

Conversation Strategies for Talking With Young People About Healthy Relationships

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Activate partners with youth-supporting professionals, young people, and researchers to translate research and create research-based resources for professionals who support young people experiencing the justice system, the child welfare system, homelessness, or disconnection from school and work.





Training Goals

Introduce four key elements of healthy adolescent relationships

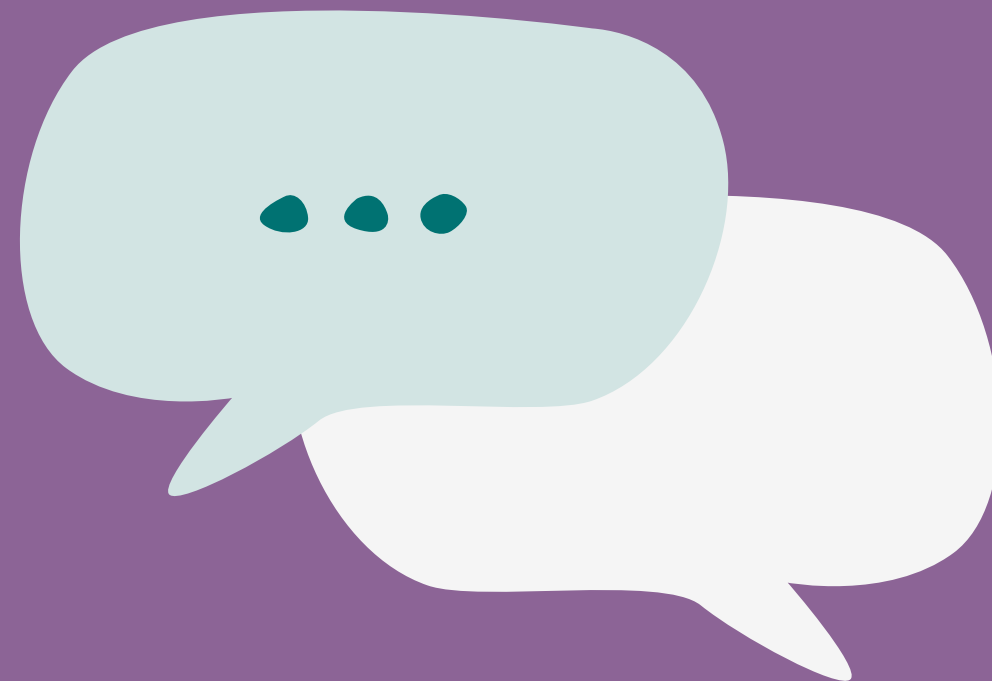
Share how to apply knowledge about these elements of healthy relationships in your conversations with youth

Discuss how to navigate aspects of youth relationships in the context of technology

