
LESSON B

Relationships and Marriage

FOCUS: Relationships affect marriage and marriage affects relationships.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Students will understand the aspects of a lasting relationship. Use Teacher Information and Student Handouts, "Lasting Relationships."
2. Discuss the three stages in a relationship: initiation, maintenance, and commitment or termination. Use Teacher Information and Student Handout "Three Stages of Lasting Relationships." Discuss with the students what it means to "be in a relationship" and what commitment means in a relationship.
3. Students will understand how a relationship changes during the engagement period. Use the Student Handout, "Engagement." Discuss with the students the validity of the statement, "Notice how your fiancée treats his (her) mother (father) and sisters (brothers) for that is how he (she) will treat you." Have the students examine the relationships they have now with their family and friends and boyfriend/girlfriend. Talk about how these relationships are indicative of their future marriage relationship. Ask the students, "What can you be doing now to improve your current relationships that will help you prepare for marriage?"
4. Students will examine the part that intimacy plays in a relationship. Use Student Handout, "Intimacy and the Relationship." Discuss with the students how trust or mistrust can be built in a relationship with respect to intimacy.
5. Illustrate trust. Have students pair up and blindfold one of the pair. Lead the blindfolded person through an obstacle course or down a set of stairs. Compare experience. What did the person do that helped the blindfolded person gain or lose trust?

See p.3 of Student Handout, "Intimacy and the Relationship."

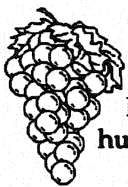
Lasting Relationships

A lasting relationship involves an investment of the self in the other person—and that person's investment of self in you. It requires constant work, nurturing and care, and the ability to give and take in the relationship. When we marry we bring our own set of absolutes to the relationship. If we allow these absolutes to be frozen in place and refuse to look at the other's point of view or their "very different" way to doing things, we can experience frustration.

Identify some of your own absolutes (statements that use never and always that we hang on to) by completing the open-ended sentences below.

1. When I get married and invest in another person, I will always _____
2. When I get married and invest in another person, I will never _____
3. When I get married, I expect _____
4. When I get married and invest in another person, my spouse will always _____
5. When I get married and invest in another person, my spouse will never _____
6. When I get married, I will be expected to _____

The "Fruit Rules"



A newly married couple were at home together. After looking in the refrigerator, the wife comes in to her husband with a shocked look on her face. "Who ate the grapes?" "I did," the husband replied. "Well, you ate them the wrong way!" she cried. "You're not supposed to pick them off randomly and leave the bunch full of holes and stems. You're supposed to pick off one small bunch at a time!" The husband replied, smiling, "I had no idea there were 'grape eating rules'".

Your family may have had ideas about eating fruit, or sandwiches, or cookies—or some other tried and true way of doing things that became traditional in your home. The person you marry will probably have a totally different way of scrambling eggs or doing laundry, for example. These are NOT right or wrong—only different!

What are some of your family's traditions that have become rules?

Lasting Relationships

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6. When I get married, I will be expected to _____

Three Stages of Lasting Relationships

First Stage: Initiation

Most lasting relationships can be understood in terms of three stages: initiation, maintenance, and commitment or termination. A couple enters *the initiation stage* once they feel mutually attracted. They test their compatibility—the ability to get along through dating. They begin to test feelings of trust, dependability, find what they have in common, share feelings and experiences—“self disclosure”. This involves risk.

It's a good time to assess your values, your personality and ability to get along with someone else, and define what you want from the relationship—someone to protect you? to grow and progress? certain other expectations? Answer the following questions for yourself and another friend.

Yourself

Your values:

What is your personality like:

What do you want in a relationship?

A Friend

Their values:

What is theirs like:

What do they want in a relationship?

Second Stage: Maintenance

As time passes, the relationship must be maintained or the couple will drift apart or break up. Maintaining the relationship requires staying connected—it takes time. During this time couples confront issues that test their values, such as finances, housing, schooling, having children, insurance, and employment.

They may also enter situations that test their role expectations, including health problems, children, financial problems, unemployment, mother staying at home or mother going to work, the division of labor. Again, this requires give-and-take—becoming couple-centered and saying “we” instead of “I.” This give-and-take, by the way, is a process. It doesn’t happen all at once.

Have students write a statement of their values about the following issues and their role expectations in the situations listed below. Include a couple of issues or situations they are concerned about that may not be listed:

ISSUES—values

Finances _____

Housing _____

Schooling for both partners _____

Having children _____

Insurance _____

Employment _____

SITUATIONS—role expectations

Health problems _____

Children _____

Financial problems _____

Unemployment _____

Mother staying at home _____

Mother going to work _____

Division of Labor _____

Third Stage: Commitment or Termination?

Commitment means that both the person and relationship are important, that both parties are willing to share lifeplans—that there is more to them as a couple than as separate individuals. Ask students these questions as they think about a future marriage partner:

1. Is there mutual understanding of each other's values, goals, and expectations from marriage?
2. Is there mutual acceptance of each other as a person with flaws and faults?
3. Does the relationship reinforce and improve your image of yourself?
4. Does it make you feel worthwhile and valuable both to yourself and the other person?
5. Does the relationship reinforce the other's self-concept?
6. Is the relationship one in which you feel natural and can be yourself? Or, do you find yourself trying to make yourself over into the kind of person you think the other wants?
7. Is the person someone you would like, admire, and enjoy, even if love was not present?
8. Is it a relationship that others recognize and approve?

