

7.2 FRIENDS AND RELATIONSHIPS

LEVEL 2 3

Big Ideas in Module 7.2

- Relationships (of all kinds) are complex and learning how to be in a relationship with another person is not always easy, obvious, or a linear learning process.
- Relationships are often not entirely healthy or unhealthy. They are a combination that must be evaluated on how they contribute to overall feelings of well-being and connection.
- Connections that young people make can be sources of support and sources of stress. Developing skills to navigate relationship stress and to ask for support are critical to increasing positive connections and building communication skills that will be useful throughout a person's life.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Identify what a healthy relationship feels/looks like.
- Critically evaluate their relationships in terms of what might promote or hinder connection.
- Learn how to articulate and negotiate their relationship needs and boundaries.

Cross-Curricular Connections

- English
- Equity Studies
- Gender Studies
- Psychology
- Social Studies
- Sociology

Terminology

- Boundaries

Materials

- Drawing and art utensils (crayons, markers, colour pencils, etc.)
- Construction paper or other large pieces of paper
- Printed copies of **Relationship Questionnaire**

Background Information for Educators

During adolescence, young people are learning to navigate different types of relationships, including friendships. They are in a process of discovering who they want to be around and why; they are weighing the benefits of relationships, how some social connections feel really good and others, not so good. It is a process of learning by trial and error. While you cannot control the relationship choices of your students, you can provide them with the skills to evaluate and make decisions about the kinds of relationships that they want in their lives. You can provide skills that will help them cultivate more of the types of friendships that they want, while helping them set and communicate **boundaries**. You can also provide students with information to determine the ingredients for a healthy relationship.

Friendships, peer social dynamics, and relationships in general are significantly influential during adolescence. While this could be said of any point in life, the reality for young people is that they are experimenting with what it means to develop separately from family and to make stronger ties with peers (Hey Sigmund, 2016). The connections that young people make and maintain during this time are both sources of support and sources of stress. The ability to identify and critically evaluate these connections are important first steps toward articulating and negotiating relationship needs and boundaries.

The activities in this module are meant to help students see the complexity of relationships. Relationships are not black and white—they are not healthy or unhealthy—relationships often include both qualities. Identifying qualities of a relationship that feel positive and healthy, as well as identifying qualities that feel negative and unhealthy, can help determine which relationships you want in your life and which you do not. It is not always possible to entirely disconnect from a person/relationship (i.e., a sibling or a parent) but you can learn to communicate needs and develop boundaries to help navigate the relationship.

Learning how to communicate needs is different than expecting 100% of your needs to be met 100% of the time. Learning how to communicate your needs is about learning how to communicate expectations while listening to the other person's needs and expectations. Part of listening to the other person's needs is being aware that they may set a boundary that could lead to feelings of rejection and emotional pain (for more information, see module 4.6). Being in a relationship is about negotiating how you can best meet each other's expectations in ways that are mutually supportive, respectful, and fulfilling.

Student Readiness

Before students engage with this lesson, ensure that safer space guidelines and group norms have been established (and revisited) within your classroom (for more information on how to establish safer space guidelines, see module 1.3). In order to effectively prepare for this activity, ensure students understand that:

- Learning how to be in relationships that feel positive, affirming, and supportive can be a lifelong process—many adults do not have it all figured out!
- Building and maintaining healthy, positive, affirmative, fulfilling, and supportive relationships is not something that comes naturally. Like everything else in life, these are skills that need to be learned. Much of this skill building starts in adolescence.
- The activities in this module will be done individually and privately.
- The purpose of this module is not to shame anyone for engaging in unhealthy relationships. The purpose is to develop skills to identify qualities you want in relationships and to communicate your needs, expectations, and boundaries within relationships.

Summary of Activities

Students will:

- Individually reflect on and visually map the relationships in their lives.
- Individually reflect on and evaluate the quality of connection in their relationships by taking a quiz.

Activity 1 2 3

Before beginning this activity, remind students that this is a private, reflective activity. Students will not be asked to present their drawings.

Instructions

1. Provide art and drawing supplies and paper. Ask students to draw a circle and label it either “Me,” their name, or draw in a caricature of themselves. You can demonstrate an example for them on the board.
2. Add other circles as per figure 7A. Ask students to use the whole page.

