

Each month during the school year NNHS will distribute a "Healthy Huskies Letter." The goal of the newsletter is to enhance our the school's partnership with families, particularly by sharing our knowledge of various topics related to your child's social, emotional, and physical health, and what our school and our families can do to promote student healthiness. Each issue will address a different health topic and will contain resources for further exploration of that topic. Staff at NNHS as well as the School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP), will be advisors for these newsletters; we encourage parents and students to suggest topics and resources. Send suggestions to kpobst@naperville203.org.

Healthy Huskies Letter

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Healthy Relationships

It is normal for young adults to have romantic relationships. At NNHS we promote healthy relationships between students whether respectful acquaintance, kind friendships, or positive romantic relationships. Directly through our Health and Family and Consumer Science classes, and indirectly in other venues in the school, we teach students to make healthy decisions about relationships. We also equip students to recognize a potentially dangerous or unhealthy relationship.

Relationships, and dating, should be fun, exciting, and developmentally constructive. In order for relationships to serve as positive learning experiences it is essential to teach teens about healthy relationships. This is done primarily by families, but the school aims to be a helpful partner.

The goal of this newsletter is to share what we teach students about how they can have positive and healthy romantic relationships and identify and avoid unhealthy ones. The information that follows was drawn from our Health and FACS curriculum. Teachers Erin Cattell, Melissa Oskroba, and our Health teachers contributed their expertise to this newsletter.

Teens should be informed 'daters'. Unhealthy relationships should not be tolerated. By educating our teens, we are equipping them with the knowledge they need to advocate for themselves. Most teenage dating relationships are healthy and positive. In this newsletter we focus on the characteristics of unhealthy relationships because they are often mysterious for teens and parents. Unhealthy dating is more prevalent than many people like to admit.

In a healthy relationship people. . .	In an unhealthy relationship people. . .
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat their partner with respect and fairness • Support and encourage each other • Treat each other as equals • Are honest • Earn their partner's trust • Have shared interests • Also have separate interests and identities • Try hard to have honest and clear communication • Enjoy being with each other • Never hurt their partner physically or sexually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat their partner disrespectfully and unfairly • Frequently argue or fight • Have no shared interests • ...or they do things ONLY with each other – they have no separate friends or interests • Lie to their partner • Don't care about their partner's feelings • Don't enjoy spending time together

Talk

If you sense that your son's or daughter's relationship is unhealthy, it's important to think about their safety now and talk about it. Consider talking about these points to help them move forward:

- *You can't change your partner.* Understand that a person can only change if they want to. You can't force your partner to alter their behavior if they don't believe they're wrong.
- *Focus on your own needs.* Are you taking care of yourself? Your wellness is always important. Watch your stress levels, take time to be with friends, get enough sleep. If you find that your relationship is draining you, consider ending it.
- *Connect with your support systems.* Often, abusers try to isolate their partners. Talk to your friends, family members, teachers and others to make sure you're getting the emotional support you need. Remember, our advocates are always ready to talk if you need a listening ear.
- *Think about breaking up.* Remember that you deserve to feel safe and accepted in your relationship. You will have other relationships, better relationships.

Many times teenagers are so excited about the new relationship they often overlook red flags that are telling them that they are in an unhealthy relationship. Unfortunately, relationship abuse among teens has become more common. One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual abuse from a dating partner. With such a high number of occurrences, it is important to talk to our teens and teach them about what dating abuse is and of what red flags to be aware.

Dating abuse can be defined as, "A pattern of controlling behavior that someone uses against a girlfriend or a boyfriend. The core of dating abuse is power and control." Dating abuse is not a one-time incident. The abuse generally occurs in a cycle that will repeat itself:

Stage 1: Tension Building . There is tension between you and your dating partner. Your partner becomes more irritable and may pick fights with you or yell at you. You feel you can't do anything right and fear that there can be an emotional blow-up at any moment.

Stage 2: Explosion. Your abusive partner "explodes" in an outburst of anger or violence that can include emotional, verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

Stage 3: Honeymoon. Your abusive partner apologizes and promises that it will never happen again. The abusive partner may try to make up by telling you they love you or buying you gifts. You may stay in the relationship because you want to believe the abuser and you believe this "honeymoon" stage is the real relationship. It isn't.

The goal of the abuser usually is not consciously to hurt the partner. Hurting the partner is just the result of a drive to gain and maintain power and control in the relationship. If you see the abusive dating relationship as about power and control, then the "red flags" of an unhealthy relationship become clearer.

