

# Healthy or Unhealthy Relationships?

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

*Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.*

## NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 8th grade, students will be able to:

**HR.8.CC.1** – Compare and contrast the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

**HR.8.SM.1** – Explain the criteria for evaluating the health of a relationship.

**HR.8.CC.2** – Describe the potential impacts of power differences such as age, status or position within relationships.

**TARGET GRADE:** Grade 8  
Lesson 3

**TIME:** 50 Minutes

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Two signs, one reading “Healthy Relationship” and one reading “Unhealthy Relationship”
- Enough of the 16 Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships cards for half the students in the class, prepared as described
- Homework: “Healthy Relationships All Around Us,” one per student
- Exit slips – one per student
- Masking tape
- White board and markers
- Extra pencils in case students don’t have their own

## ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON :

- Print out enough of the Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationship cards for half the class. Fold each one in half.
- Tape the Unhealthy and Healthy Relationship signs on the front board with a good distance between them to create a continuum.
- Print out the exit slip sheets and cut them in half, so each student gets one half (which is one complete exit slip).
- Tear off individual one-inch pieces of tape, enough for each sign in the Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships activity, and stick on a ledge or table end so they are available for students to take and use during the activity.

## A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we’ve intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun “they” instead of “her” or “him”, using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to “someone with a vulva” vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Characterize, in their own opinion, at least one relationship trait as either healthy or unhealthy. [Knowledge, Skill, Attitude]
2. Name at least two types of power differential in relationships, as well as their implication for the relationship. [Knowledge]
3. Describe at least two ways in which an unhealthy relationship can become a healthy one. [Knowledge]
4. Apply their understanding of healthy relationships to a couple represented in the media. [Knowledge, Skill]

## PROCEDURE:

**STEP 1:** Ask, “How many of you can think of a couple in your lives – it could be family

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members, friends, siblings, whoever –

who you think are in a healthy relationship?” After some students have raised their hands, ask, “How many of you can think of a couple you’d consider to have an unhealthy relationship?”

Say, “I bet if we described all these couples we would not agree about whether they were healthy or unhealthy. That’s because we have all received a variety of messages about how people should behave in relationships. These messages have a big impact on whether we see something as healthy, unhealthy – or a mix. So today we’re going to take a look at some things that can happen in relationships – and whether you think these things mean a relationship is healthy or unhealthy.”

Break the students into pairs. Give each pair one of the healthy vs. unhealthy relationship cards. Ask them to talk together about whether they think what they have describes a healthy relationship or an unhealthy relationship. Tell them that once they’ve decided, they should turn their sheet over and write down why they think it is unhealthy, healthy or somewhere in between. Explain that they are “Team One,” and so should only complete the first line on the back of the sheet, not the second. Hold up a sheet to demonstrate as you are giving these instructions.

Tell them that once they’ve finished writing their reason(s), they can bring their piece of paper up to the front of the room and tape it up where they feel it goes. Point out that there is a lot of space between the Unhealthy and Healthy Relationship signs, so they can put their card under one of the signs, or somewhere in between if they feel like it has some healthy or unhealthy characteristic, but isn’t completely one or the other.

After about 5 minutes, if all of the cards are not up, encourage students to stick their cards up on the board. Ask them to stay in their same pairs. (8 minutes)

**STEP 2:** Starting at one end of the continuum, read each of the cards. Once you have read them all, ask the students to look at what’s up on the board and comment on what they notice. Their responses will depend on where the cards have been placed (the activity is intentionally opinion-based, so the board will likely look different each time).

For example, students might say, “These all seem really unhealthy,” or “None of the cards are either completely unhealthy or healthy.”

Ask, “Are there any up here that you would want to move? Which one(s) and why?” As students indicate particular cards, take them down and read on the back why the pair of students who had each card chose to place it where they did. Ask whether that changed their view. Because this is an opinion-based activity, do not actually move any of the cards, just discuss a few.