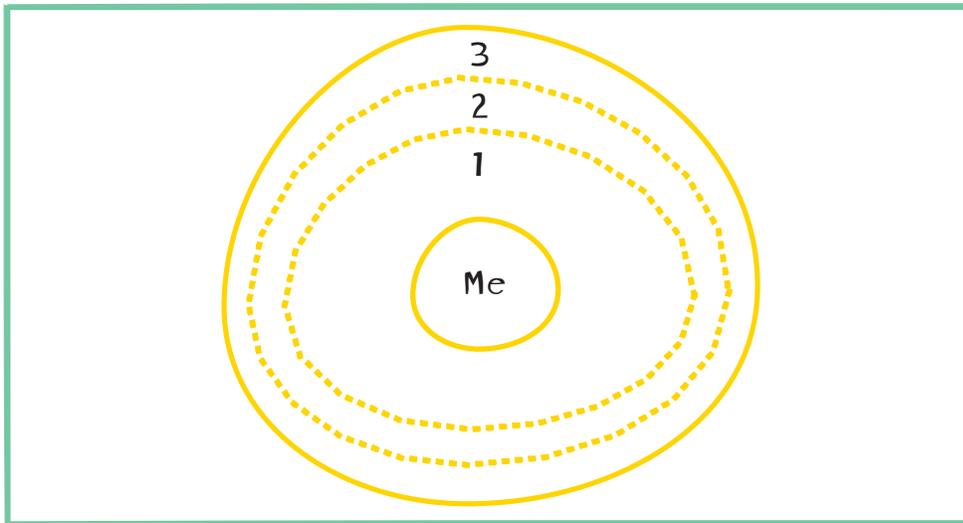


Figure 7A

3. Ask students to close their eyes and think about the most important people in their lives. With eyes still closed, ask them to reflect on who these people are and what makes them important.
4. Ask students to open their eyes and choose 4 to 8 people in their lives who they consider to be important. Explain that importance can be related to emotional closeness, their role (e.g., who they are to you), and/or time spent together. Importance does not always mean the people you feel the strongest connection to or the most supported by. *Emphasize that it is rare for one person to satisfy all of a person's relationship needs. That is why it is important to cultivate different kinds of relationships with different kinds of people (i.e., friendships, mentorships, etc.).*
5. Ask students to map each person in the drawing according to how close they are. Use a circle and an initial or a symbol (see figure 7B). *Emphasize that students should complete their drawings by thinking about how they are feeling today, recognizing that feelings about people and relationships can change day to day, month to month, etc.*

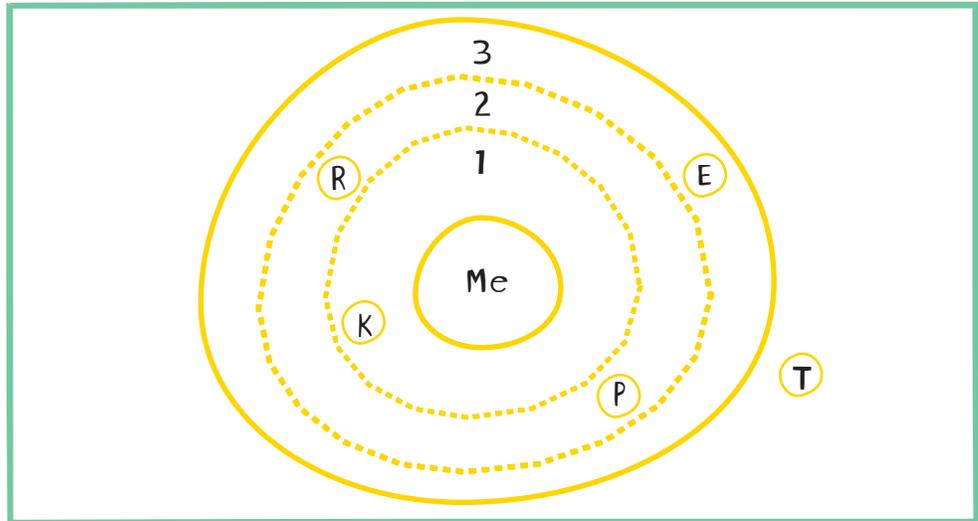


Figure 7B

Circle 1: Very close relationships

Circle 2: Close relationships but not as close as Circle 1

Circle 3: Impersonal relationships

Outside of solid line: People you do not trust and want strong boundaries with

6. Draw lines from “Me” toward each person on the map. The line can be solid (strong connection), dotted (weak connection) or zig-zagged (conflicted connection). See figure 7C.

