

# Group Application - Building and Maintaining Healthy Relationships

## Learning Objectives:

- Identify characteristics of healthy vs. unhealthy relationships
- Explore how thoughts and behaviors impact relationship quality
- Practice skills for building and maintaining healthy connections with others

## Materials needed:

- Whiteboard/flipchart and markers
- Index cards
- Pens/pencils
- Handouts on relationship qualities

## Part 1: Icebreaker – Got Your Back (10 minutes)

Purpose: Physical team-building exercise that introduces the concept of trust and mutual support.

### Facilitator Script:

"Welcome, everyone! Today we're talking about three important building blocks for healthy relationships: loyalty, mutual respect, and trust. We'll start with a quick activity called 'Got Your Back.'"

### Instructions:

1. "Let's form pairs. If we have an odd number, I'll join in or we'll have one group of three."
2. "Stand back-to-back with your partner, with your elbows linked."
3. "On my count, you and your partner will try to sit down on the floor together, and then stand back up - without breaking the link between your arms."
4. "This only works if you're communicating and working together. You need to trust each other and coordinate your movements."

### Debrief Questions:

- "What made this activity challenging?"
- "What did you need from your partner to succeed?"
- "How does this relate to our everyday relationships?"

Transition: "In this activity, you had to literally and figuratively 'have each other's backs.' You couldn't succeed alone—you needed mutual trust, communication, and respect. These are the foundations we'll explore today in our discussion about healthy relationships."

## Part 2: Main Lesson – Building Healthy Relationships (30 minutes)

### Part 2a: Understanding Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships (10 minutes)

#### Facilitator Script:

"Let's start by defining some terms. I'd like to hear from you first:

- What does loyalty mean to you?
- What does respect mean to you?
- What does trust mean to you?"

Allow 2-3 minutes for group discussion, writing key phrases on the board.

"Great insights! Now let's clarify these concepts:

- Loyalty is standing by someone through good and bad times. It means being consistent and reliable in how you show up for others. However, healthy loyalty has boundaries—it doesn't mean supporting harmful behaviors.
- Respect means treating others with consideration and valuing their thoughts, feelings, and boundaries. Mutual respect is a two-way street—it's both giving and receiving proper treatment.
- Trust is believing someone will do what they say and act in ways that won't harm you. Trust is earned over time through consistent actions, and it's easy to break but hard to rebuild.

These three elements work together—you can't have one without the others in healthy relationships."

"Based on our icebreaker, we identified several other qualities that are important in relationships. Let's expand on this by distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy relationship characteristics. On this whiteboard, we're going to create two columns: 'Healthy Relationship Qualities' and 'Unhealthy Relationship Qualities.'"

Draw two columns on the whiteboard.

"Let's brainstorm together. What are some qualities of healthy relationships?"

Helpful example to get the conversation started: "When you have good news, who do you call? Why? What about that person makes you want to call them?"

Record responses, guiding toward key qualities if necessary:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Good communication
- Support for each other's goals
- Maintaining individuality
- Equality/balance of power
- Boundaries
- Feeling safe

"Now, what about qualities of unhealthy relationships?"

Helpful example to get the conversation started: "Are there any qualities of unhealthy relationships that we see in the media?"

[Record responses, guiding toward key qualities if necessary:]

- Disrespect
- Controlling behavior
- Dishonesty
- Poor communication
- Isolation from friends/family
- Feeling unsafe
- Unequal power dynamic
- Lack of boundaries
- Pressure or manipulation

"Notice how many of these qualities are opposites. When we recognize unhealthy patterns, we can work toward replacing them with healthier alternatives."

### Part 2b: The CBT Triangle in Relationships (10 minutes)

Facilitator Script: "In CBT, we talk about the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Let's look at how this applies to relationships."

Draw the CBT triangle on the board: Thoughts → Feelings → Behaviors.

"Our thoughts about relationships influence how we feel, which affects how we behave in relationships. For example, if I have the thought, 'This person will reject me if I share my true feelings,' I might feel anxious or insecure. This could lead to behaviors like avoiding deep conversations or pretending to agree when I don't. Let's try one together. What thoughts might someone have if they believe they don't deserve respect in a relationship?"

Guide discussion, connecting thoughts to feelings and behaviors.

"Now, let's flip this to a healthier perspective. If I believe, 'I deserve to be treated with respect, and my opinions matter,' how might that change my feelings and behaviors in a relationship?"

Discuss more positive thought patterns and resulting behaviors.

"By identifying and challenging unhelpful thoughts about relationships, we can change our feelings and behaviors, creating healthier dynamics."

### Part 2c: Skills for Building Healthy Relationships (10 minutes)

Facilitator Script: "Now let's talk about specific skills we can practice to build and maintain healthy relationships. I'm going to introduce four key skills, and we'll discuss each one."

Write each skill on the board as you introduce it.

#### 1. Effective Communication:

- Use 'I' statements to express feelings without blaming
- Listen actively without interrupting
- Check your understanding by paraphrasing
- For example, instead of saying, "You never listen to me," try "I feel frustrated when I'm talking and it seems like you're focused on something else."
- Share that you are doing these things with the other person.

#### 2. Setting Healthy Boundaries:

- Know what your limits are
- Communicate boundaries clearly
- Respect others' boundaries
- For example, "I need some time to myself after school before hanging out."

#### 3. Problem Solving:

- Identify the specific issue
- Brainstorm possible solutions together
- Choose a solution to try
- Evaluate how it worked
- For example, if you and a friend always argue about what to do together, you might take turns choosing activities.

#### 4. Building Trust:

- Be reliable (do what you say you'll do)
- Be honest, even when it's difficult
- Keep confidences
- Be accountable when you make mistakes
- For example, if you said you'd meet someone at 3:00, be there at 3:00 or communicate if you'll be late.

5. What do you do if you're in an unhealthy relationship, and you can't change the relationship? (parent/teacher/boss)

- The best thing you can do is to seek support from a counselor, trusted adult or friend.
- Remember, you only have control of yourself and how you "show up."

### **Part 3: Closing – Relationship Action Plan (5 minutes)**

Facilitator Script: "For our closing activity, we're going to create individual relationship action plans. I'll give each of you an index card. On one side, write one relationship in your life you'd like to improve. On the other side, write:

1. One thought pattern you want to change regarding this relationship
2. One specific skill from today you'll practice
3. One small action step you'll take this week

Take a couple of minutes to fill this out."

Distribute index cards and allow time for writing.

"Would anyone like to share their action plan? No pressure—sharing is completely voluntary."

Allow 1-2 volunteers to share if they wish.

"Excellent work today! Remember, building healthy relationships is a process. It takes time and practice. Be patient with yourself. The skills we discussed today—effective communication, boundary setting, problem solving, and building trust—are tools you can use in all your relationships. Before we end, let me leave you with this thought: Every person deserves to be in relationships where they feel valued, respected, and safe. This includes YOU. Sometimes the most important relationship to work on is the one with yourself, because how you treat yourself sets the standard for how others treat you. For next time, try to implement your action step and notice what happens. We'll check in about your experiences when we meet again. Does anyone have questions before we wrap up?"