ACTIVITY GUIDES

GETTING STARTING WITH STUDENTS

If you are an advocate just beginning to work with a local school, the first interactions you have with students, parents, caregivers, or school staff are an important opportunity to build the foundation for a sustainable relationship with that school. A school may invite you for a full class period, a recess or lunch period, or only enough time to introduce yourself and your organization. The following guides include short activities, with discussion questions and facilitator tips, to help advocates start conversations about healthy relationships and dating abuse with students. These activities are meant to be flexible and adaptable for the size of the audience and time available. Advocates who are facilitating these activities should consider the specifics of their community in determining which of these activities would best fit the local dynamics impacting a young person’s experience with dating relationships and safety.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-TA-AX-K024 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.
ACTIVITY #1: AD SAVVY

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:

• Help students identify different types of abuse.
• Create awareness around how the advertising industry normalizes all kinds of abuse.
• Draw connections between community violence and dating abuse.
• Encourage students to think about what they can do to change social norms and the acceptance of violence and abuse.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Explain to students that you will be showing them images that are violent and could trigger a strong emotional reaction. Let students know that it is ok if they need to close their eyes or leave the room. Find out in advance who is available if a student needs to talk to someone after the activity, and share that information with students beforehand.
2. Show students examples of ads that show different types of violence and abuse. These ads can be printed in magazines, posted on billboards, in commercials, or on the internet. Use at least three different ads to show physical, sexual, and emotional or verbal abuse.
3. Ask students to describe what they see in each ad. You can also break the students up into small groups for this part of the discussion.
4. Using the discussion questions below, lead a conversation about the meaning of the ads with the large group.

VARIATIONS

• Provide magazines for students to select ads to categorize and place on posters. Categories can include, but are not limited to: violent/abusive, healthy, and unhealthy.
• Ask students to bring in their own examples.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS

• This activity addresses all types of violence or abuse that can be found in the media, so take time to address dating abuse specifically, and the connections between different types of violence.
• Whenever possible, use popular or current ads as examples to ensure that the activity is relatable.

AGE: Middle and High School
TIMING: 30-60 minutes
GROUP SIZE: 10-15 students
MATERIALS:
• Examples of violent advertising
• Magazines and examples of internet, billboard, or commercial ads
• Scissors, poster board, glue
• Computer and speakers
PREPARATION:
Locate print or online ads that showcase different types of violence. Ensure that ads are age appropriate and abide by school policy.

Print out internet ads or have commercials on hand to play on a computer.
• Encourage students to continue this conversation with other students in the school, possibly by writing about it in the school newspaper or talking about it at a school assembly. Also suggest using social media or blogs to continue the discussion.

QUESTIONS
1. What does violence look like?
   • Address physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse.
2. What kind of violence do you see on TV or in ads?
   • Ask students to name some favorite movies and think about violence in them.
3. How does violence on TV or in ads impact violence at school?
   • Are school norms affected by the media?
   • If yes or no, why?
4. When you see violence on TV or in ads, what can you do?
   • How would you like to change violence in the media?
   • What impact can your small steps take (for example, not buying products?)
5. When you see violence at school, what can you do?
   • Discuss bystander intervention, emphasizing student safety and when to seek help from an adult or 911.
   • How does your school react? How does the community react?
   • How can this have an impact?
   • What are the challenges to stepping up? What makes your school special?
ACTIVITY #2: LOVE IS...

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
- Introduce the concept of healthy relationships.
- Show that we may define love in different ways - but no matter how many definitions love has, abuse is not one of them.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Draw a giant heart on a large piece of paper.
2. Post the heart on the wall and have markers available for activity.
3. Write the words “Love is...” above the heart.
4. Invite each student to provide definitions that answer the phrase “Love is...” by soliciting ideas from the class until the heart appears to be mostly full.

