

# Rewarding Relationships (Adapted Version)

**Essential Question:** How can I make sure my relationships are healthy and positive?

*"It's complicated" can describe many of our relationships with other people, both romantic and otherwise. Add digital devices and social media to the mix, and things get even more complicated. Help students take the first step toward building healthy and rewarding friendships and romantic relationships, both online and off.*

Common Sense Education worked in collaboration with Mathematica and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to adapt this lesson to meet the unique learning needs of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This adaptation was funded under contract HHSP233201500035I/HHSP23337008T with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.



**Learners will be able to:**

- Reflect on how devices and the internet affect their relationships.
- Identify the qualities of healthy and rewarding relationships.
- Use the Feelings & Options thinking routine to brainstorm strategies for navigating challenging relationships.



**Estimated time: 75 mins.**

The actual time will depend on the needs of the students. You may teach this lesson in a single class session. As an alternative, you can split the lesson across multiple days by teaching each of the sections below separately.

- Pre-Teach and Comprehension Check (optional, 5 mins)
- Consider: Texting and Talking (10 mins)
- Explore: Friendships and Feelings (20 mins)
- Analyze: Feelings & Options (20 mins)
- Lesson Review (20 mins)

## What You'll Need



Lesson Slides



Teen Voices: Friendships and Boundaries  
(Adapted Version)



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## Take-Home Resources

 Family Activity

 Family Tips

 Family Engagement Resources

## Key Vocabulary

- **Red flag feeling:** the feeling a person gets when another person does something that makes them uncomfortable, worried, or upset.
- **Boundaries:** the limits and rules we set for ourselves in our relationships with other people.

## Pre-Teach and Comprehension Check (Optional)

5 mins.

The purpose of this pre-teach is to make sure your students understand what **boundaries** mean, because this word is part of the lesson.

1. **Ask:** *What do you think it means when someone says they "have boundaries"?*

Give students a few minutes to think and share their ideas.

2. **Explain** that **boundaries** are *the limits and rules people set for themselves (Slide 2)*. Boundaries can help keep you safe and happy. For example, one boundary everyone should have is that no one can touch you without your permission. That is an example of a physical boundary, or a boundary we set for our body to keep us safe. People also set boundaries for the relationships they have with other people to protect their feelings and emotions.

3. **Ask:** *What are examples or boundaries or rules that someone might make in a relationship?*

**Examples can include:**

- Stop talking to a person who says or does mean things to you.
- Ask someone to text you less if they're always sending you messages.



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4. **Explain** that during the next lesson, you'll discuss what it means to have boundaries when using tech to stay connected with friends.

## Consider: Texting and Talking

10 mins.

### Lesson Summary and Prep:

To help students understand what a healthy relationship is, realize how devices and the internet affect their relationships, and brainstorm strategies for navigating challenging relationships.

This lesson links to two videos. Before the lesson, please make sure you can access the Teen Voices Video from Common Sense Education (available on **YouTube** and the **Common Sense Education website**) and the **Amaze video**.

1. **Project Slide 3** and state the learning objectives for this lesson:
  - Think about how devices and the internet affect our relationships.
  - Identify the qualities of healthy and rewarding relationships.
  - Use the Feelings & Options thinking routine to brainstorm strategies for navigating challenging relationships.
2. **Ask** students: *How often do you chat or text with your friends? Every hour? Every day? How long do you wait to text back? What if your friend doesn't text you back right away? (Slide 4)*

Invite students to share their thoughts with the group. Follow up by asking: What types of things do you usually message about? Is it different from what you talk about in person?

Highlight similarities and differences in how students communicate with friends, when using devices and in person—particularly any differences in how often they communicate and which kind of communication they use the most. Record their answers on a chalkboard or whiteboard. At the end of the discussion, talk about the patterns that emerge.

3. **Say:** *Today, we're going to talk about relationships and friendships, and how people use technology to communicate with one another. We're going to begin by watching a short video.*



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4. **Show the Teen Voices: Friendships and Boundaries video (Slide 5).** Pause the video when necessary to discuss what the students are hearing in the video and to make sure they understand the points the youth in the video are trying to make.

