

With safe environment, we consider how we keep all our children, youth and teens safe. Adults are responsible for protecting young people. Young people can be empowered and encouraged to learn ways to avoid unfavorable situations, to stop when feeling unsafe, say “no” and tell a parent or a trusted adult so they can help. To build positive, healthy relationships, we need to develop an understanding of how to create and maintain relationships – with God, with ourselves, and with others.

Relating in Relationships

When research was being done to look at the larger topic of healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships, there was such a volume of information on the topic. One could develop a whole year’s curriculum, which even then would not cover the life relationships that need to be addressed.

It has been the belief that children should be taught the skills to:

- Get along with others
- Be a friend
- Be part of a social group

People assume that children know how to interact with one another in positive ways, but what actually occurs challenges this belief. The potential for meanness, both in and out of the classroom, is taking on new and more creative forms. Children are much more likely to talk back to their parents, teachers and other adults. These adults seem to tolerate, and implicitly condone, a greater amount of negative behaviors. It follows that students are demonstrating increased aggressiveness, reduced respect for adult authority and insensitivity to the feelings of others.

Research shows that children learn what is considered acceptable social behavior by observing adults, siblings, peers and older schoolmates. . . By the third grade, most students have already developed normative beliefs about how to function in a social environment, and these beliefs guide future behavior.¹

Healthy relationships are something all parents want for their children. In pre-school, children are taught basic manners, how to be a good friend, and how to play well with others. In elementary grades they learn about bullies. In the middle school, the “talk” about puberty often becomes the priority.

While it is very important to have the discussion about sex, parents should also have “the talk” about love in order to protect children from unhealthy relationships. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in ten high school students has been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend. By teaching children the key elements to healthy relationships, teens and young adults are more likely to have healthy long-lasting relationships.

According to a report from Making Caring Common, “large numbers of teens and young adults are unprepared for caring, lasting romantic relationships and are anxious about developing them. Yet it appears that parents, educators and other adults often provide young people with little or no guidance in developing these relationships.” Harvard psychologist Richard Weissbourd conducted a survey and found that 70% of the 18-25 year old participants wanted information from their parents about the emotional aspects of romantic relationships, and 65% said they wanted to learn about the emotional aspects of relationships in their sexuality education classes in school. In other words, while most parents, schools, and educators are discussing abstinence, how to avoid pregnancy, and preventing sexually transmitted diseases, kids want more. Children want to know about how to love and be loved. You cannot talk about one without the other.²

In the above mentioned study conducted by Harvard psychologist Richard Weissbourd, one teen reported, “All we are taught is how to prevent stuff, how not to get pregnant. We should be discussing the values that should guide you in love and how to really love and respect someone else. And how to be loved by someone else. That’s a lot more important.”³

The lack of modeling and conversation in both homes and schools create a void. How is it filled? Do we leave it to media and entertainment? To peers? How do **we** respond? We, with our faith and scriptures, can help our children and youth in the relationships they form in their lifetime. The Church desires to help guide them, if we give them the resources to use, and model with healthy relationships, including the relationship with our God.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.
~1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Reflection for Catechist ~ Reflect on the relationships in your own life. How can you show the Christ within you to others? What will be your first step?
 *With God...
 *With yourself... *With youth *With others...

¹The Ophelia Project. *Let’s Be Friends, Elementary Curriculum Gr. 2-3*. 2007. page 3-4. www.opheliaproject.org.
²Pittman, Robin, MS, CHES. *How to Talk with Kids about Healthy Relationships*. Jan. 16, 2018. Poe Center for Health Education.
³Weissbourd, Richard. Ed.D., *For Families: 5 Tips for Guiding Teens and Young Adults in Developing Healthy Romantic Relationships*. Oct. 2018. Harvard Graduate School of Education. <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-families/5-tips-parents-guiding-teens-healthy-romantic-relationships>

This lesson is designed for use during a class session in January/February. “Relating in Relationships” looks at ways that our faith can support us in our relationships to work on healthy, positive, and holy relationships rather than unhealthy relationships. God has given us the 10 Commandments to be a guide in our lives. Following them can guide us in building healthy, holy relationships, as well as bring us true happiness. God created each person in His own image; therefore, our dignity is grounded in God and must be respected by all. God tells us to treat each other with respect. As we learn and mature in building healthy relationships with others, we will have many experiences and opportunities to practice our beliefs and faith as we build the relationships we want in our lives. We may need help if we are in an unhealthy relationship where we are being exploited or are not free to express our thoughts, feelings, and actions. An environment of open communication encourages youth to communicate their thoughts and feelings appropriately and seek help from parents and other trusted adults when they feel others are hurting them or pressuring them to break the rules.

“Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything.”

~ Pope Francis

“Do not use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”

- Ephesians 4:29

Goal: God created us in His image to live with others in loving and peaceful ways. We do this by having a personal relationship with God, obeying his rules, and treating others with respect and dignity. We build healthy relationships using our gifts and talents in positive, loving ways.

Session Outline

- Opening Prayer (3 min)
- Review prior knowledge of term *relationship*; explore variety of relationships, including one with God. (7 min)
- Discuss/Share relationships including one with God with faith information as a start. (15 min)
- Further discussion/sharing on topics of healthy relationships vs. unhealthy relationships (15min)
- Activity: “Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships”. Do one in class together with teacher. (22 min)

Session Objectives:

- God created us each in his image, and we deserve respect and dignity. This refers to both words & actions. God made us to have healthy relationships with others.
- To review ways we can have a relationship with Jesus, and ways we can work to have it be stronger.
- To discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships that each one experiences, and learning how our Catholic Faith’s teachings and the Ten Commandments can guide us.
- Apply our faith to given aspects of healthy and unhealthy relationships; are we following God’s way?
- If we are in a relationship where we are being exploited or are not free to share our thoughts, feelings and actions with others, we need to get help.

I. Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before You asking you to help us be faithful to prayer for our relationships.

You have not created us to live life alone. We ask for healthy, positive relationships, and in our difficult relationships, we ask for healing. Help us to wait patiently while You work. Give us a heart of wisdom. Help us to look inside to see where we may need to change so that our relationships may be better. In Jesus name, Amen.

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Supplies

- Pens or pencils for each youth
- See Guides in “God’s Rules” below—having each available for activity is helpful

Activities / Hand Outs

- teacher choice:

Pg. 4 “Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships” Activity Sheet— if helpful for each one to see for class discussion

II. What Are God’s Rules?

A Reference for the Lesson —

Share with the class: “God gave Moses the 10 Commandments to help guide our lives and how to show our love to God and others. (Exodus 20: 1-17)

Other guides that Christ has given us through Scriptures and our Catholic Teachings include:

The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy (Mt. 25:31-46)
Catholic Social Teachings (see Catechism of the Catholic Church)

The Beatitudes (Mt. 5: 1-12)

Introduction

Opening Activity: Ask youth to brainstorm all the different types of relationships they have in their lives, and write their responses on the board/large sheet of paper (example: family members, relatives, friends, teachers, classmates, coaches, church members, priest, neighbors, God and possibly a significant other). **Ask:** Why might you have various types and depth of relationship with each person listed?

When God created us in His image, He also created in us to be social and live with others. He wanted us to have loving relationships with others through our lives, but especially a relationship with God who always loves us and desires what is best for us. What is your relationship with God? How might it change as you grow?

Discussion:

“God did not create man a solitary being. From the beginning, ‘male and female he created them’ (Gen 1:27). This partnership of man and woman constitutes the first form of communion between persons.” (GS 12 § 4)”

383, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed.; pg. 96.

Share with class:

The Bible has stories that involve relationships. We hear of God’s relationship with Adam, Adam and Eve’s relationship, and more throughout both the Old Testament and New Testament. As we read, we see some relationships that are positive, some that are unhealthy, as well as relationships that change for one reason or another. One clear message is that God created us as persons desiring and needing relationships. In our hearts there is the desire that draws us to a relationship with God, as well as with others. God desires a relationship with each of us to share his love with us; he makes the first move, and we have the free will to choose how

to respond. What relationship will you develop with Him?

In developing a relationship with God, one may read stories in Scriptures and other passages in the Bible. Parents may have read you bible stories when you were young. They also may have taught you the common Catholic prayers, or recited the rosary as a family. Prayers learned are another way we relate to God as well as prayers we offer that we ourselves compose. In time we grow in the relationship to enjoy quiet time alone with our Lord to be in relationship. The Catholic Church’s traditions, teachings, and guidance also help us to build this relationship—as well as our relationships with others. The Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, and the Catholic’s Social Teachings are guides for us to use as we build our relationships with others. They will lead us on the kind of relationships God wants us to have in order to be truly happy.

