

Is It Abuse If...?

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum
Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.

COLORADO ADAPTATION:

This lesson has been specifically adapted to align with the requirements of Colorado HB 19-1032

NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 10th grade, students will be able to:

IV.10.CC.2 – Describe the types of abuse (e.g., physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual) and the cycle of violence as it relates to sexual abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, and gender-based violence

TARGET GRADE: Grade 11
Lesson 3

TIME: 60 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- White board and markers
- Laptop or desktop computer and internet connection
- LCD projector and screen
- Speakers to project sound from video
- Five sheets of newsprint paper
- Five markers
- Extra pencils in case students don't have their own
- Masking tape
- Worksheet: "Is It Abuse If...?" – one per student

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Either download the video, "The Signs," from <https://vimeo.com/85676862>, or ask your IT person to make sure that URL is unblocked for use in class.
- Please give students a content warning prior to introducing this topic. Also, please have a safe space, trusted adult, and a plan to support survivors who disclose and/or who's trauma response is activated by this topic.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Describe at least two characteristics of five different types of relationship abuse. [Knowledge]
2. Explain what, in their own opinion, does and does not constitute relationship abuse. [Knowledge, Affect]
1. Name one online and one hotline resource teens can use to get help if they or someone they know is in an abusive relationship. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Explain to students that you are going to be talking about a particularly intense topic today – abusive relationships - both when it's present and when it isn't. Please also mention that if this topic is activating someone's trauma response for a student who has experienced a sexual situation in which consent wasn't present, they can go to a designated classroom or safe space with a trusted adult. Talk with your counseling or social work team in advance to let them know you're

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teaching this class, and they may expect students to come talk to them about this topic. If you have already created ground rules for your classroom, be sure to highlight them before starting the lesson. If you don't have any already created, explain to the students that you are going to ask them to be particularly sensitive and respectful during this class session.

(2 minutes)

STEP 2: Say, "There are a lot of myths out there about sexuality and relationships – particularly as it relates to teens. One myth is that relationship abuse doesn't happen in teen relationships. That's what we're going to talk about today. Actually, statistics show that relationship abuse of all kinds is as prevalent in teen relationships as it is in adult relationships. Often, people can't always tell whether their relationship is abusive or whether they're just going through a rough time with a partner. We're going to figure that out today, along with what to do when you realize you're in an unhealthy or abusive relationship. It is important to know that culture plays a role in a healthy relationship."

Say, "There are a number of different categories of relationship abuse: Physical, Emotional, Psychological, Sexual, Digital, and Financial." As you name these, write them on the board. Sometimes, a grouping of these behaviors together can be called Teen Dating Violence. "Physical abuse is exactly what it sounds like – hurting someone physically in some way.

Emotional abuse is making someone feel bad about themselves by taking away their sense of self or self-esteem. Psychological abuse is using threats or intimidation to frighten someone or make them feel like they're losing touch with reality. Sexual abuse is similar to physical abuse, although the abuse is sexual in nature. Digital abuse is using technologies such as texting and social networking to bully, harass, stalk or intimidate a partner¹ Finally, financial abuse is when the finances in a relationship – or a person's potential to earn or have money – are controlled by one person. Let's explore what each of these mean."

(5 minutes)

STEP 3: Count the class off by sixes and assign each group one type of abuse. Give each group a blank sheet of flipchart paper and a marker. Say, "Given the definitions I just shared, please work in your groups to come up with some specific behaviors that would occur under your category. For example, under the physical abuse category would be 'hitting.' Each group will come up with their own unique lists, but there may be some overlap from time to time." Answer any questions and tell the class they have about five minutes in which to complete their brainstorming.

(8 minutes)

STEP 4: Stop the groups after about 5 minutes. Ask each group to present what they came up with. Do this by asking one group to contribute one or two of their answers, then go to the next group and ask them to do the same. Continue around the room until all ideas are shared.

