



HALDIMAND-NORFOLK HEALTH UNIT

Student Health CONNECTION

A resource for school staff and teachers

SUPPORTING Healthy Student Relationships

The way teens view relationships is informed in many ways, including observing relationships of their family or friends, portrayals of relationships they see in various forms of media and increasingly, the way relationships are presented on social networking sites or apps. It's no surprise then that a number of teens have misconceptions about what is involved in healthy, consensual relationships.

Teens need to be taught what healthy relationships look like, how to differentiate between a healthy and unhealthy relationship and how to seek help if needed.

So, what is a healthy relationship? In its simplest terms, a healthy relationship is one that makes a person feel good about themselves and their partner. Developing healthy relationships during the teen years will set the stage for developing loving and secure relationships as the teen grows and matures.

Healthy relationships need to be based on a foundation of good communication, trust, honesty and mutual respect. If these components are not established, the relationship may become one based on control, fear and lack of value and respect for the other person and could lead to physical, emotional, verbal or other types of abuse.



School's Significant Role

As teens adjust to their changing bodies they may seek information from a variety of sources. This can include peers, the media, online and from trusted adults. Yet, the information they find may be incorrect or useless. When young people are given honest and accurate information from their teachers and parents, they can learn to make more responsible decisions.

School is often where adolescents form their identity through interactions with peers and develop expectations for

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relationships. Helping students develop knowledge and social skills that improve their chances of experiencing positive relationships can contribute to a teen's overall health and wellbeing.

How Can You Help?

All members of the school community - staff, peers and parents have important roles in preventing dating violence and promoting healthy relationship behaviours. Involving students can help make the issues relevant for them. There are a variety of different ways that your school can support students in developing healthy relationships and avoiding abuse.

Warning Signs of Relationship Abuse

Victims of relationship abuse may show the following signs; however it is important to recognize that these can indicate other issues as well:

- Physical signs of injury
- Missing school or a decline in attainment
- Changes in behaviour, mood and personality; becoming withdrawn and passive
- Bullying/being bullied
- Isolation from family and friends
- Inappropriate sexual behaviour, language or attitudes
- Self-harm, eating disorders, problems with sleeping



1. Promote the Policy

Ensure that all school staff are aware of the reporting policies and procedures in regards to relationship abuse. It is unlikely that a teen experiencing dating violence will disclose this information, and if they do it will likely be to a friend. For that reason, efforts should be made to promote a clear way for students to support their friend(s) if they suspect they are being abused in any way.

2. Cover it in Class

Healthy relationships and dating violence can be covered as an intentional part of the curriculum, but finding other opportunities to discuss the topic throughout the year in formal and less formal discussions can greatly enhance the impact.

3. Set Safe Spaces

It is important to make sure that you have established a safe space so students feel comfortable. One way to accomplish this is by allowing students to take part in

setting some agreement and norms, or ground rules, before starting a sensitive discussion or lesson on relationships. Simple steps such as posting information about where students can seek help or providing a safe space where students can discuss concerns with a trusted staff member can make a big difference.

4. Partnerships & Services

Discussing healthy relationships and potentially abusive situations can sometimes be a challenging topic. Be aware of what community services are available to schools and students, including:

- S.T.A.R. (Stop Abuse in Relationships) Counsellors are available for all students in every secondary school in Haldimand & Norfolk.
- Your school's Public Health Nurse. If you aren't aware who your school's nurse is, speak with guidance or visit www.hnhu.org/healthyschools
- Haldimand-Norfolk REACH - A variety of services and supports are offered for teens. Details are available at www.hnreach.on.ca



The Scoop on Sexting

As technology advances it changes the way people are exposed to sexuality and the forms of sexual communication. Sexting is one way teens may communicate in a relationship. In Canada, about 25% of students in grades 7-11 have received a "sext". Teens may sext to show off, to entice, to show interest or to prove commitment to someone.



between two individuals close in age and both parties consent, as long as the sexts do not depict abuse or assault and remain private the law does not get involved.

Have a Classroom Chat in a Snap

Teachers have the opportunity to educate students on the dangers of sexting. It's important to inform students of the ramifications of sexting and how

Sexting comes in more forms than nude or semi-nude photos, and can include:

- A message or post written with sexual language
- Photos or videos of sexual acts
- Videos involving nudity or semi-nudity
- Live chats with someone on webcam that involve something sexual
- Screen-captured photos or video recordings taken from live webcam chats

The concern with sexting occurs when that explicit photo lands in the hands or on the phone of someone. This explicit photo

can be sent to other students, employers, posted on Facebook, Instagram, sent to school personnel or a parent. It may also find its way to the police.

Sexting and Canadian Law

The child pornography sections of the Criminal Code of Canada are intended to prevent the sexual exploitation of young people. Sending nude photos of teens under the age of 18 over an electronic device is technically a criminal offense. However, when sexts are voluntarily sent

to manage online privacy. Students need to be aware of the social, psychological and legal consequences of sending sexts. Below are some discussion points about internet privacy:

1. The internet is public
2. The internet is not within your sphere of control
3. What goes on the internet, stays on the internet
4. Negative publicity on the internet can cost you in a variety of ways (loss of social standing, employment opportunities, etc.)

Classroom resources



SEXTING: Sex Plus Text Equals Trouble

This 30-minute DVD, aimed at Grade 7-12 students, presents real-life sexting scenarios along with the resulting consequences affecting a teenager's personal, social and future life.

Speak to your school's public health nurse if you are interested in borrowing this DVD from the Health Unit.

Youthrelationships.org

This website is the creation of 'The Fourth R', a group of researchers and professionals in Ontario, dedicated to promoting healthy adolescent relationships and reducing risk behaviours. They work with schools, parents, and community organizations to promote the neglected "R" (for Relationships) and help build this Fourth R in school climates.

Visit the website for resources, training opportunities and information about the Fourth R curriculum.



Consent Matters

You've probably heard the phrase "no means no." This is true, but this expression is not adequate because there are many other ways to communicate no. Freezing up, saying you're tired, crying, or pulling away are a few examples of ways to communicate no. A person doesn't have to yell no, scream, kick, or bite for it to be exceedingly clear that they don't want to engage in sexual activity.

What consent really means is a voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. In other words, it means communicating yes on your own terms.

It is important that students learn what consent is from an early age. Knowing about consent gives students the ability and skills to say no and allows others to do the same.

Getting Clear on Consent

Here are a few basic starting points for a conversation with students about consent:

- Consent doesn't need to be difficult or complicated! We all can naturally tell when someone is consenting or not- it's just a question of respecting their choice. If there's any



uncertainty at all, just ask.

- Sexual activity includes any sexual behavior, from touching for a sexual purpose to sexual intercourse, and consent must be given for every activity, every time.
- Sexual consent needs to be mutually agreed upon by both parties and if they feel forced or bullied it is not consent.
- No always means no.

Consent and the Law

Canadian law has an affirmative standard for consent. This means a voluntary, enthusiastic "yes-I-really-want-to-and-thank-you-for-asking" type of consent –

not a consent that's implied on the basis of silence, previous sexual history, or what the person is wearing.

The age of consent for sexual activity according to Canadian law is 16 years of age.

The only exceptions are if:

- A young person aged 14 or 15 consents to sexual activity with someone less than five years older
- A young person aged 12 or 13 consents to sexual activity with someone less than two years older
- These apply only if the older person is not in a position of trust or authority. The law says young people under the age of 12 cannot give consent at all.

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