

Diocese of Rapid City

Keeping God's Children Safe

A Safe Environment Newsletter

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How do we develop and maintain positive, healthy relationships . . .

This winter, youth were presented a safe environment lesson on the Right Relationship concept of Relating in Relationships. Our goal is that they will be able to distinguish between an unhealthy relationship and a healthy relationship so they may choose healthy relationships in their lives as they grown and mature. We are each 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" of home, guide and mentor their children in learning their faith and how to apply it to the world they live in.

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.¹

Teaching enduring faith values by our words and example

As parents, we aim to prepare our children for adult life. We give lessons on manners, and treating others with respect. Do we 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? What do we tell them when a relationship fails or ends? We need to share our faith and values when we visit and discuss. We can help guide them how our faith (with many Scripture stories) shows us what a healthy, loving, and holy relationship is like rather than an unhealthy relationship where one wants control of the other person, or to meet only one's own needs. If we do commit and give the time and attention to build skills for healthy relationships, using our faith foundations, perhaps in our children's adult lives, this may change the divorce percentages, and show cohabitation does not provide the covenant our Lord wants for his people and their happiness. Our goal, as a community together, is to teach key elements of healthy relationships, so our youth may have healthy, long-lasting relationships. If not a parent, as an adult you can still help youth when you encounter them in daily situations, and influence them by showing your faith in action through your behaviors and words.

Lent has recently started. Perhaps this is the best time for adults to lead and start. Reflect on how you spend your time at home. Does use of your phone or computer draw you away from family members and into you own world? Can we sacrifice a percentage of that time, and give the time gained to be present and involved with others we care for? When we model putting aside technology to gain more time for

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**Diocese of Rapid City
Safe Environment**
www.rapidcitydiocese.org/safe-environment/

**USCCB Office of Child
and Youth Protection**
[http://www.usccb.org/
issues-and-action/child-
and-youth-protection/
index.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/child-and-youth-protection/index.cfm)

"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

our real, important relationships with family members and others, we can ask our children to do the same. Make a “date” with each child, and give each some one-on-one time. Perhaps start with a prayer at the beginning of the date asking the Holy Spirit to be present and help us to listen to each other with the love we have for each other; or at the end in thanksgiving and gratitude for the time spent together and helping our relationships to grow (or both). Rotate these times through each child, and then repeat. Hopefully, it will continue beyond Easter! The sacrifices made to do this will reap improved relationships with those we love the most.

What to talk about? Ideas to get you started...and then listen to your child (or other loved one), and realize the opportunities are endless if we are attentive in their lives:

- Hearing about your child’s/other’s day is a great starting place for conversation.
- Current events are good for discussions as well.
- Listening to the other’s view as they share will give you a picture of how they may handle difficult situations ahead—and where they may need guidance.
- Youth also need assistance in how to create and sustain healthy relationships. We need to give them tools based in faith and values so they may reflect on their options and make sound, healthy, holy choices; they have experienced many unhealthy behavior models from media sources, society’s views, and others.
- Share your experiences; they want to hear your stories. We are all humans working together to attain heaven.
- Remember to bring in the faith, using scriptures and Church teachings. “I’ll look into that and get back to you” shows your involvement to them, and allows you time to search or ask for the answers. Pray together!

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.²

Each day we have opportunities to talk about relationships

As adults work with children to learn basic manners, how to be a good friend, how to play well with others, and learn about bullies, we can see this is only the beginning steps in starting relationships with others. Parents have an obligation to engage with their children about how to create and maintain positive, healthy relationships in order to protect minors 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 youth the key elements to healthy relationships, they will be more likely to have healthy long-lasting relationships. With what our faith teaches, we can create a strong foundation that can be used to build a healthy relationship. Each day, we each commit by our actions how we work to maintain our healthy relationships.

Our children and youth can find great guidance on relationships by the growth of their faith life. They need to understand the importance of having a healthy, personal relationship with Jesus. Parents encourage this relationship by teaching prayers to their children, and praying as a family together, including the rosary. The relationship with God and His Church builds stronger with personal prayers, through the Mass and sacraments, the Scriptures and the parish family.

With safe environments in our parishes, we intend to 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. We support parents in their role, and require a training process for all clergy, employees, and adult volunteers who work with minors or vulnerable adults. *The Adult Safe Environment Training is open to parents and all adults as well; contact your parish safe environment coordinator.* Ask to attend the next training! The more support, awareness, watching, and taking action when needed will lead to greater success in protecting others. To build positive, healthy relationships, we need to develop an understanding of how to create and maintain healthy relationships – with God, with ourselves, and with others.

FOOTNOTES

¹Pittman, Robin, MS, CHES. *How to Talk with Kids about Healthy Relationships*. Jan. 16, 2018. Poe Center for Health Education.

²The Ophelia Project. *Let’s Be Friends, Elementary Curriculum Gr. 2-3*. 2007. page 3-4. www.opheliaproject.org.

OTHER SITE

Dykeman, Mary, Prevention Specialist. *Teaching Our Kids About Healthy Relationships*. Family Counseling Services of Cortland County, Inc. <https://fscortland.org/Health+Relationships>