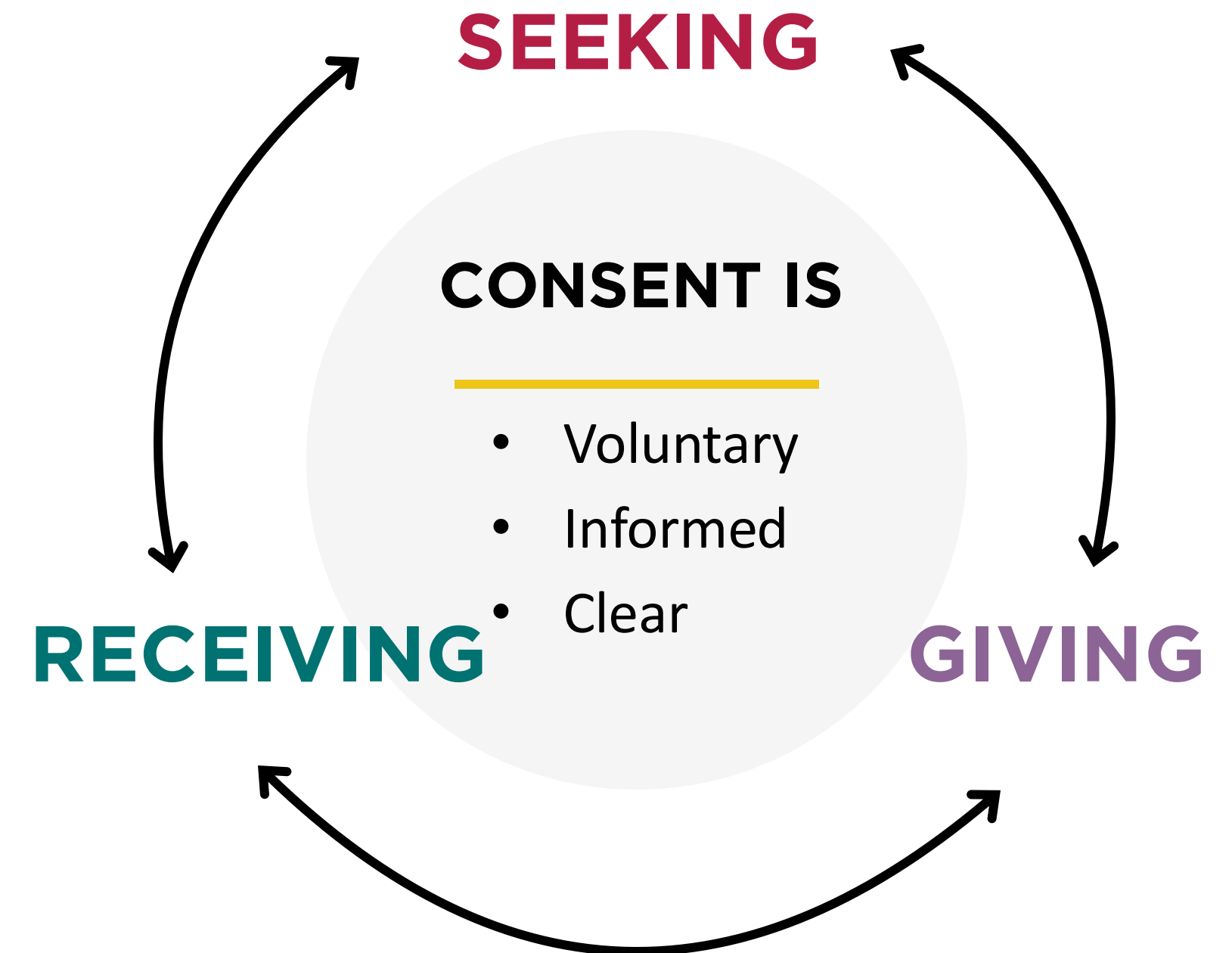
