

Introduction

- This curriculum is designed to educate students on the brain, psychology, and how to manage relationships in healthy ways.

Students will gain the following knowledge:

- Functions of the brain
- Anatomy and functions of the limbic system
- Malfunctions of the brain (in regards to psychology)

Objectives

As a result of this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify healthy relationships
- Identify positive mental health vs negative mental health
- Learn tips for managing personal relationships

Materials

- Zoom

Activities/ Discussion Points

1. **Allow students to enter the Zoom room- give extra time to ensure everyone is logged in and internet connection is stable.**

2. **Warm-up:** Ask students what they currently know about the brain, psychology and mental health. Record answers on chalkboard/whiteboard. Discuss their answers. Use this information to stress areas of focus for lesson.

3. **Teach:** Adolescent development. **How does the brain function/send messages?** Neurotransmitters. "There is a burst of overproduction of neuronal connections as brain cells link with other brain cells. That overproduction is followed by a pruning of connections that go unused."

What is the limbic system? A critical set of structures in the brain that deal with emotions and memory.

4. **Teach:** Last lesson was a discussion on conflict resolution. Review this with the students.

- Remind students that conflict in life is normal but its important how we respond to these moments
- What are examples of positive conflict resolution skills?
- Where can students seek help if a situation becomes too difficult to manage alone?

5. **Discuss:** What does a healthy relationship look like to the students? Encourage students to discuss all types of relationships: friendships, familial, dating etc. Remind students

6. **Activity:** (Optional) Ask students to share examples of healthy relationships.

- What does this mean to them?

- Do they find the majority of their personal relationships enjoyable, stressful or both?
- If at all, what do they find to be the most difficult part of relationships?

7. **Discuss: What is stress?** Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is your body's reaction to a challenge or demand.

- **NOT ALL STRESS IS BAD STRESS.** There are plenty of instances where stress can be positive. **Can you give any examples?** *Example:* Like feeling nervous before an exam. However, if it escalates, it can become negative and cause anxiety.

8. **Discuss: What is anxiety?**

- Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. **If a relationship causes you persistent, ongoing anxiety, is it healthy?**

9. **Discuss:** Positive Mental Health

- High Self Esteem
- Confidence
- “Staying true to self”
- Positive Engagement with others
- Saying “No” appropriately
- Calm, clear expressions of emotions

10. **Discuss:** Negative Mental Health

- Comparison
- “Bottling”
- Over-thinking
- Low Self-Esteem
- Negativity and anger towards self and others
- Abnormal Withdrawal
- Depression
- Thoughts of Self-Harm or Suicide

11. **Discuss:** As a group, discuss healthy ways to cope with stress and anxiety in regards to relationships.

- Think positive.
 - o For example: Conflicts can arise with your parents. But try understanding that your parents, are regular people, just older and trying their best. This is the same for you. Parents can make mistakes too. Give them benefit of the doubt and think positively. This is a key thought process in healthy relationships. Understanding

that everyone has imperfections, and those don't necessarily define their entire character.

- Enjoyable social interactions.
 - o Try not to isolate yourself! Get involved and create healthy relationships for yourself. Everyone has different interests. Try connecting to people with similar tastes.
 - o Studies after studies have found that friendships are an important component of life. They provide a sense of belonging/ value, aid with increasing positive outlooks on life and self and can even lower the risk of developing anxiety or depression.
- Set boundaries.
 - o Do you have that one cousin that is always negative? Set a boundary and do not engage. You are not required to interact with negativity, family or not.
- Don't feel obligated to immediately talk about things that make you uncomfortable.
 - o Take some time to think about why you're uncomfortable. Some conversations are uncomfortable but necessary. Some conversations are uncomfortable and not necessary however. Be honest with yourself about which one you're experiencing.
Can you guys think of some conversations that are uncomfortable but necessary?
 - o If your aunt wants to speak about your love life and you're uncomfortable or feeling embarrassed, politely change the conversation to something you're more comfortable with. Perhaps something positive in school or with your activities.
- Feeling peer pressured?
 - o Take a minute and get some space. Romantic relationships are about finding a balance between your wants and desires and your partners. However, you shouldn't feel pressured outside of your comfort zone. Especially on a regular basis. If you're ever uncomfortable, it's best to press pause for a moment rather than trying to power through and ignore your feelings. Slow down and speak up!

12. **Wrap-up:** Questions to check for understanding:

- What is the function of the brain?
- How are messages in the brain sent?
- What is an important system that controls emotions?
- What is anxiety?
- How can you make personal relationships healthier?

This curriculum meets the National Health Education Standards as defined by the Center for Disease Control. The curriculum is adaptable to a variety of settings, including special populations, integrated teaching, and even non-traditional classrooms like after school programs and physical activity programs. HealthyExcitedYouth.org is a complementary website with further information, infographics, and interactive activities.