**Note to the Teacher:** *Go through up to five of the cards, adjusting for student engagement in this part of the activity. If the discussion lags, stop after three; if it is still vibrant and connected, you may choose to continue beyond the five.*

Here are some suggestions for a few in which there is a lot of grey area and about which you will likely have extensive discussion:

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- A guy walks his girlfriend to school every morning, meets her for lunch every day, and picks her up to walk her home at the end of each afternoon.
- A girl notices her girlfriend is getting a lot of attention from two different people at school. She goes up to each of them separately and warns them to stay away from her, “or else.”
- A couple has an agreement that they won’t put passwords on their phones and can check each others’ texts and social media accounts whenever they feel like it.

(8 minutes)

**STEP 3:** Ask, “In which of these relationships do you feel like one person has more power than the other person?” Point to the example of a girl who has a girlfriend who is ten years older than she is. Ask, “In what ways could the older girlfriend have more power than the younger one?” Write a “P” on that card to indicate that there’s the potential for one partner to have more power than the other.

As students mention other examples where they feel like there could be a power difference, write a “P” on each of those.

Say, “Power can come in different forms. Sometimes, people realize there’s a power difference and are okay with it – and other times, a power difference can lead to really unhealthy or even abusive relationships. I’m going to ask you to keep the idea of power in mind as you do this next part of the activity.” (6 minutes)

**STEP 4** Ask one student from each pair to come up to the board and take one of the cards, not the one they originally worked on, and return to sit with their partner. Tell them that they should talk about what’s on the card, turn the card over and read why the other students labeled it as they did. Then ask them to discuss what would need to change in order for them to feel like this card could go underneath the “Healthy Relationship” sign. Have them write their answers in the space provided. Tell them they have about 5 minutes in which to do this. As they are working, take the “Healthy Relationship” sign and move it to a more centered location on the board. (7 minutes).

**STEP 5:** Go around the room and ask the pairs to share what they came up with as specific steps or things their couple needs to do to make their relationship healthy. Paraphrase the characteristics they share and write them on the board beneath the “healthy relationship” sign.

For example, if students were to say, “They need to stop checking each others’ phones,” you might write “Trust” on the board and “cell phones” in parentheses next to that. If any of the next pairs repeat something that was already said, put a check mark next to that characteristic. (12 minutes)

**STEP 6:** Ask students to look at the list they generated and what they think of what they see. Again, because this list is generated from the students, it may look different each time. Process the list by asking the following questions:

1. Are you surprised by what’s received the most check marks here?  
Why or why not?
2. Is there anything missing? Is there anything else that would help make a

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- relationship healthy wasn't mentioned?
3. How easy or challenging is it to do some or all of these? For the ones labeled as "challenging," ask why they think that is.
  4. Ask, "What about the idea of power? Where do you see power reflected in this list?"

Say, "What relationships look like and how they work can be different – but as you see here, there are certain characteristics that people will agree mean that a relationship is healthy. When a relationship is healthy, it's good for both people involved – and it doesn't have a negative impact on the people outside of the relationship who are still a part of the couple's lives, like friends and family members."

Describe the homework assignment and distribute the worksheet. Tell students that you created a list of characteristics that tend to be considered part of healthy relationships, which will include some of what they generated on the board as well as some other ideas. Ask them to talk about a couple they know – whether in real life or from a movie or tv show or a couple from a book or they've read about online -- and say whether they think they are a healthy couple based on those characteristics.

Distribute the Before You Go exit slips to the students and ask them to complete them and hand them to you on the way out of class. (9 minutes)

### **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:**

Teachers will be able to assess how well they have reached the first three learning objectives during the in-class activity, discussion and process. The fourth learning objective will be achieved through the homework assignment.

### **HOMEWORK:**

Healthy Relationships All Around Us – Students are to provide three examples of couples in their own lives, or from a tv show, book, movie or other source and explain why they think they are healthy relationships.

