



Building healthy relationships: conversation starters

Learning how to develop positive and healthy relationships from a young age plays an important role in preventing gender-based violence and abuse. Here are a few conversation starters that you can use to stimulate thought and discussion in a group setting such as a youth group. You could incorporate making the 16 Days of Activism friendship bands as part of the session (see Mothers' Union website for the instruction sheet at www.mothersunion.org). Conversations may need to be framed in an age appropriate way.

- 1.** Talk about three things that are important in creating a good friendship or relationship. If you are making the friendship band, you could look at each quality as a strand of the band.

- 2.** Talk about three things that might make a friendship or relationship hurtful.

- 3.** Discuss whether it is ok for a boyfriend or girlfriend, husband or wife to do any of the following:
 - Tell you what to wear

 - Continually make fun of you in front of other people

 - Tell you that it's your fault if they hurt or upset you

 - Physically restrain or hurt you

 - Make you do something sexual you don't want to do

 - Take or share photos of you without clothes on and share them with other people, either face to face or online

 - Keep on phoning, texting or sending messages online when you don't want them to; or following you or sending unwanted gifts.

- 4.** Talk about any examples of good relationships or friendships that you see around you.

- 5.** Talk about how you think you can be a good friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, or husband or wife.

If during the course of any conversations there is disclosure of any form of abuse, or comments that give you cause for concern:

- If it is in an organised setting with young people eg a school or youth group, follow the relevant safeguarding policies and contact the person responsible for safeguarding
- If it is an informal setting with a child or young person, such as a family member or child of a friend, you should contact the child protection team in your local authority. Local authority details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>. You could also contact organisations such as the NSPCC on 0808 800 5000; or the 24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline on 0808 2000 247 for advice. **If you believe a child or young person to be in immediate danger, always call the police straightaway on 999.**

If it is an adult, see Mothers' Union's information leaflet "*Support for people affected by gender-based violence and abuse*" available at www.mothersunion.org or 020 7222 5533. For more information and support on issues that may arise in discussions the following resources from other practitioners operating in this area could be useful.

Additional resources

The NSPCC has produced information and support for children and young people on healthy relationships which is available at

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/healthy-unhealthy-relationships/>

and

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/friends-relationships-sex/sex-relationships/>

The PSHE association's *Disrespect Nobody* resource addresses preventing abuse in teenage relationships and is available at

<https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/disrespect-nobody-discussion-guide>

Women's Aid *Expect Respect Educational Toolkit* about domestic abuse is available at

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/safer-futures/expect-respect-educational-toolkit/>,

and the *Spiralling Toolkit*, which covers healthy relationships at

http://thehideout.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/spiralling_toolkit.pdf.

There are also a variety of resources that offer support in talking to children and young people about issues such as grooming and sexting at

<http://www.childnet.com/teachers-and-professionals/for-working-with-young-people/hot-topics>.