VARIATIONS
- Invite students to come up and fill in the heart themselves.
- Ask students to write the phrase and definitions on their own individual sheets of paper, and take pictures or display them all.
- If time or space is not conducive, ask students to verbally complete the phrase.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
- Talking about healthy relationships with youth often resonates better than addressing dating abuse directly. These conversations can allow students to open up about what are healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors. Be sure to encourage sharing and supporting naming positive behaviors. This is a great, quick activity that’s good for groups of all sizes.
- The activity is easy to set up and can be done in most spaces, with a wide age range.

QUESTIONS
1. What types of words are listed in our heart?
   - Are there any that appear a lot or multiple times?
   - What kind of words are these?
2. Is there anything you don’t see in this heart?
   - How do these words make you feel? Not make you feel?
   - Is there anything you were unsure of whether it should be in the heart?
3. Why are there so many different words?
• Are there words you disagree with?
4. Can there be love in an abusive relationship?
  • Is that a reason to stay in the relationship? Why or why not?
5. Define abusive, unhealthy, and healthy behaviors.
  • Are there words about abuse in the heart?
  • Are there unhealthy words?
  • Are there other factors that might impact whether a word is healthy or unhealthy?
GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Put students in the shoes of someone deciding ‘what they would do’ in a given situation. By doing this, the activity teaches healthy decision-making, empathy, and allows students to determine their own values in a relationship.
• The activity introduces students to behaviors within a dating relationship that could be defined as healthy, unhealthy, or abusive.
• Encourage young people to communicate and define healthy and unhealthy behaviors themselves, even though students may not classify behaviors the same way.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Set ground rules for respect in the group to promote a safe space.
2. Distribute at least one dating relationship card (see “Preparation”) to each student in the class.
3. Explain that each card contains an example of a behavior that might be present in a dating relationship.
4. Instruct each student to read the card and consider what they might do if that action were occurring in their relationship: “stay together” “let’s talk about it” or “it’s over.”
5. Have each student read their card out loud and tell the rest of the group which category they think the behavior should be placed in and why.
6. Record each response by category on paper or the board as students go around.
7. At each card, facilitate a short conversation. Allow students to make suggestions as to what they may or may not do and why.

VARIATIONS
• For a larger group, read the cards aloud to the group and ask students to raise their hands for each category and to comment.
• If there is more time, put students into groups of 3 and ask them to make decisions as a group. This can open up more discussion.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
• This activity is more sensitive than others, and therefore would work best with a group of students that are familiar with each other and have built some trust and group identity.
• Encourage conversation about disagreements, without singling out individual students for ‘wrong’ decisions.

QUESTIONS

1. Define healthy, unhealthy, and abusive.
2. After looking over the “It’s over” category, is it always easy to end a relationship?
   • Why or why not?
   • What could some barriers be to leaving an abusive relationship?
   • What barriers do people at your school face to leaving an abusive or unhealthy relationship?
3. Which category did we talk about the most?
   • Why do you think that was?
4. Which cards may be warning signs of abusive relationships?
   • Do we disagree on any?
5. Is it okay that different people wanted two different categories for behaviors?
   • How would you talk about a disagreement like this with a friend? Or partner?
GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Consider how technology can be used as a tool for dating abuse.
• Support students in considering what their communication goals would be with a partner.
• Discuss how to challenge unhealthy technology use in relationships.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Write the sentence “I have a right to a safe and healthy relationship” on the board.
2. Ask students to fold their sheets of paper in half.
3. Start by explaining to students that they will need to copy down the sentence on one half of their paper.
4. When they hear the noisemaker/buzzer they will stop writing the sentence and begin writing their first and last name on the other half of the paper.
5. Once they complete writing their first and last name they will resume writing the sentence on the other half, but from the beginning.
6. Let students know that every time they hear the noisemaker/buzzer they must stop and write their first and last name.
7. Only allow students to write a few words between buzzes or buzz multiple times so students are forced to write their names several times in a row.
8. Do this activity for 1-2 minutes or as long as necessary.