Respect and kindness for both oneself and others are key characteristics of healthy relationships. In contrast, in unhealthy relationships, one partner tries to exert control and power over the other person - verbally, physically, sexually, and/or emotionally.

Healthy relationships are viewed when each of the two individuals treat each other well, using the foundation of dignity and respect. This is reinforced through our Catholic Social Teachings. Healthy relationships may have these qualities: mutual respect, trust, honesty, support, fairness/equality, separate identities, and good communication. These qualities will be viewed on a handout for an activity.

Unhealthy relationships develop when one individual controls the relationship through their actions and responses. This relationship does not use a foundation of dignity and respect for both individuals. When one can stand back and see the relationship for what it is, we will see it is not a loving relationship; this is not what God wants for us nor will it make us truly happy.

An unhealthy relationship usually involves control where one makes all the decisions, even trying to control the other individual. It also includes disrespect of the other person, shown in many ways, including dishonesty, and acts of intimidation to the point of hostility. These relationships can also lead to an abusive relationship where one may be verbally, emotionally, physically, or sexually abused. This is not what God wants for his beloved sons and daughters! He wants you to be the best you you can be.

It is important for youth to be able to recognize signs of unhealthy relationships before the relationship escalates this far. Remember, even though you may feel bad or feel for someone who’s been mistreated, you need to take care of yourself—it is not healthy to stay in a relationship that involves abusive behavior of any kind! Speak to a trusted adult and ask for help and resources from professional individuals.

IV. ACTIVITY

We can see how important one’s dignity and respect is—for every person. Our Church has many guides we can look to as a compass in where God wants to lead us, if we choose to follow His ways. Using the chart on page 4, as a class we will go over the aspects of a healthy relationship. Can we find support for these qualities looking to what our Faith teaches? If not, what does Jesus want for us? What qualities do we need to strive to have in our healthy relationships with others? Use the 10 Commandments, Catholic Social Teachings, Eight Beatitudes, and even the Catechism of the Catholic Church, to see what the Church says...

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

<i>Healthy Relationships</i>	<i>Unhealthy Relationships</i>
Equality – Persons share decisions and responsibilities. They discuss roles to make sure they are fair and equal.	Control - One person makes all the decisions and tells the other person what to do, or what to wear, or who to spend time with.
Honesty – Persons share their dreams, fears, and concerns with each other. They tell each other how they feel and share important information. Honesty builds trust and strengthens the relationship.	Dishonesty - One person lies to or keeps information from the other. One person steals from the other.
Mutual Respect – Persons value and treat each other like they want to be treated and accept each other’s opinions, friends, and interests. They listen to each other and understand each other’s boundaries.	Disrespect - One person makes fun of the opinions and interests of the other person. He or she may destroy something that belongs to the other person.
Comfort – Persons feel safe with each other and respect each other’s differences. They realize when they’re wrong and are not afraid to say, “I’m sorry.” Persons can “be themselves” with each other.	Intimidation – One person tries to control every aspect of the other’s life. One person may attempt to keep the other person from friends and family or threaten violence or a break-up.
Independence – Neither person is dependent upon the other for an identity. Persons maintain friendships and activities outside of the relationship. Either person has the right to end the relationship.	Dependence – One person feels that he/she “can’t live without” the other. He/she may threaten to do something drastic if the relationship ends.
Humor – The relationship is enjoyable for both partners. Persons laugh and have fun.	Hostility – One person antagonizes the other. The other person may “walk on egg shells” to avoid upsetting the other. Teasing is mean-spirited.
Physical safety – Persons feel physically safe in the relationship and respect each other’s space.	Physical abuse – One person uses force to get his/her way (for example, hitting, slapping, grabbing, shoving).
Sexual respectfulness – Persons never force sexual activity or insist on doing something the other is not comfortable with.	Sexual abuse – One person pressures or forces the other into sexual activity against his/her will or without his/her consent. ¹
Good communication – Each person should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If one person needs to sort out his or her feelings first, the other person should respect those wishes and wait until he or she is ready to talk.	

The information in the above table has been adapted from the Liz Claiborne-sponsored web site www.loveisnotabuse.com, Youth Resource www.youthresource.com/our_lives/healthy_relationships, and the Center for Young Women’s Health at www.youngwomenshealth.org/healthy_rel.html

¹ Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2005). *Choose respect community action kit: Helping preteens and teens build healthy relationships*. Retrieved from [http://www.aldine.k12.tx.us/cms/file_process/download.cfm?docID=BED9BF514B2EAD07\(link is external\)](http://www.aldine.k12.tx.us/cms/file_process/download.cfm?docID=BED9BF514B2EAD07(link%20is%20external)) (PDF, 60 pages)

This week we discussed the Right Relationship concept of Relating in Relationships. We are created in God's image; therefore, we have a divine dignity to be respected by ourselves and others. Parents, the first teachers in the "domestic church" at home, will guide and mentor the child in learning their faith and the world they live in; all of this is involved in our relationships.

