



Resource Pack

**What does *healthy* look like?
Starting conversations with young
people about relationships.**



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Introduction

This resource pack was created as a result of [SafeLives](#) work on bringing the [voices of men and boys](#) into conversations about abuse and relationships.

Huge thanks to our funder and to the young people and the specialist organisations and practitioners who contributed their time, skills, and expertise to this project.

These resources build on research and development work that was done in relation to boys and young men but gender-neutral language is used as far as possible, to allow them to be used by practitioners working with young people of any gender.

The resources in the pack are designed primarily for use with young people aged 13-21 but could still be useful for professionals working with those outside of that age bracket.

Whilst this work often focuses on intimate or sexual relationships, these conversations are also important in relation to all the personal relationships that young people will have, including friendships.

SafeLives have produced a podcast to support this pack, talking through the background of the project and giving some guidance on starting conversations with young people. There is also a short webinar on the research.



Practitioner resource: 5 key things to remember

When we are working with young people, we need to:

- Think about **language**
- Consider our **approach**
- Build the **relationship**
- See the **whole person**
- Understand the roles of **peers**



Language

- Is it inclusive¹?
- Not judgmental
- Not victim-blaming or labelling.
- Relatable and jargon-free
- Allow young people to use their own terms

Approach

- Should be education or information-based, rather than based on judgement
- Consider the young person's identity or background
- Ensure it is culturally sensitive/competent
- Tailored to the individual young person
- Flexible in terms of structure, timescales etc.

¹ When we say inclusive, we mean considering intersectionality of identity and experience and taking into account sexual orientation, gender identity, faith and belief, disability, citizenship, race, and culture on each topic. If the young people don't bring this in themselves then you can offer other perspectives to expand the conversation

Relationship

- Think about the role that trust plays in work with young people
- Takes time to build, need to work at their pace
- Must be led by the young person
- Consider what activities they enjoy and start there
- Model congruence, transparency, and clear boundaries
- Clear around confidentiality and disclosures



Whole person

- Consider the context of their current situation and early experiences
- Behaviour and attitudes are connected to sources of influence – what is their ‘normal’? Why?
- Link to contextual safeguarding
- Is safeguarding possible if they disclose risk of harm?

Peers

- Peers can be a source of support as well as of risk
- We can work with groups to build culture of challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours
- Working with groups may allow us to connect with young people that will not engage with us 1:1
- Allows us to build understanding that we are someone it would be safe to approach, if a young person needed to talk.

Practitioner resource: Conversation starters

- What 3 things do you think are most important when you are seeing someone?
- What do you value most in a relationship? Who or what might influence this?
- What attitudes or behaviours might make you think about breaking up with someone you were seeing?
- What does the word toxic mean to you? What sort of thing might make a relationship toxic?
- What examples of healthy/toxic relationships have you seen in tv/films?
- Do you ever see your friends behaving in their relationships in a way that worries you?

What do you do? / What could you do?



Using activities with young people

Before you introduce any of the activities on the following pages into your work with young people, there are a few things to bear in mind.

The activities can be used in 1:1 conversations with individual young people but work best with a group. Ground rules are important in all work with young people, but especially when working in group settings. The exercises may highlight differing personal views, and everyone needs to feel safe and comfortable. If you don't already have ground rules or a group agreement, talk through that before you undertake any activities.



It will be important to tailor the activity to suit the young person or group you are working with. We wrote this pack with young people aged 13-21 in mind, but the exercises would work with those outside this age range.

We have included facilitator notes for each exercise.

Activity: Priorities

Online: Draw a line on a Zoom whiteboard or Google jamboard.

In room: Write the characteristics on post-its for a group or individual to arrange in a line on a wall.

Place/write the most important characteristic at one end of the line and work along. This also works well on a vertical line with the most important at the top.

Explore differences of opinion and where the importance comes from, is it the individual or society/culture? Why is x more important than y?

Examples of partner characteristics:

- Good looking
- Kind
- Listens to me
- Has lots of friends
- Clever
- Gets on with my friends and family
- Honest
- Shows their emotions
- Generous
- Has experience in relationships



Priorities activity - facilitator notes:

The aim of this activity is to start a conversation about what young people feel is important in relationships and why that might be.