Ending Relationships

Dating relationships may end before or after the commitment stage is reached. Here are some realities about ending relationships:

- The sooner an unsatisfactory relationship is ended, the less damaging it is to self-esteem.
- Some people hold on to an unworkable relationship.
- The way a person ends a relationship tells a lot about his or her maturity. People who are overly dependent may be willing to do or give anything in an attempt to maintain the relationship.

Why do some people stay in a "no growth" relationship?

Since marriage is considered a lifetime arrangement, it's difficult for us to think about or consider ending the marriage. In addition, a lot of growth can come from working things out, learning to forgive, and a willingness to learn from each other. In reality, some relationships will end. Consider why (or why not) these situations could end a relationship. Ask students to consider the following situations:

1. Premarital pregnancy
2. Involvement in financial dishonesty
3. Physical abuse
4. Emotional abuse (more difficult to measure)
5. Drugs or alcohol
6. Unfaithfulness to partner
7. Health problems

First Stage: Initiation

Your values, your personality, and ability to get along with someone else define what you want from the relationship—someone to protect you? to grow and progress? certain other expectations? Have students answer the following questions for themselves and another friend.

Yourself

Your values:

What is your personality like:

What do you want in a relationship?

A Friend

Their values:

What is theirs like:

What do they want in a relationship?

Second Stage: Maintenance

Staying connected requires give-and-take, becoming a "we" instead of "I." It's a process. See how you will adjust. Write a statement of your values about the following issues and your role expectations in the situations listed below. Include a couple of issues or situations you are concerned about that may not be listed:

ISSUES—values

- Finances _____
- Housing _____
- Schooling for both partners _____
- Having children _____
- Insurance _____
- Employment _____
- _____
- _____

SITUATIONS—role expectations

- Health problems _____
- Children _____
- Financial problems _____
- Unemployment _____
- Mother staying at home _____
- Mother going to work _____
- Division of Labor _____
- _____
- _____

Third Stage: Commitment or Termination?

Check your commitment. Ask yourself these questions as you think about a future marriage partner:

1. Is there mutual understanding of each other's values, goals, and expectations from marriage?
2. Is there mutual acceptance of each other as a person with flaws and faults?
3. Does the relationship reinforce and improve your image of yourself?
4. Does it make you feel worthwhile and valuable both to yourself and the other person?
5. Does the relationship reinforce the other's self-concept?
6. Is the relationship one in which you feel natural and can be yourself? Or, do you find yourself trying to make yourself over into the kind of person you think the other wants?
7. Is the person someone you would like, admire, and enjoy, even if love was not present?
8. Is it a relationship that others recognize and approve?

Why do some people stay in a "no growth" relationship?

In reality, some relationships will end. Consider why (or why not) these situations could end a relationship. Write your answers in the space below.

1. Premarital pregnancy
2. Involvement in financial dishonesty
3. Physical abuse
4. Emotional abuse (more difficult to measure)
5. Drugs or alcohol
6. Unfaithfulness to partner
7. Health problems

Engagement

A relationship changes during the engagement period. Engagement is a time for a couple to plan realistically for the future. Consider how a variety of engagement issues will influence a couple's relationship:

- Emotional—learn to function as a team and cooperate and compromise as needed.
- Financial—income? spending? How much? By whom? Paying bills? Household and other expenses? Checkbook? Budget? Savings?
- Social—working out relations with new and old friends and relatives requires more give-and-take.

Roleplay three different situations in your class. Describe them below and discuss their possible effect on the couple's relationship.

Situation #1

Situation #2

Situation #3

Think of other engagement issues that might influence the relationship.

Intimacy and the Relationship

Intimacy is that part of the personal relationship that allows one person to become familiar with the feelings, moods, strengths, and weaknesses of another. Women are more aware of feelings and men may think of love and intimacy as physical rather than emotional. Actually, both physical and emotional sharing are important to an intimate relationship. Some couples try to use shortcuts to intimacy such as sex, alcohol, or drugs.

What are your intimacy expectations?

What do you like about your parent's relationship?

What about your parent's relationship would you do differently?

Genuine intimacy is built up through the experience of sharing a variety of "little things" together. These "little things" could be a special look, a funny story or personal experience, a shared disaster, holding hands, bumping against each other's ideas and working things out, laughing together, or crying together.

Interview two people you respect from your parent's generation about what has brought them close to their marriage partner.

Person #1

Person #2

We live in a society that commercializes sexuality. It confuses infatuation and sexuality with love. It is easy for the media to depict intense moments of physical intimacy. It is more difficult to capture the subtle emotional interactions that combine to create feelings of love.

Describe the emotional interactions you think might exist before a love scene in a popular soap.

You may have certain expectations regarding the sexual relationship in your future marriage. Whatever moral choices you make with respect to sexuality require a relationship of trust of the part of both partners. If you can trust the other person, you feel secure.

Part of that trust relationship is that the other will care even when things aren't going well. They may be angry or sad, but not indifferent or apathetic. When we are indifferent or apathetic, we are using manipulation or playing games with the other person's emotions. This is NOT intimacy. If a couple feel love for each other, they will think about each other's long-term well being and use their intimacy to build one another's self-esteem.