

Targeted session: Acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in relationships

Session overview

This session looks at behaviours that are acceptable and unacceptable in relationships and how we might respond to these whilst developing an awareness of the different contexts, and introducing the concept of coercive control.

Resources needed for this session

- Statement cards
- Hierarchy cards

Information for practitioner

The relationships we are looking at may be intimate, partner relationships or could be relationships with family or friends – in fact with anyone.

There is a particular emphasis in this session on the examples relating to online relationships.

During this session the young person – and practitioner – are expected to share examples. **Be mindful not to blame our own behaviours that we may reflect on during the activity.**

Pre-session action

Select a *"Looking after yourself"* exercise in advance for the close of the session.

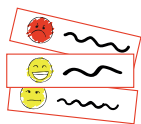
Session

Check in with the young person as to how they have been since your last session together. Are there any thoughts or feelings that you may need to reflect on and address before you begin this session?

Inform the young person what we are going to do in this session, sharing the overview.

Relationships

In most relationships there is always a bit of 'give and take' as we may do things one person wants to do on occasion and then do things that we want to do on other occasions. Problems can occur when someone expects us to do everything they say. When they do this, it doesn't always seem unreasonable so can be difficult for us to see that things might not be right.



Statement and hierarchy cards

Activity

Place the statement cards across the spectrum of acceptable, to feeling uncomfortable, through to unacceptable behaviour. Discuss each one considering whether the behaviour is fixed in place or moveable depending on the context.



This gives you as practitioner the opportunity to discuss some of the intricacies as there are examples that may be more complex and need unpicking to be able to consider the situation and context.

Both of the following examples could sit in different places across the acceptable to unacceptable spectrum depending on the discussion.

For example, *"Says I should do what they want to do"*. This could be that you might always do what you want and now they want a choice, or it could be that you always have to do what this person wants and you rarely/never have choice.

Another example would be “sharing funny memes”. This may be seen as harmless but what if we offend someone? Are they always funny?



Consider the following questions in an open discussion with both practitioner and young person to share examples.

- **What would you do if you came across a behaviour you felt was unacceptable?**
- **Does the intention behind the behaviour make a difference?**
For example, sharing a meme because someone is intentionally laughing at you or sharing without realising it was hurtful.
- **Depending on who it is, does it change how you react and feel?**
- **How does it differ if the behaviour was a ‘one-off’ compared to something that happens again and again?**
- **How might such behaviours affect how in control you feel about things?**
- **How do you challenge that in a kind way?**
- **Have you ever said or done anything that someone else might have felt was unacceptable?**
- **How does it feel to think about that now?**



Reflection on this session:




It is easy to not notice increasingly unacceptable behaviours when they come gradually, one after another. Coercive control starts in this way – we get used to not-okay behaviours bit by bit (they become ‘normalised’), and any attempt to say how you feel is dismissed and you are made to feel like you are wrong. It is possible to not even notice that it is happening, so much so that what behaviours would have seemed totally unacceptable at the start of the relationship feel normal.



Closing activity

Looking after yourself exercise to close

Statement cards

|  ACCEPTABLE |  FEELS UNCOMFORTABLE |  UNACCEPTABLE |
|---|--|---|
| I feel safe most of the time | Tells me what to wear | Sharing funny memes |
| Leaves me out sometimes | We don't often agree | They give me choices |
| I look forward to seeing them | We make decisions together | Checks my phone and socials |
| Says I need to do as I am told | I feel listened to | I feel I need to keep my opinions to myself |
| Sometimes talks to me, sometimes ignores me | They are the only person who understands me | Phones me to check where I am or what I am doing |
| They would rather we spent time only with each other | Wants to know who I have been talking to | I enjoy spending time with lots of people |

Statement cards continued

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Tells me no one believes anything I say | Says "you would if you loved me" | Have fun together most of the time |
| Says I should do what they want to do | I'm scared they won't want me anymore | Makes jokes about me in front of others |
| I'm worried they will tell someone what I have said | I never know what mood they are going to be in | They stick up for me when someone is being unkind |
| Takes photos and shares them without me knowing | We share passwords to things as we don't have secrets | Says sorry when they do something wrong |
| Questions where I was and who I was with when I shared a post on snapchat | Tells me to block certain people online (friends, family, ex-partner) | Tells me that I've sent intimate pictures before so should just send them |
| Says they will send intimate pictures of me to other people if I don't send more | If I don't answer messages straight away they get cross at me | |

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