These are some suggested pause points and discussion questions you can ask:

- **1 minute 46 seconds:** What did the youth in the video say are the benefits of using devices to connect with friends?
  - A phone keeps people connected.
  - In hard times, it can help you support friends, even if they're far away.
  - You can call for help in an emergency.
- **2 minutes 28 seconds:** What did the youth say are the downsides of using devices to connect with friends?
  - It's good to have alone time.
  - It can affect the friendship if one person is texting or calling more than the other person wants them to.
- **3 minutes 18 seconds:** What did the youth say about why it's important to take a break from your phone?
  - You can get in trouble if you use your phone in school.
  - It can make you anxious if you're waiting for people to respond.
  - It's good to have space from phones sometimes.
- **End:** What did the youth say about how to set digital boundaries with your friends?
  - Be clear about your boundaries.
  - Make sure to spend time with your family.

5. **Invite** students to share their ideas about the video. As they give their ideas, highlight examples of relationships and communication that feel positive and healthy, and ones that do not.

If students missed key concepts from the video, replay the video and pause it to see if students can give an example of what the actors were talking about. Then discuss how that may apply to their own lives.



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6. **Ask:** *Do the experiences of the people in the video match yours? Why, or why not?*

**Suggestion:** This is a good place to stop the lesson, if you need to, and cover the next section in another session. If you choose to do this, begin the next session with a short reminder of the main takeaways from the activities in this section, including how online interactions and texting can affect friendships in positive and negative ways.

## Explore: Friendships and Feelings

20 mins.

1. **Say:** *Now, we're going to watch another short video to learn what a healthy relationship looks like.*
2. **Play the Amaze video (Slide 6)** and watch it as a group.

**Note:** It might be helpful to watch the video twice. The first time, you can pause the video occasionally to discuss what the characters are saying to make sure the students understand what's happening in the video. This discussion should focus on the facts of what the students are viewing. The class can watch it once more uninterrupted, and then participate in a discussion on what they learned from the video.

3. **Ask:** *Based on what you saw in the video, how would someone treat their friend or partner in a healthy relationship? How would they want to be treated by a friend or romantic partner?*

The goal of these questions is for students to share with the class what they learned about what a healthy relationship looks like.

4. After students share their thoughts, explain the keys to a healthy relationship (**Slide 7**) with the class and elaborate on each, if necessary. These are:
  - Each person supports and encourages the other.
  - Each person is interested in what the other person has to say.
  - Disagreements are handled respectfully.
  - Both people give and take in the relationship.
  - There is no verbal or physical abuse.



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- There is no pressure to do things they don't want to do.
- The relationship makes both people feel good about themselves.

5. **Explain** to the class some common signs of an unhealthy relationship (**Slide 8**). These are:

- One or both people do not support each other.
- One or both people do not respect each other.
- There is verbal or physical abuse.
- One person tries to keep you away from your friends or family.
- One person thinks they should always get their way or tries to control the other person.
- One or both people feel pressured to do things they don't want to do.
- The relationship makes one or both people feel bad about themselves.

6. **Say:** *If you think you might be in an unhealthy relationship, remember you can always ask a trusted adult to help you think about what you can do.*

**Suggestion:** This is a good place to stop the lesson, if you need to, and cover the next section in another session. If you choose to do this, begin the next session with a short reminder of the main takeaways from the activities in this section, including how a person can tell if a relationship is healthy or not.

## Analyze: Feelings & Options

20 mins.

1. **Say:** *When something happens in a friendship or relationship that makes you uncomfortable, this might give you a red flag feeling. A red flag feeling is when someone does something that makes you feel uncomfortable, worried, or upset (**Slide 9**). It's a warning sign that something might be off. When you have a red flag feeling, it's important to slow down, pause, and think about the situation.*



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2. **Explain** that you can use the Feelings & Options thinking routine to help think through a red flag feeling (Slide 10).

Describe the four steps of the thinking routine to students (identify, feel, imagine, and say) and explain that you're going to look at a scenario together and use the steps of the thinking routine to analyze it.

3. **Read** the Jason and Tim situation (Slide 11) aloud to the class:

*Jason's classmate Tim has started texting Jason a lot, every day. Jason and Tim are friendly, and Jason has always liked Tim. At first, Jason was happy to be talking to Tim out of school. But Tim was having a hard time: His parents were fighting a lot, and his life at home had gotten really stressful. Jason wanted to be kind and supportive, and always tried to be available when Tim texted. Recently, the texting has become overwhelming for Jason. Jason cares about Tim and doesn't want to make his situation any worse by not being a good friend. Jason was also worried about Tim's mental health. At the same time, Jason thought Tim was texting too much, and it was starting to take a toll. Jason thought he needed to set some boundaries, but he wasn't sure how, and didn't want to make things harder for Tim.*

4. **Pause** to check that the students understand the scenario. Then, walk them through the first three steps of the Feelings & Options thinking routine. Use the prompts below to help you guide the conversation.

