By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Describe the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships;
- Identify reasons why relationships end;
- Explain the main components of a safety plan; and,
- Describe ways to help a friend who is in an abusive relationship.

Where do we learn about relationships?

Growing up, we’ve seen our parents, family, and other adult figures model what it is to be in a relationship. Some of us see examples of healthy modeling, while others see unhealthy or abusive displays, with a whole range in between. Combine these real life observations with what we’ve seen in the media; both of which have been reinforced by our society. Each of us ends up with a different perspective and chooses to either follow those models or take another path.

Relationships are complicated.

They may ebb and flow as time goes on. No couple’s relationship is 100% healthy, whether it involves partners who are in the honeymoon phase or those who have been together 50 years. What we do think is that relationships fall on a continuum of health. On one end are healthy relationships, the middle are unhealthy, and abusive fall on the other end.

What is a healthy relationship?

It is one that is hallmarked by respect and equality. Characteristics of healthy relationships include:
• Respect;
• Trust and support;
• Honesty and accountability;
• Negotiation and fairness;
• Shared responsibility;
• Economic partnership;
• Non-threatening behavior; and,
• If applicable, responsible parenting.

**Resource**

[Love is Respect](#)—a online resource to empower youth to prevent and end dating abuse

*The Equality Wheel, which was developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, shows us the components of a healthy relationship.*¹

The model has the central focus of equality and is surrounded by spokes that describe qualities that reinforce equality. Finally, it is encased in nonviolence to show that all of the components can be achieved without the use of harm.
In a healthy relationship, both of you:

- Are comfortable communicating with each other. You can honestly express your feelings, needs, and boundaries, and actively listen.
- Value what the other says and encourage each other to pursue personal goals. You affirm the other’s feelings and don’t judge.
- Deal with conflict in a fair and non-threatening way without the use of name-calling or put-downs. You use negotiation and compromise when appropriate, admit when you’re wrong, and agree to disagree with respect.
- Understand that you are individuals first, and a couple second. Self-esteem can be enhanced by your relationship, but is not dependent on it.
- Are supportive of spending time apart and enjoying personal activities and friends.
- Trust each other and don’t get jealous.
- Respect each other’s privacy as well as autonomy over finances and digital information. You keep things the other person has told you in confidence between the two of you.
- Have an equal division of labor when it comes to tasks or shared responsibilities.
- Respect each other’s desires and boundaries regarding sexual activity. All sexual activity is consensual.

Balanced and Healthy Relationships

Video Transcript

Robin: A healthy relationship is full of communication.
Nolan: At its core, you have to have honesty, and trust and communication.
Maddy: Both partners having equal say, and valuing each other’s opinion, and emotions, and ideas and being able to compromise through those things.
Robin: It’s about growing as an individual, and as a couple.
Luis: But where each person within a relationship can still maintain their personal identity.
Robin: It’s people who say something when they have a problem or bring up issues or say something when something makes them happy.
Luis: I don’t want to lose friends because I’m in a relationship, and I don’t want to hurt, damage that relationship because I want to spend time with my friends, so it’s a constant, kinda, bargain.
Maddy: Also, just really liking each other. Being able to have fun with each other.
Robin: Communication, support, and consent, I think are the basis of a healthy relationship.
You have rights in your relationships and as an individual.
Remember that you deserve all of them. You are worthy of love and affection—don’t forget that!

My Declaration of Rights:
I have the right to be treated with respect.
I have the right to have and express my own feelings.
I have the right to say "no" and not feel guilty.
I have the right to change my mind.
I have the right to say "I don’t know."
I have the right to express anger in a healthy way.
I have the right to be treated as a capable human being.
I have the right to have my needs be as important as others’ needs.
I have the right to make mistakes.
I have the right to ask “why?”
I have the right to have and express my own opinions.
I have the right to set limits on relationships.
I have the right to take time to respond to someone.
I have the right to take time to think before I communicate.
I have the right to take time to meet my own needs.
I have the right to take time to be alone.
I have the right to change my goals whenever I want.
I have the right to change a relationship when my feelings change.
I have the right to be myself without changing to suit others.
I have the right to start a relationship slowly and say “I want to know you better.”
I have the right to say no if I don’t want physical closeness.
I have the right to stand up for my beliefs and values.
I have the right to share my true feelings with others.
I have the right to feel good about myself without another person’s attention.
I have the right to handle opinions different from my own.
I have the right to be satisfied with my achievements.
I have the right to tell someone I don’t like the way they are treating me. 
I have the right to have an equal relationship with a partner.  
I have the right to feel good about myself. 