¹ Definition from https://www.loveisrespect.org/pdf/What_Is_Digital_Abuse.pdf

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Sample responses should include:

PHYSICAL

- Hitting
- Kicking
- Slapping
- Punching
- Pinching
- Restraining
- Choking
- Blocking their way

EMOTIONAL

- Criticizing the person's appearance or intelligence
- Telling the person that no one else would ever want to be with them
- Flirting with other people in front of the person
- Using what they know makes the other person feel vulnerable in an attempt to make them feel worse

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Threatening to hurt the other person
- Threatening to hurt people they know or care about (or pets)
- Threatening to hurt yourself if the other person doesn't do what you want
- Spreading rumors about the person

SEXUAL

- Rape
- Forcing the other person to do anything sexual they don't want to do
- Making the other person watch porn
- Sharing sexy photos of the other person without their consent
- Refusing to practice safer sex

FINANCIAL

- Controlling the money in the relationship
- Stealing from the other person
- Telling the other person they need to spend time with you instead of going to work
- Keeping the other person from going to or finishing school, which limits their ability to earn money

DIGITAL

- Says mean or untrue things about you online
- Demanding someone's passwords to their online accounts
- Texting nonstop and expecting the other person to text back by a certain time
- Sharing sexy photos of the other person via text or socials without their consent

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Note that many forms of digital abuse are also psychological or emotional in nature, just done via a digital platform.

As you go through the lists, ask other groups if they have anything they would add. Ask students what they notice about the lists. Say, “It can be relatively easy to come up with a list of behaviors – especially when we’re not in the relationship in the moment. However, sometimes abusive situations aren’t so clear.”

Say, “In many cases of abuse, the person with more power tries to use that power to hurt their partner. This is never okay. That may sound like: a person who has had sex putting pressure on their partner who hasn’t yet had sex, threatening to tell someone’s family that they’re gay if they don’t do something, or a White partner not validating someone’s experience of another race. Disability LGBTQ+ identities, intersex variations can all be leveraged against someone in abusive relationships. An example of this could be: “I am going to tell all of your friends that you are LGBTQ if you don’t come with me to that party” or, “I am not going to help you out of your wheelchair if you don’t do what I want”.’

(14 minutes)

STEP 5: Say, “When someone is being abused, it often means they are being put in situations, or are subject to behaviors they did not consent to.” Let’s talk a bit more about what consent means.

Say, “Consent means that someone is giving their affirmative, clear, voluntary, continuous, and knowing agreement to engage in a sexual encounter or personal relationship. Say, “There are so many kinds of consent. Today we are going to be talking about affirmative consent and nonverbal consent.”

Ask students to share what they know about affirmative consent. Say, “Affirmative consent is when consent is requested by asking and receiving a “yes” instead of waiting for someone else to say no. For example, if you’re asking to have sex with someone, you have to wait until you hear them clearly communicate a ‘yes’ through their words or non-verbal signals. Just because someone does not say no, it doesn’t mean you have consent to do anything with them.”

“When getting consent you must remember two things: First, it must be clear what someone is consenting to, for example, you can’t ask someone to do one sexual behavior and then assume you can do a second, different sexual behavior. Second, make sure their consent is voluntary, which means they made the decision on their own. If you said something like, “if you don’t have sex with me, I’m going to tell your mom about that time we had sex” or even using something harsher against them. Then that person feels pressure (or coerced) to consent and that isn’t a decision that they made on their own.”²

Now tell the students that consent can be verbal or nonverbal. Consent can be given in words or actions if the words or actions are clear permission regarding someone’s willingness to engage in an activity. It is important you know that the person giving consent isn’t feeling pressured or threatened when it happens.” Ask students how a person may or may not give consent to something nonverbally:

² Concepts and definitions provided by [CCASA](#) and [Project PAVE](#)

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- Nodding their head yes
- Giving a thumbs up
- Shaking their head no
- Putting up two hands with palms forward indicating, 'stop'

Discuss with students the appropriate way to react if someone says no, and therefore, does not give consent. A person may feel a bit sad or embarrassed if someone does not give consent, but the most important thing is listening to and respecting their boundaries. If a person doesn't give you consent, you must stop. Now say, "It is important that you practice effective communication about boundaries and consent and stop right away when someone says "no".

