

**A GUIDE TO TEEN  
RELATIONSHIPS:  
A HANDBOOK  
FOR PARENTS  
AND GUARDIANS**



# About CVIC

With a bold mission to end violence in two generations, CVIC delivers vital safety and healing services throughout Greater Grand Forks and Grand Forks County to adults and children experiencing domestic or sexual violence. We educate youth, adults, and professionals about how to stop violence and teach our communities ways to develop healthy relationships.



**Safety:** When you experience interpersonal violence due to domestic or sexual violence, stalking or other interpersonal crime, finding a safe place to go and feeling safe again is a first step.



**Healing:** We are learning more each day about the impact of trauma on human lives. And with the right approach, we can offer hope and healing for those harmed by violence.



**Education:** We teach our communities, from youth to adults, skills needed to build relationships and become bystanders who promote a violence-free community and change norms.

**Content Notice:** This handbook may contain sensitive topics for some people. This handbook includes information on dating violence, boundaries, consent, and sexual violence. The purpose of this handbook is to inform parents/guardians on how to identify if their teen is in a healthy/unhealthy relationship.

If triggering please consider utilizing these resources for supportive services:

Community Violence Intervention Center

[www.cviconline.org](http://www.cviconline.org)

701-746-0405

24/7 Crisis Line: 701-746-8900

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

National Domestic Violence Hotline

[www.TheHotline.org](http://www.TheHotline.org)

1-800-799-7233

Text "START" to 88788



# A Quick Note To The Reader:

*Welcome to the parent/guardian handbook for healthy relationships. The team at CVIC has created this for you in hopes that it can provide brief educational information on teen relationships. Some aspects of this handbook are purely educational and others include tips for you to support your teen. In this handbook we start by discussing healthy relationships but in order to understand teen relationships fully we also include characteristics of unhealthy and abusive relationships. Please utilize this handbook as much as you would like!*

**-CVIC Team**



# Healthy Relationships

Those who learn to develop healthy relationships in their teenage years are more likely to have healthy relationships throughout their lifetime.

As parents and guardians you can play a crucial role in helping your teens to develop healthy relationship skills and help to identify unhealthy or abusive relationships. By being a positive role model, you have the ability to teach your teen what positive relationships look like. This is one of the most effective ways to teach your teen about healthy relationships.

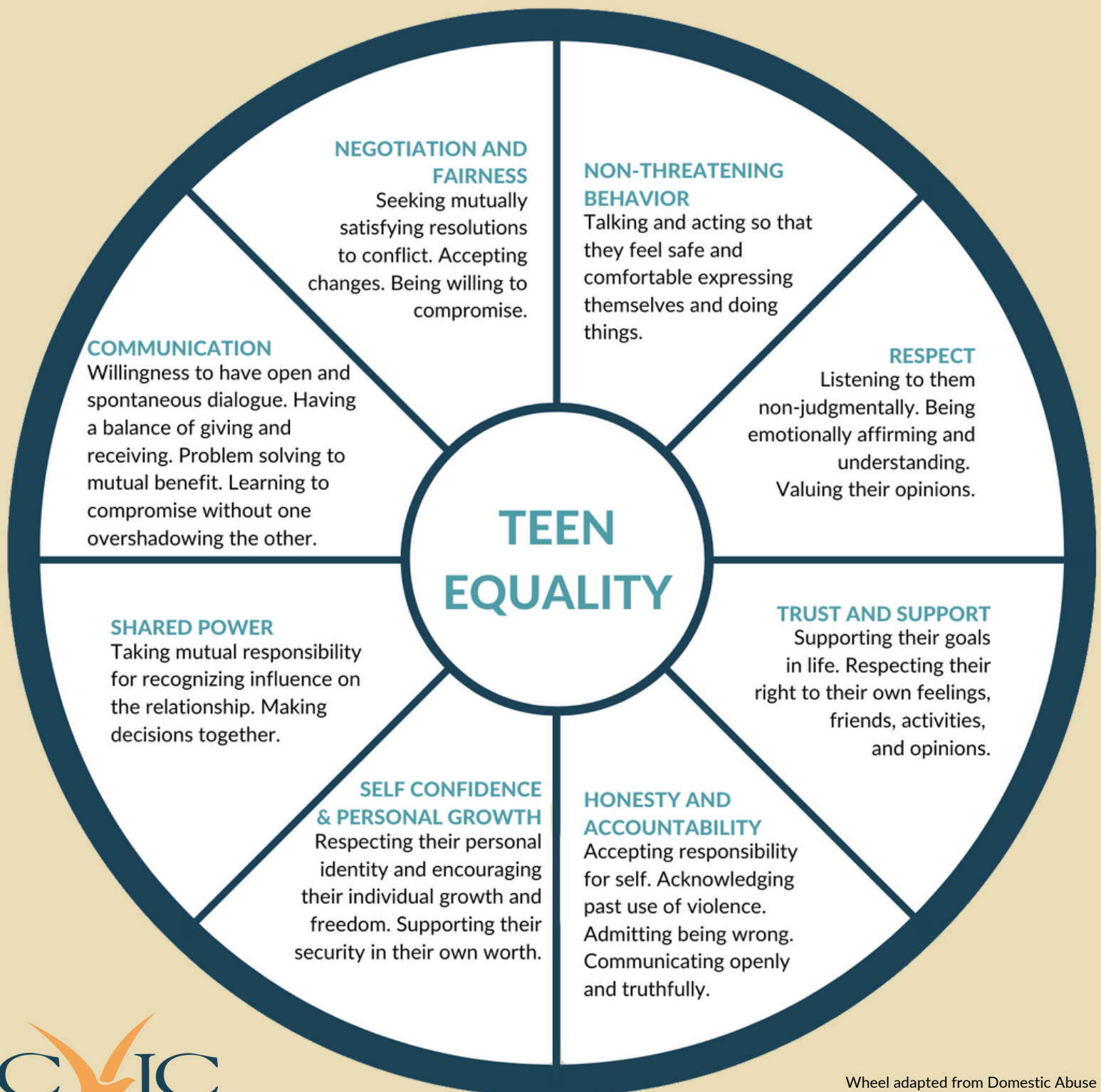
As your teen transitions to high school, they may begin to spend more time with friends and others in their peer group and less time with their family. This is a normal transition that may result in changes in relationships including friendships and dating relationships.