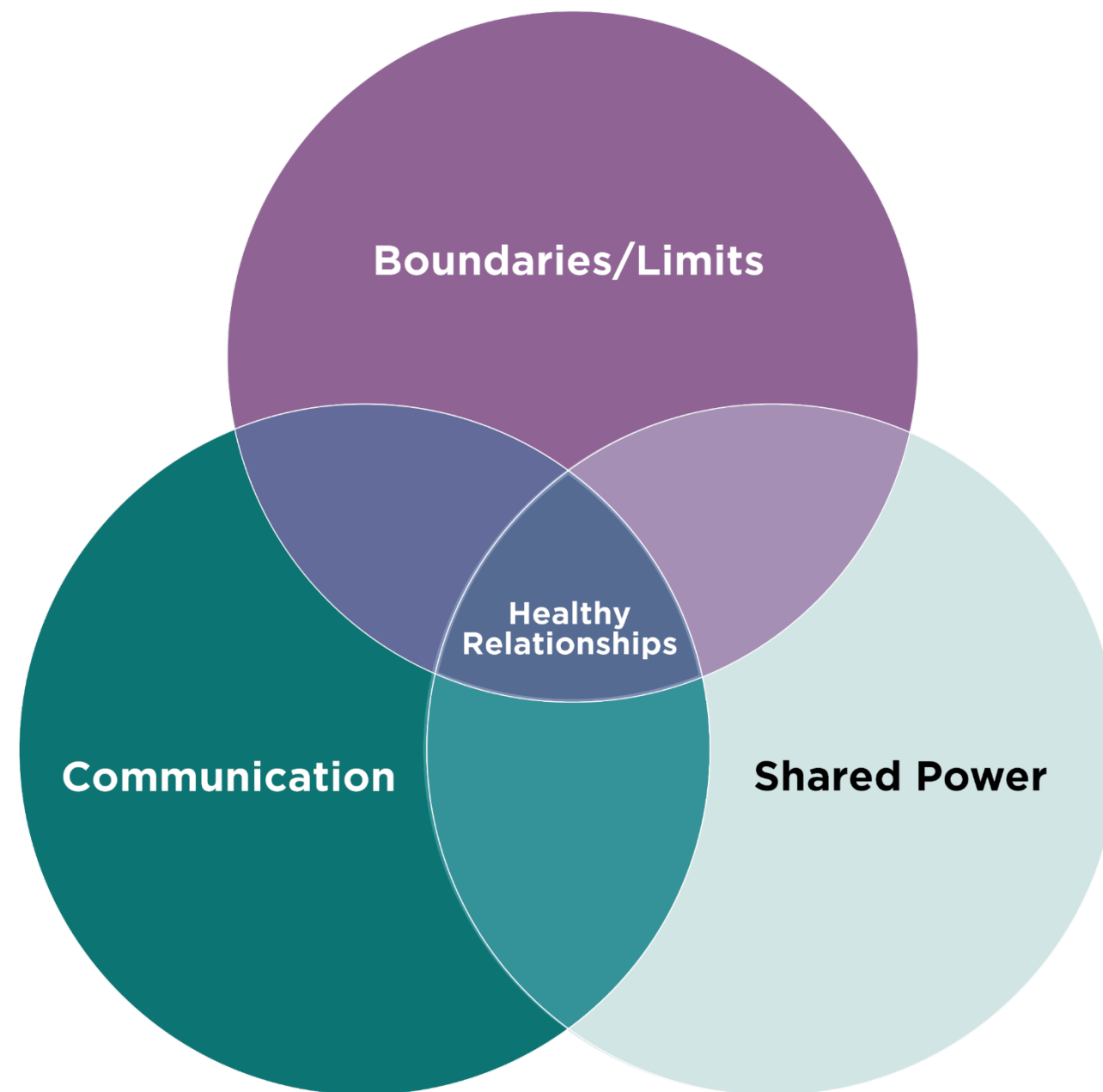