**Identify (Slide 12):** Who are the people in this situation? What problem or challenge are they facing?

- **People involved:** Jason and Tim are the main characters in this situation. Jason and Tim are classmates and they often text each other. Tim has been having issues with his parents at home and started to constantly text Jason about it.
- **Problem:** Jason might have a red flag feeling because Tim wants more attention and communication than Jason is comfortable giving. But Jason might be nervous to say so because he's worried about how Tim will react.

**Feel (Slide 13):** What do you think each person in the situation is feeling? Why might the situation be hard or challenging for each of them?



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- How do you think Jason is feeling?
  - Jason might be feeling overwhelmed by the number of texts that Tim is sending.
  - Jason might feel worried about Tim, and even guilty about not responding to all of Tim's texts, or not being there for Tim during a difficult time.
- How do you think Tim is feeling?
  - Tim might be feeling lonely and in need of support.

**Imagine (Slide 14):** Imagine different ways that Jason could handle the situation. Come up with as many ideas as possible.

Student answers may include:

- Jason could text Tim back and explain that he knows Tim is having a hard time with his situation and wants to help. But Jason also has a lot of stuff going on and can't be there as much as Tim needs him to be.
- Jason or Tim could talk to an adult or family member about the situation and ask for advice on the best way to handle it.
- Jason could tell Tim it's okay to text a couple of times a day in the evenings.
- Jason could tell Tim that he's worried about him and encourage him to reach out to a trusted adult (teacher, counselor, adult family member, and so on) to talk about the challenges he's facing at home.

5. **Say:** *Now that we've come up with different ideas for how Jason could handle the situation, let's pick one option to build. Which do you think is the option that would lead to the best outcome, where both Jason and Tim feel good or are taken care of?*

Give students some time to think about and discuss the idea.

6. **Explain** that now that they've picked one idea to focus on, students are going to complete the last step of the Feelings & Options thinking routine. The goal of this step is for students to generate a concrete idea for an action step that they would realistically do if they were in Jason's position.



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7. **Say:** *Let's think more about the idea you chose for handling the situation. What could the people involved say or do?*

Prompt students to think first about the medium they would use to take action. Examples can include:

- In person
- Direct or private message
- Call or FaceTime
- Email
- Text

Then, ask them to say or write what they envision the character would actually say or do. Examples can include:

- Jason could say/type: "I'm really sorry you're having a hard time. I want to help, but I have a lot of stuff going on so I can't always answer your call or text."
- Jason could say/type: "Have you talked to an adult or a family member you trust about what's going on? They might be able to give you support and advice."
- Jason could say/type: "I'm worried about you. I think you should reach out to an adult you trust, like a teacher or family member, to talk about what's going on at home."
- Jason could say/type: "I'm really sorry you're having a hard time, but it's hard for me to get so many texts and take care of my own homework and chores. Could you only text me a couple of times in the evenings?"

**Suggestion:** This is a good place to stop the lesson, if you need to, and cover the next section in another session. If you choose to do this, begin the next session with a short reminder of the main takeaways from the activities you just covered, including the Feelings & Options steps.

## Lesson Review

20 mins.

The goal of this section is to reinforce key concepts from this lesson and assess student learning.

Use the questions below to help you guide the group assessment. After students have shared their answers, you can explain which answers are right and why they're the best choice. If most students are not getting the answers right, you might have to review some of the lesson content.



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1. **Read** the statements on **Slide 17** and have the students give a thumbs up for ways that technology can be good and a thumbs down for ways that technology can be bad.
  - Friends can talk or chat more easily, even when they're far away. [Thumbs up]
  - Friends can ignore limits and expect other people to answer texts or calls at all times of the day or night. [Thumbs down]
  - Friends can reach you even when you want time alone. [Thumbs down]
  - You can connect with friends who have the same interests. [Thumbs up]
  
2. **Read** each statement (**Slide 18**) and ask students whether each of the following examples feel good or bad, and why.
  - A friend shares a funny video. [Good]
  - Someone asks you to share a private or inappropriate photo. [Bad]
  - Someone answers your text right away and makes you feel like they listened to you. [Good]
  - Someone you don't know that well messages you and asks for private information, like your address. [Bad] [Note: You can mention that this request might cause a red flag feeling and that they might want to talk to a trusted adult about it.]
  - Someone likes your post. [Good]
  
3. **Read** the Alan and George situation on **Slide 19**, then walk students through the steps of the Feelings & Options thinking routine:
 

**Identify (Slide 20):** Who are the people involved in the situation? What problem or challenge are they facing?

  - People involved: Alan and George are the main characters in this situation. They're friends from school and they usually text each other when they get home.
  - Problem: George might be worried because he's in a challenging situation with Alan. Alan is pushing George to watch anime, even though George isn't really into anime.

