

Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills

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Agenda

- ❖ Qualities of healthy relationships
- ❖ What leads to the absence of those qualities?
- ❖ Strategies to repair and strengthen those qualities
- ❖ A special focus on young men and boys
- ❖ Examples from evidence-based and promising programs
- ❖ Discussion & Questions

Qualities of Healthy Relationships

What comes to mind?
What gets in the way?



Know Yourself, Know Your Partner

Know Yourself and Your Partner

- Start with physical health and emotional well-being
- Core values and beliefs
- Relationship expectations

Personal histories and backgrounds

- Important life experiences?
- What about ACEs?
- Significant relationships?

Personal strengths and challenges

- Recognize your own strengths and acknowledge your partner's strengths
- Attend to your own challenges, and be supportive of your partner's challenges

Communication & Conflict Resolution

Good communication basics:

Listen actively, with an open mind.

Check your understanding

Use “I” statements

Use affection and respect:

Actively demonstrate care toward each other

Use affirmation - notice positive characteristics and actions

Communication & Conflict Resolution

Positive Conflict resolution basics:

- Start calm
- Be willing to accept influence/willingness to change
- Maintain positive tone
- Don't sweat the small stuff (pay attention to what is really bothering you)
- Apologize / forgive

Unhealthy conflict resolution includes:

- Criticism
- Defensiveness
- Contempt
- Stonewalling
- denial

7 Key Components

(Love Notes, Marline Pearson)

1. Seek a good match
2. Pay attention to values
3. Don't try to change a person into someone else
4. Don't change yourself just to keep someone's love or friendship
5. Expect good communication, willingness to work at it
6. Don't play games, be phony, pressure or use someone
7. Expect respect, have standards for how you will be treated

Relationship Checkup

(Marline Pearson)

Communication Danger Signs Quiz (used with permission from Love Notes and PREP, Inc. accessed from ACT youth network website). Use the scale below to rate how often you and your partner experience this:

1 = never or almost never 2= Once in a While 3= Frequently

Little arguments escalate into ugly fights with accusations, criticisms, name calling, or bringing up past hurts.

This person criticizes or belittles my opinions, feelings, or character.

This person seems to view my words or actions more negatively than I mean them to be.

I hold back from telling this person what I really think and feel.

I often wish this person was not in my life.

I feel lonely and unconnected in this relationship.

When we argue, one of us withdraws -- that is, one of us stops talking or just leaves.

When we have a problem, it seems like we are on opposite teams.

Sometimes Healthy Qualities are Absent

Problems occur when youth disconnect from:

- Their emotions

- Their experiences and

- Their bonds with parents and others.

Restoring Healthy Relationship Skills

Program Leaders Should

Be Caring and Consistent

Listen Actively

Model and Encourage Empathy

Be Respectful

Create a Safe Atmosphere

Putting all of this Into Practice

“Youth welcome the opportunity for a safe space to discuss critical issues like relationships and mental health. They find the topics engaging and appreciate the opportunity to develop skills and awareness.”

(Claire Crooks on the Canadian Healthy relationship Plus Program)

Boys Council & Girls Circle

(One Circle Foundation)

- ❖ An Experiential learning model
- ❖ Small discussion and activity groups
- ❖ Ages 9-18
- ❖ Facilitated by trained adults
- ❖ Developed by the One Circle Foundation
- ❖ Uses a Strengths-Based approach
- ❖ Relational-Cultural Theory
- ❖ Resiliency Principles