Handout Exercise 1

Reflecting on Talking With Young People



Healthy Relationships



Healthy Communication:

What to Know





What Does Healthy Communication Look Like?

Active Listening

- Listening to understand, not just to respond

Clarity

- Clearly stating what you mean/your intentions
- Intentionally trying to see another perspective
- Not making assumptions





What Does Healthy Communication Look Like?

Emotional Regulation

- Being able to pause and come back to a conversation

Open to Repair

- Recognize missteps, apologize, compromise, and work to rebuild trust

Respect

- Handle sensitive topics with respect



Healthy Communication: *Talking With Young People*





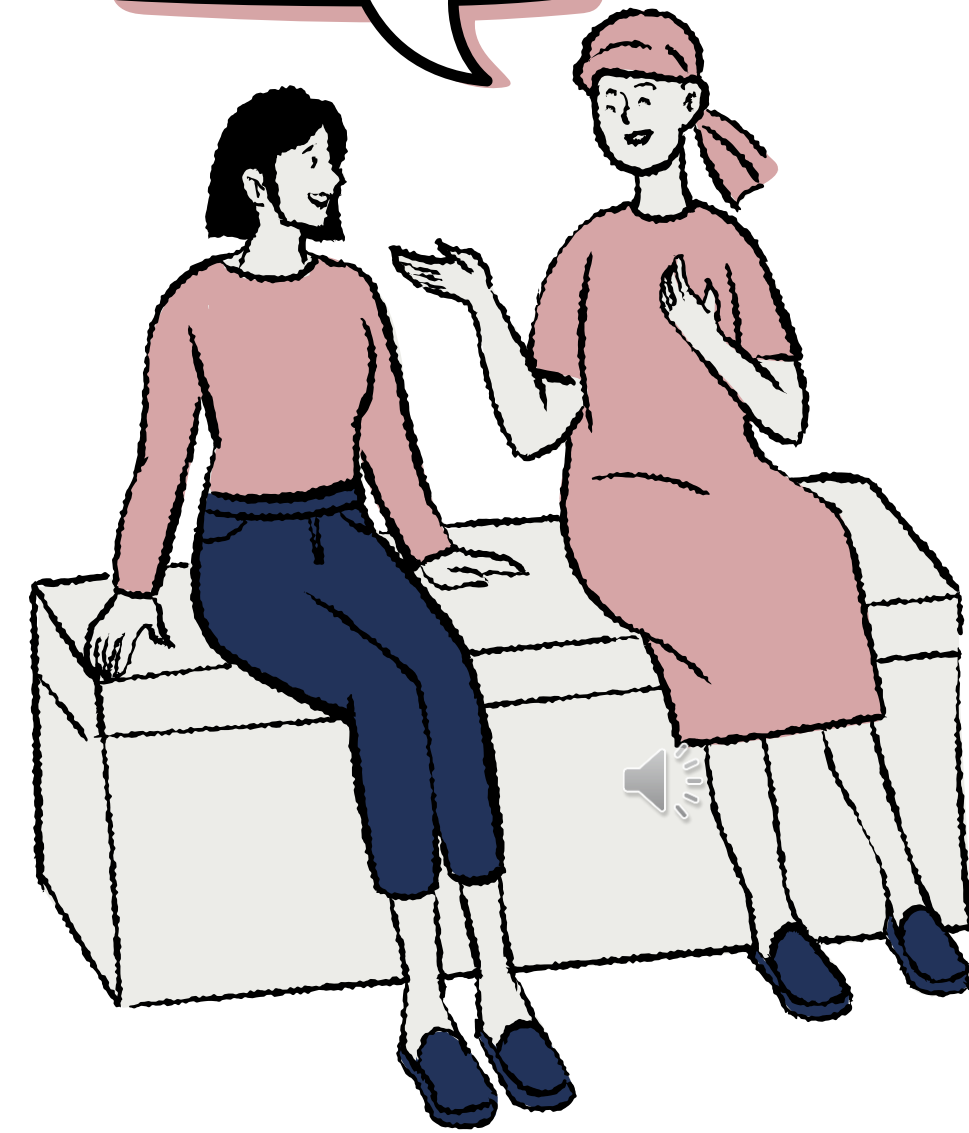
Model Healthy Communication

Ask direct questions to understand young adults' relationships

Avoid making assumptions about their experiences

Practice active listening using phrases

"What I'm hearing is XYZ. Did I get that right?"



Handout Exercise 2

Is this a communication issue,
a power issue, or both?



Shared Power:

What to Know





What Does Shared Power Look Like?

- 1 Decisions made together
- 2 Each person's needs matter
- 3 No one dominates, controls, or punishes to get their way



Shared Power:

Talking With Young People





Listen, Reflect, Explore

Listen

- What happened?
- How did it make you feel?
- Did you feel you had a choice?

Reflect

- What I am hearing is that you felt pressured. Is that right?

Explore

- What would shared power have looked like in the decision-making process about your dress?



Boundaries:

What to Know





Four Types of Boundaries

Physical

Touch, affection, sex,
personal space



Emotional

Sharing feelings, privacy
around past experiences



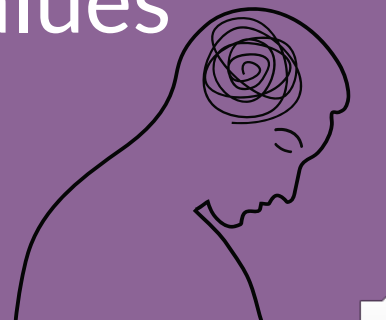
Material

Money, possessions,
phone access



Mental

Beliefs, opinions, values



Boundaries:

Talking With Young People





Strategies for Talking With Young People About Boundaries

Talk about boundaries in general before discussing boundaries in dating relationships

Consider asking youth to reflect through written prompts and share what they are comfortable sharing. For example:

- “What are 3 things that are deal-breakers for you in a relationship (e.g., breaking promises, other actions you won’t tolerate)?”
- “What’s one thing you do not share (e.g., clothes, phone, location)?”