**What does an unhealthy relationship look like?**

Some characteristics of an unhealthy relationship include:

- Ineffective communication: Silent treatment or holding grudges;
- Lack of trust: Making your partner feel guilty for hanging out with other people. Having to prove their love;
- Jealousy;
- Putting one person’s desires above the other person;
- Disrespecting previously made agreements; and,
- Not spending time apart.

One example of unhealthy communication is described by psychologist John Gottman’s model of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” The four horsemen are stonewalling, otherwise known as emotionally withdrawing, criticism, contempt, and defensiveness. According to this model, married couples who use any of the four horsemen in their communication have a higher predictive likelihood of early divorce. Ask yourself if you’ve used these types of communication in your relationships. The horsemen model led to the development of Gottman’s balance theory, which proposes that successful couples have a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions. That means that for every five positive interactions like smiling, laughing, complimenting, or touching, there is one negative interaction. So while it may be okay to communicate negatively some of the time, successful couples have a higher percentage of the positive.³

**How has jealousy manifested in your relationships?**

**Video Transcript**

Devyn: So, it’s not always a walk in the park. My partner and I have troubles sometimes, being polyamorous. Um, for example, if one of us is spending a significant amount of time with another person, one of us might become jealous. Um, and the thing that we found time and time again is that it’s really important just to tell each other how we’re feeling. And to be able to talk about that.
How has jealousy manifested in your relationships? Video Transcript cont’d…
Nolan: It was 3 or 4 nights a week that I be talking to her for 4 or 5 hours. And I think it was because I was in college, experiencing these new things and she was still in high school.
Maddy: I had one boyfriend and I went to a cafe, and I was just hanging out with some guy. He got super jealous and it became like this big fight thing where he was assuming all these things. And you know, he was assuming that I was sleeping with him or making comments that I was sleeping with him, which were really unjustified.
Nolan: We eventually broke up from just the overall stress of it all. I just, I just couldn’t handle it anymore.
Luis: If I want to spend time with my friends, there’s always the questioning of, “Oh, why do you want to spend so much time with these people especially when, you know, there’s kind of the attractiveness towards each other?”
Danica: I never wanted him to spend time with like, his football team ‘cause I wanted to hang out with him.
Ashlee: I kind of blew it with him because I was constantly not trusting him and like wanting to see who he was texting and checking his Facebook and things like that. And that’s not healthy either if I’m like smothering him. So, we ended up not working out.
Aiefe: Now that I’m in college, you know and I realize, oh, you don’t have to know where somebody is all the time. And like when I was constantly being berated with questions of like, “Where are you?” “Who are you with?” Things like that. Oh, that was, that was really manipulative and controlling. It kind of like shed light on what it looked like to be in an unhealthy relationship and for jealousy to appear.
Janelle: The way that I deal with that is I recognize when I’m being jealous and talk about it with the person that I’m feeling that jealousy towards.
Maddy: So, when you get jealous of your boyfriend or girlfriend or something it’s important to ask why are you jealous? You know, like is it something that’s happened in the past or is this person actually betraying you?
Danica: Yeah, jealousy’s tough. It’s really hard. And it can really ruin relationships if you’re not careful.

It can be hard to draw the line between an unhealthy and abusive relationship. Do note that an unhealthy relationship is not necessarily abusive, but an abusive relationship is always unhealthy. What makes a relationship abusive? Abusive relationships are centered on power and control and are characterized by:
Intimidation;
Isolation;
Minimizing, denying, and blaming;
Using coercion and threats;
Using privilege, like gender identity or sexual orientation;
Emotional, financial, physical, sexual or digital abuse; and,
If applicable, using children.