**Feel (Slide 21):** What do you think each person in the dilemma is feeling? Why might the situation be hard or challenging for each of them?



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- How do you think George is feeling?
  - George feels like he has less in common with Alan lately.
  - George doesn't know a lot about anime and doesn't know what to say to Alan.
  - George might feel like anime is all Alan wants to talk about.
- How do you think Alan is feeling?
  - Alan might feel upset that George doesn't want to talk about anime.

**Imagine (Slide 22):** Imagine some options for handling the situation. Come up with as many ideas as possible. There's no one right answer! Possible answers include:

- George could text Alan back and explain that he doesn't like to watch anime, so hopefully they can find something else to text about.
- George could text Alan about something else that he knows they both enjoy.

Then choose: Which option might lead to the most positive outcome, where both George and Alan feel good or taken care of?

**Say (Slide 23):** *Let's think more about the idea you chose for handling the situation. What could the people involved say?*

- George could say/type: "I'm really glad you like anime so much, but I don't like watching it. Maybe we can find a show that we both like to watch and text about that."
- George could say/type: "I feel like you only want to talk about anime. What else have you been watching or doing lately?"

4. **Read** the Anthony and Demi situation on **Slide 24**, then go through the steps of the Feelings & Options thinking routine with the class.

**Identify (Slide 25):** Who are the people involved in the situation? What problem or challenge are they facing?

- People involved: Anthony and Demi are two friends. They usually talk to each other through texts. Anthony and Demi had an argument because Demi wasn't responding to Anthony's texts.
- Problem: Demi is feeling overwhelmed by how often Anthony is texting her.



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**Feel (Slide 26):** What do you think Demi and Anthony are feeling? Why might the situation be hard or challenging for each of them?

- How do you think Demi is feeling?
  - Demi is feeling overwhelmed by how often Anthony is texting her.
  - Demi does not want to be on the phone all the time.
- How do you think Anthony is feeling?
  - Anthony is upset because Demi isn't answering his texts.

**Imagine (Slide 27):** Imagine options for how the situation could be handled. Come up with as many ideas as possible: There's no one right answer! Possible answers include:

- Demi could ask Anthony to be more patient if she doesn't answer a text right away.
- Demi could tell Anthony that she doesn't like to be on her phone all the time, so she might not see a text right away.

**Say (Slide 28):** *We're going to talk about a few things Demi could say to Anthony. Which one do you think would make them both feel good? (Slide 29)*

- "I don't know how other people put up with the number of messages you send!"
- "I've been feeling overwhelmed by all the texting lately. I want you to know that when I don't answer, it's not because I'm ignoring you. I just don't like being on my phone all the time."
- "Why have you been texting so much? You're so annoying."
- "It's been hard to keep up with all the texts lately, so can we just not text each other anymore?"

5. Once you complete the group evaluation, have students do one of the following extension activities.

- Perform a dance or song that's a tribute to healthy friendships. Students can have the option to use a video app to record and share their dance or song.
- Create a form with three questions from the lessons for the class to discuss.
- Create a video for a movie trailer highlighting the key concepts in the lesson.



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6. While students are working on the extension activity, you can conduct an individual review of the content with each student.

Meet with each student one on one and ask them how they would keep a friendship healthy. They can use an example or personal story about their own healthy or unhealthy relationships to help explain how they would do this.

After all students have had a chance to speak to the teacher one on one, write down any relationship qualities that they highlight to share with the class anonymously. Sharing responses with the class will help validate and affirm students' knowledge of the lesson content and be a chance for more review.

If the students identify any healthy relationship qualities highlighted in the lesson, the lesson has been a success. If they don't, you can keep reinforcing these lessons throughout the year. Another option is to notify the student's family and share a link to the family resources.

7. Send home the [Family Activity](#), [Family Tips](#), and [Family Engagement Resources](#).



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