



Workshop Description: This workshop includes practice for reflecting on, discussing, and brainstorming ways of fostering healthy peer relations among youth. Successful implementation of this workshop will assist staff in understanding the ways that healthy relationships between peers in the program support positive youth development.

This workshop guide will ask participants to communicate and collaborate with one another to learn the importance of modeling healthy peer relations among staff so that youth have a framework on which to base their own peer relations. Participants will also develop the skills necessary to better identify what healthy peer relations look like among youth and how to support their development.

Preparation Time: The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

Instruction Time: It will take approximately 60 to 65 minutes to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

Materials:

- Handout: *Healthy or Not? Behavior Examples* printed and cut out
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to [How Youth Learn Emotion Regulation](#). In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

1. *Understanding Emotion Regulation,*
2. *Development of Executive Functioning,*
3. *Understanding Peer Relationships*
4. *Understanding Emotion Regulation – Staff,*
5. *Understanding and Practicing Active Listening,*
6. *Understanding and Practicing Inquiry,*
7. *Understanding and Practicing Acceptance,*
8. *Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving, and*
9. *Understanding and Practicing Cognitive Reappraisal.*

Knowledge: Understanding Peer Relationships

Using a strengths based approach, youth programs offer activities that provide opportunities for youth to learn new skills and make meaningful connections with their peers and staff.² These connections, especially with peers, can help improve youth’s safety and enjoyment of the program.



Having strong family and peer connections is linked to youth’s ability to more easily manage their anger and conflicts with their peers.²⁸ This means that strong, positive relationships with family and peers can help youth regulate negative emotions.

While parents may play a large role, peers strongly influence each other’s emotion regulation.¹ Healthy peer relationships, those interpersonal connections developed based on a mutual respect, trust, honesty, support, fairness, autonomy, communication, and caring for another’s wellbeing, have been found to have a positive impact on youth’s emotion regulation, empathy, and overall adjustment.^{57, 58} In addition, in neighborhoods with higher rates of violence, having friends with good emotion regulation skills and prosocial behavior greatly improved youth’s behavior and youth were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior or aggression.⁵⁹

Objectives:

- Understand the definition of a healthy relationship
- Identify examples of healthy peer relationships and the ways they are formed and supported
- Identify ways the program can support healthy peer relationships

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe healthy peer relationships and how they support positive youth development.
 - What to say: “Today we are going to talk about how healthy peer relationships among youth support program quality, safety, and enjoyment. Everyone knows what having friends looks like, but what makes a relationship healthy can be harder to pinpoint. Through this workshop, we will explore some of those aspects of healthy relationships and how to support their development among youth and their various peer relations.”
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: “To start, we are going to gauge how familiar you are with the concept of healthy peer relations and where the gaps in your knowledge are.”

Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the staff to share how they would define a healthy peer relationship. You may need to assist with these definitions using the background information provided for you to jumpstart the conversation. Record these responses on a large sheet of paper or white board so staff can see.
- Once you have agreed on a definition for healthy peer relationships, come up with some examples as a group. Examples may illustrate qualities such as trust, dependability, honesty, generosity, encouragement, fairness, autonomy, positive and mutual influence, fairness regarding conflict resolution, etc.
- Ask the staff how they will know if a peer relationship is healthy or unhealthy. A healthy relationship will likely produce the benefits mentioned in the background information. An unhealthy one might lead to an increase in negative outcomes and emotional responses. Record responses.
- Ask the staff if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to peer relationships or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

Activities:

Activity: *Building Healthy Relationships* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Building Healthy Relationships* activity:
 - What to say: “We are going to do a collaborative activity that will ask you to use what you know about building relationships. The goal of this exercise is to help you identify your strengths and weaknesses so that you can model positive peer relationship building and maintenance for youth.”
- Lead the *Building Healthy Relationships* activity:
 - Prior to the start of the activity, explain to staff that a healthy relationship begins with mutual interest and respect.
 - Divide the staff participants into pairs. Ask the pairs to introduce themselves and share at least one aspect of their lives that they consider essential to their personalities. While one person is talking, the other should listen intently and ask questions.
 - Once all the pairs have had a chance to get to know their partners, reconvene as a large group and go around the room having each participant introduce their partner and explain what they learned from their conversation.
 - Next, ask staff to discuss the ways this activity is a good model for the foundation of a healthy relationship. Bring attention to the aspect of the activity that involves listening and asking questions about another.
 - Transition into the next activity by asking staff to think about how emotion coaching can be woven into the development of healthy peer relationships.

Activity: *Healthy or Not?* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *Healthy or Not?* activity:
 - What to say: “Now that you are more familiar with what makes a relationship healthy, we are going to look at a variety of peer relationships and how to intervene with emotion coaching strategies when relationships are or become unhealthy.”
- Lead the *Healthy or Not?* activity:
 - Before the start of this activity you should have printed and cut out the Handout: *Healthy or Not? Behavior Examples*.
 - Ask the staff to get into groups of three to four people. Provide each group with a behavior example (or several if there are fewer groups).
 - Instruct the staff to discuss whether their example(s) is an example of healthy or unhealthy behavior in a relationship. Also ask staff to discuss ways of intervening if they determine the behavior is unhealthy. Remind staff of the aspects of emotion coaching and its usefulness in these situations: tell staff that identifying the issue for youth or helping them identify the behavior as unhealthy (asking the youth why they are feeling bad/pointing out a reason could be an aspect of one of their relationships) is the first step of emotion coaching. Remind them of the second step as well: generating solutions. Groups should come up with ways of fixing or correcting unhealthy relationship behaviors.
 - Come back together as a large group and ask a few volunteers to share what their groups’ behavior example(s) was, whether the group thought the behavior(s) was healthy or unhealthy, and what methods of correcting unhealthy behaviors they came up with.

Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):



- Return to the staff's responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the staff what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as "What part of the activity made you realize that?" and "How could you use these strategies with youth?"

Resources:

Handout: *Healthy or Not? Behavior Examples*

Sources:

Talking with teens about peer relationships: How you can make a difference. (2017). *Office of Adolescent Health*. Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-training/for-families/peer-relationships/make-a-difference/index.html>

Workshop guide for developing healthy relationships: Preparing your child before they start dating. (n.d.). *Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence*. Retrieved from <https://idvsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Parent-Middle-School-Student-Workshop.pdf>



1. Gives you a hard time about spending time with your friends or family
2. Tells you that you are too sensitive
3. Only wants you to wear things that they like
4. Hurts your feelings when you are down
5. Criticizes you, calls you names, and yells at you
6. Gives you the silent treatment
7. Withholds approval, appreciation, or affection when you disagree
8. Gets mad and won't stop talking until the issue is settled
9. Makes fun of you, and then tells you it is a joke
10. Interrupts you and doesn't listen to your point of view
11. Jealous when you talk to others
12. You express your opinions less freely
13. Values your opinions



14. Is accountable for their actions

15. Can disagree without being put down

16. Supports your dreams

17. Participates in activities that you like, even if they don't particularly like it

18. Being able to apologize

19. Gets insecure when you don't text back right away

20. Both partners take space for own friends and interests

21. Encourages you to try new things

22. Only posts stuff about you/your relationship with your permission

23. Argues with you publicly on Facebook