Relationship Violence
Video Transcript
Traci Thomas-Card: Relationship violence is defined as causing physical harm or abuse, or threatening to cause physical harm or abuse. And relationship violence can also include factors such as emotional abuse, economic abuse, dependency and control over a partner. And there really isn’t a specific victim we have in mind when we’re talking about relationship violence. Relationship violence, and sexual assault and stalking for that matter, really defy all stereotypes of who a victim should be. It can be somebody of any age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability. Emotional violence can include things like threatening or causing harm to another person in terms of name calling or shaming and blaming that person for choices that he or she is making. So, often times, we so often think of abuse as a physical thing and it has to leave bruises or cuts on somebody’s body but the truth is those bruises can be internal as well. So, if somebody is consistently calling a partner names, that also constitutes relationship violence. There’s often stigma against male victims reporting abuse. So, for example, if Mary is texting Joe 20 times a day, she’s hacked into this Facebook account. She’s looking at his Twitter feed. And Joe doesn’t want Mary to be doing that, that would a good example of stalking or relationship violence in which Mary has control over what Joe is doing on social media.

The Power and Control Wheel, which was developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, provides a visual representation of the types of battering that can be experienced by an intimate partner.  

Relationship violence is manifested by power and control, which are central to the abuse and have been normalized by the abuser. The spokes of the wheel represent the different types of abuse or tactics used. The outside of the wheel is
surrounded by physical and sexual violence. Not all of the components have to occur for a relationship to be characterized as abusive, as every situation is unique. It may be easier to see the physical or sexual abuse as an outsider, but it’s more difficult to notice how power and control manifests itself in other ways.

It’s important to note that this wheel is intended to show only the ways in which some men batter women—use patterns of physical, emotional, and sexual violence to intimidate, threaten, or punish their intimate partners into compliance. The wheel’s creators believe men and women use violence against each other with different intentions, effects, meanings, and patterns. This dominance-based wheel does not work to illustrate the creators’ perspective that most violence women use against men in relationships is to resist or retaliate against being battered. While the folks who created the wheel acknowledge that a very few women do batter men, their experience tells them men batter women far more often than women batter men, and women’s resistive and retaliatory violence can be perceived or portrayed as battering if context is not carefully considered.
What are some red flags of an abusive relationship? It could be that your partner:

- Blows up at relatively simple things, having extreme mood swings or an explosive temper. This includes jealousy, anger, and controlling behaviors.
- Gets attached to you very soon into your relationship, likely telling you they love you right away and want to be with you all the time.
- Blames or accuses you, while not taking responsibility for their own actions.
- Convinces you to spend all of your time with them, while isolating you from your friends and family.
- Uses hurtful language, put-downs, or humiliation.
- Doesn't acknowledge your thoughts or opinions.
- Makes excuses and is self-centered.
- Reinforces gender or sexual orientation norms—you have an unequal partnership.
- Intimidates you by breaking things, looking or gesturing at you in a certain way, or harming pets.
- Threatens to out you.
- Knows your digital passwords and monitors your social media, email, texts, and voicemail.
- Controls your finances.
- Physically harms you.
- Coerces or forces you into sex, or sabotages contraception or STI protection.

Keep in mind that some of these examples might actually be more subtle in reality. You may not immediately notice these behaviors, or they may gradually become more apparent. Do you see an imbalance of power and control in your relationship? Have you observed any of these red flags in your partner? You may just have a gut sense that something is wrong—listen to that instinct. Do you recognize any of these characteristics in yourself?
Unhealthy Relationships

Video Transcripts

Janelle: I think an unhealthy relationship is where you need somebody, with such an intense focus and obsession.

Robin: Having this person take up all of your time or being jealous when you're hanging out with your friends, so you stop hanging out with them as much. Or so you stop answering the phone when your grandma calls just because you don't quite have the time to talk to them right now 'cause your partner's there. And you know that they want you to spend that time with them.