While it may be difficult to get your teen to open up about their relationships, there are signs you can watch for to help determine if your child is in a healthy or unhealthy relationship.



# Equality Wheel For Teens

These 8 components illustrate what a healthy relationship looks like. It is important that your teen(s) are aware of these components in order for them to establish and maintain a healthy relationship.



# 10 Signs Your Teen is in a Healthy Relationship

## 1. Comfortable Pace

The relationship moves at a speed that feels *enjoyable* for each person. It's normal to want to spend a lot of time with someone when you first meet them, but it's important that both people are on the same page with how the relationship is moving.

## 2. Trust

They have the *confidence* that their partner won't do anything to hurt them or ruin the relationship. In a healthy relationship, trust comes easily and they won't have to question the other person's intentions or whether that person has their back.

## 3. Honesty

They can be *truthful* and *candid* without fearing how the other person will respond. In a healthy relationship, they should feel like they can share the full truth about their life and feelings with their partner – they will never have to hide things.

## 4. Independence

They have space to be themselves outside of the relationship. The other person should be *supportive* of your teen's hobbies and relationships with other friends, family and coworkers. The partner does not *need* to know or be involved in every part of their life.

## 5. Respect

Both partners value one another's beliefs and opinions, and like one another for who they are as a person. They feel *comfortable* setting boundaries and are confident that the other person will *respect* those boundaries. They cheer for them when they achieve something, support their hard work and dreams, and appreciate them.

# 10 Signs Your Teen is in a Healthy Relationship

## 6. Equality

The relationship feels **balanced**. They don't let one person's preferences and opinions dominate, and instead, both partners hear each other out and make compromises when they don't want the same thing. They feel like their needs, wishes and interests are just as important as the other person's.

## 7. Kindness

They are **caring** and **empathetic** to one another, and provide comfort and support. In a healthy relationship, the other person will do things that they know will make your teen happy. Kindness should be a two-way street—it's given and returned in the relationship.

## 8. Taking Responsibility

Owning their actions and words. They avoid placing blame and are able to admit when they make a mistake. They can take **ownership** for the impact their words or behavior has, even if it wasn't their intention.

## 9. Healthy Conflict

**Openly** and **respectfully** discussing issues and confronting disagreements non-judgmentally. Healthy conflict is recognizing the root issue and addressing it respectfully before it escalates into something bigger.

## 10. Fun

They enjoy spending time with their partner and they bring out the best in each other. A healthy relationship should feel easy and both people should be **happy**. They can let loose, laugh together, and be themselves — the relationship doesn't bring their mood down but cheers them up.