Handout Exercise 3

Helping Young People Reflect on Boundaries



Consent:

What to Know





What Is Consent?

Voluntary, informed agreement

Ongoing and can change at any time

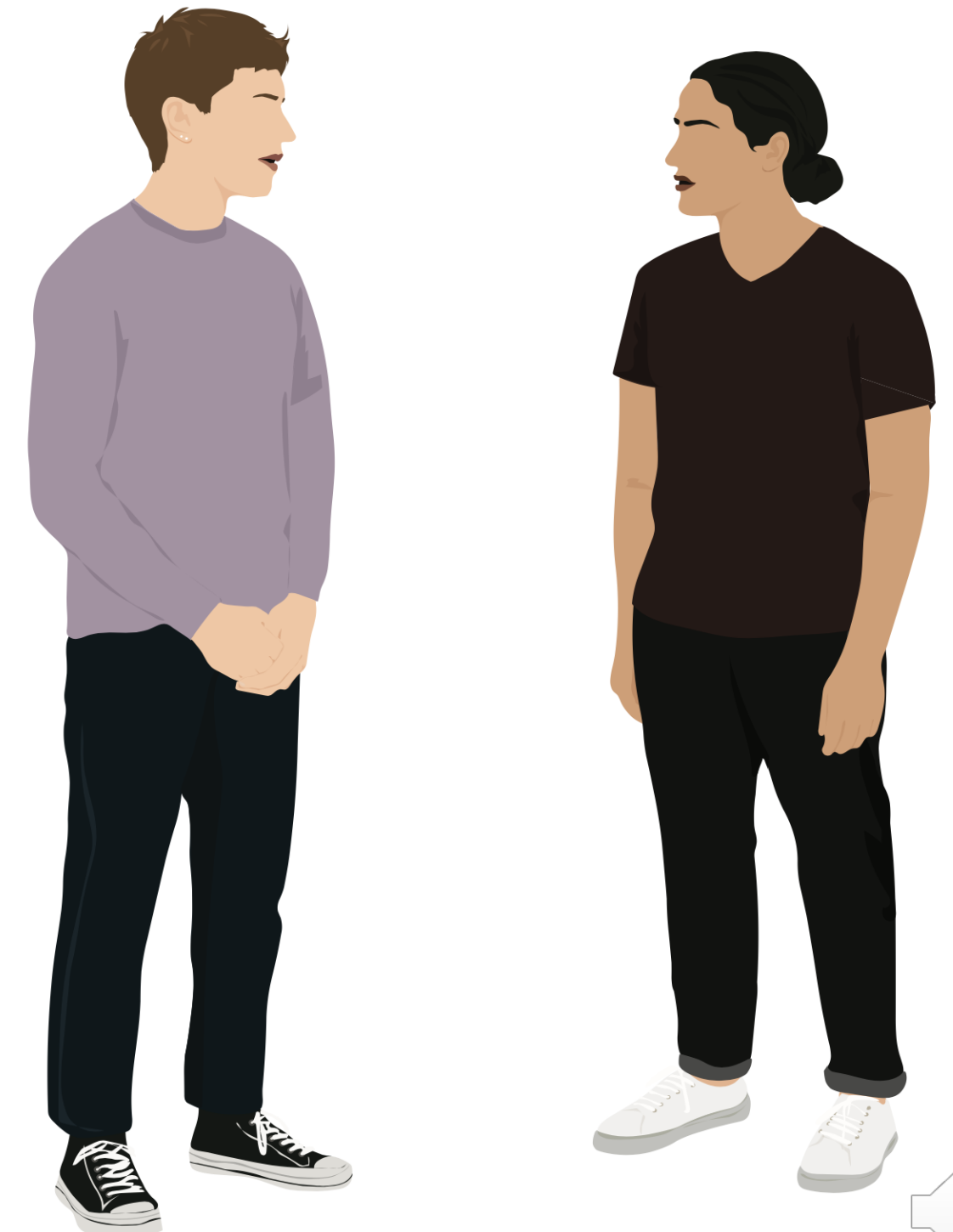
Pressure, fear, or impairment
cannot lead to consent

Verbal and nonverbal

The absence of a “no” does not mean “yes”

What parts of your body are you comfortable with me touching?