Heather: You say something, it's like your opinion, and the person responds with, "You're so stupid. Like that's not true."

Aoife: You don't really support the other person and what they wanna do or what they believe in.

Jess: To me, personally, like the most unhealthy thing is a lack of communication or a disregard for the different ways you can communicate and show affection.

Maddy: An unhealthy relationship is where somebody has more power and control over one person than the other.

Robin: We see a lot of examples of people who are verbally abusive but we don't call it that. It's just somebody who gets angry.

Ashlee: I've been with a guy before who thought that that was the case. That anytime he wanted to have sex, I should just be willing and I should hop in the bed with him. But I don't think so. I think it should be a mutual thing. And if one person is uncomfortable with it, then it shouldn't be happening.

Nolan: It was not. He was like. She was. There was. Like. The odds of her being pregnant were .000000001. And she was just doing it to get attention from him. She knew the whole time that she wasn't pregnant. I just think that after they were involved, he was looking for something else in a relationship, and she was just trying to scare him to stay around.

Robin: Abusive relationships don't start out abusive. If somebody was mean to you from the get-go, you probably wouldn't be in a relationship with them. It's starts out good; it starts out nice; it starts out wholesome. And then, small things change along the way.

Danica: You know, if you're unhappy, then it is unhealthy.
The original Power and Control Wheel was purposely created to focus on men being abusive towards women.

Therefore it does not take into account the particular nuances that affect people of differing gender identities and sexual orientations. Unhealthy and abusive relationships occur at similar rates amongst folks who identify with the LGBTQ community and those who don’t. The Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse adapted the original model with permission to make it more inclusive. Some examples of tactics an abuser can use may take advantage of the fact that their partner is not out with their sexual orientation or gender identity. They may also manipulate their partner knowing that the legal system still does not offer full and equal protection to all people.

Optional Resource
Northwest Network of Bi, Trans, Lesbian & Gay Survivors of Abuse
To review, the health of a relationship can be viewed as a spectrum. Now that you’ve learned about the differences between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive
relationships, try your hand at identifying examples of each type in this interaction.

Why might you want to end a relationship?
You may come to a point where you feel like it just isn’t working anymore, or maybe it never worked to begin with. Sometimes the intimacy that is shared becomes more of a friendship and less romantic. Or it could be that there is a loss of intimacy on multiple levels, and there is no longer a connection. One or both of you may be unhappy with your partnership or realize that your differences are too much to overcome. Maybe you recognize that your relationship is unhealthy or abusive, and you need to leave. Sometimes it is spurred by an event, like crossing boundaries or cheating. You might just know that it’s over and you’re ready to move on. Everyone has a different experience that is unique to each situation.

If you are in a relationship that is having issues, ask yourself to identify the root causes. Sometimes working on the modifiable factors, like how you communicate, can drastically improve the relationship. On the other hand, factors related to individual personality are not easily changed. Talking to a counselor or licensed therapist either alone or together is one option if you want to try to improve things before deciding whether or not to end it for good.

Breaking up can suck.
If you’re the one who is initiating the split, it can come with a range of emotions. Finding the courage to speak up and communicate your desire to end things can come with guilt, sadness, and anxiety. You may question yourself and wonder if you’re making the right decision. Depending on where you’re at in your life or how long you’ve been in the relationship, you might ask yourself if you’ll find someone who will be a good fit or who will love you like you deserve to be loved. You may worry about your partner’s future and how they will deal with the break-up. You may grieve the loss of the future that you imagined you and your partner would have shared.

If you are the one who is on the receiving end of the split, you may experience similar emotions, especially if you feel like you were caught off guard because you thought your relationship was peachy-keen. It’s a difficult spot to be in. You might question what was wrong with you or look back and ask what you could
have done differently. However, the reasons are generally not that simple and you may never fully understand why. A relationship takes two people, and the reasons why you’re no longer together have to do with more than just you.

Does it matter who initiates a break up?

Video Transcripts

Ashlee: I think it definitely matters who breaks up with who. Unless it was like a mutual thing, you both just felt like it wasn't working out, but for me it sucks way more when you get broken up with or get dumped and it just makes you feel really bad, and your self-esteem just pretty much goes in the toilet.

