

“LOVERS AND FRIENDS”: HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP PRACTICES (PLATONIC AND ROMANTIC)

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This lesson explores the process of determining one’s personal standards for romantic and platonic relationships. In it, participants will discuss self-defined components of good relationships, and evaluate how those components can best be cultivated with the people they are most connected in relationship with.

KEYWORDS

Boundaries
Emotional
Intelligence
Relationships
Sexual/Relationship
Values

THEME

Family &
Relationships

FORMAT

Workshop

TIME

60 minutes





PREPARATION

PREPARATION

The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.

WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

According to The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) (ncadv.org/statistics), nearly 20 people per minute experience domestic partner violence in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men, with 1 in 4 men having been victims of some type of intimate partner violence (IPV) within their lifetime. Among these, the Williams Institute (williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Intimate-Partner-Violence-and-Sexual-Abuse-among-LGBT-People.pdf) asserts that “bisexual men seem more likely to report ever having experienced IPV than heterosexual men, and gay men seem less likely than heterosexual men to report ever having experienced IPV.” Though these differences are generally statistically insignificant, it is of note that there is currently no Federal or state-particular law addressing interpersonal violence within same-gender-loving relationships. For black men in those circumstances then, finding support when one is in an unhealthy dynamic can be particularly challenging, given the general scarcity of available and relevant resources and support.

GOAL

Participants will increase their capacity to develop and reflect on their personal standards for healthy and unhealthy relationships.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify and discuss personal standards for platonic and romantic relationships.
- Evaluate their own ability to uphold personal standards in platonic and romantic relationships.

TIME

STEPS 1-3	Introductions and Opening Activity: “What You Mean to Me”	20 min.
STEPS 4-11	Group Discussion: “What Makes a Good _____?”	30 min.
STEPS 12-15	Closing Activity	10 min.

REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

The facilitator of this lesson should be sensitive to intimate partner violence, specifically in black same gender loving communities. Specifically, the facilitator should have some training in trauma-informed practices, especially if any participant is currently navigating unhealthy or abusive relationship dynamics. Potential resources:

- Houston, E., & McKirnan, D. J. (2007). Intimate partner abuse among gay and bisexual men: Risk correlates and health outcomes. *Journal of Urban Health*, 84(5), 681-690.
- Li, Y., Baker, J. J., Korostyshevskiy, V. R., Slack, R. S., & Plankey, M. W. (2012). The association of intimate partner violence, recreational drug use with HIV seroprevalence among MSM. *AIDS and Behavior*, 16(3), 491-498.

KEY TERMS

Romantic relationships: A persistent interpersonal dynamic between at least two people that is marked by feelings of great affection and love; usually characterized by the state of being “in love”. Though it does not have to, the relationship is often characterized as including formal titles between partners and/or regular sexual activity.

Platonic relationships: A persistent interpersonal dynamic between at least two people in which there is usually no romantic or sexual desire; may also refer to relationships in which there is regular sexual activity but no romantic affection and no formal title.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Discussions of intimate partner violence can be challenging to process, particularly for individuals who have had experiences as IPV victims and/or perpetrators.

Facilitators may wish to provide content warnings to participants prior to the beginning of the session, so that they may adequately prepare themselves for any unexpected emotional reactions they experience, or leave the session if they believe the content may be too uncomfortable for them.

MATERIALS

The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

- Writing utensils (*one for each participant*)
- Notepads (*one for each participant*)
- Flip chart paper or dry erase board
- Permanent or dry erase markers
- Eraser
- Easel stand or tape (*optional*)

FACILITATION PREP

The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

- If space allows, arrange participant seating in a circle or semi-circle. Avoid lecture-style room set-ups.
- Prepare two sheets of flip chart paper with one of the following titles written at the top of each:
 - What Makes a Good Friend?
 - What Makes a Good Partner?

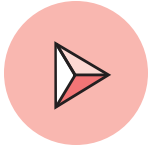
Place the sheet out of sight from participants until you are prepared to discuss it.

- If applicable, prepare a list of services offered within the agency, and make it readily available to participants at the end of your session.