...I need time to think about that before going further.



Consent:

Talking With Young People





Ways Young People Communicate Consent

Type of Communication	Giving consent to engage in/continue sexual activity	Declining to engage in/continue sexual activity
	(Examples)*	(Examples)*
Verbal cues only	Providing direct, spoken communication agreeing to an activity ^{35,36}	Saying clearly and directly that you do <i>not</i> want to do something
	Before: “Yes, I’d love to do that!” ³⁷ During: “I really like this! I’d love to keep going.” ³⁸	Before: “No, I’d rather not do that.” ³⁹ During: “I’m not having fun anymore. I want to stop.” ⁴⁰
Nonverbal cues only	Displaying actions and/or body language to show you’re comfortable, interested, and/or in agreement with the activity ⁴¹	Displaying actions and/or body language to show you’re uncomfortable, not interested, and/or not okay with the activity
	Before: Excitedly nodding when someone suggests an activity in which you’d like to engage. ⁴² During: Taking a step closer or holding someone tighter during an interaction such as a hug. ⁴³	Before: Frowning and shaking your head or moving away when someone suggests an activity in which you do not want to engage. During: Pulling away from an interaction or pushing someone’s arms or hands away. ⁴⁴
Verbal and nonverbal cues	Using words <u>and</u> body language to show agreement	Using words <u>and</u> body language to show refusal
	Before: “Yeah, a hug sounds nice,” while opening your arms. ⁴⁵ During: “This is nice,” while leaning into the person you are hugging. ⁴⁶	Before: “No, I don’t want a hug,” while stepping away. ⁴⁷ During: “Please let go,” while pulling away from a hug. ⁴⁸

Source: Rosenberg, R., Rivas-Koehl, M., Mihalec-Adkins, B., Schlecht, C., Parekh, J., & Rivas-Koehl, D. (2025). A Practice Guide for Understanding Consent. Child Trends.
Note: The examples provided in the table are informed by research included in an accompanying research synthesis.



Handout Exercise 4

Helping Young People Practice Consent



Healthy Relationships and Technology:

What to Know





Technology and Relationships— Risks and Opportunities

Technology can facilitate community and connection,
but can also expose youth to harm

Things for youth-supporting professionals to be aware
of include:

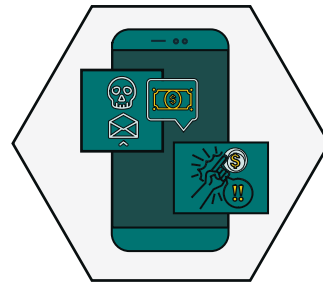
- Sexual cyberbullying and digital red flags
- Misinformation and disinformation



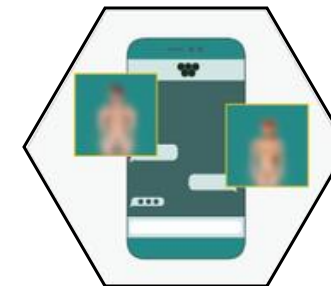


Sexual Cyberbullying: What Is It?

Sexual cyberbullying is a broad term used to describe any sexually aggressive or coercive behavior facilitated by technology to intentionally harm, embarrass, threaten, or intimidate another person.