## Healthy Relationships All Around Us!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Think about relationships you've seen in your life. These could be characters from a tv show or movie, public figures or people you know personally. Please provide three examples of healthy relationships and explain why you think they're healthy, based on what we talked about in class. Be sure to explain your reasons with examples, too!

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### EXAMPLE

Couple: Beyonce and Jay-Z

Know them from: Music videos and award shows

Why do you think this is a healthy relationship? Please give examples:

**They talk about each other a lot in the media, always in positive ways. They started a family together and both seem really into each other whenever you see them in pictures.**

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Couple 1:

Know them from:

Why do you think this is a healthy relationship? Please give examples:

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\_\_\_\_\_

Couple 2:

Know them from:

Why do you think this is a healthy relationship? Please give examples:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Couple 3:

Know them from:

Why do you think this is a healthy relationship? Please give examples:

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## BEFORE YOU GO...

The characteristic of healthy relationships that most stood out for me from today's class was

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because \_\_\_\_\_

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## BEFORE YOU GO...

The characteristic of healthy relationships that most stood out for me from today's class was

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because \_\_\_\_\_

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## BEFORE YOU GO...

The characteristic of healthy relationships that most stood out for me from today's class was

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because \_\_\_\_\_

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**After spending a lot of time together, a couple wants to start having sex. They talk about safer sex and decide to use condoms every time.**

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CARD

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

----- (FOLD HERE) -----

**A guy walks his girlfriend to school every morning, meets her for lunch every day, and picks her up to walk her home at the end of each afternoon.**

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CARD

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A couple have been together for a month and are talking about having sex. One has had sex before, but the other hasn't - but says they have because they're embarrassed.**

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CARD

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A girl notices her girlfriend is getting a lot of attention from two different people at school. She goes up to each of them separately and warns them to stay away from her, “or else.”**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A couple has an agreement that they won't put passwords on their phones and can check each others' texts and social media accounts whenever they feel like it.**

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CARD

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**Partner one wants to have sex.  
Partner two says they're not  
ready, but after talking about it,  
gives in and has sex, even  
though they didn't really  
want to.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A guy and a girl have been together for six months, and things haven't been going so well. She decides to stop taking her birth control without telling him, because she thinks if she gets pregnant he won't break up with her.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**One partner usually decides when, where, and what they do together. The other partner says they don't like making decisions and is fine with this.**



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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A guy has been with his boyfriend for five months. They've said "I love you" to each other, but when they're around other friends at school, one guy pretends they're not a couple. He says it's because he hasn't yet told his family that he's gay.**

HEALTHY VS. UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP CARD

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship? \_\_\_\_\_

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did: \_\_\_\_\_

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**A couple text all the time. But when they get together, whether alone or with friends, they feel uncomfortable talking to each other.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A guy has a very strong religious background. He's having sex with his girlfriend, but after each time, he says he feels disgusting. His girlfriend tells him to get over it.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A girl tells her partner that they're in a one-on-one relationship, but she is having sex with other people. Her partner does not know; she figures she's sparing their feelings by not telling them.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A guy finds out he has an STD.  
Since it's easily cured with a  
shot, he doesn't tell his partner  
about it and figures that if they  
get it, they can just get treated,  
too. They continue to have sex  
without using condoms.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A guy and a girl have been together for six months and are having sex. Whenever the guy does something the girl doesn't like, she tells him that she won't have sex with him until he does something nice for her.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A girl has a girlfriend who is ten years older than she is. Her older girlfriend has a job, a car and a place to live where they can be alone together. When they go out, the older partner always pays.**

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Team Two: How this could be a healthier relationship?

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Team One: Why we rated this the way we did:

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**A guy notices his partner is getting a lot more texts than usual. When he mentions it, the partner says he's imagining things. When his partner goes to use the bathroom, he checks their phone and reads their texts.**



# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

# **UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**