

Safeguarding Newsletter

Healthy Relationships



ENCOMPASS
SAFEGUARDING

When we think of ‘relationships’ we tend to think about teenagers and romantic or intimate relationship, however relationships with parents, siblings, peers and trusted adults are impactful from the day we are born.

All relationships need healthy boundaries, which serve as invisible yet essential lines that define appropriate behaviour and communication.

Modeling healthy relationship behaviours

Teachers and staff serve as role models for students, demonstrating healthy relationships and clear boundaries. This creates a safe, respectful learning environment where students can develop crucial social and emotional skills.

By observing and emulating these positive interactions, students learn to:

1. Recognise and respect others' boundaries
2. Develop emotional intelligence
3. Navigate cultural expectations
4. Build foundations for future personal and professional relationships

These practices contribute to better mental health and well-being for both students and staff, fostering an atmosphere conducive to learning and personal growth.

Why having healthy boundaries is important:

- Helps to understand your own needs and limits
- Encourages valuing personal space and well-being
- Promotes balanced interactions with peers and authority figures
- Aids in managing stress and maintaining mental health
- increased self-esteem and confidence
- Reduced stress and anxiety
- Stronger, more authentic relationships

Making choices aligned with personal values

External pressure (from peers, family, culture etc) is a factor in many decisions that we all make. The complexities of students' lived experiences means that setting personal boundaries is a crucial skill for empowering themselves and fostering healthy relationships as they grow into adulthood. Boundaries are personal, internal limits that define where one person ends and another begins, which encompass physical, emotional, and mental aspects of relationships.



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Empowering students to develop healthy boundaries:

Establishing clear classroom expectations:

- Creating and enforcing consistent rules
- Explaining the reasons behind boundaries and expectations
- Allowing input from students in creating classroom norms

Promoting open communication:

- Encouraging students to express their feelings and needs
- Creating a safe space for discussions
- Responding to concerns with empathy and respect

Respecting individual differences:

- Acknowledging diverse backgrounds and experiences
- Promoting inclusivity and cultural sensitivity
- Adapting teaching methods to meet various learning needs
- Encouraging self-advocacy
- Teaching students to express their needs and concerns
- Empowering students to set and maintain their own boundaries
- Supporting students in seeking help when needed

Case Study Primary School

Mei and Akira, both 5 years old, are in the same class. Mei consistently refuses to share toys during playtime, often snatching them from other children. When Akira tries to play with a toy Mei wants, Mei pushes him away and yells, "Mine!" The teacher notices that Mei struggles to take turns and becomes upset when asked to share, while Akira becomes increasingly reluctant to engage in group activities.

What can teachers do? A few practical ideas:

Sharing Circle: Modelling and practicing sharing in a teacher controlled way

Emotion Recognition: Use picture cards to help children identify and express different emotions.

Model active listening and help children to explore the difference between not wanting to share and feeling uncomfortable with something that is happening.

"Kindness Jar": Recognise and reward acts of sharing and kindness throughout the week.

Collaborative Art Projects: Engage students in group activities that require sharing materials and working together.

SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATION : We need to teach children to share and live cooperatively but was also want them to understand that it is also OK to say NO if sharing, touching or agreeing to something that someone else wants, makes them feel uncomfortable or “icky”. We need children to encourage children from a young age to trust their gut feelings, learn how to appropriately and kindly use their voice to share how they are feeling and also respect other children’s feelings.

Reporting Concerns

In addition to modelling positive relationships and interactions, providing lessons and learning around this area, schools also need to make sure that students have ways to report their concerns both about their own experiences and also about their friends experiences.

The main way students will do this is by directly telling a trusted teacher or counsellor but it is also a really good idea to have a confidential (not anonymous) reporting system that students can easily access, such as a QR code on a poster in bathrooms or a link on student learning platform

Remember, creating a safe, open environment is key to empowering students. By teaching about healthy boundaries, we give students invaluable tools for their present and future well-being.

Case Study Middle School

Sophia, 11, is part of a close-knit group of friends. Recently, she's been excluding her longtime friend Elena from group activities and spreading rumours about her. When confronted, Sophia claims Elena is "too boring" and doesn't fit in anymore. Elena, feeling isolated, has started eating lunch alone and her grades are slipping. Other classmates have noticed the situation but are unsure how to intervene.

What Teachers can do? A few practical ideas:

Friendship Skills Workshop: Discuss qualities of good friendships and role-play positive social interactions.

"Inclusion Champions": Assign rotating roles to students to ensure no one is left out during recess or group activities.

Conflict Resolution Scenarios: Present hypothetical conflicts and guide students through peaceful resolution strategies.

Empathy Building Exercises: Read stories about diverse experiences and discuss how characters might feel.

Digital Citizenship Lessons: Teach about online etiquette and the impact of spreading rumours or excluding others online

SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATIONS : It is quite natural that children's relationships change as they get older and develop different interests and we have to support children to manage those natural transitions. Where friendship issues can become very concerning is when it moves into Peer on Peer abuse. This generally happens because the power difference between the children makes one very vulnerable and bullying can become relentless and significantly harmful. Those excluded are also extremely vulnerable to exploitation.

Case Study High School

Alex and Jamie, both 17, have been dating for six months. Their relationship has become increasingly intense, with Alex constantly checking Jamie's phone and social media accounts. Alex discourages Jamie from spending time with friends or participating in extracurricular activities, claiming they should prioritise their relationship. Jamie has started skipping classes to appease Alex and seems withdrawn. Friends have noticed bruises on Jamie's arms but are afraid to speak up.

What teachers can do? A few practical ideas

Healthy Relationships Seminar: Invite guest speakers to discuss characteristics of healthy vs. unhealthy relationships.

Consent and Boundaries Workshop: Interactive sessions on understanding and respecting personal boundaries.

Red Flags Role-Play: Act out scenarios depicting controlling behaviour and discuss how to recognise and respond to them.

Support Network Mapping: Help students identify trusted adults and resources they can turn to for help.

Explore Celebrity Relationships: Analyse portrayals of relationships in media and discuss their reality away from the camera and realistic expectations.

SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATIONS : The majority of teens get most of their knowledge of intimate relationships from their peers and the internet, neither a reliable source. Schools ignoring and passively allowing low level sexually harmful behaviour; comments, unwanted touching, misogynistic or homophobic actions leads to that behaviour becoming 'normalised' and very difficult to challenge when it becomes steps over into sexual assault. Schools need to find ways for students to have their voices heard and ensure that low level sexually harmful behaviour is identified and challenged!

We hope this information helps you in the important conversations in your classrooms and throughout the school.



Please get in contact if you would like to discuss any specific incidents or situations that you are dealing with or if you would like to organise regular Safeguarding Supervision to further explore any issues.