The Problem

No two people communicate in the same way and all of us struggle to be understood. As adults we develop our own unique ways of using words, gestures, and body language. This unit will investigate concepts in basic communication, intimacy, love, commitment, and passion in a relationship. It is important to understand what factors build strong relationships. We will also look at our sexual selves and when our sexual identity begins to form. How our caregivers treat us helps determine what behaviors are appropriate for our gender. Social constructs play an important role in how we express our sexuality. This unit encourages building acceptance for others who may have different ideas about lifestyle and commitment.

Know the Terms:

1. **Accountability**: Accepting responsibility for personal decisions, behaviors, and actions.
2. **Cohabitation**: Living together without marriage or without being married.
3. **Common-Law Marriage**: Cohabitation lasting a designated period of time that is legally binding in some states; requirements for a common-law marriage to be validly contracted differs from state to state.
4. **Family of Origin**: The family you were born into; the family that you were raised in, or grew up in, including parents and siblings.
5. **Intimacy**: The feeling of being in a close personal association and belonging together; a close affective connection with another; a bond that is formed through knowledge and experience of the other.
6. **Monogamy**: Greek word meaning "one marriage"; sexual involvement with only one partner.
7. **Open Relationship**: Interpersonal relationship in which the parties want to be together but agree to a non-monogamous relationship.
8. **Self-Disclosure**: Sharing feelings or personal information with others.
9. **Self-Nurturance**: Responsible self-care and self-support; fulfillment of one’s needs; appreciation of self-worth and self-respect.
10. **Domestic Partnership**: A legal or interpersonal relationship between two people who live together and share a common domestic life. Neither joins in marriage or a civil union.
11. **Civil Union**: Also referred to as a "domestic partnership", it is a legally recognized form of partnership similar to marriage.
12. **Transgender**: A general term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviors and groups involving tendencies to vary from culturally conventional gender roles.

Gender and Building Healthy Relationships: Basic Training

1. **Communicating: Keys to Good Relationships**:
   - **Effectively Communicating**: how you feel is a critical aspect in establishing relationships and enhancing, or interfering, with the developing relationship.
     - When it comes to communication, indeed there is "Venus and Mars" (gender related differences) [Click here to review some of these fundamental differences.]
   - **Self-Esteem and Self-Acceptance**:
     - Your self-concept is like a mental mirror that reflects how you view your physical features, emotional states, talents, likes and dislikes, values, and roles.
     - How you feel about yourself or evaluate yourself constitutes your self-esteem.
     - Self-perceptions influence communication choices.
   - **Learning Appropriate Self-Disclosure**:
     - Self-disclosure is sharing personal information about you.
     - Self-disclosure is not storytelling or sharing secrets; it is revealing how you are reacting to the present situation and giving any information about the past that is relevant to the other person's understanding of your current reactions.
     - Do the following to overcome the fear of self-disclosure:
- Get to know yourself.
- Become more accepting of yourself.
- Be willing to discuss your sexual history.
- Choose a safe context for self-disclosure.

**Becoming a Better Listener:**
- Listening is a vital part of interpersonal communication.
- To improve listening skills:
  - Focus on the speaker
  - Avoid interruptions
  - Demonstrate understanding of what you hear
  - Avoid challenging
  - Avoid generalities and get to know your speaker
  - Be specific in what you need

**Using Nonverbal Communication:**
- Nonverbal communication can include all unwritten and unspoken messages, both intentional and unintentional.
- Nonverbal communication can include the following:
  - Touch
  - Gestures
  - Interpersonal space
  - Facial expressions
  - Body language
  - Tone of voice

2. **Characterizing and Forming Intimate Relationships:**
   - Intimate relationships can be defined in terms of four characteristics:
     - Behavioral interdependence refers to mutual impact that people have on each other as their lives and daily activities intertwine.
     - Intimate relationships fulfill our needs for intimacy, social integration, nurturance, assistance, and affirmation.
     - Emotional attachment means strong bonds of love and intimacy.
     - Emotional availability is the ability to give to and receive from others emotionally without fear of being hurt or rejected.
   - In the early years of life, families provide the most significant relationships; gradually our circle enlarges to include friends, coworkers, acquaintances, and eventually significant others.

**Being Self-Nurturing**
- Two concepts are especially important to any good relationship:
  - Accountability means that both partners see themselves as responsible for their own decisions, choices, and actions; they do not hold the other person responsible for positive or negative experiences.
  - Self-nurturance means developing individual potential through a balanced and realistic appreciation of self-worth and ability.

**Families: The Ties That Bind**
- A family is a recognizable group of people with roles, tasks, boundaries, and personalities whose central focus is to protect, care for, love, and socialize one another.
- Because the family is a dynamic institution that changes as society changes, the definition of family also changes.
- Our family of origin includes the people present in our household during our first years of our life where we learn about feelings, problem solving, love, intimacy, and gender roles.

**Establishing Friendships**
- Friendships are relationships between two or more people that involve mutual respect, trust, support, and intimacy that may or may not include sexual intimacy.
- Basically, you like people who like you.

**Relationships and Lifestyles**
- Most committed partners fit into one of four categories: married heterosexual couples, cohabitating heterosexual couples, lesbian couples, and gay male couples.
Love relationships involve fascination, exclusiveness, sexual desire, giving, and being a champion or advocate.

3. **What We Call “Love”:**
   - Love is usually characterized in one of two ways:
     - Companionate love is a trusted and secure connection, similar to what we may feel for family members or close friends.
     - Passionate love is a state of arousal filled with the ecstasy of being loved and the potential agony of being rejected.
   - Defining Love:
     - This is difficult to define because it can mean different things to different people.
     - It can be a collection of behaviors, thoughts, and emotions that are associated with a psychological attraction toward other individuals.
   - Theories of Love
     - Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love isolates three components of love:
       - Intimacy is the emotional component that involves feelings of closeness.
       - Passion is the motivational component that reflects romantic, sexual attraction.
       - Commitment is the cognitive component that includes the decisions you make about being in love and the degree of commitment to your partner.
     - Anthropologist Helen Fisher suggests that there is a pattern of falling in love. (see website attached)
       - Imprinting: our genetics as well as past experiences trigger romantic reactions
       - Attraction: when neurochemicals produce euphoria and elation
       - Attachment: endorphins cause lovers to feel peaceful, secure, and calm
       - Oxytocin (production of the cuddle chemical): is released, eliciting feelings of satisfaction and attachment.
   - Picking Partners
     - For both men and women, choosing a relationship partner is influenced by
       - Proximity-being in the same place at the same time.
       - Similarities in attitudes, values, intellect, interests, education, and socioeconomic status.
       - Physical attraction.

4. **Committed Relationships:**
   - *Commitment* in a relationship means that one intends to act over time in a way that perpetuates the well-being of the other person, oneself, and the relationship.
   - *Marriage:*
     - Within the US, marriage refers to the act of entering into a legal agreement. This can include sharing or property, finances and family raising responsibilities.
     - Most Americans believe in a monogamous environment.
     - In the past, about 90 percent of Americans marry at least once during their lifetime.
     - For many Americans the pattern is one of serial monogamy, which means a person has a monogamous sexual relationship with one person before moving on to the same type of relationship with another person.
     - An open relationship involves agreement between partners that there will be sexual relationships outside the relationship.
   - *Cohabitation:*
     - Cohabitation is defined as two unmarried people with an intimate connection who live in the same household.
     - Cohabitation or common-law marriage is lasting 7 years. Some states recognize this in legal matters with regard to real estate and financial obligations.
     - Can lack of social validation, health insurance benefits and tax deductions.
     - Two persons not legally committed but sharing expenses.
   - *Gay and Lesbian Relationships:*
     - Lesbians and gays have the same desire for intimacy as heterosexuals.
     - Challenges to gay and lesbian couples include discrimination and dealing with social, legal, and religious doctrines.

5. **Living the Single Life:**
   - Increasing numbers of adults of all ages are electing to marry later or to remain single altogether.
   - Many singles live rich, rewarding lives and maintain a large network of friends and family.

6. **Dealing with Couples Concerns:**
   - Healthy relationships depend on respect, communication, and mutual fondness.
   - Jealousy doesn't fit well into Relationships
     - It can be described as an aversive reaction evoked by a real or imagined relationship involving one's partner and a third person.
• Indicates underlying problems, such as insecurity or possessiveness that may prove to be a significant barrier to a healthy intimate relationship.
• Causes of jealousy typically include the following:
  ▪ Previous relationship results and experience.
  ▪ Overdependence on the partner.
  ▪ Threat because of low self-esteem.
  ▪ High value on sexual exclusivity.
  ▪ Fear of losing control

  o Gender Roles in Modern Society
  ▪ Our modern society has very few gender-specific roles.
  ▪ Rather than taking on traditional female and male roles, many couples find it makes more sense to divide tasks based on schedules, everyday conveniences, and personal preference.

  o Power Sharing versus Power Struggles:
  ▪ Power is defined as the ability to make and implement decisions.
  ▪ Powerful people are those who know what they want and have the ability to attain it.

  o Developing our Expectations:
  ▪ Expectations are an expansion of our hopes, values, beliefs and dreams for the future.
  ▪ Well communicated expectations can help a relationship thrive.

7. Deciding on Children:
  o Children change relationships. Important “couple” time together is affected.
  ▪ Resources of time, money and energy are split many ways and couple attention may flounder.
  o Our fast paced lifestyles are affecting the way children are raised.
  o Important tools to use, regardless of the family structure are consistency, communication, affection, and mutual respect.

8. When Relationships Fail:
  o Breakdowns or changes in communication.
  o Changes in the value of time with one or both individuals. This can be a hidden problem for concern.
  o Why Relationships End
  ▪ Reasons relationships may falter
    ▪ Illness
    ▪ financial concerns
    ▪ career problems.
    ▪ infidelity
    ▪ trust
    ▪ differing expectations
    ▪ communication collapses
    ▪ Changes or differences in sexual needs
  o Coping with Failed Relationships
  ▪ Tips for coping with a failed relationship:
    ▪ “Rebound” Don't rush into a new relationship prior to grieving for your loss.
    ▪ Acknowledge the importance of your feelings and understand the loss associated with this failed relationship.
    ▪ Get involved in activities. Find healthful ways to express yourself, rather than turning them inward. Workout, take a walk or talk with friends.
    ▪ Have an outlet. Reconnect with old and new friends.

9. Understanding Sexual Health:
  o Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation:
  ▪ Through a complex interaction between genetics, social factors and physiological factors sexual identity can be recognized.
  ▪ Femininity or masculinity is traditionally reinforced by the parents and/or society.
  ▪ Children have the language and insight to correctly identify their gender by 18 months.
  ▪ Biological sex, gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation all blend together to form sexual identity.
  ▪ Transgendered or transexualism are words that apply to someone who doesn’t fit within society’s standards of how a woman or a man is supposed to look, to act or to feel.
    ▪ Transgender is a title that has only been around for a few decades but has happened throughout history.
    ▪ Transgender does not rely on medical procedures. Some opt for medical procedures to align their gender identity but many do not alter their bodies. They can be considered transgendered in either case.
    ▪ The person may or may not feel “trapped” in the wrong body.
Transgender is an umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth.

Gender identity refers to a person's internal sense of being male, female, or something else; gender expression refers to the way a person communicates gender identity to others through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, voice, or body characteristics.

“Trans” is sometimes shorthand for “transgender.”

While transgender is generally a good term to use, not everyone whose appearance or behavior is gender-nonconforming will identify as a transgender person.

The ways that transgender people are talked about in popular culture, academia, and science are constantly changing, particularly as individuals’ awareness, knowledge, and openness about transgender people and their experiences grow.

- Transgenderism has always occurred but as a title has only recently been coined in the last 20 years.
- Transgender does not rely on medical procedures. Some opt for medical procedures to align their gender identity but many do not alter their bodies. They can be considered transgendered in either case.
- The person may or may not feel “trapped” in the wrong body.

Sexual Orientation:

- A person's enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectionate attraction to other persons.

Classifications of orientation can be classified as:

  - Heterosexuality refers to the attraction of the opposite gender
  - Homosexuality refers to an attraction of the same gender
  - Bisexuality refers to the attraction of either gender

Sexual prejudice refers to negative attitudes, emotions and hostility towards a specified social grouping.

Gender Identity Issues:

- Sexual identity and sexual behavior are closely related to sexual orientation, but they are distinguished, with identity referring to an individual's conception of themselves, behavior referring to actual sexual acts performed by the individual, and orientation referring to “fantasies, attachments and longings.”
- Transvestism is the act of dressing in the opposite gender clothes.

Human Sexual Response Pattern:

- Sexual expression that can include celibacy, kissing and erotic touching, manual stimulation, oral-genital stimulation, vaginal and anal intercourse.
- First stage, excitement/arousal phase: Stimulates vasocongestion which increases blood flow to the genitals. Can be known as a “sex flush.”
- Plateau phase: Responses intensify. The heart rate, blood pressure, respiration rate and muscle tension all increase. Female’s nipples and male’s penis become erect. The penis secretes pre-ejaculatory fluid. Sensory impulses in both sexes reinforce the sexual sensations. This stimulation to the senses leads to the next phase.
- Orgasmic Phase: Peak muscle tension is reached throughout the genital regions. For males this involuntary response (which can voluntarily be controlled) result in the vas deferens and urethra to contract. At this time the prostate and seminal vesicles release secretions. For females, an orgasm is characterized by a rhythmic contraction of the pelvic muscles and vaginal walls.
- Resolution Phase: The body goes back to the pre-arousal state. The heart rate, blood pressure and respiration rate lower and muscles begin to relax. In males, erections subside and may not return for minutes or hours. Women, on the other hand, have the capacity to reach multiple orgasms in sequence.

Sexually Transmitted Infections and Disease:

- Sexually Transmitted Infection:
  - Infection or invasion of body tissue by a microorganism (bacteria, virus, protozoa) that can be passed from one person to another during intimate bodily contact.
  - Infection has the potential to cause disease or illness, but the infected individual is asymptomatic (not experiencing symptoms) and may not feel sick.
  - Someone with an STI can unknowingly pass on an infection as they are often unaware they are carrying an infection and may not take the proper precautions toward protecting their partner.
Sexually Transmitted Disease:

- Disease (damage) resulting from a Sexually Transmitted Infection (above).
- An infection with symptoms

Common Sexually Transmitted Infections and Diseases (click on title below to read)

- Bacterial Vaginosis (BV)
- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhea
- Genital Herpes
- HIV/AIDS & STDs
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)
- Syphilis
- Trichomoniasis
- Viral Hepatitis

When Relationships Become Abusive:

- Relationship abuse is a pattern of destructive and/or coercive behaviors used to maintain power and control over another individual.
- Abusive in a relationship is not limited to physical attacks by the person who claims to love or care about you.
  - Abuse can be emotional, financial, sexual or physical and can include threats, isolation, and intimidation.
  - Abuse tends to escalate over time.
  - When someone uses abuse and violence against a partner, it is always part of a larger pattern to try and control her/him.

Types of Abuse include:

- Verbal Abuse: Any verbal attempt to lower partner's self worth
- Destruction of Personal Property: Any attempt to destroy or alter a personal belongings
- Intimidation: Any attempt to use looks, actions, tones, or expressions to scare your partner
- Restriction of Freedom: Any attempt to limit partner's free will
- Abuse of Authority: Any attempt to use authority to control partner
- Sexual Abuse: Any unwanted sexual advance to partner
- Physical Abuse: Any attempt to cause bodily harm to your partner
- Emotional Abuse: Any attempt to manipulate partner's thoughts or feelings

For Additional Information on Types of Abuse click here for the Center for Relationship Abuse Awareness.

Talk’n Stats:

- Per capita, marriage is declining.
  - In the year 2000 there were 2.32 million new marriages in a population of 281 million persons.
  - In 2010, there were 2.1 million new marriages, despite a growing population of 309 million persons.
- Divorce rates in America:
  - The divorce rate for first marriage is 41%.
  - The divorce rate for second marriage is 60%.
  - The divorce rate for third marriage is 73%.
- 40 million Americans use online dating services;
  - The online dating industry generates $1.8 billion per year and the matchmaker/dating coach business generates $260 million per year in the United States.
- Speed-Dating, invented by a rabbi from Los Angeles in 1999, is based on a Jewish tradition of chaperoned gatherings of young Jewish singles.
- Nearly 40% of men do not feel confident meeting a woman for the first time.
- 44% percent of the adult American population is single.
- The ratio of single men to single women in America is 86 to 100.
- The state of Idaho has the lowest ratio of single people in the U.S. at 40%, the highest being Washington D.C. at 70%.
• 51% of the single people surveyed said that flattery is the best way to attract someone.
• The average amount of time to make a first impression on a man is 15 minutes.
• The average amount of time to make a first impression on a woman is 1 hour.
• The number one relationship argument is money.

Know Your Numbers:

For Healthy Relationships to exist (personal and professional), the fundamental aspects of Caring and Respect must be present. Consider the following questions while reflecting on your relationships:

1. Awareness:
   o What do you know about your partner, friends, classmates or coworkers?

2. Listening:
   o What is your Posture?
   o Where are your, Eyes, Ears, Focus or Interest, during Conversations?

3. Giving:
   o Do you offer Non-Monetary Donations to your Relationship?
     ▪ Things other than money such as time, pride, emotions, etc.

4. Communication Style:
   o How do you communicate?
     ▪ Do You Talk With a Person? To a Person? At a Person?
     ▪ Does your Communication Style lean towards Correction vs. Criticism?
     ▪ Do you often/seldom say "Please" or "Thank You"?
     ▪ What does your Non-Verbal Body Language say during Conversations?

5. Accountability:
   o Are you Dependable? Responsible? Accountable to your partner, friends, classmates, or coworkers?

6. Personal Pride:
   o Does personal or professional Pride interfere in your relationship(s)?
   o The "i" in Pride is surrounded by:
     ▪ Personnel, Resources, Dedication and Effort!

Thoughts for Living:

Healthy relationships can be one of the best support systems in your life. Good relationships improve all aspects of your life, including the health of your body, mind, and emotions. However, if a relationship struggles, it can also be a tremendous drain. Relationships are an investment. The more you invest, the more you can get back. Consider the following tips to help keep a healthy relationship strong, or repair trust and love in a faltering relationship.

Intimate relationships possess characteristics that are unique to each couple, and partners come together for many different reasons. However, there are certain elements that are common in all healthy relationships. Consider the following from Helpguide.org:

• Staying involved with each other:
  o Some relationships get stuck in peaceful coexistence, but without truly relating to each other and working together.
  o While it may seem stable on the surface, lack of involvement and communication increases distance.
  o When you need to talk about something important, the connection and understanding may no longer be there.

• Getting through conflict:
  o Some couples talk things out quietly, while others may raise their voices and passionately disagree.
  o The key in a strong relationship, though, is not to be fearful of conflict.
  o You need to be safe to express things that bother you without fear of retaliation, and be able to resolve conflict without humiliation, degradation or insisting on being right.

• Keeping outside relationships and interests alive:
  o No one person can meet all of our needs, and expecting too much from someone can put a lot of unhealthy pressure on a relationship.
  o Having friends and outside interests not only strengthens your social network, but brings new insights and stimulation to the relationship, too.

• Communicating:
  o Honest, direct communication is a key part of any relationship. When both people feel comfortable expressing their needs, fears and desires, trust and bonds are strengthened.
  o Critical to communication are nonverbal cues—body language like eye contact, leaning forward or away, or touching someone’s arm.