

Trusting & Being Trustworthy LE 25

Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers:

If you have not already done so, please review the Introduction to Teaching Healthy Relationships and Relationship Skills for suggestions on teaching social-emotional skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SES.

This learning experience aims to help students understand the importance of being able to trust and be trustworthy and the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that lead to the development and maintenance of trust and those that hinder the development of trust and destroy trust once it has developed. The Healthy Relationships learning experience may be used instead of this learning experience since all the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors of healthy and unhealthy relationships are identified and discussed. This learning experience would only be used if you wanted to focus on trust as a separate issue or come back to the issue of trust in the future after students have completed the Healthy Relationships learning experience. If you want students to evaluate their levels of trust and trustworthiness or the levels of trust and trustworthy behaviors within the class, consider having them complete the My Levels of Trust & Trustworthiness LE.

Procedure/Directions

Divide students into groups of 3-4 and have them brainstorm all the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that facilitate the development of trust in relationships, including in groups. Have each group select a group member to record their responses. After some time, have a member from each group report their results. Create a class list of the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that lead to the development and maintenance of trust. Responses that my students have brainstormed for healthy relationships but also build and maintain trust include:

1. good listener
2. shares feelings and open with you
3. respectful
4. follows through on commitments
5. trusting
6. caring
7. trustworthy
8. understanding
9. supportive
10. accepting
11. encouraging
12. reliable
13. loyal
14. kind
15. available
16. helpful

17. honest
18. real/genuine
19. forgiving
20. self-disclosing
21. keeps secrets

If there are qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list. Be sure that the essential qualities/characteristics/behaviors of being real/genuine, sharing your feelings/being open/self-disclosing are included on the list.

Next, ask each group to brainstorm a list of qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that hinder the development of trust and/or destroy trust once it has developed. After some time, have a member from each group report their results. More than likely, most of their lists will be the opposite of the behaviors that facilitate the development of trust (e.g., disrespectful, dishonest, etc.) but may also include others.

Now, create a class list of the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that hinder the development of trust and destroy trust once it has developed. Likely responses of other characteristics (other than the opposite of those that build trust) that my students have brainstormed include the following:

1. argumentative
2. aggressive
3. threatening
4. violent
5. insulting
6. rude,
7. phony,
8. two-faced

and someone who:

9. talks behind others' backs
10. breaks a promise
11. spreads rumors
12. uses you
13. ignores you

If there are qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that they do not identify that you think should go on the list, suggest them and ask if they should go on the class list. Be sure that the qualities/characteristics/behaviors of being phony, not sharing feelings/not being open/self-disclosing are included on the list.

You may decide to include qualities, characteristics, and behaviors from other classes and create whole grade lists (e.g., a 10th-grade list of qualities, characteristics, and behaviors that help build and maintain trust and those that hinder the development of trust and/or destroys trust once it has developed. Once compiled, you may make a copy available to all students.

Finish by summarizing or having them summarize how being trustworthy and trusting others is essential to developing and maintaining relationships, and the qualities, characteristics, and behaviors they identified that build trust, and unhealthy behaviors hinder the development of trust or destroy trust if it has been developed. Summarize the importance of being real/genuine, sharing your feelings/being open/self-disclosing, and its relationship to developing trust. See the information on self-disclosure and trust in healthy relationships and talking points below.

Self-Disclosure and Trust in Healthy Relationships

Essential to the attainment of emotional and interpersonal well-being is the willingness and ability to self-disclose. We can attain full health only when we gain the courage to be ourselves with others. This means being able to share our feelings and thoughts with others. The willingness and ability to let ourselves be known to others (to self-disclose) is essential in discovering who we are and how we wish to become and in the formation of close relationships. A relationship between two people develops as the two become more open about themselves--more self-disclosing. If individuals cannot reveal themselves, they cannot become close to others or be valued by others for who they are. To work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, we need to be able to share our feelings and why we feel that way with others and be aware of and share our needs.

Healthy relationships also require the willingness to trust and be trustworthy. We must trust others before we are willing to reveal ourselves (to self-disclose), and we must act in trustworthy ways before others reveal themselves to us. The willingness and ability to self-disclose are essential in the development and maintenance of trust, and not reciprocating another's self-disclosure hinders the development of trust.

Talking Points:

1. The ability and willingness to self-disclose is essential in forming close relationships.
2. A relationship between two people develops as the two become more open about themselves--more self-disclosing.
3. If individuals cannot reveal themselves, they cannot become close to others or be valued by others for who they are.
4. To work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, we need to be able to share our feelings, why we feel that way and our needs.
5. Trust is essential for a relationship to grow and develop.
6. To build a relationship, you must learn to create a climate of trust.
7. Trust exists in a relationship and constantly changes and varies.
8. The actions of both people are important in establishing and maintaining trust in their relationships.
9. Trust initially develops when one person takes a risk by self-disclosing their feelings and thoughts, and the other responds with understanding, acceptance, and support and reciprocates by disclosing their own thoughts and feelings.

10. If one person does not reciprocate by self-disclosing, then the development of trust will be hindered.
11. If one person responds in a way that communicates that they are not listening, don't understand, or are judgmental, then the level of trust will be reduced.
12. Trust is built and maintained by mutual self-disclosure and when understanding, acceptance, and support are communicated and demonstrated.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying Trusting & Trustworthy Behaviors In Real-Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. The process of using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

1. Students complete the My Levels of Trust & Trustworthiness LE ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)). This learning experience has students complete a questionnaire regarding their levels of trust and trustworthiness in general, with friends, with a specific person, and in their class.
2. Students develop a goal to use a behavior that builds trust they currently don't use or use consistently and/or to eliminate a behavior they currently use that destroys trust. They use the My Goals Log LE, and the My Goals Log ([SES Projects Module](#)). Using the My Goals Log allows students to change their behavior and develop goals that do not require much analysis or the exploration of alternatives and choices. The My Goals Log can be used to have students develop goals and evaluate their success at the midpoint and again at the end of the project.
3. Have students develop and implement the Healthy Relationships Project ([SES Projects Module](#)) for a behavior that builds trust they currently don't use or use consistently and/or to eliminate a behavior they currently use that destroys trust. This project aims to facilitate behavior change in ways students have identified as important to them in real-life situations. It is a more extensive project than the My Goals LE. It requires students to monitor their progress over time using self-monitoring charts and making self-assessments of their effort, their progress, and/or the extent to which they completed the project.