HANDOUTS

Each participant should be provided with the following printed materials:

- End-of-Session Evaluation



PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.



Introductions and Opening Activity: “What You Mean to Me”

STEP 1

Welcome participants to your session and conduct brief introductions with the group as needed. Review all established group agreements and reaffirm consent from the group. If group agreements have not been completed, please create them at this time (*use the Community Agreements lesson, if necessary*).

STEP 2

Distribute a sheet of paper and writing utensil to each participant, and then instruct them to write out a list of all the people who are important to them, beginning with the most important person, and working through the rest of the group. Specify that these should be people they actually know and have relationship with (i.e., no celebrities or imaginary characters); participants can write out the individuals’ names, or the title they hold in their lives. After the list has been created, instruct participants to jot down a note or two about each individual explaining why they have been given the list placement they have.

STEP 3

Once the opening activity has concluded, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What was it like creating your list of important people? How about ranking their importance? Were there any choices that were difficult to make? Why or why not?”
2. “Do you believe that making distinctions between people is something people do in real life? If so, what do you think this looks like in action?”
3. “Do you believe that the people on your lists know what priority they hold in your life? If so, how?”



Group Discussion: “What Makes a Good _____?”

STEP 4

Reveal the sheets of flip chart paper labeled “What Makes a Good Friend?” and “What Makes a Good Partner?” Beginning with the “Good Friend” sheet, instruct participants to shout out answers to the question. Record the first 10–15 answers.

STEP 5

Move to the “Good Partner” sheet, and then ask participants to answer that question. Again, record the first 10–15 answers.

STEP 6

Distribute a second sheet of paper to each participant. Instruct participants to fold their sheet of paper in half vertically.

STEP 7

Instruct participants to write down the list of traits developed by the group from the “Good Friend” brainstorm exercise on the left half of their sheet. Then, instruct participants to use the right half of that same side of the paper to give each item a written grade between A and F, in terms of how relevant or important the item is to them.

STEP 8

Instruct participants to turn their sheet of paper to the other side and repeat the same actions for the “Good Partner” flip chart sheet, writing down each item on one side of the fold, and their respective personal grade on the other.

STEP 9

Once all participants have finished grading according to each trait’s level of importance, instruct them to go back through the list and add an additional grade to each item based on how well they believe they uphold the trait listed. Even if it’s a trait they’ve graded as an “F” in importance, instruct them to grade themselves on all the traits listed.

STEP 10

Once all participants have completed their grading, reconvene the large group and proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. “How was it completing this activity?”
2. “Did anyone notice any similarities or differences between the traits they graded for importance and how they graded themselves on them? If so, what do you think those similarities or differences mean?”

3. “Think about the traits you noted on each list of high ‘A-grade’ value. Do you see them in operation in the relationships you have with the people you said were most important to you earlier in the session? If so, what do you believe helps those traits flourish; if not, what do you think keeps them from flourishing?”
4. “Now, think about the traits for which you graded yourself a ‘C’ or lower. How do you feel about those items? If you met someone who scored highly on all the traits you valued, would that affect how you feel about those scores? How would you negotiate those differences?”

STEP 11

Conclude the discussion by thanking everyone for their contribution. **Encourage** participants to consider that there are many reasons a person will value a relationship they have, not all of which may have been mentioned during the session but are just as valid. **Explain** to participants that while there were no right or wrong answers in this discussion, it is important to reflect about what we offer others in the relationships that we build, and to take time as opportunities present themselves to discuss our values with the people we deem as important.

**Closing Activity****STEP 12**

Ask if anyone has any outstanding questions about the lesson. **Respond** to these as necessary.

STEP 13

Distribute a copy of the End-of-Session Evaluation to each participant. **Allow** participants 5–7 minutes to complete the evaluation, and **collect** them as they are completed. After five minutes, **invite** any participants who have not completed the evaluation to do so after the next activity.

STEP 14

Close by asking each participant to name one thing they are glad to have learned in this session, and one thing they will continue to think about after they leave.

STEP 15

Once all participants have given responses, **thank** them for attending, and **adjourn** the group.