

WARNING SIGNALS

Recognizing Clues to an Unhealthy Relationship

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Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Identify at least three common behaviors that signal a relationship is not honest, equal, responsible and/or respectful.
2. List at least two ways to respond if they were confronted with a partner's behaviors that warn of problems in the relationship.

Audience

Middle adolescents (ages 14-17)

Rationale

Recognizing the signs that a relationship is unhealthy or even abusive can be challenging. Many relationships involve controlling or manipulative behaviors that go unnoticed and could in fact be warning signs of an unhealthy relationship. People of all ages continue relationships even when there are clear signs that their partner does not respect them and the relationship is damaging to the person's emotional and/or physical health. Often individuals deny the seriousness of the situation or minimize the extent to which their own needs or wishes are being discounted by their partners. In this lesson participants examine behaviors that could be problematic, as well as more significant warning signs.

Note: It is recommended that this lesson come after participants have already learned about healthy vs. unhealthy behaviors.

Lesson Outline

Introductions, Group Agreements and Purpose (See **The Lesson Essentials**, p. 3)

Relationship Behaviors on TV

Recognizing Warning Signals

Conclusion

Materials

- Sticky notes that are three different colors, enough for each participant to have one of each color

- Three signs, prepared with one of each of the following: **HEALTHY, UNHEALTHY, SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN**
- Easel paper/whiteboard
- Pens/pencils for all of the participants
- **Handout: Warning Signals**

Procedure

RELATIONSHIP BEHAVIORS ON TV

1. Begin the lesson by asking participants to think about some of the television shows they watch regularly that depict people in relationships. Invite a few people to share some of their ideas.
2. Instruct participants to form small groups of three or four people, and to select one couple that is shown in a television show that everyone is familiar with. Examples will change over time, but a few time honored examples may include Homer and Marge from “The Simpsons,” Mr. Big and Carrie from “Sex in the City,” Dawson and Joey from “Dawson’s Creek,” Dan and Roseanne from “Roseanne,” Ricky and Lucy from “I Love Lucy,” Jim and Pam from “The Office,” Gina and Martin from “Martin,” Cam and Mitchell from “Modern Family,” Callie and Arizona from “Grey’s Anatomy,” Louise and George from “The Jeffersons,” Marshall and Lily from “How I Met Your Mother,” Sheldon and Amy from “The Big Bang Theory” and Dan and Serena from “Gossip Girl.”
3. Once they have selected a couple, participants should identify some behaviors that the couple engage in, and determine if the behaviors that are portrayed are healthy, unhealthy or somewhere in between. Designate each category with a color of sticky note. For example, healthy behaviors can be written on green notes. Instruct participants to write the healthy behaviors on one color note, unhealthy behaviors on another color note, and the somewhere in between behaviors on yet another color note. Ask each group to select one participant to share highlights of their discussion with the larger group.
4. Bring the large group back together and ask each small group to share what couple they chose and the behaviors they noted as healthy, unhealthy or somewhere in between. As each group shares, instruct the participants to place the sticky notes in the appropriate category on the wall.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What are your observations about the distribution of the sticky notes?
- b. What conclusions can we draw about TV’s portrayal of relationships based off this activity?
- c. How did you decide if behaviors were healthy, unhealthy or somewhere in between?

RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNALS

1. Introduce the activity by noting that sometimes people find themselves in an intimate relationship that is not good for them. Sometimes these relationships are damaging to their emotional and/or physical health, but for a variety of reasons the individual continues the unhealthy relationship. Ask for volunteers to name some behaviors that are unhealthy in a relationship, without naming names. Write the responses on the easel paper/whiteboard.
2. Distribute the **Handout: Warning Signals** to each of the participants. Review the instructions, asking participants to use their imaginations and decide what they would probably do in each situation.
3. As students complete the **Handout**, ask them to pair up with another participant and compare their answers. Then bring the whole group together for discussion. (At the end of the discussion, stress that **all** of these behaviors are negative signs in a relationship.)

Discussion Questions:

- a. How did you decide which boxes to check?
- b. If you checked the middle column for a behavior, what are you hoping to discuss about the relationship?
- c. What might be the consequences of ignoring one of these behaviors?
- d. What behaviors were clear signals to you that it was time to end a relationship?
- e. What other behaviors not listed on the handout would be a warning signal to you that a relationship should end?
- f. If you decided to discuss a behavior, how would you start the conversation?
- g. What other tips would you give someone for discussing these behaviors with a partner?

CONCLUSION

1. Conclude the lesson by asking participants to share one thing that they will keep in mind after participating in the lesson.

Warning Signals

Directions: A healthy relationship is *honest, equal, responsible* and *respectful*. Researchers have identified the behaviors listed in the chart below as *warning signs* that a relationship is *not* honest, equal, responsible and respectful. Check what *you* would probably do in each of the following situations.

IMAGINE YOUR PARTNER:	YOU WOULD PROBABLY:		
	Do nothing	Discuss the relationship	End the relationship
1. Makes negative comments about your clothes, body or hair.			
2. Turns out to be much older — or younger — than they told you they were.			
3. Always decides where you will go together.			
4. Makes you hide things from your friends.			
5. Puts you down in public.			
6. Accuses you of fooling around with someone when you are not.			
7. Calls and turns up unexpectedly in order to check up on you.			
8. Ignores what you want to do.			
9. Puts a guilt trip on you when you go out with friends or family.			
10. Keeps you away from your family.			
11. Pushes you and then apologizes.			
12. Refuses to use a condom.			
13. Will not let you get or use protection.			
14. Demands you have intercourse when you do not want to.			
15. Refuses to get tested for a sexually transmitted infection.			