Abby: I guess as I think about it right now, If I am being broken up with, the relationship just ends, like I don't see that person, again.

Ashlee: But, if you are the one breaking up with somebody, you can still feel bad, you can still miss the person and then you can also feel bad because you see that they’re upset.

Luis: It doesn't really matter, if I am the one initiating the break-up or not, but what I've noticed is that it is a lot more difficult to maintain those relationships after the fact. When I'm the one initiating it because people, I mean, you are, hurting people’s feelings.

Laura: Even when I initiated the break-up, it was still hard because I cared about the guy.

Abby: But the people that I have broken up with, I think I usually try to continue a relationship and that works. It’s not working so well right now with my current partner, but it’s hard to balance that, we use to date and now we are friends, and what does that mean.

Getting over the split takes time, which is a completely individual factor and is unique to every break-up.

You may get over one relationship very quickly and take a long time to get over another one. Additionally, the time it takes you to recover can be different from the amount of time it takes your former partner, which can sometimes be difficult to understand. You may hold out hopes that you’ll get back together. Or you might question if you can ever be just friends. If your ex goes to the same school, you’ll have to handle the chance of seeing them on campus, or they might even have classes with you. Then the time will probably come when they may start dating someone else and you’ll have to deal with the chance of seeing them with a new partner. Feelings that you thought had subsided may rise. If you’re having
trouble getting through this period, take advantage of your friends and family for support. Talking to a counselor can also be helpful. While it may really suck in the aftermath, know that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and you’ll eventually get to a better place.

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**Breaking up: How to Deal**

**Video Transcript**

Ashlee: Usually to deal with a breakup, the first thing I do is call my friends and cry to them, because at first, I’m going to be emotional and be like upset about it.

Aoife: They suck. Nobody likes breakups.

Danica: They were always harder the further I go into them, which for some people, it’s really hard in the beginning.

Ashlee: And then after that, I usually just plan something fun to do and like go out with my friends and get dressed up and realize that there are other people out there, and it’s not going to be the end of the world.

K-anna: Dealing with the breakup was definitely hard for me. It was a dark time, but I used my family. They made everything more positive. And we’re back to friends now. It just had to be a time where we both stopped talking to each other so we could both heal.

Laura: Have my friends come cheer me up or kind of do that, “Ahh, boys suck” day.

Danica: I mean everybody takes it really differently. Some people take it really hard, and it’s really hard for them to move on. Some people bounce back, and some people bounce back by moving on to somebody else. But I really think that you just have to learn how you react to those types of things. Then just know what you can do to help yourself.

Luis: I kind of have this philosophy that I liked you for a reason, so I want to maintain that reason, whatever it may be.

K-anna: Realizing that I’m happy for him and he’s in a relationship. That means I have moved on.

Luis: I kind of have a personal attitude within breakups that I want to maintain a friendship as best that I can with whoever my ex may be.

K-anna: Sometimes it’s hard not being able to go to my best friend about everything and that’s what he was, but I don’t know I’m just I’m happy that we are both able to move on and that it’s good for both of us.

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*If you’re in an abusive relationship, it can make it extremely hard to leave.*

In these situations, it takes an average of 6-7 attempts for someone to actually leave the relationship. Your abuser may use things, people, pets, threats or other tactics to keep you there. When you decide to leave, there are ways to do it.
safely. Remember, there are always people who are available to help you through the process; you shouldn’t go through it alone. Check with your school’s counseling center, student health service, or sexual assault & domestic violence center.

**You may want to consider a safety plan for either getting out or reducing the chance of harm if you are unable to leave.**

A safety plan can help you be prepared in the face of different scenarios. It will ask you to think about ways to minimize contact with your abuser, locate resources on your campus or in your community, identify supportive people, and figure out how to lower your risk of harm.

