationship. Relationships exist along a spectrum; from healthy to unhealthy. This course also reviews abusive behaviors that are considered to be red flags and should be recognized in relationships.

So what makes a relationship “healthy”? Let’s start by reviewing some qualities of a good relationship.
Trust

Trust is one of the most vital components of healthy relationships. Most would agree that without trust, no relationship can thrive. People who are trustworthy are reliable; their words and behaviors are consistent. Trustworthy people hold to the truth, and give others the benefit of the doubt. When asked to, they keep things confidential. Their actions create a safe environment where feelings, concerns, and dreams can be shared without fears or judgement.

Trust is two directional, meaning that it must be given and received. It is fragile, and can easily be lost, if not cherished and protected.

Honesty

Historically, honesty has been considered one of the most important values in a human being. Many believe that honesty and trust are the foundations of social relationships. Honesty promotes well-being because it establishes trust and credibility. People who are honest are sincere in their words and actions. Whether within the context of their personal lives with family and friends, or at the workplace with colleagues, honest people behave consistently.

Honest people must first be honest with themselves. Practicing self-reflection helps people discover conflicts between who they are and how they behave.
**Respect**

Developing respect for each other is essential in developing and maintaining a healthy relationship. Valuing your partner’s opinions and feelings can help in developing respect. This includes maintaining respect when your partner’s opinions and feelings may not be the same as your own.

In a healthy relationship, people accept each other’s differences. Not trying to change the other person to suit their needs, but rather, they love them for who they are. It is also important to respect each other’s privacy and space. Many people value spending time together and time apart, or time alone.

**Independence**

A healthy relationship also means keeping other relationships going, such as, family, friends and co-workers. Occasionally time apart is an important part of establishing independence. Consider picking up a hobby or joining a club that interests you and encouraging your partner to do the same.

It is important for both partners to have their own space outside of the relationship and not be involved in every part of each other’s life.
Responsibility

Taking responsibility in a relationship often proves to be challenging, however it can go far in resolving conflict and in developing respect. Taking ownership for mistakes and avoiding placing blame are examples of taking responsibility. Understanding the impact of your words and being able to offer a sincere apology when a mistake is made can create a stronger, more meaningful relationship.

Equality

Equality in a relationship is characterized by both individuals having an equal amount of input in decision-making and effort. Finding balance in a relationship will often involve compromise. This involves making an effort to give and take while attempting to understand another perspective.
Healthy Conflicts

It is important to understand that disagreement and conflict are normal in a relationship. Healthy conflict consists of communication while maintaining respect when a disagreement arises.

If conflict arises, keeping open communication and practicing compromise is beneficial to building a healthy relationship. When seeking solutions, focus on outcomes that will benefit both parties. Taking time to be reflective of personal thoughts, actions, and emotions in anticipation of the conversation may be helpful before re-engaging in conversations. As you navigate through communication, an “agree to disagree” resolution may be the outcome of discussions.

Unhealthy Conflicts

When conflicts involve behaviors that are hurtful and destructive the conflict is considered unhealthy. When a conflict becomes emotional or someone becomes upset, conflicts can quickly become unhealthy and destructive.

Unhealthy conflict is often characterized by one person attempting to assert power over another in the form blaming, talking over someone else, or putting someone down verbally. These behaviors will not lead to a positive resolution of the conflict.
It is important to understand that conflict should never involve verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. You can recognize these types of abuse by understanding the signs. Next, let’s take a look at abuse and other unhealthy behaviors.

**Emotional and Verbal Abuse**

Unhealthy relationships are often characterized by abuse or other unhealthy behaviors. Emotional and verbal abuse

Emotional and verbal abuse involves a person exerting power and control to another person through the use of humiliation, embarrassment, isolation, shame, and blame. Verbal threats, name calling and put downs are examples of verbal abuse. The person causing the abuse is often times unpredictable and demanding in nature. Additionally this person may seek control by continuously monitoring the other person or punishing them by withholding affection. Often emotional and verbal abuse are dismissed through the justification that it isn’t “as bad” as physical abuse. However, it should be noted that emotional abuse has long terms effects and is often a sign that physical abuse will follow.
Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the unwanted and intentional contact with you or something close to your body that causes injury or puts you in danger.

It is important to understand that physical abuse includes the throwing of objects near your body. Physical abuse also includes those actions that are unwanted, but may not cause a bruise or physical scar. These actions include the grabbing of clothing, pulling hair, or pushing or pulling someone.

Escaping physical abuse is often a difficult step to take. An important step in escaping the abuse is realizing that the behavior is wrong and acknowledging that it should not be tolerated for any reason. Understanding that there are others that can help in this experience is important.

Talking with other trusted individuals, advocates, or organizations is a critical step in escaping physical abuse.
Sexual Abuse

Simply put, sexual abuse is any type of unwanted sexual contact which includes anything from unwanted touching to rape.

It is important to understand that coercion and/or pressure to do something sexual, is also considered abuse. A common misconception is that if someone doesn’t resist then they are consenting to the sexual activity. While this is not true, this can make it difficult for victims of sexual abuse to reach out for support.

Abuse is in no way the fault of the victim. Sexual abuse is a very serious issue and knowing what to do can help you or someone you know.

Contacting someone that you trust is vitally important at this time. Support from someone who can help tremendously. Support can come in the form of a friend, teacher, counselor, faith leader, or abuse advocate.

If the decision is made to report what has happened then the proper authorities should be notified. They will provide support and guidance on the next steps that need to be taken to ensure short and long-term safety.
Conclusion

In this course, we have explored the characteristics of a healthy relationship and how those characteristics can help create and maintain meaningful long lasting relationships.

We also learned the importance of healthy conflicts as well the differences between healthy and unhealthy conflicts.

Additionally, we learned about the different types of abuse and how they are characterized and some actions that can be taken if such an abuse occurs.

Included in this course are resources that help you further your understanding of the topics discussed in this course.

Thank you for completing the Healthy Relationships course!