Red Flags--Warning Signs

For teens and their parents it is important to identify the common warning signs of an abusive relationship:

- There is a decline in your child's grades or school attendance.
- Your child spends dramatically less time with other friends; they become isolated.
- Your child asks you to cover for her if she goes somewhere with friends or someone other than her boyfriend.
- Your child's boyfriend or girlfriend calls frequently and wants to know where your child is at all times; possessiveness and jealousy characterizes the relationship. Rule-making.
- The partner is controlling. Your child makes decisions based on the reaction of the other person (e.g. She doesn't go to the mall because the boyfriend insists that she stay home and wait for him).
- The partner uses emotional blackmail, perhaps threats of self-harm, to exert control.
- Your daughter or son dresses very differently than their usual taste as a way to please their partner.
- The boyfriend or girlfriend posts questionable updates on social media sites or resists your child's access and posting to these sites.
- Your child receives excessive texts and instant messages, and seems upset or nervous if he or she can't respond immediately.
- The relationship is unequal—there are double-standards.
- Your child has increased anxiety, depression, or other emotional issues.
- Your child blames herself or himself every time her boyfriend or girlfriend is upset and is always the one in the relationship to apologize.
- Name-calling and rude communication.
- Physical aggressiveness. Roughhousing, play wrestling, holding on too tightly, pushing, shoving, grabbing, twisting.
- Touching in ways that are not consensual and causes discomfort.
- Sexual threats. Threats to leave the relationship if dating partner doesn't consent to sexual activity.
- Physical injury, or indications of injury, such as bruising or scratches.

A key to healthy romantic relationships is healthy communication. But ubiquitous communication is also a key way that relationships can become unhealthy. Teens now have almost instant access to significant others through texting, emailing, and social media. This can exacerbate relationship problems.

Protecting Your Teen from Unhealthy Relationships

While there are sure ways to protect your children from an unhealthy relationship or dating violence, there are several things you can do to create safe, secure environments that can help reduce the opportunities for unhealthiness or violence:

- Communicate. Talk early and often with your child and teach her or him about respecting others and insisting on being respected. Be clear on expectations for relationship behavior and the proper treatment of others and of self.
- Make his or her relationship a family relationship. Spend time with your child and the person he or she is dating. Nothing is better than personal observations and your instincts.

- Monitor the Phone. Check your child's phone records for repeated calls and texts, especially when your child should be sleeping or in school.
- Monitor Social Media. Insist on being a "friend" on your child's social media so that you can be aware of changes immediately and see unhealthy or threatening posts. Install a computer monitoring program and use it.
- Passwords. Have access to your child's passwords so that you can find information quickly in case of emergencies.
- Be alert to "sexting," we see more and more of it all the time. Check out [this link](#).
- Emergency Code. Develop a code with your kids they can use in texts, phone calls, or online posts so they can signal you that they are in danger or they need your help.
- Send a Clear Message. Do not blame, criticize, or punish your child when they are the victim of a controlling partner. Empower them to break free.
- Self-Defense. Teach your children appropriate self-defense, in words and physical action.

Most importantly, be sure to get professional help for your child immediately if you feel your child is in danger or in an abusive situation. Your pediatrician is a great starting place. The doctor can help point you toward resources in your area to help address this serious situation.

Establishing Healthy Boundaries

Talk to your son or daughter about establishing boundaries in their relationships that are healthy and that they are comfortable with. You and your child must have open discussions about what are healthy boundaries for them.

Personal boundaries are limits or borders that define where you end and others begin. Your personal boundary is defined by the amount of physical and emotional space you allow between yourself and others. Boundaries are physical, emotional, and spiritual. Personal boundaries help one decide what types of communication, behavior and interaction one should accept from others. The type of boundaries you set defines whether you have healthy or unhealthy relationships.

Personal boundaries are harder to define than a clear message posted like a trespassing sign on private property. The lines are not always clearly visible; we do not necessarily wear them on our sleeves. They are unique to each individual and can change in different circumstances. Though they are challenging to identify and articulate, they are essential for maintaining healthy relationships.

Resources

<http://www.loveisrespect.org/dating-basics/dating-basics>

<http://parentingtodaykids.com/article/warning-signs-your-teen-is-in-an-abusive-relationship/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecBm1VwYBrc>

<http://www.reputation.com/reputationwatch/articles/how-prevent-teenagers-sexting-and-protect-them-other-teens-who-do>

NNHS aspires to partner with parents to promote healthy relationships, please reach out to us if you want assistance.