



Conversation Strategies for Talking With Young People About Healthy Relationships

Participant Training Guide

Name: _____ Date: _____

How to use this handout

Use this handout while watching the [pre-recorded training](#). When prompted, pause the [video](#), write your responses, and then resume. The goal is not to have perfect answers; rather, it is to practice asking questions that center young people's perspectives and experiences, identify healthy and unhealthy relationship dynamics, and plan how you might use these strategies in your own setting.

Learning objectives

- Describe key elements of healthy adolescent relationships.
- Use practical conversation strategies to talk with young people about healthy relationships.
- Help young people safely navigate digital-based relationships.

Exercise 1: Reflecting on talking with young people (Slide 5)

Before the training moves into strategies, take a moment to think about why conversations about healthy relationships can be challenging for youth-supporting professionals.

What can make it difficult to talk with young people about healthy relationships?

What do you want young people to feel during these conversations with you?

Safety reminder

If a situation may involve interpersonal violence, coercion, stalking, threats, sexual exploitation, or fear of retaliation, prioritize safety and follow your organization's reporting, referral, and safety-planning protocols. Do not put responsibility on a young person to confront someone when doing so may increase the level of risk to them.



Exercise 2: Is this a communication issue, a power issue, or both? (Slide 14)

Scenario: Jordan tells Kate that she should wear a certain dress to prom. Kate wears the dress even though she does not want to because she is not sure how to discuss the issue with Jordan.

2A. What additional information would you need?

Area to explore	Questions to consider
Choice and pressure	Did Kate feel like she could say no? Was she worried about how Jordan would respond?
Pattern over time	Has Jordan made decisions for Kate before? Does this happen with clothes, friends, social media, money, transportation, or plans?
Reaction to disagreement	What happens when Kate disagrees with Jordan? Does Jordan listen, become angry, guilt-trip her, threaten her, or punish her?
Safety and fear	Is Kate afraid of Jordan? Has there been intimidation, monitoring, threats, or physical harm?
Support and autonomy	Who does Kate feel comfortable talking to? What would she want to do next?

2B. Draft follow-up questions for Kate that center the perspective of young people.

Write questions that are open-ended, nonjudgmental, and grounded in curiosity. Before you fully understand the situation, avoid assuming that Kate is overreacting or that Jordan is abusive or telling Kate what to do.

Questions for Kate:

2C. Draft a prompt Kate could use with Jordan, if it feels safe to her.

In real situations, first consider whether it would be safe for the young person to raise the issue directly.

One thing Kate could say to Jordan:

→ Sample follow-up questions you could adapt:

- How did you feel when Jordan told you what to wear?
- Did you feel like you had a choice?
- What do you think would have happened if you had said you wanted to wear something else?
- Is this the kind of thing that has happened before, or did it feel unusual?

→ Sample prompts Kate could adapt:

- When you told me what to wear, I felt pressured. I want us to make suggestions without making each other feel controlled.
- I am open to hearing your opinion, but I want the final choice about my clothes to be mine.
- Next time, can we talk about what we each like without making it feel like one person gets to decide?

Exercise 3: Helping young people reflect on boundaries (Slide 23)

3A. Write general boundary-related questions you could ask young people.

Try to write questions that do not require young people to disclose personal experiences unless they choose to.

Questions about everyday boundaries:

Questions about relationship boundaries:

Examples of boundary reflection questions

Boundary focus	Questions young people could reflect on
Values and deal-breakers	- What are three things that help you feel respected in a relationship? - What is one deal-breaker for you in a friendship or dating relationship?
Physical boundaries	- How do you know when physical affection feels okay to you? - What could someone say or do to check in before touching you?
Emotional boundaries	- What parts of your life do you like to keep private until trust has been built? - What does it look like when someone respects your feelings?
Material and digital boundaries	- What is something you do not share, such as clothes, money, your phone, passwords, or location? - What would you want someone to ask before posting a photo of you?
Communication boundaries	- How fast is fast enough to reply to a text? - What could you say if you need time before responding?

3B. Practice turning a boundary into language.

Choose one boundary and write a sentence a young person could use to communicate that boundary clearly.

Boundary:

Language to communicate boundary:

Exercise 4: Helping young people practice consent (Slide 28)

Sometimes young people may struggle to figure out how to communicate consent in practice. Use this exercise to help you practice becoming more comfortable talking to young people about communicating consent in their everyday lives.

Purpose	Example language
Ask clearly	• Can I kiss you? • Is this okay? • Do you want to keep going?
Check in	• Do you want to stop or keep going? • How are you feeling about this? • Do you want to slow down?
Decline or slow down	• I am not ready. • Let's slow down. • No, I do not want that. • I changed my mind.
Respect the answer	• Okay. Thanks for telling me. • We can stop. • I do not want you to feel pressured.

Write one consent check-in question you could use to help a young person practice:

Write one respectful response to hearing “no,” “not now,” or “I changed my mind”:



Exercise 5: Healthy relationships in digital spaces (Slide 32)

Technology can support connection, identity exploration, and relationships across distance. It can also create opportunities for pressure, monitoring, harassment, image-based abuse, and other harms. Use this exercise to connect digital behavior back to communication, shared power, boundaries, and consent.

5A. What concerns you, and what concerns young people?

What concerns me as a youth-supporting professional?	What have I heard about that concerns young people?

5B. Connect digital concerns to healthy relationship concepts.

Digital situation	What relationship concept does it connect to?
Someone expects immediate replies and becomes angry when the young person does not respond.	Communication boundaries; shared power; possible monitoring or control
Someone pressures a young person to send a sexual photo.	Consent; boundaries; pressure cancels consent
Someone shares a private image, message, or screenshot without permission.	Consent; trust; privacy; digital boundaries
Someone asks for passwords or location access as proof of trust.	Material/digital boundaries; shared power; potential coercion or surveillance
Someone posts a photo of a young person without asking.	Consent; digital boundaries; respect

Closing reminder

You do not have to solve every relationship issue in one conversation. Your role is to create space, ask good questions, model respect, help young people reflect, and follow appropriate safety protocols when concerns arise.



Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many contributors to this resource. Experts who informed the resource include Chris Drescher and Morrigan Hunter. We also thank other Activate project team members who assisted in the development of this resource, including Amy Dworsky (co-principal investigator) and April Wilson (project director). We are grateful for the support of Child Trends staff who contributed to this resource, including Gabriella Guerra, Karlee Naylor, Kristen Harper, Marta Alvira-Hammond, Olga Morales, Catherine Nichols, Brent Franklin, and Stephen Russ.

Suggested Citation: Rivas-Koehl, M., Scott, M.E., & Rivas-Koehl, D. (2026). Conversation strategies for talking with young people about healthy relationships (Participant training guide). Child Trends.

This project is supported by the Office of Population Affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$4,584,000 with 100 percent funded by OPA/OASH/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, OPA/OASH/HHS or the U.S. government. For more information, please visit opa.hhs.gov.