Sextortion: Receiving or sending a message claiming that an explicit image will be shared online unless one complies with the sender's request



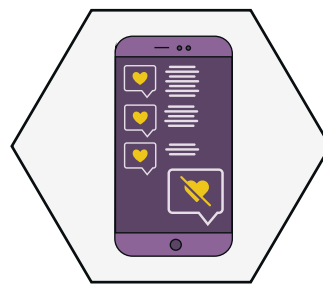
Revenge porn: Distributing photographs or videos of an ex-partner, obtained via hacking or other methods



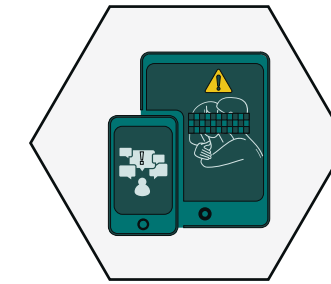
Online sexual harassment: Receiving or sending an unsolicited message on Instagram asking about what someone likes/is into sexually



Cyberstalking: Receiving/sending messages through a social media platform that one is being watched



Nonconsensual sexting: Receiving or sending a naked picture on Snapchat without consent



Cyberdating abuse: Finding hurtful comments about one's body on a partner's Instagram post

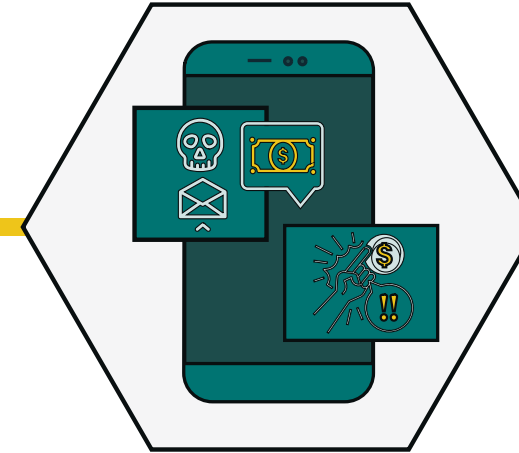


Sexual Cyberbullying Behaviors

WHAT IS THIS BEHAVIOR?

Non-physical way of forcing sexual favors by threatening to reveal evidence of someone's sexual activity.⁹

SEXTORTION

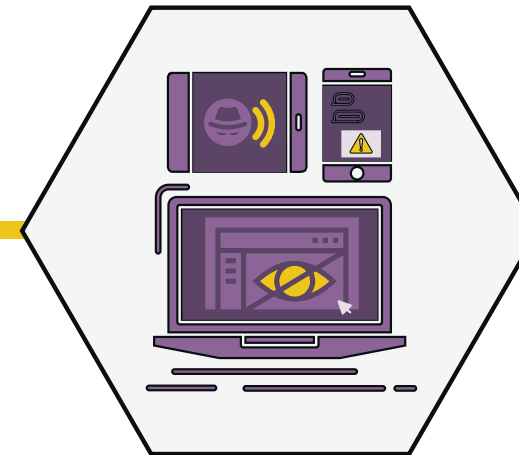


WHAT COULD IT LOOK LIKE?

Receiving or sending a message claiming that an explicit image (e.g., a nude) will be shared online unless one complies with the sender's requests.¹⁰

ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Unwanted sexual behavior on any digital platform.¹¹ This can occur between anyone, including family, friends, acquaintances, or strangers.



Receiving or sending an unsolicited message on Instagram asking about what someone likes/is into sexually.

NONCONSENSUAL SEXTING

Nonconsensual texting of sexually explicit messages or photos.¹² This can occur between anyone, including family, friends, acquaintances, or strangers.



Receiving or sending a naked picture on Snapchat without consent.

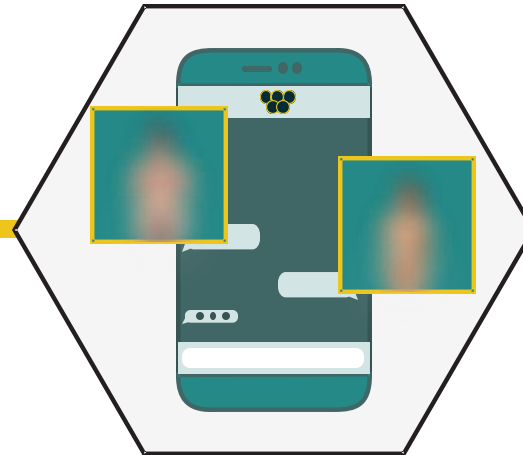


Sexual Cyberbullying Behaviors

WHAT IS THIS BEHAVIOR?

