



HEALTHY CHOICES, HOPEFUL FUTURES

# A PARENT'S GUIDE TO AWARE

ZILLAH MIDDLE SCHOOL  
8<sup>th</sup> 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,

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# Day 1

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## ***Analyzing Influences***

Students break into groups to discuss how media has changed their lives for the better or worse. Statistics are shared about how too much time online can affect them. Then, students talk about how it has changed relational communication. A video, *Facetime*, is shown to illustrate how texting is not the ideal form of communication.

Students spend time rating their values/maturity in 10 categories:

1. Self focused vs. others focused
2. Healthy choices only when being watched vs. when no one is watching
3. Insecure and goes with crowd vs. independent and resists pressure
4. Focuses on immediate pleasure vs. able to put off pleasure
5. Sees gender roles stereotyped vs. sees interplay of strengths and weaknesses in genders
6. Confuses love with physical attraction vs. sees love as more than physical attraction
7. Believes value is in being with certain people vs. works on own identity
8. Self-centered vs. caring, kind, giving
9. Expresses emotions explosively vs. expresses emotions assertively
10. Can't admit when wrong vs. can admit when they've made a mistake

## **DISCUSSION:**

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- Ask what area of maturity your youth thinks they most need to grow in, and the area where they feel they are the most mature.
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# Day 2

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## *Healthy Relationships*

As an object lesson, 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 brainstorm ways relationships start, develop and mature and we place those ideas into a relationship pyramid, showing that healthy relationships take time to develop and have very strong foundations.

They are encouraged to take relationships slow and focus on the other elements of intimacy: verbal, emotional, social, spiritual and commitment.

Consent is explained, and we watch a video (*Tea and Consent*) that illustrates the common sense of the issue.

### **DISCUSSION:**

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- 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

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## ***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:**

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

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## ***Decision Making***

The brain chemistry of attraction is explained, and the neurohormones involved (with focus on NEA, norepinephrine, dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin). We do an object lesson where glitter represents these hormones and how it clouds our vision, emphasizing that it takes 3-6-9 months for these hormones to settle so we can see the other person in the relationship more clearly. The video, *The Science of Love*, is shown and discussed. We identify risks they may be taking if they progress too quickly in a relationship.

Students learn a high risk vs. low-risk decision model to use in relationships. We also focus on some of the emotional risks of sex too soon.

We end with a game where students must decide the best order for life choices that sets them up for success. Then they must decide where sex (and subsequently children) best fit into their life choices.

### **DISCUSSION:**

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- Ask your youth to explain some of the risks they may be taking if they slide into a relationship too quickly.
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# Day 5

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## *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 they progress physically in their relationship. Afterward the students are given an opportunity to decide where they are going to draw the line in physical intimacy in relationships. The benefits of marriage are discussed as the safest place for sexual activity.

### **DISCUSSION:**

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- **Ask your teen what surprised them most about the lesson.**
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# Day 6

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## ***Violence Prevention***

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. We watch a video, *What Comes Next* that shows a girl pressuring a guy to sext, then the video pans out showing there are two female observers laughing out of the way of the camera. We discuss lines that could've been said to counter the pressure to sext. We talk about consequences to sexting.

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. Students watch a video, *The Science of Porn*, and discuss how it affects the brain.

### **DISCUSSION:**

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

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## *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**

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- 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](http://www.AwareOptions.org)