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Lesson:

How to Create

Healthy Relationships



BACKGROUND

Strong, **healthy relationships** are the foundation of society. Everyone has multiple relationships with family members, friends, acquaintances, work associates and others. And when these are unhealthy individuals may suffer. Relationships can become **unhealthy** from **abuse**, neglect, mistreatment, or apathy.

Teaching children how to build healthy relationships will enable them to recognize when a relationship is unhealthy, build healthy relationships, and allow them to help others to foster healthy relationships.

PREPARATION

- Use the quiz in the Activities section below to evaluate your relationships to see if they are healthy or unhealthy.
- Prior to the lesson practice the steps to having a healthy relationship with your spouse and child.
- Identify where your children are creating relationships (i.e. home, school, park, work, etc.)
- Evaluate an unhealthy relationship that you no longer have and determine what part you played in making that relationship unhealthy. Use your evaluation to discuss how children can avoid unhealthy relationships.

OBJECTIVE

- Define healthy relationships for your child and share examples of some of your healthiest relationships.
- Help children understand why we should have healthy relationships.
- Discuss how relationships can change from unhealthy to healthy or vice-versa.
- Discuss how positive communication, kindness, caring, compassion, and empathy affect relationships.

LESSON

Relationships are part of everyone's daily lives. Children and adults have various relationships such as those between **peers**, teacher-student, parent-child, siblings, boss-employee, romantic partners, etc. A healthy relationship is one where both individuals are invested, caring about the other, and there is reciprocity of positive emotions, actions, and thoughts.

DISCUSSION

Relationships are much like our physical bodies. Just as our bodies need nutritious foods, exercise, and sleep to be healthy, relationships need positive communication, empathy, and kindness to be healthy.

- Share personal examples of healthy relationships and how they have impacted you.
 - Talk about a person with which you have had a healthy relationship (i.e. parent, teacher, spouse, sibling)
 - One thing they did to make me feel important was...
 - This made our relationship stronger because...
 - This made me want to be better because...
- Discuss how relationships are affected and the importance of:
 - **Positive communication.**
 - Using **active listening** when the other person is discussing their thoughts and feelings.
 - Being kind to the other person even when they are not being kind.
 - Noticing when the other person needs you to care and then acting on those needs.
 - Having compassion when the other person is dealing with challenges or difficulties.
 - Being empathetic to the other person's wants, desires, struggles, challenges, emotions, and joys.
- Discuss the steps to building a healthy relationship. (These steps may vary for some relationships.)
 - Get to know the other person through casual conversations.
 - Find similarities between you and the other person.
 - Share experiences (i.e., spending time together, communicating about your similarities, etc.).
 - Make time for one another.
 - Share various aspects of yourself.
 - Find ways to support each other in your similarities and differences, hard times and good times, etc.
 - Continue the steps to build and maintain the healthy relationship

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION FOR OLDER KIDS

- Discuss how relationships involve two people and both must work together for a healthy relationship to thrive.
- Discuss how relationships may have healthy and unhealthy times because individuals are not perfect.
- Discuss how relationships will change over time and we need to be accepting of the changes to maintain healthy relationships.
- Discuss how even some healthy relationships will last a brief amount of time whereas others may last a lifetime.
- Discuss how technology can change the dynamics of building a relationship.
 - Others can portray themselves online differently than they are in real life.
 - Texting conversations can be different than face-to-face.

- Others can find out more information than you may be willing to share early on in the relationship (i.e. Google searches, Facebook or Twitter stalking, looking through old Instagram photos).

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD

1. How would you define a healthy relationship?
2. What creates a healthy relationship?
3. What can you do to make your relationships healthier?
4. Do you think that we have a healthy or unhealthy relationship? How can we make our relationship healthier?
5. What behaviors, situations, or changes would help you to understand that it is time to end a relationship?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

1. What behaviors in a relationship would you consider unhealthy?
2. What problems have you seen your friends have when they are in an unhealthy relationship?
3. How can others being able to find out a lot of information about you online affect your relationship with them? How could this be beneficial to the relationship? How could it be damaging to the relationship?
4. Why is texting a person different than speaking face-to-face? How can this help a person hide their true feelings in a relationship?

ACTIVITIES

1. Take this quiz to evaluate if your relationships are healthy.
 - a. How do you feel when you are around this person?
 - b. Do you feel that you can be yourself around this person?
 - c. Do you feel this person accepts you as you are?
 - d. Can you tell this person anything without being afraid of them getting upset?
 - e. Does this person encourage you to be a better person?
 - f. Do you or the other person, often use harsh, **belittling** or **degrading** words towards the other?
 - g. Are you open and honest with this person? Do you feel this person is open and honest with you?
2. Think about one of your friends.
 - a. Do you have a healthy or unhealthy relationship with this friend?
 - b. What is something you can do to have a healthier relationship?

FOLLOW UP FOR PARENTS

- As a parent you may recognize some of your child's relationships as unhealthy. Children need to recognize these as unhealthy themselves, or they cannot repair the problems or discontinue the relationships. Parents who try to force their child to end unhealthy relationships may actually cause damage to their relationship with their child rather than fixing the problem.
- **If you or your child is in an abusive relationship, please seek professional advice.**
Abusive relationships are unhealthy relationships, and may take more than basic healthy relationship skills to overcome. You must be very clear in helping children understand what an abusive relationship is and that abusive relationships should not continue. Children need to understand that if they are being controlled through intimidation, threats or isolation by another person, they are in an abusive relationship. Examples include:
 - A boy/girlfriend not allowing your child to spend time with friends.
 - A friend threatening to harm themselves, others or your child if your child does not follow the friend's demands.
 - A family member using their position as an adult to sexually assault your child.
 - A boss intimidating your child through demeaning vocabulary.
- Children learn best by modeling parents' behaviors. As you work to build and maintain healthy relationships, especially within your family, your children will be more likely to have healthy relationships themselves.
- Relationships, especially for children, have a technology emphasis attached to them. Many children, especially teenagers, spend time texting friends, tweeting, facebooking, instagramming, vining, etc., which can strengthen or weaken relationships. Although each of these can be useful in building healthy relationships, they can also cause relationships to become unhealthy if bullying occurs.

RELATED DISCUSSIONS

All of these topics can be found in [30 Days to a Stronger Child](#) on [Amazon](#):

Friendship

Respect

Empathy

Assertiveness

RELATED ARTICLES AND LESSONS

[5 Ways to Teach Children Empathy](#)

[Lesson: Kindness Online, Face to Face, and Everywhere](#)

GLOSSARY TERMS

Abusive Relationship: An unhealthy relationship where at least one person uses controlling behaviors such as intimidation, threats, and isolation to act out for perceived wrongs physically, emotionally, verbally, and/or sexually.

Active Listening: Using all senses to fully concentrate on the messages and words a person is delivering to the listener.

Belittling: A negative behavior meant to make another person feel unimportant or minimize their self-worth.

Degrading: A negative behavior meant to lower another person's self-respect or cause humiliation.

Healthy Relationship: A relationship where both individuals are invested, caring about the other, and there is reciprocity of emotions, actions, and thoughts.

Intimacy: A close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving, personal relationship with another person or group.

Peers: Other individuals usually of the same socioeconomic background, and age that you associate with.

Positive Communication: Being able to share all thoughts and feelings (positive or negative) in an uplifting or constructive way.

Unhealthy Relationship: A relationship where one or both individuals do not encourage the other to do good, achieve goals, or try to be the best person they can.