Ask students, "What are some things you can say when someone does not give you consent for a behavior?" Examples may include:

- Hey, no problem
- It's okay, I get it
- Oh, I'm sorry
- Let's do something else then

(10 minutes)

STEP 6: Ask students to return to their original seats. Distribute the worksheet, "Is It Abuse If...?" Tell students to read each statement and decide whether they think what is described is abusive, and to indicate their decision by circling the response on the sheet. Tell them they have about 5 minutes in which to do this.

Once everyone has finished, divide the class into groups of four. Instruct students to go through each scenario and discuss their answers. Tell them they can change their answers if they wish. Allow for about 10 minutes for their small group discussions.

Start processing the activity by asking, "What was it like to do that? What was [fill in students' responses] about it?"

Ask students whether they found any of the statements particularly easy to discuss and/or agreed on and why. Then ask them to talk about some that were more challenging to discuss and/or disagreed on and why.

Point out that the gender(s) of the partners were not revealed in the examples. What did you picture in these relationships? Who was an abuser? Who was being abused? Would your responses have changed based on whether the characters were one gender or another?

Tell the students that culture plays a role in what is defined as a "healthy" relationship. Each culture has their own set of norms and values, so relationships differ depending on a person's culture. What is considered healthy in one culture may be considered unhealthy in another, but abuse is always abuse.. It is important that we make sure we are acknowledging everyone's differences and respecting them. It is important to know that there is a difference between cultural norms and someone being abusive. Any of the types of abuse we've talked about today are not okay to do.

(17 minutes)

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STEP 7: Show the video, “The Signs,” from <https://vimeo.com/85676862>, stopping it at 3:17 so the students can read the list of signs. Consider setting the playback speed to .75 for both videos to best support learners of all abilities.

Let them know that that is number is specific to NY State but the National Domestic Violence Hotline is 1.800.799.SAFE (7233).

Teacher’s Note: *The video included in this lesson does not have a Closed Captioning option online, however, it remains the best video to support the learning objectives for this lesson. Please connect with local technology or learning support team to determine if there is a way to get a Closed Captioning service provided.*

Say, “If you or someone you know were in a relationship like any of these, what would you do or advise them to do?” In most cases, students will say, “Dump the other person,” or “ask someone for help.” Ask students for examples of people to whom a young person in an unhealthy or abusive relationship can go for help, probing for parent(s)/caregiver(s), teachers, coaches, friend’s parent/caregiver, etc.

Say, “Sometimes, people don’t feel they can talk with someone face-to-face. They may feel ashamed of having been in an abusive relationship. Depending on the gender or genders of the people involved in the relationship, the person being abused may be even less likely to disclose that they had been abused and to seek help. So, an anonymous website or hotline can encourage people to be more honest and get the help they need.

Write the following resources on the board:

For Teen Relationship Information: Text Lovels to 22522 - LovelsRespect.org

For any kind of crisis: Text Home to 741741 - crisistextline.org

There are so many resources to support survivors. Please use the website below to find resources for students who may need it. www.youhavetherightco.org

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

Defining and categorizing the types of relationship abuse will achieve the first learning objective. The “Is It Abuse If...?” activity will accomplish the second learning objective. The teacher sharing the “Love is Respect” contact information at the end will accomplish the third objective.

HOMEWORK: None.

Note: The activity, “Is It Abuse If...?” was created by Elizabeth Schroeder, EdD, MSW, and then subsequently published in the American Journal of Sexuality Education in 2005. This is an adaptation of that activity.

Worksheet: Is It Abuse If...?

1. ... a couple is arguing and when one partner begins to freak out the other gives them a light slap to calm them down?

YES NO

Comments:

2. ... a person walks their partner to school every morning, meets them for lunch every day, and picks them up at the end of each afternoon?

YES NO

Comments:

3. ... every time a same-sex couple argues, one of the partners threatens to “out” the other to their family?

YES NO

Comments:

4. ... an 18-year-old has sex with a 14-year-old?

YES NO

Comments:

5. ... a couple starts “play-fighting” and they wrestle around on the floor resulting in bruises on one of their arms?

YES NO

Comments:

6. ... one partner says they want to have sex. Their partner says they’re not ready, but after talking about it, gives in and has sex anyway, even though they really don’t want to?

YES NO

Comments:

7. ... someone expects to be able to check their partner’s cell phone/texts anytime they wish?

YES NO

Comments