**Resources**
- Privacy & Safety on Facebook – A Guide for Survivors of Domestic Abuse
- Reach out for help when you need it most with the Circle of 6 phone app
- FCC Smartphone Security Checker
- A Thin Line – Digital Abuse Campaign
- The Use of Technology to Stalk

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**How does a person leave an unhealthy relationship?**

**Video Transcript**

Traci Thomas-Card: There are several things that students can do if they are seeing the warning signs of an unhealthy relationship. The first is to make a safety plan. So, whether a student is ready to leave that relationship or not, safety is always the first and foremost thing to keep in mind. So, whether that is retaining documents that might be important to you leaving. Retaining a financial account all on your own. The second suggestion I would have if a student is ready to leave that relationship: working with an advocacy agency would really help that student, in terms of support and validation for what the student is feeling.

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**Optional Safety Plan Interaction**

Please return to Page 25 of the online lessons or visit the website **Love is Respect website** to develop a safety plan. You can also download a **PDF version of this safety plan**.

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**Getting out of an abusive relationship while in college is often different from after graduation.**

College students are less likely to be living together or sharing financial resources, and less likely to have pets or children.
The process of staying in or getting out of an abusive relationship can be extremely stressful. Remember, what is happening is not your fault! Take care of yourself and lean on trusted friends and family. If you’re having trouble with your academics or other areas of your life, meet with your school counselor or academic advisor to discuss your options.

**Community Resources**
The [Aurora Center](tel:(612) 626-9111) (626-9111) (24-hours):

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**What is stalking?**

**Video Transcript**

Traci Thomas-Card: Stalking is defined as a course of conduct that’s directed at a specific person uh, that causes a reasonable person to feel fear. So, it really doesn’t matter what the stalker intended what matters is if the recipient was feeling fear.

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**How can you be supportive if you have a friend in an abusive relationship?**

If they are up for it, you can help them make a safety plan regardless of whether or not they are ready to leave. Be there for them, and don’t make ultimatums like threatening to end your friendship if they don’t leave their abuser. Listen to them without judgment. It won’t make the situation any better to knock on them for staying. Just think, they have most likely already been enduring verbal put-
downs from their abuser; the last thing they need is the same behavior coming from a friend. Be supportive by hooking them up with resources like domestic violence organizations, where to find an order of protection, or a counselor. Keep in touch with your friend by shooting them a text or giving them a call to let them know that you care and are there to listen, but be conscious of what you communicate in case their abuser is monitoring messages. You can enlist your mutual friends who already know about the situation to also provide support. Be respectful of your friend’s digital privacy by refraining from posting online where they are or other revealing details unless you okay such things with them first. Finally, don’t give up on them. It may be extremely frustrating from your end, but know that your friend is more likely to leave their abuser when they know that they have a support system to fall back on that will be there for them if they decide to leave.

**Resource**
Ted Talk – “Why Domestic Violence Victims Don’t Leave” by Leslie Morgan

**Community Resource**
The Aurora Center (612) 626-9111 (24-hours):

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### How to intervene with a friend who is experiencing relationship violence

**Video Transcript**
Traci Thomas-Card: So, if a student has a friend who’s experiencing some sort of a relationship violence whether it’s physical or emotional or mental or some other sort of violence there are a couple of things that student can do personally to intervene. One is using the direct method and approaching your friend and saying, “You know what, I see some things going on in your relationship, and I’m concerned about it. Is there some way that I can help?” We always recommend you using “I” statements as opposed to “You” statements. “You” statements tend to sound accusatory and often will put people on the defensive. Probably the best thing that that student can do is to be there for his/her friend. So, we know that once somebody has made the decision to leave a violent relationship, it often takes 6 to 7 attempts before they are actually able to leave that relationship. So, this is something that requires a great deal of patience. So, that’s where finding an advocate can really assist through that process.

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Information in these course lessons is provided for educational purposes. It is not meant to and cannot substitute for advice or care provided by an in-person medical professional. The information contained
herein is not meant to be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease, or for prescribing any medication. You should always consult your own healthcare provider if you have a health problem or medical condition.

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2 Aurora Center for Advocacy and Education (n.d.). My declaration of rights.
4 Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. (n.d.). *The power and control wheel*.