# 10 Signs Your Teen is in an Unhealthy Relationship

## 1. Intensity

Expressing very extreme feelings and *over-the-top behavior* that feels overwhelming. Things are getting too intense if your teen feels like someone is rushing the pace of the relationship (comes on too strong, too fast) and seems obsessive about wanting to see them or be in constant contact.

## 2. Possessiveness

*Jealousy* to a point where someone tries to control who your teen spends time with and what they do. While jealousy is a normal human emotion, it becomes unhealthy when it causes someone to control or lash out at them.

## 3. Manipulation

*Attempts to control* another's decisions, actions, or emotions. Manipulation is often hard to spot because it can be expressed in subtle or passive-aggressive ways. You know your teen is being manipulated if someone is trying to convince them to do things they don't feel comfortable doing, ignores them until they get their way, or tries to influence their feelings.

## 4. Isolation

A partner keeps your teen away from friends, family, or other people. Often, they will ask your teen to *choose* between them and their friends, insist that they spend all their time together, or make them question their own judgement about friends and family.

## 5. Sabotage

When someone *purposely ruins* your teen's reputation, achievements, or success. Sabotage includes keeping your teen from doing things that are important to them. Behaviors like talking behind their back, starting rumors, or threatening to share private information about them is also sabotage.

# 10 Signs Your Teen is in an Unhealthy Relationship

## 6. Belittling

Doing and saying things to make another person *feel bad* about themselves. This includes name-calling, making rude remarks about people they're close with or criticizing them. It's also belittling when someone makes fun of your teen in a way that makes them feel bad, even if it's played off as a joke. Over time, this can make your teen lose confidence in themselves and their abilities.

## 7. Guilting

When someone makes your teen feel *responsible* for their actions or makes them feel it's their job to keep them happy. They may blame your teen for things that are out of their control and make your teen feel bad for them. This includes threatening to hurt themselves or others if your teen doesn't do as they say or stay with them.

## 8. Volatility

Strong, *unpredictable reactions* that make your teen feel scared, confused, or intimidated. A volatile person makes you feel like you need to walk on eggshells around them or they will have extreme reactions to small things. Your teen's relationship with them might feel like a rollercoaster that contains extreme ups and downs.

## 9. Deflecting Responsibility

Repeatedly *making excuses* for unhealthy behavior. They may blame your teen or other people for their own actions. Often, this includes making excuses based on alcohol or drug use, mental health issues or past experiences (like a cheating ex or divorced parents).

## 10. Betrayal

Acting *disloyal* or intentionally dishonest. They may act like a different person around other people or share private information about your teen to others. It also includes lying, purposely leaving them out, being two-faced, or cheating on them.

# Relationship Spectrum

Abusive relationships are based on an imbalance of power and control.

Unhealthy relationships are based on attempts to control the other person.

Healthy relationships are based on equality and respect.

Relationships exist on a spectrum from healthy to abusive with unhealthy somewhere in between. We can all be unhealthy in our relationships at times. However, we see unhealthy relationships become abusive with a **repetition** of unhealthy behaviors. We also see them become abusive relationships when any of the different forms of abuse are present (ie: physical, emotional, financial, etc.)

# Tips for Helping Teens in Abusive Relationships

- Listen closely to what your teen has to say.
- Acknowledge your teen's feelings.
- Let them know the abuse is not their fault.
- Support your teen by saying, "I am here for you."
- Explain to them your concern of the specific abusive behaviors that you have observed.
- Connect your teen to local and national resources.
- By listening, caring, and being there for your teen you are making a difference for them!



# Tips for Helping a Teenager Who is Abusive

- Make it clear to your teen that their behavior(s) are not OK.
- Be clear in the harmful behavior(s) that you observed and why it is concerning.
- It is important to listen to your teen because these conversations can be a learning opportunity for both you and your teen.
- Identify that the behavior(s) are separate from your teen and they don't have to define them.
- Discuss the impacts that their behavior(s) can have on their partner and the consequences that may come with those actions.
- Connect your teen to local and/or national resources.
- Educate your teen on healthy and respectful relationship behaviors.
- It is important that you listen to your teen attentively, acknowledge their statements, and explain to them your concerns. This will foster an open conversation between you and your teen.





# Boundaries

It is important to talk with your teen(s) about their right to set their own boundaries. Whether you are talking about dating relationships or friendships no one should feel pressured to compromise or change their boundaries. Below are some examples of the different types of boundaries we all have the right to set.

## Physical

- The right to consent to any type of physical touch.
- Physical boundaries may include hugging, kissing, holding hands, who is in their physical space, any type of sexual contact, and more.