VARIATIONS
• If the group is very large, ask for 5 volunteers to do the activity in front of the group.
• Seek out accompanying YouTube or other videos that may support conversations around abusive use of technology. Check out loveisrespect.org’s YouTube for ideas.
DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS

• This is an interactive activity for an involved group of students.
• It works great in most spaces and group sizes, as long as there are desks available.
• Be prepared for students to be energetic after the activity, and harness that energy into conversation rather than distraction.
• If some students get frustrated during the activity and stop writing, use this as part of your discussion on how they felt and the relation it has to being controlled through technology.

QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel during this activity?
   • At the beginning?
   • At the end?
2. How many times did you have to write your name?
   • Did you finish writing your name?
   • How did your name change throughout the game?
3. Explain the purpose of the buzzer and how it represents unwanted, controlling, disruptive, or threatening text messages from their dating partner.
4. Emphasize that these controlling messages are what we call “W” messages – Where are you? What are you doing? Why don’t you answer?
5. Does this happen at your school?
6. Are text messages like that unhealthy or abusive?
   • Do you see this at your school?
   • What makes the text messages unhealthy or abusive?
7. Discuss how technology can be used as a tool of abuse. Emphasize that technology and communication are not bad, but that they enable constant communication and monitoring that can lead to abuse, if clear boundaries are not discussed and respected.
   • What are some warning signs of abuse using technology?
   • Address monitoring and stalking behavior, as well as sharing passwords.
8. What would you have done or what could you do if this was an actual situation?
   • Would you have said anything? When?
   • If they wouldn’t stop, what would you do?
   • Is there anyone you could ask for help?
ACTIVITY #5: BOUNDARY SETTING

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Promote awareness of local response services.
• Discuss what healthy relationships mean for the students, and why that might look different for everyone.
• Encourage students to consider their own boundaries and priorities in relationships.
• Define healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Begin the activity encouraging students to think about what a healthy relationship looks like.
2. Spend time talking about this while they find magazine cut outs that support their ideas to decorate their journals with. Include things that make them happy, or make them think of people in their lives they have healthy relationships with.
3. When the journals are decorated, set up a quiet time and space for students to write. Ensure they have enough privacy.
4. Explain that what they put in the journals is private and theirs to keep, and for them to write about their thoughts on relationships and what they want.

VARIATIONS
• If there is less time available, students can decorate or write in their journals after class. The journals can also be a gift to students accompanied by an introduction of services available in the community.
• This activity can also be used in response to a video, article, or discussion about dating abuse.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
• This is a quiet, reflective activity that works best with groups that are used to spending that kind of time together.
• Older students who are more likely to have been in relationships may benefit more from this activity.
• Though the focus is on dating relationships, encourage students to consider the questions for personal family, friend, or peer relationships as well.

QUESTIONS/Writing PROMPTS
1. What does a healthy relationship look like for you?
   • How should it make you feel?
   • Does love mean you are in a healthy relationship?
2. What behaviors do you look for in a dating partner?
   • Are these the same qualities you look for in a friend?
   • What qualities do you bring to a relationship?
3. What makes you feel safe in a relationship?
   • What doesn’t make you feel safe?
4. What are your non-negotiables in a relationship? Negotiables?
   • Think about behaviors that could come up in a relationship. Are there certain behaviors that would absolutely end it? (i.e. physical abuse, cheating, lying). This can also apply to smaller things, such as shared interests or goals.
ACTIVITY #6: PSA MAKING

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:

• Encourage students to consider social norms in the media from a healthy relationships perspective.
• Support students in thinking about what healthy relationships look like and encourage conversation.
• Promote youth activism and challenge students to change school and community norms to promote healthy relationships.

ACTIVITY

STEPS

Part A
1. In class, present these examples and talk about what makes the relationship seem healthy.
2. Prompt students to find other examples in the media, or come up with their own examples.
3. Refer to Part A discussion questions for support.

