

# They Love Me.. They Love Me Not...

*A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum  
Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.*

## NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 12th grade, students will be able to:

HR.12.CC.1 – Describe characteristics of healthy and unhealthy romantic and/or sexual relationships.

PS.12.INF.1 – Describe potential impacts of power differences (e.g., age, status or position) within sexual relationships.

**TARGET GRADE:** Grade 9  
Lesson 1

**TIME:** 50 Minutes

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Desktop or laptop computer with video, “Dating Abuse: Tools for Talking to Teens” – see above
- LCD projector and screen
- White board and markers
- Worksheet: What Would You Tell Them To Do? – one copy for every three students
- Resource sheet: Love Is Respect, cut up into individual squares
- Student journals [if they have them and are using them in your class]
- Extra pencils if students do not have them
- Lined paper if students do not have paper handy in class, both for the small group work and to write down the homework link

## ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Download the video “Dating Abuse: Tools for Talking to Teens” from <https://vimeo.com/99610424> or work with the IT person at your school to enable internet access. It is also helpful to watch the video before class to ensure you can lead the discussion confidently.
- Print out the resource sheet, “Love is Respect,” and cut up into individual squares, enough for each student to receive one square.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Describe at least three characteristics of an unhealthy or emotionally abusive relationship. [Knowledge]
2. Explain at least one thing a person in an unhealthy or abusive relationship can do to leave that relationship. [Knowledge]
3. Identify their own feelings about partners’ roles and responsibilities in a relationship when there is a power difference between the two. [Knowledge, Affect]

## A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we’ve intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun “they” instead of “her” or “him”, using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to “someone with a vulva” vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

## PROCEDURE:

**STEP 1:** Say, “Everywhere around us are examples of people in romantic relationships. People in our families, people we know – celebrities, characters in tv shows and movies. We constantly get messages about what it means to be in a relationship – and then it’s up to us to determine what we want and need, as well as what we’re willing to put up with, since no one’s perfect, and no relationship is perfect!

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Some of you have already started being in relationships, and some of you haven't yet. No matter who we are or how old we are, we all hope for one thing: That our relationship is happy and healthy. We want to enjoy the time we spend with the other person. We want to care about them and know they care about us.

We also need to learn from our relationships – how to disagree respectfully and make up without holding grudges. We need to learn when and how to compromise, and when we need to dig in our heels and insist on something. Above all, we need to learn to recognize when things we don't like in our relationship are kind of frustrating but part of an overall give and take of a healthy relationship – and when things we don't like mean our relationship is unhealthy, or even abusive. That's what we're going to talk about today.”  
(3 minutes)

**STEP 2:** Show the video, “Dating Abuse: Tools for Talking to Teens.” Stop the video right at 4:45 when the screen says, “Teens Need to Talk.” Ask for general reactions to the video, then probe more deeply about what they saw by asking the following questions:

- What were some of the things the teens were excited about when they first met their boyfriends? Probe for:
  - He was funny; they laughed a lot
  - They spent a lot of time/did a lot together
  - He was cute/hot
  - He made them feel good about themselves
  - He was attentive – e.g., texting cute messages
  - He was smart
  - He was “mine” – the idea of belonging to another person
  - He was thoughtful
  - He was “different” – no one had ever talked to/done that for one of the teens before
- What were some of the things that happened in these relationships that indicated things were changing? Probe for:
  - Texting a lot and getting angry if they didn't text back
  - Getting annoyed or angry if they spent time with friends and family instead of their boyfriend
  - Wanting to know where they were and who they were with 24/7
  - Becoming possessive – including threatened by close or best friends who were male; accusing them of cheating
  - Jealous of activities or clubs they were involved in that didn't include the boyfriend
  - Giving ultimatums – “choose the club or that person or me”
  - Disrespecting boundaries – asking for sexy photos and the posting them on social media
  - Commenting on – or even deciding on – what their girlfriend or boyfriend was wearing

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- In each of the relationships, the person being controlled figured it was them – they were the problem, not their boyfriend. What examples do you remember of that? Why do you think they made those concessions – like quitting the debate team, or giving him more attention, or sending naked pictures, not just sexy pictures even when they seemed like they didn't want to do it?
- What happened in these relationships? Probe for:
  - All the power in the relationship was taken by the abusive partner – for example, one person said they “needed his permission to do anything”
  - One used threats – for example, threatening to show one girl's brother the naked photos; threatening to “out” or tell everyone that his boyfriend was gay
  - One used physical violence – shaking or even slapping his girlfriend
  - One boyfriend wanted to stop using condoms, even though his girlfriend was concerned about it – then became angry with her and forced her to have sex – which is rape, even if it's someone's boyfriend or girlfriend and even if they have had sex before
- In each of the relationships, the abusive partner had power and control over his girlfriend or boyfriend. What techniques did he use to control his girlfriend or boyfriend? Probe for:
  - He'd get angry – but then say how much he missed them.
  - He'd apologize
  - He'd promise not to do it again—“I'll change”
  - He gave flowers/gifts
  - He took away his boyfriend or girlfriend's sense of self-worth – e.g., “Who else would want me?” and “I felt stupid.”
  - He isolated his boyfriend or girlfriend from their friends and family

Say, “The most frequent question people ask of others who are in abusive relationships is, ‘why did you stay so long?’ or ‘why didn't you break up with them sooner?’ While this ends up blaming the person being abused (we should be asking the abusive person why they were abusive!), it is a very common question. What do you think some of the answers to that question are, based on what you saw in this video?” Probe for:

- It's not always so clear what's normal – what's a typical fight or typical attentiveness and what's abuse or being obsessive – especially if things were going well for a while and then started to go bad.
- Because the person being abused usually has strong feelings for the abuser before they become abusive. They may hang on to hope that the abuser will change back to the sweet person they were before the abuse started – or may even blame themselves for the abuse.

Summarize the discussion by saying, “One thing that's important to keep in mind here has to do with gender. In all of these cases, the person who was abusive was one gender, but people of all genders can be abusive, too – and it can happen in relationships where they have boyfriends and it can happen in relationships where they have girlfriends. So while

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the majority of reported relationship abuse cases are between a male-female couple where the guy is the abuser and the girl is being abused, a person of any gender can be in either position.” (20 minutes)

**STEP 3:** Say, “Given that people who are in abusive relationships can sometimes feel confused or unsure, people in their lives – family members or friends, for example – can play really important roles in helping the abuse stop. Let’s take a look at what some of those things are.”

Divide the class into groups of 3. Distribute the worksheets, “What Would You Tell Them?” Instruct them to work together to complete the two scenarios using a separate piece of paper if they want to write anything down. Let them know they have about 8 minutes in which to do the work together.” (10 minutes)

**STEP 4:** After about 8 minutes, ask the groups to stop their work. Ask for a volunteer to read scenario 1 aloud. Ask for a volunteer from another group to respond to the first question, then solicit other responses from other groups. Do the same with scenario 2, continuing to ask for volunteers from groups who have not yet spoken. The processing of this activity will depend on what is contributed by students, but you can use the following questions as a guide in order to get to some key issues around power differences in both relationships:

- What was it like to do that? What was [easy, sad, frustrating – fill in their answers] about it?
- What did both scenarios have in common? [That there was a power difference in each relationship; that someone who has strong feelings for another person doesn’t necessarily see when the relationship is becoming unhealthy or abusive.]
- What did you notice about the advice that was suggested for each scenario? How likely do you think it would be that Oliver or Karen would get out of their unhealthy relationships? Why?

Say, “Whenever you see something going on in a friend’s or a loved one’s relationship you don’t like, you have to ask yourself, ‘Do I say something? Is it my place?’ When it comes to an unhealthy or abusive relationship, the answer is yes – it’s really important to say something to let that person know you’re there for them, but without making them feel like they’re stupid for being in the relationship in the first place.” (15 minutes)

**STEP 5:** Explain the homework assignment, which will have them listen to a short podcast and react to it in their journals [if you have been using journals in class], or that they can complete by writing on a piece of lined paper or typing up their reaction on the computer. Write the following link on the board: <https://www.wnyc.org/radio/#/ondemand/531001> and ask them to write this down on a blank piece of paper or a blank page in their journals.

*Note to the Teacher: You may also wish to email or text the students the link after class to ensure they wrote it correctly.*

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Say, "As you leave, I am going to give each of you a small piece of paper. Keep it for yourselves, or share it with someone you know who you think might need it. It has a hotline and a text number for someone who thinks they're in an unhealthy or abusive relationship – and a hotline for some more information about what you can do if this were to be you, or if you wanted to help someone else." Distribute the small pieces of paper as they leave.  
(2 minutes)

**RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:**

The in-class discussion and small group work will achieve the first two learning objectives, although feelings will be identified and expressed during these activities (objective number three). The third learning objective will be fulfilled by the affective homework assignment.

**HOMEWORK:**

Students will listen to an episode of Radio Rookie in which a teen's older sister is in an abusive relationship and write a journal response to it:  
<https://www.wnyc.org/radio/#/ondemand/531001>.

## Worksheet: What Would You Tell Them To Do?

### Scenario – What Would You Tell Him To Do?

Oliver is 14 and Emily is 17. He has never had a girlfriend before and can't believe that someone in the 12th grade is interested in him – especially someone as popular and beautiful as Emily. His friends tell him they don't like her – they think she's really bossy and fake, but he tells them they just don't know her. She likes when he comes to her soccer games after school – at the last one, he sat with a girl he's known since they were in kindergarten and considers one of his best friends. Emily sees them and they both wave to her on the field, but she doesn't wave back. When the game is over, she walks up to him, slaps him across the face and hisses, "Let's go!" and walks away. Oliver looks at his friend, shrugs, and runs after Emily.

1. In what ways does Emily have power over Oliver? How does she use this power?
  2. If Oliver came to you for advice, what would you advise him to do? Keep in mind how he feels about Emily.
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### Scenario – What Would You Tell Her To Do?

Quinn and Greg are both in 10th grade and have been a couple for four months. Quinn has loved Greg in some way since they were little kids, and adults always joked they were destined to get married. Greg's father is the CEO of a major company and they have a huge home in the nicest part of town. Quinn lives with Quinn's dad, who works for the local cable company, in a one-bedroom apartment (Quinn sleeps in the living room). Quinn babysits every afternoon and weekend to make money to help pay for clothes and any social life with friends. Everything else goes into a college fund. Greg is intense – whatever he does, he does to the max – he goes out a lot and spends a lot of his dad's money. Everyone wants to hang out with him and he rewards people by paying for things – including Quinn. Greg wants Quinn with him all the time, and if Quinn is supposed to work babysitting, he just pays whatever Quinn would have earned that night. This is awesome for Quinn – getting the money and a social life! His parents are away a lot, and Greg has lots of parties at home when they're away. At one party, Greg calls Quinn over and asks Quinn to dance really sexy in front of his friends. Quinn whispers in his ear, "I don't do that kind of thing in front of other people." Greg smiles and says, "But baby, you work for me – and I want you to."

1. In what ways does Greg have more power in this relationship? How does he use this power?
2. If Quinn came to you for advice, what would you advise Quinn to do? Keep in mind how Quinn feels about Greg.



