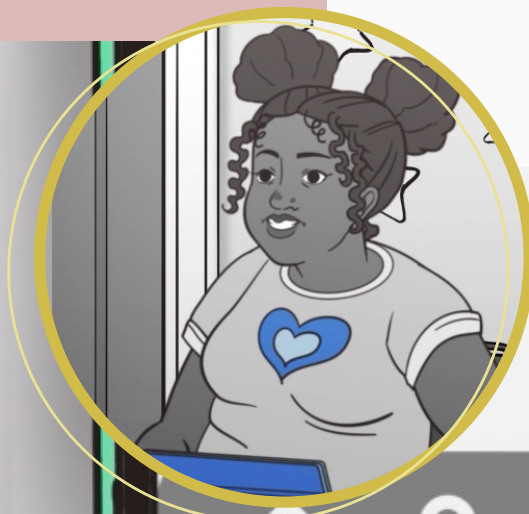




Healthy Relationships

Discussion Guide



NetSmartz®

A program of the

NATIONAL CENTER FOR
**MISSING &
EXPLOITED**
CHILDREN®

Healthy Relationships

These discussion questions are meant to help spark conversation after watching the video. Unhealthy behaviors in relationships can mimic grooming behaviors, which may lead to child exploitation such as online enticement, sextortion, and child sex trafficking. By having an open dialogue about preventing unhealthy relationships with children, adults can help them develop critical thinking skills and develop trusted relationships that could help protect them from online exploitation and other forms of victimization.

Why should you take time to get to know someone online and offline before you trust them?

Let participants/children come up with some ideas.

Usually, when we start talking to or dating someone we like, everything seems wonderful at first. However, we all have flaws and make mistakes.

Initially, we feel excitement about talking to them, and we might want to speed up the getting-to-know-each-other process. However, keep in mind that taking the time to get to know each other is important; it can help us to:

- **Learn about who they are.** It takes time to learn about the other person's interests, friends, hobbies, family, dreams, values, likes, and dislikes. Sometimes when we meet people, we may think we have a lot in common, but after we get to know them, we learn that this isn't always true.
- **Build trust.** This is essential to having a healthy relationship. Learn about the person's values, how they react to different situations, how they deal with emotions, how they solve problems and treat others, how they make us feel in different circumstances, and how they communicate. Building trust takes effort and requires time.
- **Explore your feelings.** Sometimes we can have strong initial chemistry or attraction for some people, but that initial excitement fades, and we might realize that it was only a crush. Take time to explore your own feelings when meeting someone – you'll learn about yourself and how you actually feel about the other person.

In the video, it seems like the boy gets upset with the girl very often. What do you think about their relationship dynamics?

Let participants share their answers and then move on to the next question.

Here are some tips for healthy conflict resolution and possible red flags for relationships both online and offline:

Stay calm, even while disagreeing with the other person. It is okay to feel angry, sad, or frustrated.

- You should not feel scared, unsafe, threatened, or guilty.

Focus on fixing the problem and not winning the argument.

- Manipulation, guilt trips, and undermining are tactics used to take control over the situation or relationship. Pay attention to these behaviors as they are big red flags that can lead to more serious issues.

Set healthy boundaries. Communicate what you feel and assert, give, and receive respect.

- Do not agree to do something because you feel pressured to do so or because you don't want to upset the other person or feel forced or manipulated into doing so.

Take a break when you or the other person are fighting.

- Arguing when one or both parties are disrespecting each other can cause a lot of emotional harm. If you are not able to take a break because the other person does not allow you, and if you feel emotionally drained, insulted, or threatened during an argument in a relationship, go to an adult for help and reach out to friends for support.

Take responsibility for your actions and work together toward a solution. Look for a compromise that works for **both** of you.

- Compromises should not be one-sided; if you feel like you are the only one compromising, that should be a red flag.