Part B
1. Divide students into groups of 5.
2. Ask them to create posters supporting healthy relationships to hang around the school. They can use some images from the media discussed in part A, or come up with their own ideas.
3. Encourage them to think about what their school climate is like, and how to promote positive, healthy dating.

VARIATIONS

• Parts A and B can be stand alone versions if time is restricted.
• If this is a multi-session or significantly longer session, students can record their own PSA’s on iPhones or other devices.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS

• This activity works well with many different groups, though in totality takes longer than others in the guide.
• Incorporate the types of media students see most frequently (i.e. online ads, local billboards) in the activity as much as possible.

QUESTIONS

Part A
1. What makes a relationship healthy?
2. Why do these relationships seem healthy to you?
3. Can you always see warning signs of abuse?
4. Where do you see advertisements and media most often? What kind of messages are these?
5. What role do the media have in promoting healthy relationships?

Part B
1. Are healthy relationships important in your school?
2. What would they like to communicate to other students at the school about healthy relationships?
3. Why is this important?
4. How could this be communicated?
5. What change would you like to see in your community?
6. What challenges are there in your communities to changing how people see healthy relationships?
ACTIVITY #7: MUSIC LYRICS

ADAPTED FROM BOSTON START STRONG’S “SOUND RELATIONSHIPS”

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Encourage students to think about what they hear every day about healthy relationships. Young people often idolize musicians and pop culture, and may not think about the messages they hear.
• Teach students to analyze what they hear every day from classmates, family members, and the news.
• Think about how negative messages impact the way we talk about relationships.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Play 3-5 recent, popular songs for students (partially, if they are long).
2. Talk about whether the lyrics to those songs support healthy relationships.
3. Hand out the lyrics after the conversation and address anything that wasn’t covered.
4. After going through 3-5 songs, ask students what they feel the impact is of these songs on young people’s relationships.

VARIATIONS
• If it is a large group or needs more structure, ask students to write down or classify health/unhealthy words and behaviors they hear during the song.
• Ask students for their own examples.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
• This is great for a more active group and as an easy introduction to healthy relationships.
• Save time for defining healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behavior during the discussion.

QUESTIONS
1. What song exemplifies healthy relationships to you, and why?
2. How does listening to these songs make you feel?
3. What is the impact of these songs on young people’s relationships at your school?
4. Are most songs out today violent? Just some? Why?

• Ask about gun, dating, peer on peer.
• Is it important to listen to songs that have healthy relationships in them?

5. What other ways do young people get messaging about relationships in your community?
ACTIVITY #8: WALK THE LINE

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Consider what the definition of abuse might look like in real relationships.
• Foster discussion about the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviors, and how friends and partners might disagree on the differences.
• Encourage students to consider why people might not always leave abusive relationships.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Establish ground rules of respect and a safe space.
2. Have students stand up in the center of the room at the start of the narrative.
3. As the narrative goes through an individual’s experience of an increasingly abusive relationship, ask students to sit down when they would “leave” the relationship.
4. Anticipate students sitting down at different points in the story, and be sure to include behaviors that are “grey” and will spark debate.

VARIATIONS
• Can also ask students to write down when they would ‘leave’, or raise their hands, to avoid stigma of those who choose to stay longer.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
• This activity requires some preparation, but is both active and thought-provoking for students. For this reason it can work well in many environments with very little preparation and supplies.
• Encourage honesty and support of student’s decisions when to ‘leave’. Avoid judgment words that imply there is a right or wrong answer, and emphasize the behavior instead.

QUESTIONS
1. Were there certain behaviors where many students sat down?
2. Why that behavior rather than others?
3. Where there any behaviors where students had many different opinions?
   • What does it mean that the group disagreed on definitions of abusive behavior?
   • Is unhealthy behavior unhealthy for each person?
   • Can repeated unhealthy behavior become abusive?

