

LESSON 7: HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

“(A friend is) a present you give yourself.”

Robert Louis Stevenson



Having different kinds of relationships with others provides you with many learning opportunities. Whenever you enter into new relationships, you will learn many new things about yourself and others. This learning process is important in preparing you for adulthood. But, some teenagers seem to keep finding themselves caught in relationships with controlling or abusive people. They may regret ever getting into these unhealthy relationships, yet they keep finding themselves back in them over and over again. Melissa is one of these people.

Melissa's Story

Melissa cannot understand why she always seems to find herself in relationships with guys who are very possessive and controlling. Looking back at the boyfriends she's had, each was very jealous and mean to her.

Melissa does not look for this kind of guy, yet she seems to be more attracted to those who criticize her. As each relationship becomes more negative, Melissa works very hard to save it. But this never seems to work very well.

Melissa's friends told her she needed to find a guy who would treat her with more respect. But Melissa would answer, "The ones that are nice and polite are so boring."

Now, Melissa is dating a guy who will not allow her to spend time alone with her friends. He tells her that where he goes, she goes. Every now and then Melissa sneaks some time with her friends, but she is worried he will find out. Although she is not happy in this relationship, Melissa says she can't tell her boyfriend about her real feelings or he will surely break up with her.

Discussion Questions:

Melissa is an example of someone who repeatedly finds herself in the same kind of unhealthy relationship. Discuss your answers to the following questions:

1. What is unhealthy about this relationship?
2. Why do you think Melissa finds herself attracted to this type of guy?
3. What could Melissa do differently to prevent herself from being in this kind of relationship?
4. In your own relationship(s) with others, how can you reduce the risks of:
 - Being with someone too possessive or controlling?
 - Being too dependent on the other person?
 - Being with someone who will be a negative influence on you?
 - Pregnancy?
 - Sexually-transmitted diseases?
 - Being deeply hurt?

Unhealthy Relationships

The following list contains characteristics of unhealthy relationships. Check those items that apply to one or more of your relationships or to relationships between other people you know.

- Dominating/Controlling
- Dishonesty
- Rushed intimacy
- Poor communication
- One-sided attraction
- Big differences between the people
- Arguing too frequently
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Interference by family or friends
- Flirting with others
- Rescuer (When one person keeps seeking troubled partners to “help”)
- Troubled companions (When both partners have problems and their relationship is built on trying to rescue each other)



Developing a Healthy Relationship

Here are some ways to increase the chances of getting into a healthy relationship with someone. Discuss each with your counselor.

- ☞ Start the relationship slowly by having fun and getting to know each other. Talk with each other about your interests, strengths, goals, families, hopes, and fears.
- ☞ Plan to do a variety of activities together that could decrease the chances of being placed in an uncomfortable situation.
- ☞ Communicate your feelings openly about what you are and are not looking for in a relationship.
- ☞ Take turns sharing your personal beliefs and values.
- ☞ Don't be too pushy or too weak. Stand up for your rights, but don't become over critical of the other person.
- ☞ It has been said that the key to a healthy relationship is for each person to consistently show four characteristics: caring, accepting, understanding, and trustworthiness.
- ☞ If you have already experienced several unhealthy relationships or continue to be attracted to the same kinds of troubled people, see a counselor. Through counseling you may be able to discover how you can find happier and healthier relationships.

What do You Look For?

The following list of qualities are what some people your age look for in a relationship. Score each of the following items according to how important it is to you when you are considering a relationship. Discuss your responses with your counselor.

1 = Unimportant

2 = A little important

3 = Very important

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Good looking | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexually experienced |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A nice car | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexually abstinent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Well dressed | <input type="checkbox"/> Religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Popular | <input type="checkbox"/> Athletic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wealthy | <input type="checkbox"/> A close friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Humorous | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful | <input type="checkbox"/> Interested in similar things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quiet or shy | <input type="checkbox"/> Outspoken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career minded | <input type="checkbox"/> Good listener |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Honest | <input type="checkbox"/> Older than me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscular | <input type="checkbox"/> Younger than me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intelligent | <input type="checkbox"/> Adventurous |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reliable | <input type="checkbox"/> (Other) |



Optional Activities

1. Think about a healthy relationship between two people that you've known. Discuss what they did that helped their relationship succeed? Then, think about an unhealthy relationship you have seen. Discuss what hurt their relationship?
2. Interview your school counselor or pastor, and ask what he/she believes are qualities of a healthy relationship.