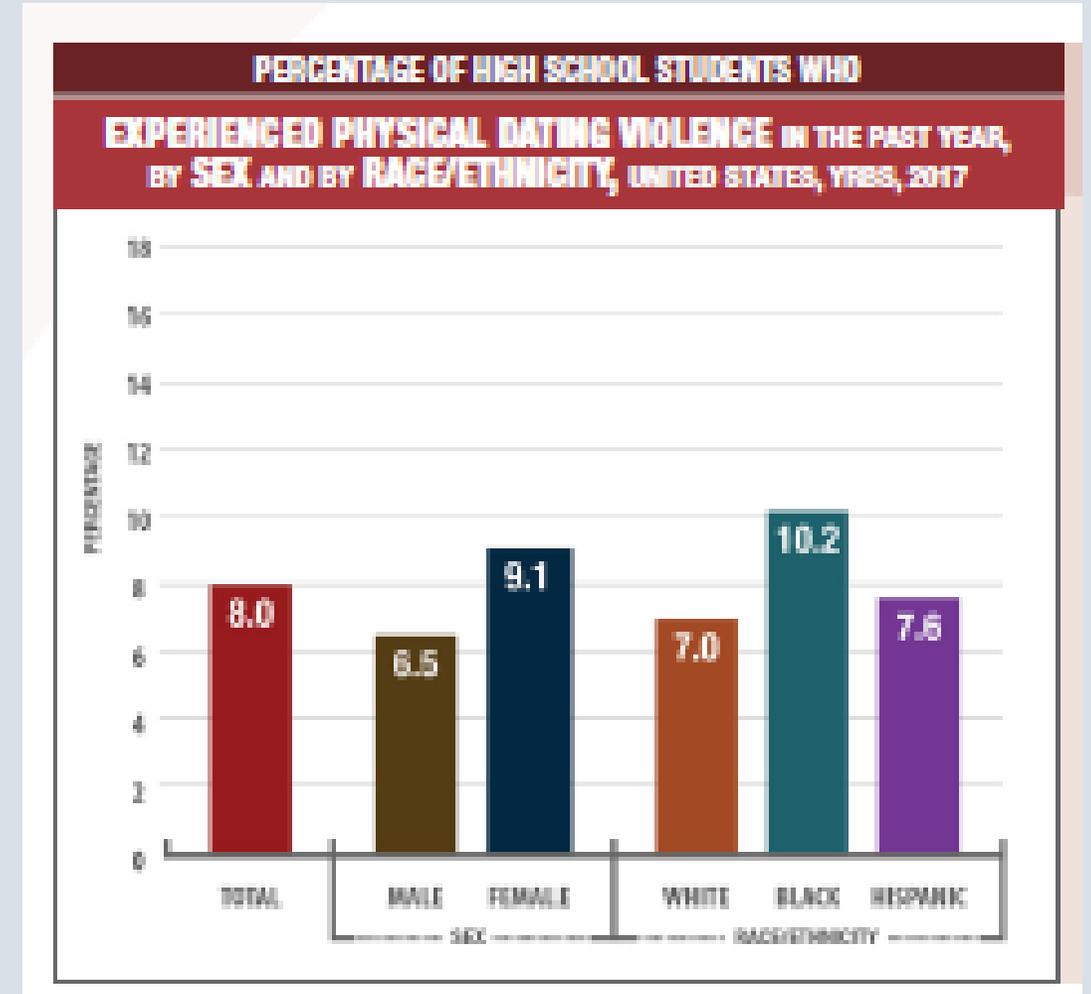
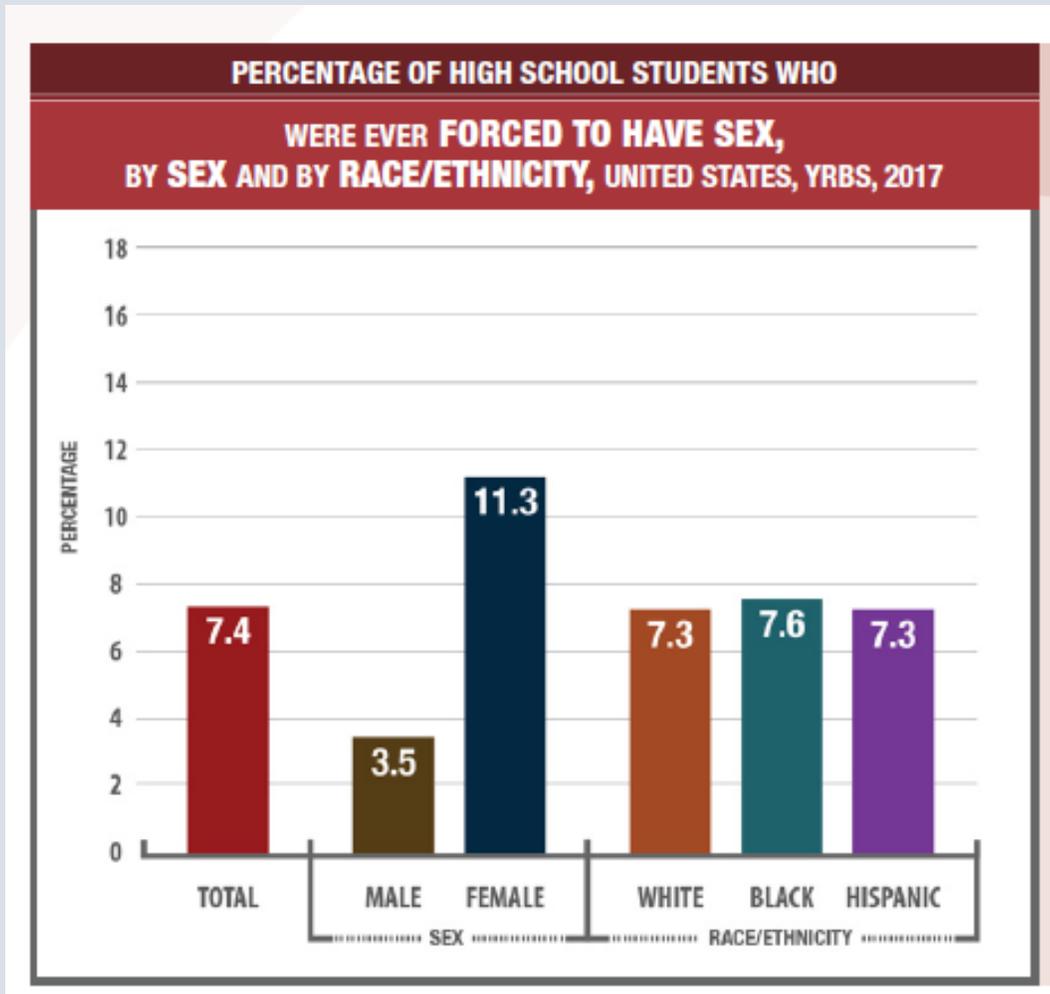
The Boys Council 7 Step Format