AGE:
High School

TIMING:
30 minutes

GROUP SIZE:
Under 30 students

MATERIALS:
• Open space
• Narrative to read aloud

PREPARATION:
Come prepared with a narrative of a teen’s relationship that goes from healthy to unhealthy to abusive. Include teen-specific behaviors and try to make the demographics and experiences relatable for the audience. About 10-12 specific behaviors are recommended, with an equal number in each category (healthy, unhealthy, abusive) woven into a narrative. Check out youth-specific examples to use at loveisrespect.org.
• What role do boundaries and communication play?
4. Encourage students to understand that each person will have different needs and boundaries in a relationship, but abusive behavior can be dangerous and have negative implications for their lives.
5. How could you help a friend in a situation like this?
6. What barriers are there for someone leaving a relationship at your school?
7. What resources do you know of in your community?
ACTIVITY #9: KNOW THE FACTS

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Raise awareness about dating abuse and to advertise available services in the community.
• Facilitate a conversation about the stigma of abuse and barriers to reporting.
• Challenge students to talk about abuse and healthy relationships in their communities.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Read the statistics to the students and ask them to raise their hands to decide whether they are true or false.
2. Give the correct answer and provide more information to facilitate a discussion about the topic.

VARIATIONS
• If the group is smaller, set up A, B, and C stations around the room and present three options for each statistic (i.e. Is the answer 25%, 50%, or 75%) and ask students to walk to the station they estimate.
• Accompany with relevant YouTube videos by Love is Respect if possible.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
• This is a very simple, introductory activity to raise awareness about dating abuse. Awareness about the prevalence of dating abuse can be very important in communities with a great deal of stigma around the issue.
• This activity works well with large groups in a short amount of time.

QUESTIONS
1. Were you surprised by the statistics?
   • Which ones were most surprising? Which weren’t?
   • Why? (Aim for community specific responses.)
2. What did the statistics teach you?
   • Do you think these statistics apply to your school/community?
   • Why or why not?
3. What is stigma?
4. Why might some people who experience abuse not report it or tell other people?
5. What do you think it is like for survivors of dating abuse in your community?
ACTIVITY #10: WHAT’S IN A WORD?

GOALS
The purpose of this activity is to:
• Educate students that abusive behavior in dating relationships is not okay.
• Abusive behaviors can look like many different things, but is always about power and control.
• By defining the words we use to talk about healthy relationships, this activity gives students the tools to peer educate and advocate on their own behalf.

ACTIVITY

STEPS
1. Hand out the list of words, without definitions, to the students.
2. Give them 10 minutes to define the words they know, or write ‘word associations’. For example, ‘respect’ could be associated with ‘conversation’ and ‘honesty’.
3. Discuss the definitions as a group.

VARIATIONS
• If more time is available, or the group is team oriented, divide the students into groups to come up with definitions on their own.
• Read the words to students rather than hand out a readymade list.

DISCUSSION

FACILITATOR TIPS
• This activity is a terrific educational activity for any group size and space.
• Allow students to come up with their own words and challenge definitions they disagree on.

QUESTIONS
1. What words were hard to define?
   • Are there any definitions we don’t agree on?
   • What makes those words hard to define?
2. What words are missing here?
   • Do students at your school use other words to talk about dating?
   • What is dating like at your school?
3. Why are these words important to know?
   • What can you do with them?
   • How can you support healthy relationships at your school?
4. Discuss bystander intervention, emphasizing student safety and when to seek help from an adult or 911.
5. Discuss available services in the community.

AGE:
Middle and High School

TIMING:
30 minutes

GROUP SIZE:
Any

MATERIALS:
• Paper
• Writing utensils
• Handouts of words (optional)

PREPARATION:
Come prepared with a list of healthy relationship words and their definitions. Edit the list for age-appropriateness of the group and approval by the school.

Suggested words include: abuse, boyfriend, dating, fear, girlfriend, healthy harassment, intimate, rape, relationship, respect, safe, safe sex, sabotage, sex, sexual coercion, stalking, unhealthy, etc.