

### ACTIVITY 5

## Building safe and healthy relationships

**This activity introduces students to the importance of connecting with others through healthy friendships and intimate relationships.**

### Key messages

- All relationships need negotiation so that everyone can be fully themselves and comfortable within the relationship.
- Knowing ourselves and what we feel comfortable with, and being able to communicate this with others, is a corner stone of having healthy friendships and intimate relationships.
- We need to be curious about and appreciate individual differences. This is especially the case when connecting with someone with a different gender, sexuality, age, disability, neurodivergence, class, race or culture etc.
- All relationships have the potential to feel safe and joyous as well as toxic and damaging.
- Fruitful relationships are not about the avoidance of conflicts but rather the management of them. For example, respectfully working through an argument or difficulty can help a friendship or an intimate relationship grow stronger.

### Activity

1. In small groups, invite the students to think about all the different kinds of relationship/connections they have. For example, with:
  - Family/other people they live with
  - Friends - in real life and online
  - Romantic/sexual partners
  - Peers/colleagues
  - Strangers (on trains, in shops)
  - Teachers/adults/bosses
2. Invite the students to come up with the key ingredients for any safe and healthy relationship. This might include:
  - Listening, being honest/clear about what you want/expect, appreciating/respecting different perspectives, knowing myself physically, emotionally and cognitively), not avoiding debate and differences etc

Ask each group to share some of their ideas with the wider group. You may want to capture these ideas.

3. Encourage students to share any positive experiences of negotiating a relationship where there has been a conflict/disagreement/mismatch.

If the students can't think of any examples – why is this? Is it because, for example, once there is conflict the relationships are broken? What are the risks of never seeing if a relationship can survive any conflict?

4. Discuss the skills we all need to be able to handle conflicts, disagreements and mismatches in relationships – what are these? (eg being able to see someone else's point of view, empathy etc).

Discuss that being able to see someone else's point of view and empathising with them does not mean agreeing with them or doing something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

5. Invite the students to consider some of the 'ingredients' of a safe and healthy relationship that they came up with earlier. Can they (individually or in pairs) think about some of these and how they relate to their own relationships? Some questions to consider include:

- Which of the ingredients do they contribute to their relationships?
- Which of the ingredients do they receive from their relationships?
- Do all their relationships follow a pattern or do they behave differently in different relationships? e.g. they might be good at being honest with friends about what they want/like/prefer but not with within their romantic or sexual relationships.
- What aspects of their relationships do they need to work on?
- Invite the students to make an action plan for

themselves. This might include making small steps, for example, being honest with a friend about how they feel or apologising to someone whose boundaries they may have crossed.

6. Reassure the students that making safe and healthy connections is a life-skill that they will need to develop throughout their lives. We all make mistakes when trying to connect with others – but it is how these are handled that counts.

**Please ensure all students have access to further support and information about healthy and safe intimate relationships. Useful advice and information can be found at:**

[Brook - Help and Advice](#) 🔗

[NHS - Let's Talk About It](#) 🔗

[Women's Aid - Expect Respect Toolkit](#) 🔗

**Some students may need access to more specialised support and information, for example, autistic students:**

[National Autistic Society - Sex Education](#) 🔗

[Robyn Steward - books](#) 🔗