Revealing sexually explicit images or videos of a person on the internet without the consent of the subject to cause them distress or embarrassment.¹³

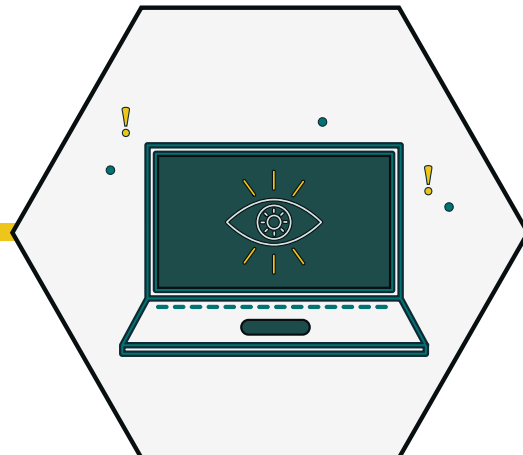
REVENGE PORN



WHAT COULD IT LOOK LIKE?

Distributing photographs or videos of an ex-partner, obtained via hacking or other methods. Finding an explicit image or video of oneself that an ex-partner posted without consent after a breakup.

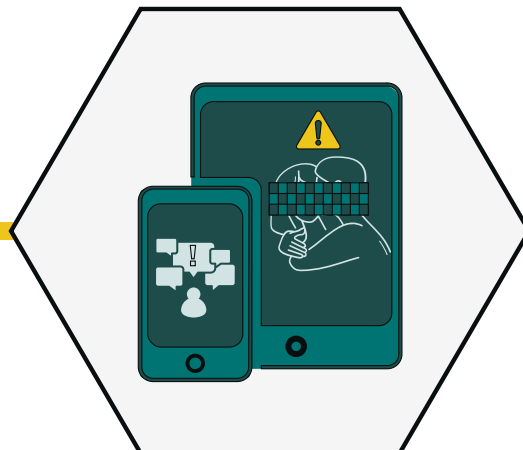
CYBERSTALKING



Using technology to repeatedly threaten, harass, or intimidate another person, making the other person concerned about their safety.¹⁴ This can occur between anyone.

Receiving/sending messages through a social media platform saying that one is being watched. This includes watching someone's social media to learn where they are and arriving uninvited.¹⁵

CYBERDATING ABUSE



Using technology to spread negative information (e.g., spreading rumors, talking badly about their body) or to direct aggression or control toward an intimate partner or romantic interest.¹⁶

Spreading rumors about a partner or romantic interest's sexual identity/orientation on an online gaming chat room. Or, finding hurtful comments about one's body on a partner's Instagram post.



Healthy Relationships and Technology:

Talking With Young People





Helping Young People Think About Healthy Relationships in a Digital World

Sample prompts

- “How do you and your partner use social media in your relationship?”
- “How fast is ‘fast enough’ to reply to a message or text?”
- “What would you do if someone pressured you to send a photo you did not want to?”

How youth can communicate digital boundaries to partners

- “I’m not sharing my password.”
- “I’m busy. I’ll reply when I can.”
- “Don’t post me without asking.”

Increase access to and use of accurate, research-informed information



Handout Exercise 5

Healthy Relationships in Digital Spaces



Final Considerations





Final Considerations

Balance between
guiding young
people and
respecting their
autonomy

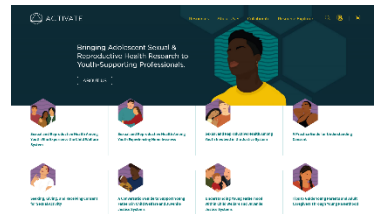
Meet young people
where they are

You don't need to
know everything





Stay Informed!



Website: activatecenter.org/



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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 (Recorded training). Child Trends.