When establishing the group, highlighting the central value of anti-discrimination is important, so participants know that:

1. You will always listen to their intention so it's okay if they don't get it right, and
2. Discriminatory language and attitudes are not welcome in the space.

Be aware that if young people do not have their own experience of relationships, they may focus on more superficial and stereotypical ideas of an ideal partner such as physical appearance, rather than personality or behaviour traits. It can be helpful to use examples to explore the discussion further, these could be from tv/film or just hypothetical scenarios.

You can add in other characteristics, in line with the conversation, if that is useful. Make sure they relate to an individual rather than a relationship dynamic.



Activity: Values

Online: Create a Zoom white board or Google jamboard with three headings.

In room: Write each heading on a post-it note.

Look at the list of sex and relationship topics/issues and take it in turns to place them under one of three headings and explain why you have placed it there:

“I value this for me/this is ok for me”,

“I value this for others/this is ok for others”,

“I don't value this/this is not ok for anybody”

Topics/issues:

- Looking at porn
- Celibacy/choosing not have sex
- Open relationships
- Marriage/commitment
- Sharing nudes
- Sex before 16 years old
- Masturbation
- Abortion
- Having lots of sexual partners



Values activity - facilitator notes:

The aim of this activity is to create space for young people to explore what their own values are when it comes to relationships for themselves and others and where those values come from.

The topics here are intentionally broad, this is likely to open up discussion about context, legislation, age, social expectations etc. The intention is to start a conversation, so allow the young people to explore the topics if it feels comfortable and appropriate.

You could use short video resources to support this activity, such as [this one on enthusiastic consent](#) or [this one made by LGBTIQ+ young people](#).

You may need to provide additional support or information, particularly in relation to legal issues. You may also want to include or refer to additional resources, for example around consent or sexual health.

[Bish](#) and [The Mix](#) are both excellent sources of information around these topics.



Activity: Behaviours

As a group, discuss whether you think each of the following relationship behaviours are healthy or unhealthy.

These things aren't always clear cut and there may be some grey areas, discuss why it might be hard to decide. Context is important.

Behaviours:

- Looking at their phone.
- Showing them off to your friends.
- Listening to their opinions.
- Making all the decisions.
- Checking who they are with.
- Hanging out with them and their friends.
- Telling them you love them all the time.
- Having your own interests or hobbies.
- Keeping secrets from them.
- Always wanting to know where they are.
- Encouraging them to do things with their friends.
- Wanting them to dress/look a certain way.
- Getting annoyed if you can't contact them.



Behaviours activity - facilitator notes:

The aim of this activity is to get young people to consider how people behave in relationships and the impact that can have on others.

If you want to run this as a practical activity, you can write the individual behaviours on cards and get the group to discuss each one and place it under the healthy or unhealthy heading. This would also work in an online setting on a Zoom whiteboard or Google jamboard.

You may find, especially with older groups, that they want more information on context, to decide where to place a particular behaviour. In that case, ask them to describe how they think the behaviour could be both healthy and unhealthy in different situations.

An example from young people on our pilot:
'wanting them to dress/look a certain way' because you have arranged a fancy night out as a surprise is different to telling someone what they are allowed to wear all the time.

Links to further resources

- [SafeLives. The voices of men and boys.](#)
- [SafeLives – SpotLight #3: Young people and domestic abuse](#)
- [Draw The Line](#)
- [Signs of an Abusive Relationship - the Bish guide](#)
- [Engaging men in violence prevention: Key resources](#)
- [Boys talk on gender, sexism and online ethics](#)
- [Boys \(still\) don't cry: How thinking outside the 'man box' could help prevent violence](#)
- [Principles of Contextual Safeguarding](#)
- ['Languaging Child and Adolescent Vulnerability': A Guide For Professionals, Practitioners and Partner Agencies](#)
- [Boys to men: the cost of 'adultification' in safeguarding responses to Black boys](#)
- [Healthy Manhood – A Call to Men](#)
- [Recognisable, an LGBT+ survivor story zine](#)
- [Is my relationship healthy?](#)
- [Healthy relationships toolkit](#)