## Emotional

- The right to dictate their own feelings.
- The right to expect respect.
- The right to communicate their feelings within their comfort.
- The right to say no.
- The right to ask for space.

## Digital

- The right to decide who has access to their technology. For example, sharing their password with a partner.
- The right to decide what is posted about them online.
- The right to decide what they share and with whom (ex: location sharing).
- The right to decide what types of communications they are receiving and how often they receive them. (text messages, DMs, phone calls, snaps)

# Relationships and Technology

We know that technology plays a large role in the daily lives of teenagers. As your teen(s) continue(s) to build relationships in the digital world, it is important to be able to recognize when those relationships may become unhealthy. Here are a few real life examples that may give you an indication your teen may be in an unhealthy relationship involving their technology:



## Sexting

Sexting is defined as sending a photograph of a person who is naked or engaged in a sexual activity.

It is important for your teen to understand that sending explicit images under the age of 18 is illegal. Teens may be charged with the creation and distribution of child pornography which may carry heavy consequences. This not only includes pictures they may have taken of themselves, but also includes images of other people that they forward onto others.



Your teen is constantly messaging their partner. You may notice an increase in cell phone usage including calls, texts, and social media.



Your teen has irrational reactions when they are without their cell phone or feeling like they need to answer their cell phone right away.



You notice a decline in your teen's academic performance or extracurricular activities due to increase of cell phone usage.



Your teen would rather spend time on their technology than in the moment.



# Consent

We know these conversations can be difficult to have with your teen(s) but as they grow older it is important for them to understand what is consent and what is not consent:

## What is Consent?

- Consent is defined as permitting for something to happen or agreeing to do something. For example: holding hands or kissing.
- Consent and respect are interconnected. When we are respecting someone, their opinions, and their boundaries, we are going to respect their right to give consent.



## What is NOT Consent?

- Someone who is under the influence of a substance is not able to provide consent.
- Silence is not consent.
- In many states there is a legal age of consent. In North Dakota it is 18 years old and in Minnesota it is 16 years old. This means that if an individual is not of this age they cannot legally give consent.
- Consent is never implied by past behavior, what you wear, or where you go.



It is important to note that if an individual becomes uncomfortable they may reverse their consent at anytime.

# Sexual Violence

When consent is not present it may fall under the sexual violence umbrella when the act includes unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention, contact, or activity.

Different forms of sexual violence may include rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, trafficking, sexual coercion, stalking, dating violence, sexting, street harassment, and more.



# Supporting Victims and Survivors of Sexual Violence

Listen attentively to the experience that your teen is sharing with you.

Make your teen aware that you will not judge them so they can openly share with you.

Acknowledge your teen's experience and emotions.

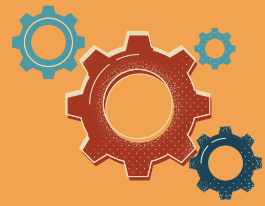
Thank your teen for sharing with you and recognize the bravery it took to do so.

Support your teen through phrases like: "This is not your fault", "I am here for you", or "How can I support you?"

Believe your teen.

Connect your teen to a local or national domestic/sexual violence agency.

# Strategies for Encouraging Healthy Relationships



Talk to your teen about what a healthy relationship looks like

If you witness an unhealthy relationship behavior, discuss it with your teen

Create a safe space for your teen to share their experiences

Remind your teen that they deserve to be in a healthy relationship

Model healthy relationship behaviors

Discuss how to act as an active bystander

Be an active parent in your teen's life



# Additional Resources

## Local Resources

Community Violence Intervention Center

[www.cviconline.org](http://www.cviconline.org)

701-746-0405

24/7 Crisis Line: 701-746-8900

Facebook: @CVICGF

Instagram: CVICGF

Grand Forks Police Department

[www.GrandForks.gov](http://www.GrandForks.gov)

701-787-8000

Grand Forks County Sheriff's Office

[www.GFCounty.nd.gov](http://www.GFCounty.nd.gov)

701-780-8280

## National Resources

One Love Foundation

[www.JoinOneLove.org](http://www.JoinOneLove.org)

1-866-331-9474

Text Line: 1-866-331-9474

National Domestic Violence Hotline

[www.TheHotline.org](http://www.TheHotline.org)

1-800-799-7233

Love Is Respect

[www.LoveisRespect.org](http://www.LoveisRespect.org)

1-866-331-9474

Text Line: 22522

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network

[www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

800-656-HOPE (4673)

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

[www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)

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