As parents, we teach their children to prepare them for adult life. We give lessons on manners, and treating others with respect. We also need to instruct them about relationships—the different types of relationships we all encounter in our lifetime as we grow and mature, and how each may be different. Our faith and values are shared when we visit and have discussions to help guide them to reflect on relationships—what makes it a healthy, loving, and holy relationship rather than an unhealthy relationship where one wants control of the other, or to meet only one's own needs. If we commit to giving the time and attention needed to build these life skills of healthy relationships, based on our faith, would this not change the divorce percentages, and show that cohabitation does not provide the true covenant our Lord wants for his people and their happiness? Our goal, with all working together, is to teach key elements of healthy relationships, so our youth may have healthy, long-lasting relationships.

Healthy relationships differ by the level/type of relationship - acquaintances, relatives, friendships, dating, or intimate relationships. However, some common behaviors that all healthy relationships have and value are:

SELF KNOWLEDGE as an individual. They need to find value in who they are; to know their strengths and weaknesses. They need to know they have the power to make choices, and by making good choices for themselves, they in turn find value in who they are. They choose the behavior, and the consequence can be positive or negative. In reading stories, they can look for the cause/effect (consequences) that may be similar or different from theirs.

PERSONAL BOUNDARIES are something every person needs to establish to feel safe and secure. They also help protect against sexual and physical abuse. Help your child to identify and articulate their personal values and boundaries, and they are to be respected and reinforced. Do they understand that the other person's boundaries need to be respected as well?

BALANCE is another important behavior for youth to learn. It is important to teach your children that it can be healthy to have many friends in many places. They may need help to understand that spending time with one friend does not mean you do not like other friends. Youth may need your help with this issue. Youth need to learn to balance between the relationships and the responsibilities in their lives such as school, chores, other commitments, and other relationships.

RESPECT is a must. It is essential for both individuals to be respectful in both communications and actions. We show it by how we treat our self and others. This exhibits acceptance and understanding of each other.

COMMUNICATION is essential. When communication is used that is respectful, honest and direct, both parties feel heard and understood. Although all relationships will experience conflict, healthy communication based on understanding will find common ground. When communication is heated, partners may need a "time out" and agree to address the issues at a later, calmer time.

DIGITAL ABUSE occurs when a person uses technology devices improperly to harass or harm another person. It opens the door widely to many unhealthy behaviors. They include: constant unwanted calls or texts, harassment/cyberbullying on social media; sexting—pressure to send nude or private pictures or content, using forms of social media to send insults, monitor whereabouts, control other relationships, or to pressure their partner for their passwords to social media sites and emails.

RESILIENCE is important when relationships do not work out, or end. They need to be able to recover when valued relationships fall apart. They need healthy coping skills to deal with the disappointments that ending a relationship can cause. As positive role models, parents can provide support and assistance in this area.

These are not the only behaviors for creating healthy relationships; nor is the learning a "one-time" event. The list of behaviors goes on, and the opportunities are endless if we are attentive in our children's lives. Hearing about your child's day and school is a great starting place for conversation. Watching TV programs, and pointing out or asking questions about the relationships being viewed can teach which portray real life and which are acting in telling a good story; current events are good for discussions as well. Listening to your child's view in all they share will give you a picture of how they may handle difficult situations ahead—and where they may need guidance. Youth also assistance in how to create and sustain healthy relationships. Daily youth are bombarded with many unhealthy behavior models from the internet, media, society, and even families and peers. We need to give them tools based in faith and values to reflect on their options and making sound, healthy, holy choices.

Our children can find great guidance on relationships by the growth of their faith life. They need to understand the importance of a healthy, personal relationship with Jesus. Parents encourage this relationship by teaching prayers to their children, family prayer, including the rosary. In time, the relationship builds stronger with personal prayers, through the Mass and sacraments, the Scriptures and the parish family. As they mature in faith, their relationship with our Lord needs to grow deeper through their life.

To view Winter Lessons 2019 for youth: <https://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/safe-environment/young-peoples-safe-faith-environment-program/>

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