PreWorks

Curriculum

FOUR MODULES
OF MODERN COMPREHENSIVE
SEXUAL AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION
FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND PREVENTION
OF SEXUALLY TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

PreWorks

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PreWorks 2026

Illustrations & Layout
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Foreword

Sexual and relationship education is an essential foundation for fostering gender equality and preventing sexually transgressive behavior. In today's evolving societal landscape, young people need access to accurate, inclusive, and comprehensive education that empowers them to navigate relationships with confidence, respect, and awareness.

The **PreWorks** Curriculum is a carefully developed framework that brings together **four key modules**, designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking necessary to engage in safe, healthy, and equitable relationships. Rooted in modern, comprehensive sexual and relationship education principles, this curriculum addresses vital topics such as boundaries, consent, digital self-representation, and the impact of social norms on gender identity and relationships.

Developed through collaboration between experts in education, social work, and gender studies, this curriculum serves as a proactive approach to preventing sexually transgressive behavior. By fostering open discussions, encouraging self-reflection, and providing practical tools, **PreWorks** aims to create lasting change and empower individuals to build relationships based on mutual respect and equality.

At the heart of this curriculum is the commitment to **gender equality** -not just as a theoretical concept, but as a practice embedded in everyday interactions and societal structures. By challenging harmful stereotypes, deconstructing power imbalances, and promoting inclusive perspectives, we lay the groundwork for a world where all individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive free from discrimination and violence. Achieving gender equality is not only a goal but a continuous process that requires education, dialogue, and active engagement.

We hope that this curriculum will serve as a valuable resource for youth workers dedicated to promoting a culture of respect, safety, and equality. By engaging in these discussions and activities, we take a crucial step toward a more inclusive and just future. Together we pave the way for a future where equality, respect, and dignity are not just ideals, but lived realities for all.

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Curriculum Structure

This intervention is designed as a structured and interactive learning journey, divided into four core modules that each explore key themes related to identity, relationships, and digital well-being. The modules build upon each other and can be delivered flexibly depending on the needs of the group.

Each module begins with a comprehensive background section, equipping facilitators with essential context, key concepts, and practical guidance for implementation. This foundation ensures that facilitators feel confident and well-prepared to engage with the group.

Following the background, each module includes an intervention plan, structured into activites that support engagement, reflection, and learning such as:

- **Introduction** – Presentation of the PreWorks video and brief overview of the session's goals and relevance.
- **Activation Activity** – An interactive exercise to spark curiosity and activate prior knowledge.
- **Theoretical Exercises** – Core content delivered through guided activities, discussion, or input.
- **Break** – A short pause to rest and recharge.
- **Reflection** – Deepening understanding through discussion, personal reflection, or creative methods.
- **Closing Activity** – Wrapping up with a recap, feedback, or take-away message.

This structure provides consistency by giving each session a familiar rhythm, helping participants feel secure and oriented in the learning process. At the same time, it offers flexibility—facilitators can adapt the depth, timing, or format of each part based on the group's age, energy level, prior knowledge, or emotional responses.

Module 1
Gender & Stereotypes

Module 1: Gender & Stereotypes

Background

Gender Norms and Societal Expectations encompass the evolving gender relations and roles within various cultural contexts. This includes the development and impact of these roles over time, as well as self-reflection and discussions on sex, gender identity, and gender expression. It also addresses the inclusion and recognition of diverse identities, including LGBTQ+, fostering a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in society (Risman, 2004).

Research consistently shows that gender norms and societal expectations profoundly impact youth development. These norms shape identity, behavior, and mental health outcomes across various cultural contexts (R. Connell, 2012; Leaper, 2015). Traditional gender roles often impose constraints on personal expression, leading to psychological stress and limited opportunities for both boys and girls (Galambos, Berenbaum, & McHale, 2009).

The origins of gender norms and societal expectations

The development of gender roles and relations is influenced by cultural changes and societal expectations. Over time, these roles have evolved, reflecting shifts in cultural attitudes and values (R. Connell, 2012). For instance, in more egalitarian societies, youth may experience greater flexibility in gender roles, leading to broader opportunities for self-expression and personal growth (Ridgeway, 2011).