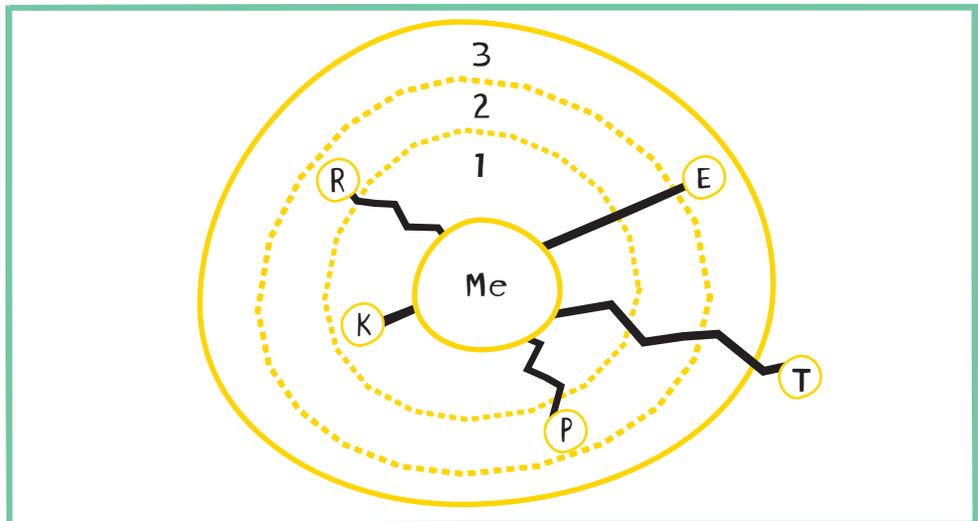


Figure 7C

7. Add a “+” and/or a “-” on each line to show whether the relationship is supportive or draining. Supportive relationships where you get care, insight, and feel safe are “+”. Relationships where you give and feel depleted are “-”. Some relationships are both. See figure 7D.

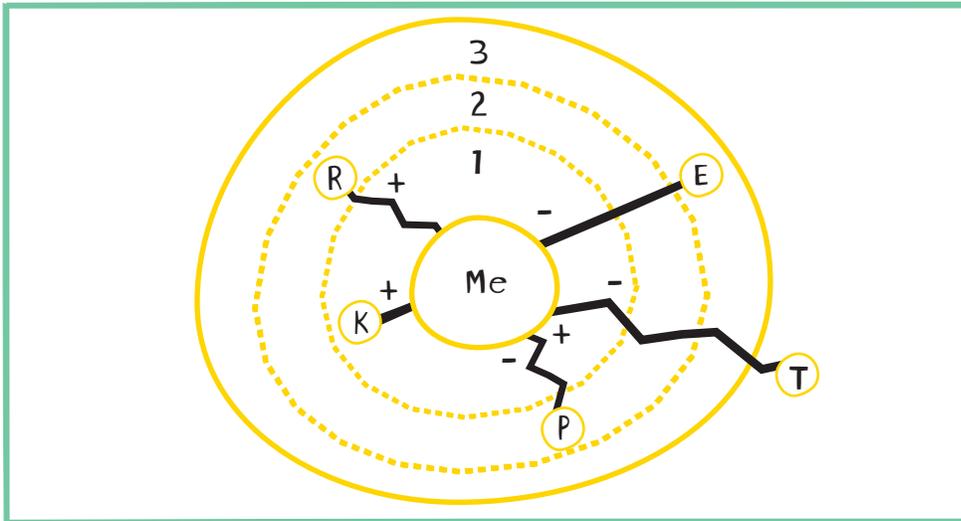


Figure 7D

8. Remind students that this is a snapshot of their relationships and relationship “orbit” today. It is not the past or the future. Give students some time to finish up their drawings. Then, ask students to privately reflect on their drawings/relationship orbits by turning over their paper and either writing or drawing their answers to the following questions:
- What do you notice about your orbits today?
 - What do you like and what would you like to change?
 - Do your orbits reflect your values and who you are as a person?
9. ✚ Optional: Have students use the written or drawn reflections to create a poem about one of the relationships in their lives. The poem can be kept private or presented to the class (as long as there is no identifying information).
10. Debrief as a class using the following prompts:
- What can we do to change distances with people in our orbits? How can we invite them closer? How can we make more distance?
 - Strong connections do not always feel supportive and weaker connections do not always mean there is no trust. What do you think that means?
 - How would it feel if everyone in your orbit was in Circle 1? What if they were all in Circle 3?

- What do you think might happen if you did this activity once every year?

