

## Lesson 3: Unhealthy and Abusive Relationships

### Introduction

In this lesson students learn that conflicts and disagreements are part of all relationships and that there are appropriate ways of behaving when dealing with these conflicts. When the behaviours in a relationship are inappropriate, an abusive relationship may develop. Abuse of any kind is unacceptable and may even be indictable under the Criminal Code of Canada. Students learn about the warning signs of abusive relationships and how abuse can be subtle or obvious. They also learn that some relationships must end because they are unhealthy and, in some cases, place individuals in danger. Students have the opportunity to practise effective and assertive communication skills.

It is essential that teachers discuss the following topics with students prior to teaching this lesson: the characteristics of healthy relationships (Module E, Lesson 1); effective communication within relationships (Module E, Lesson 1); and the rights and responsibilities within an intimate relationship, including consent (Module E, Lesson 2).

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### Specific Learning Outcomes

- 12.HR.2** Demonstrate understanding of effective communication within a relationship and the potential impact of technology on communication within a relationship.
- 12.HR.4** Apply problem-solving and decision-making strategies to identify and prevent the development of abusive relationships and/or to end unwanted relationships.
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### Key Understandings

- Everyone has the right to be in a relationship that is free from any form of abusive behaviour.
  - Abusive relationships are the result of abusive behaviours that may develop over time.
  - Everyone has the right to end a relationship safely.
  - There are appropriate ways to end an unhealthy relationship as safely as possible.
  - Changing abusive behaviours is not the responsibility of those victimized by the behaviours.
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### Essential Questions

1. What are the warning signs of an abusive relationship?
  2. What are the types of abusive behaviours?
  3. What are some appropriate ways of ending an unhealthy relationship?
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## Background Information

### Early Warning Signs of Abuse

Any relationship in which the responsibilities are not being met can develop into an unhealthy relationship. If the conflicts that arise are not mutually resolved, they may lead to unacceptable behaviours, which may be considered abusive.

Abuse in a relationship can be emotional, physical, sexual, or financial (as discussed in Module E, Lesson 1). Anyone, regardless of his or her background, can be abusive, and both males and females can be abused. Emotional abuse (e.g., making degrading comments, isolating) is often a warning sign of escalating abuse. In some cases, physical abuse does not start until much later in a relationship, but early warning signs are usually evident. Being aware of warning signs during the dating process is especially important.

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## Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

### Troubles in Paradise

While everyone has a different degree of tolerance for certain behaviours in a relationship, some behaviours should never be tolerated. This learning activity challenges students to determine which behaviours can be worked on and which behaviours lead to or signal the end of an unhealthy relationship.

#### *Directions/Description*

- Provide each student with a copy of RM 4–HR and have students complete it individually.
- Once students have completed the form, divide the class into small groups to discuss their selections. Have the groups determine behaviours that were most commonly selected and behaviours that resulted in the most varied responses.
- As a class, identify five to eight warning signs from the behaviours that prompted common responses.



Refer to RM 4–HR: Troubles in Paradise.

#### *Possible Debriefing Questions*

1. What was it about the identified behaviours that prompted students' selections?
  2. Were there any unanimous responses? If so, for which behaviours?
  3. What behaviours signalled the termination of the relationship?
  4. What behaviours warranted assistance from others?
  5. What behaviours prompted dissimilar responses, and why?
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## Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

### Relation Shifts

As identified in Module E, Lesson 1, abusive behaviour in a relationship or in a dating situation can be categorized as emotional, physical, sexual, or financial abuse.

RM 5–HR presents a case study of a teenaged couple. This case study shows how emotional abuse and physical abuse may manifest themselves in a relationship.

#### *Directions/Description*

- Divide the class into five groups and have each group review the case study.
- A narrator reads the case study to the group and asks the questions at the indicated place.
- After each group has completed the case study, they report to the class about the case study and the group discussion.



Refer to RM 5–HR: Relation Shifts: Case Study.

For more information and/or to examine additional case studies that depict other forms of abusive behaviours, teachers may consider using the *Relation Shifts* DVD and Facilitator's Guide (refer to Note to Teacher).

### NOTE TO TEACHER

The *Relation Shifts* case studies, developed by Clinic Community Health Centre, Teen Talk Program, are available for loan or duplication from the Instructional Resources Unit of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth.

- To borrow a copy of the *Relation Shifts* Facilitator's Guide, please contact Media Booking Services  
Telephone: 204-945-7849  
Toll-Free: 1-800-592-7330  
Provide the title and media booking number: **D-0873**.
- To order a copy of the *Relation Shifts* DVD, please use the *Media Duplication Order Form* available online at [www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/iru/services/media\\_dup/forms/media\\_booking\\_form.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/iru/services/media_dup/forms/media_booking_form.pdf).  
Provide the title and duplication request number: **DV-0041**.

#### **Caution**

The case studies presented on the *Relation Shifts* DVD depict the full range of relationships, including same-sex and heterosexual couples, each involving a particular type of abuse or violence.

Check with your school administration for school and school division guidelines and procedures related to depth and breadth of content, choice of learning resources, assessment/reporting procedures, and providing a parental option.

A *parental option* means that parents may choose a school-based or alternative delivery (e.g., home, professional counselling).

Teachers are reminded to review both the DVD and the Facilitator's Guide in order to be familiar with the content and suggestions related to introduction, debriefing, and action-planning activities.

### Questions for Discussion\*

1. Did either of the characters start dating because he or she was planning on experiencing abuse?
2. What were some of the first signs of abuse in this relationship?
3. What abusive behaviours did you notice in the couple?
4. What excuses did the person acting abusively use?
5. Do you think the person believed his or her own excuses? If yes or maybe—Does that make the abuse okay?

### Possible Debriefing Questions\*

1. If someone acts abusively once, do you think the person will likely do so again?  
*Yes, most often abuse will continue to happen. Abuse usually starts to happen slowly, and then happens more and more frequently over time. Abusive acts also become increasingly serious over time.*
2. If we know that abuse becomes more frequent and gets worse over time, what can someone do to get away from the abuse?  
*Leave the relationship.*

\* Source: Klinic Community Health Centre. Teen Talk Program. *Relation Shifts*. DVD and Facilitator's Guide. Winnipeg, MB: Klinic Community Health Centre, 2007. 6–7. Adapted with permission.

## REFERENCES



For additional information related to abusive relationships or dating violence, refer to the following websites:

Department of Justice Canada. *Criminal Code* (R.S. 1985, c. C-46).  
<<http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/C-46/>>.

Klinic Community Health Centre. Teen Talk Program. *Relation Shifts*. DVD and Facilitator's Guide. Winnipeg, MB: Klinic Community Health Centre, 2007.

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Queen's Human Rights Office. "Are You in a Healthy Relationship?" *Sexual Harassment Menu: Healthy Relationships*. 1999.  
<[www.queensu.ca/humanrights/2Relationships.htm](http://www.queensu.ca/humanrights/2Relationships.htm)>.

Teen Talk. "Dating Violence." *FAQ: Teen Dating Violence*. <[www.teen-talk.ca/FAQFiles/Teen%20Dating%20Violence%20Sections/TDV%20FAQ.htm](http://www.teen-talk.ca/FAQFiles/Teen%20Dating%20Violence%20Sections/TDV%20FAQ.htm)>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <[www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/)>.



## Background Information

### Breaking Up

Beginning and ending relationships is a part of life that we all experience. Some relationships do come to an end or have to be terminated. Sometimes relationships simply fade away because the people in the relationships develop new goals or new interests. Some relationships, however, develop conflicts that result in irreconcilable differences and sometimes even result in abusive situations, as examined in the *Relation Shifts* case study.

Ending a relationship is never easy. Even when a relationship is abusive, deciding to end it may be difficult, and it is certainly normal to feel nervous and sad about doing it. If it is determined that a relationship must end, there are appropriate ways to do this.

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### Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

#### Top 10 Ways Not to Break Up

Using the group brainstorm strategy, have students identify ways that could be considered inappropriate in breaking up with someone (e.g., text message). From this brainstormed list, identify the class's top 10 ways not to break up and post the list in the classroom.

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### Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

#### Breaking up is Hard to Do

While the *Relation Shifts* case study may be used for this learning activity, students could also create their own scenarios (and submit them to the teacher on paper).

#### *Directions/Description*

- In small groups (or individually), have students script appropriate ways to break up with a partner.
- Each response should
  - identify what method of communication (e.g., phone, text, email) the person initiating the break-up would use, and explain why
  - use assertive communication skills (see RM 6–HR)

#### NOTE TO TEACHER

If students are creating their own scenarios, they should submit them in writing for your review before they present them to others. If you find that the scenarios are not appropriate as submitted, they may need to be edited by you or by the students.

- identify, if possible, why the person is breaking up (if personal safety is not a concern)
- describe a plan to ensure personal safety if this is a concern
- Have each group share their scenario and responses with the rest of the class.
- For any scenarios that included abusive behaviour, have the class identify possible ways that the abusive person could change his or her behaviour(s).
- This activity could conclude with a class discussion about appropriate responses on behalf of the person who did not initiate the break-up.



Refer to RM 6–HR: Assertive Communication Tips.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



The following resources, available from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (NCFV) and the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada, address the cycle of violence, dating violence, and sexual assault.

*Beyond—Surviving the Reality of Sexual Assault.* VHS. NFB. 2000. (27 min.)

See <[www.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=50601](http://www.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=50601)>.

“This is a story of a young woman who is sexually assaulted by a casual acquaintance. The video depicts the sexual assault, her experiences in seeking treatment and support, dealing with the justice system, and her ability to heal” (Health Canada, NCFV, and NFB 15).\*

*A Love That Kills.* VHS. NFB. 1999. (19 min. 32 sec.)

See <<http://www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/index.php?id=33865>>.

“*A Love That Kills* is a powerful documentary that tells the story of a 19-year-old woman who was murdered by her former boyfriend. The video helps to identify the warning signs of partner abuse, and the related effects, especially in young people” (Health Canada, NCFV, and NFB 19).\*

Babcock, Maggie, and Marion Boyd. *Choices for Positive Youth Relationships: Instructional Guide.* Kit. Mississauga, ON: Speers Society, 2002.

“This package contains the video *A Love That Kills*, plus a 140-page teacher’s guide for [Grades 10 to 12] students developed by the Speers Society, a charitable organization dedicated to preventing youth relationship abuse” (NFB

<<http://www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/index.php?id=51227>>). \*\*

*Your Truth Is Your Truth—Moments with Strong Women from Abusive Peer Relationships.*

NFB. 2001. (30 min.) See <<http://www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/fiche/?id=51604>>.

“This video profiles women who have experienced partner, spousal, or dating abuse. It features interviews with women of all ages with a particular focus on young women and their views on positive relationships. The video is an ideal resource providing education on the various forms of abuse, individual empowerment, and the essential elements of healthy relationships” (Health Canada, NCFV, and NFB 24).\*

\* Source: Health Canada, National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, and the National Film Board of Canada. *National Clearinghouse on Family Violence: Video Catalogue.* Ottawa, ON: Health Canada, 2005. Available online at <<http://www3.nfb.ca/webextension/ncfv-cnivf/index.html>>.

\*\* Source: National Film Board of Canada. *Our Collection.* <<http://www3.nfb.ca/collection/films/>>.