Facilitators' notes: Emphasize that facing issues, disagreements, and conflicts is a normal aspect of relationships, but if they are not experiencing healthy conflict resolution or conflict happens constantly, they should talk to a trusted adult about it. This might be a red flag or an indication of a more serious issue, such as having a controlling or abusive relationship.

In the video we can see that the girl doesn't feel content with the relationship, but she seems to have a hard time letting it go.

Can you share some barriers that might keep someone from letting a person go who is not making them happy?

Let participants/children share their answers.

Possible answers:

- Fear of being alone
- Fear of changing their mind after breaking up
- Feeling like they can't end it
- Feeling pulled back in
- Feeling responsible for the other person's safety
- The other person threatens or blackmails you
- Feeling like the other person does not let you end things

Facilitators' Notes: Remind them that healthy relationships make you feel safe, heard, respected, confident, connected, understood, and overall happy. If you are in a relationship that makes you feel isolated, guilty, or scared but you can't seem to let go, talk to a trusted adult. Also talk to a trusted adult if you often find yourself returning to the relationship even if you aren't happy. You shouldn't feel responsible for that person's well-being, and you should never feel guilty or emotionally unable to let go in a relationship.

- Yes, all relationships have their ups and downs, and there are times when we feel angry, sad, disappointed, jealous, and even a bit insecure, but those feelings should be brief and associated with a specific time and circumstance.
- If any relationship makes you feel isolated, constantly guilty, or scared, talk to trusted adult about it.

*If you are currently or if you have ever been in a relationship that makes you feel scared, depressed, discouraged, controlled, or anxious, or if you experience other strong negative emotions, talk to someone like a school counselor, a trusted adult, or a therapist.

What would you tell a friend who shared with you that they are in an unhealthy relationship?

Allow participants/children to share their opinions. Emphasize the following:

- Thank them for trusting you.
- Ask them how you can support them.
- Acknowledge their fear and the fact that thinking of ending things with someone can be a hard and scary decision to make.
- Tell them you believe in them, and they can get through this.
- Show that you will be there for them.
- Encourage them to seek help by talking to a school counselor or a therapist.
- You should also talk to a trusted adult to help you.

What are some red flags in the video?

Allow participants/children to name some red flags in the video:

- Love bombing.
- Controlling behavior.
- Trying to isolate the girl from her friends and family.
- The girl feels unhappy as though something isn't right in the relationship.
- The boy shows strong emotions, and demands why the girl isn't hanging out with him.

What are some things you should have in a healthy relationship?

Let participants/children share their answers. Emphasize the following:

- **Feeling safe and secure.**
- **Feeling content and fulfilled.**
- **Feeling proud of yourself.**
- **Feeling supported in your dreams and goals.**
- **Feeling like your partner complements your life,** but not like your partner completes or saves your life.
- **You should feel the person you are talking to or dating is supportive** of other important relationships in your life and they are genuinely happy you have your family and friends.
- **You feel good about who you are** because you feel accepted and loved.
- **You feel equal in the relationship.**

If you have questions about your relationship or if you need help, visit youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence/resources

What would you tell a friend who had a similar experience as the one in the video?

- **Let them know it is not their fault.** Anyone can find themselves in an unhealthy relationship. The important thing is to be there for your friend. Support them as best you can and try to identify a trusted adult who can help them.
- **Acknowledge that ending a relationship can be really scary.** But emphasize unhealthy relationships can lead to more serious issues, like victimization. Tell your friend they deserve better and it's important for them to prioritize their safety and well-being.
- **Encourage them to talk to a trusted adult.** They can provide guidance and resources to help your friend navigate this difficult situation.
- **Ask how you can support them.** Be present, show your support, and check in on your friend.
- **Encourage them to reach out to a trusted adult to create a safety plan.** This could include healthy ways to cope with situations. Encourage your friend to name three trusted adults they could talk to or ask for help, or advice on what to do if the person they're dating makes them feel unsafe.