1. Opening ritual – set a positive tone, invites boys into space
2. Theme Introduction – topics include identity, emotions, bullying, gender roles
3. Warm up activity – Physical activity that invites participation and connection
4. Check in – boys say as much or as little as they choose, using talking piece
5. Activity –promotes awareness and skill building in safe and protected environment
6. Reflection – share responses feelings, interpret themes, explore commonalities, connect theme to their own experiences
7. Closing ritual – sends members out safely with positive tone, gratitude and respect

Dating Matters

- Focus on prevention of teen dating violence for Youth ages 11-14
- Parent programs to foster improved communication
- Help for educators to identify risk factors and warning signs of TDV
- High school focused peer messaging programs
- Assessment and planning tools for communities to build prevention capacity

Sexual Violence



Let's Talk About Consent

- Active consent is part of good communication.
- Teens and adults are not always clear on what consent means, how to express it or ask for it.

Love Notes

(Marline Pearson)

Organizing principles:

Knowing yourself

Forming and maintaining healthy relationships

Frameworks for assessing relationships

Recognizing unhealthy relationships and responding to dangerous ones

Effective communication and conflict management skills

Intimacy, sexual values, pacing relationships, consent, and sex.

Planning for sexual choices

Activity Examples: Group Juggle

How the game is played:

Participants toss ball to another while saying their own name and something they are proud of of, OR one tradition they appreciate from their own ethnic/racial/cultural heritage.

As the ball is tossed, each person remembers what the next person said

The key process question:

What was it like to share something about yourself?

- This question opens up real talk about sharing something personal and unique for each participant

Activity Examples: Personal Timelines

How the activity works:

Working independently, participants add significant things that happened at specific ages to their own personal timeline.

Pairs of participants share timelines with each other, then introduce their partner to the group

For Example: This is my partner Elijah, and here are some important things on his timeline (e.g. moving, birth, death of someone special, first celebration of families religious or cultural tradition, something challenging;, something joyous happened in his life

The key process question: What was it like to feel heard?

We all have a story and the more we know each other's stories the less likely we are to tear them down or outcast them, more likely to support and friendship

Special Focus on Young Men and Boys



Activity Examples Boys and Their Emotions

It's Cool, Not so Cool, I'm Outta here

How the Activity Works: Boys respond to scenarios that involve expressing emotion (telling someone their feelings, receiving a hug, being embarrassed, feeling angry etc.) by standing under the “It’s cool/not so cool” messages

Key Process Questions:

After each question, ask if anyone wants to share why they chose to stand where they did?

Were you surprised by where you ended up compared to the group?

How can we encourage each other to move closer to “It’s Cool”

Activity Examples: Boys and Their Emotions

The Boy Code/Man Box

How the Activity Works:

Boys step into and out of the box (big space) on the floor if they have experienced personal challenges such as: Done something to prove you were tough, had a problem or pain and kept it to yourself, witnessed another man you look up to commit violence) This activity focuses on the way boys hear messages like act tough, don't cry, show now fear.

Key Process Questions:

What was it like to share that activity with others; see what you and others have been through?

What can we do to challenge and change these Boy Code messages to break out of the Man Box?

How are Relationships Affected by Gender Roles and Expectations and Stereotypes

How do gender roles and stereotypes contribute to unhealthy relationships?

Where do young people hear these messages?

Who perpetuates these messages?

Take Away Points for Leaders

- ✓ Model what you want to see
- ✓ Listen Well
- ✓ Show Respect
- ✓ Encourage Self-Reflection

Resources

Boys Council & Girls Circle <https://onecirclefoundation.org/>

Love Notes www.dibbleinstitute.org/our-programs/love-notes-ebp/

Dating Matters www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/datingmatters/index.html

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMSHA) <https://www.samhsa.gov/>

Trauma Informed Practice www.integration.samhsa.gov/clinical-practice/trauma-informed

Cultural Competence www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-training/tpp-and-paf-resources/cultural-competence/index.html

The Boy Code: – act touch look cool, hide feelings (William S. Pollack) background and materials at http://www.williampollack.com/real_boys.html

The Man Box - narrowly defined set of traditional rules for being a man (Paul Kivel) an overview of this work with links to resources is at <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/the-history-of-the-man-box-megasahd/>