EDUCATOR ANSWER KEY

- You can invite people closer by reaching out. You can do this by telling them that you would like to spend more time together. You could also talk with them more often, invite them to hang out with you, invite them to an event, and/or activity that you enjoy. You can create more distance by telling them that you would like to take some distance in the relationship. You could also hang out with them less often, and/or find activities to do that are not associated with them, and/or spend more time with other people who you want to bring in closer.
- There are many different kinds of connections that you can have and these might not always feel supportive. For instance, you can have a strong romantic connection with someone but you may not feel emotionally supported. Likewise, you could have a childhood friend whose connection has grown weak over the years and yet you trust them with your life. Trust is something that is often built and earned, not something that happens because you have a strong connection with a person.
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 • Everyone is different, meaning that people have different preferences when it comes to relationships. Some people might thrive if all of their connections are in Circle 1, while others might thrive if all of their connections are in Circle 3. People often thrive from a mix. It is important to cultivate different kinds of relationships and sometimes this means that the connections will be various degrees of strong or weak as is appropriate with the kinds of relationships being developed. Having every relationship in Circle 1 might seem great objectively but it can become difficult to sustain and draining to keep up close and strong connections with everyone in your life all of the time. It might feel draining to have everyone in Circle 1 and it might feel lonely or isolating to have everyone in Circle 3.
- You might be able to see how your relationships change year to year. You might be able to see which relationships stay relatively stable and which do not. You might be able to track how your relationships change and how they stay the same. This kind of reflection can be helpful to see if and how your relationships have grown and if you have succeeded in bringing in people you want closer and distancing yourself from people you want space from.

Activity 2 2 3

Instructions

1. Give students copies of the **Relationship Questionnaire**. Clarify that they can use this for friendship or dating relationships. *The indicators also apply to family and sibling relationships to some degree though power dynamics might be different.*

2. Ask students why they think that the same things that build friendships also build dating/romantic/sexual relationships.

EDUCATOR ANSWER KEY



Both kinds of relationships are based on connection, authenticity (i.e., being yourself), trust, respect, and communication. Whether long term (e.g., best friends for many years, long term couples) or short and casual (e.g., summer camp friends, casual dates, hookups), you can be real, honest, and clear.

3. Ask students to rate some of the relationships in their own lives.
4. + Optional: Include rating into the chart from Activity 1.
5. Discuss what students have learned from these exercises.

EDUCATOR ANSWER KEY



Let students' answers guide the discussion. Encourage students to look for patterns instead of specific observations that might name people. These patterns could include:

- Most relationships are not all positive or all negative and are instead a combination of both. It can be helpful to figure out which relationships are more positive than negative and assess whether or not you want to bring those relationships closer into your “orbit.”
- The value of reflecting on relationships is trying to figure out which relationships to invest in and which to ask for distance on/around.
- Relationships are constantly changing. Through reflection and evaluation, we can guide the changes that we want to make.

Wrap-up

Summarize the module with the following points:

- Relationships are not all positive or all negative, they hold aspects of both.
- Relationships keep changing. We always have some control in how they change.
- Reflection and evaluation are an important part of having relationships. They can help clarify how you feel, what you need, and how you want to be in the relationship.

7.2

FRIENDS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship Questionnaire

Circle all that apply.

Qualities that Promote Connection

1. You accept each other's friends and understand the importance of spending time with them.
2. You have common beliefs and values.
3. You can talk about your relationship with each other.
4. You share and alternate decision-making power.
5. You treat each other well no matter where or who you are with.
6. You are supportive and encouraging.
7. You feel happy for each other when good things happen to the other person.
8. You trust each other.
9. You welcome and expect the other person to change and grow.
10. You feel safe (can include sexually).
11. You make important decisions about your relationship together.
12. The relationship feels good to you most of the time.
13. You feel proud to be in this relationship.

Qualities that Challenge Connection

1. You keep tabs on each other's whereabouts.
2. You don't let them have other friends or friends of a certain kind (or vice-versa).
3. You secretly look at their messages and texts (or vice-versa).
4. You use putdowns to purposely hurt each other.
5. You feel isolated.
6. You feel worse and worse about yourself.
7. You talk behind each other's backs.
8. You feel pressured (can include sexually).
9. You worry constantly about upsetting the other.
10. You have hit or physically hurt each other (or threaten to).
11. You try to control each other.
12. You have tried to end the relationship but they will not let you (or vice-versa).

Person:

.....
of qualities that promote
connection:

.....
of qualities that challenge
connection:
