



HEALTHY CHOICES, HOPEFUL FUTURES

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO AWARE

ZILLAH MIDDLE SCHOOL
7th Grade

INTRODUCTION

Parents, Grandparents, and Caregivers,

Thank you for allowing us to educate your teenager about healthy relationships, safe boundaries, and sexual risk avoidance.

We're thrilled to have the opportunity to educate, equip, and encourage your child to think and plan for a healthy future. We look around today and see that our youth are suffering not just from the physical consequences of risky sexual behaviors (although those are very real), but also from the emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual and financial results of these decisions. Teens need strategies to plan for their future while being aware of cultural influences that model little commitment and unhealthy relationships.

Through the AWARE program, using Relationship Smarts curriculum, we aim to empower your child with the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy choices for a hopeful future. At the same time, we know that your involvement is key to their success.

If you wish to continue the conversation at home, we made this guide as an overview of what your child is learning. They will have prompts they will come to you with after each presentation. We hope these will spark further communication with your child because your role is crucial!

Sincerely,

Connie Peacock
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Day 1

Analyzing Influences

Students are taught how children can be impacted during their first three years of life as well as in utero. They learn how children can be harmed by abuse that occurs in families. Students are given a quiz to analyze their family patterns in regard to: Communication, Conflict, Togetherness, Discipline, Responsibilities, Trust/honesty, Appreciation, Stress, Commitment, Affection, and Nurture. They are encouraged to decide what patterns to keep and change.

The line of respect is discussed in relationships, and three questions to ask themselves whether a relationship is healthy or not. Students do an exercise where they experience what peer pressure feels like, by having the students “move if...” a certain activity pertains to them. Then the students discuss why they may or may not succumb to it.

DISCUSSION:

- Ask if your youth is experiencing any pressures to do certain behaviors they know are wrong.
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Day 2

Healthy Relationships

Students discuss what character is and how that can affect choices and relationships. We do an activity where a student chooses a bead with their eyes closed. Green beads symbolize healthy relationships and red beads symbolize unhealthy relationships. There are more red beads than green beads. We talk about how to increase the likelihood of choosing a healthy one (green bead). Students brainstorm healthy characteristics in relationships. They are given a list of questions to think about their friendships.

Then students are walked through situations where they might be pressured to do inappropriate things, and we talk about the different options they have, and which ones would be best. Then students are given a situation and they must think through their options and decide the best one.

DISCUSSION:

- Ask the youth what characteristics they would expect to see in a healthy relationship.
 - Share what characteristics you feel are most important.
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Day 3

Communication

Students are taught that there are bad ways to complain and good ways to bring up issues. They are taught the WWA method:

W: WHAT HAPPENED? Focus on the specific behavior that bothers you.

W: WHERE OR WHEN? Focus on last time it happened. Avoid “you always...;you never....”

A: Explain how it AFFECTED you, made you feel, or why it bugs, upsets you, or makes you mad.

Students observe and then practice the speaker-listener technique with a partner:

Speaker:

Speak for yourself, no mind reading

Don't go on and on

Pause, let the listener paraphrase

Listener:

Don't interrupt or disagree

Seek to understand

Paraphrase what you hear

DISCUSSION:

- Ask your youth to practice the Speaker/Listener Technique with you.
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Day 4

Decision Making

Students watch a video, *Anger and Stress*, and discuss how stress impacts our brain's ability to make good choices. We explain how time outs lead to healthier decisions, how to do it the best way, and what to think about while you're in a time out. We talk about 4 danger signs that can happen in communication: Put-Down/Invalidation, Escalation, Negative Interpretations, Avoidance/Withdrawal. Students do an activity where we talk about positive and negative situations where these signs could be present.

We also talk about how hidden issues can cause us to explode if we haven't dealt with those problems. Students are advised to take a time out and to think about it, using the Speaker/Listener technique to further talk out the problem. We talk about a problem-solving method they can use once they've processed through the emotions. Students are encouraged to write a note of appreciation to someone they might take for granted. Lastly, students are quizzed on what different methods they can use to solve communication problems.

DISCUSSION:

- Ask your youth to explain the 4 danger signs, and to identify which one/ones they may need help with not falling into.
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Day 5

Prevention

Students learn about different types of contraception, and how abstinence is the only 100% effective way to protect their whole health. Students learn what sexually transmitted diseases are, and how they can spread. They are given information about the most common STDs. Students watch a video (*Who Do You Know?*) about a youth who is worried he might have gotten HIV from an old girlfriend, and then discovers that his best friend does have HIV. He is encouraged by his friend to get tested. The emphasis is that they can't assume who would or wouldn't have an STD just by looking at them.

Students are told a story about a fictional couple and how their relationship progresses physically. Information is shared about the emotional risks teens might experience when they become sexually active too soon. The other types of intimacy (verbal, social, emotional, spiritual, and commitment) are encouraged as a focus instead of physical intimacy. Refusal skills are given to the students to practice.

DISCUSSION:

- **Ask your teen what surprised them most about the lesson.**
 - **Have them practice their refusal skills with you.**
-

Day 6

Violence Prevention

Students learn what red flags they should be looking for to identify abusive relationships. They watch the video *Sunshine – Don't Confuse Love and Abuse* and are asked to spot the warning signs they see illustrated in the video.

The levels of relational intimacy are discussed, and students are encouraged not to share information that is too intimate on the internet. Students are shown the videos *Accidental Bully*, and *Cyber Life* and we discuss the pitfalls of oversharing information. The risks of sexting and cyberbullying are discussed.

Students learn how pornography can impact relationships, and lead to conditioning them to associate arousal with an image. They watch a clip from the sitcom *The Office* where Jim teaches Dwight to associate the sound of his computer with a mint. Students are given information about the effects of porn.

DISCUSSION:

- Ask your youth what some of the warning signs are in abusive relationships.
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Day 7

Dimensions of Health

Students are taught that there are 4 dimensions of health: physical, mental, emotional, and social. The physical brain development is discussed and how the delay in formation of their prefrontal cortex affects them. Regarding social health, we focus on the ability to have self-regulation and impulse control in order to achieve goals. An object lesson is used with a broom where the student tries to balance the broom only looking at the handle, and then attempting to balance it by looking up at the end illustrating that you need to be able to look ahead to keep things balanced. Emotional health is discussed along with a train car activity showing how if we let our emotions lead our behavior, we can end up in a “train wreck” with negative behaviors following.

We end by talking about life goals, and explaining a study called the Success Sequence which showed that if millennials graduated high school, got a full-time job and/or some technical or college training, and waited to be married before having children they were more likely to be in the middle to high tax income bracket.

DISCUSSION

- Ask you youth what their goals are for the future, both their “up close” (short term) and “far away” (long term) goals.
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HEALTHY CHOICES, HOPEFUL FUTURES

The conversation doesn't stop here! You are the person that inspires your child to make healthy choices, and you play a crucial role in their future.

Nearly 9 in 10 (87%) of young people say it would be much easier for them to delay sexual activity if they have open, honest conversations about this topic with their parents. Statistically, parents have more influence on teens' sexual choices than peers, media, or teachers.

Be encouraged! You are making a difference!

www.AwareOptions.org