Historically, gender norms and societal expectations have been deeply influenced by patriarchal structures, where strictly defined roles were assigned to men and women. In pre-modern societies, religious and cultural beliefs dictated sexual behavior, often linking women's sexuality to family honor and moral virtue (Brundage, 2009).

The 20th century brought significant shifts as feminist movements challenged traditional gender roles and advocated for sexual autonomy. This period saw the beginning of a reevaluation of norms surrounding STB, although societal expectations continued to impose double standards. Today, discourse around STB has evolved to focus on consent, power dynamics, and inclusivity, reflecting broader cultural shifts toward recognizing diverse gender identities and sexualities (Ridgeway, 2011).

The psychology of gender norms and societal expectations

Social categorization is an inevitable aspect of human cognition, occurring naturally and without intention since infancy. The process of categorization shapes our perception of similarities and differences. While categorization serves crucial cognitive functions by helping us organize and navigate the world, it can also lead to adverse consequences, such as reinforcing stereotypes. Gender roles are prime examples of learned stereotypes, with notions of what is considered masculine and feminine varying across different times and cultures. This may lead to gender role stress, where individuals identify more strongly as members of a group rather than as unique individuals. When group membership becomes salient, there is a tendency to establish positive social distinctiveness by conforming to group expectations and discriminating against outgroups or those who threaten "our worldview".

The function of gender norms and societal expectations

At the sociological level, gender norms and societal expectations function as mechanisms that maintain and reinforce the social order by dictating appropriate behaviors and roles for individuals based on their gender. These norms are deeply embedded in the fabric of society, influencing institutions such as family, education, and the workplace. They serve to perpetuate existing power dynamics by establishing and upholding a hierarchy between genders, where traditionally, masculinity is often valued over femininity (R. Connell, 2012). This reinforcement of gender roles helps to stabilize societal structures by providing clear guidelines on what is expected of individuals, thus facilitating social cohesion. However, these norms also contribute to the marginalization of those who do not conform, perpetuating inequality and limiting personal freedoms. The rigid enforcement of gender norms can lead to social exclusion, discrimination, and gender-based violence, particularly against individuals who challenge traditional gender roles (Butler, 2011). As such, while gender norms and societal expectations provide a framework for social organization, they also impose significant constraints on individual identity and social equality.

The effects and consequences of gender norms and societal expectations on perceptions and behavior

Gender norms and societal expectations profoundly shape perceptions and behaviors, often fostering harmful outcomes such as aggression, violence, and STB. Traditional masculinity ideals, which emphasize dominance and aggression, can normalize violent behaviors, particularly among men, as a misguided assertion of power (R. W. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These pressures contribute to gender-based violence and STB, reinforcing patriarchal structures. Additionally, the stress of conforming to rigid gender roles negatively impacts mental health, leading to issues such as anxiety and depression among men and women alike (Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007). These consequences underscore the need to challenge and redefine harmful gender norms.

The influence of gender norms and societal expectations on STBs

Gender norms and societal expectations significantly influence STBs through a complex interplay of cultural, social, and individual factors.

Gender Relations and Roles Development

The development of gender roles and relations is influenced by cultural changes and societal expectations. Over time, these roles have evolved, reflecting shifts in cultural attitudes and values (R. Connell, 2012). For instance, in more egalitarian societies, youth may experience greater flexibility in gender roles, leading to broader opportunities for self-expression and personal growth (Ridgeway, 2011).

Self-Reflection and Discussions on Sex, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

Self-reflection and open discussions about sex, gender identity, and gender expression are crucial for healthy psychological development. Such dialogues enable youth to explore and understand their identities in a supportive environment (Galambos et al., 2009). This is particularly important for adolescents as they navigate the complexities of their developing identities.

LGBTQ+ Youth

LGBTQ+ youth face unique challenges due to societal stigma and lack of acceptance, which can lead to higher rates of bullying, mental health issues, and lower self-esteem (Russell & Fish, 2016). Research indicates that supportive environments, including inclusive family and school settings, play a critical role in fostering positive development and well-being for LGBTQ+ youth (Russell & Fish, 2016). These environments can mitigate the negative impacts of societal stigma and promote resilience.

Cultural Contexts

Gender norms and expectations vary widely across cultures, influencing how youth perceive and perform their gender roles. Understanding cultural differences is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems for youth.

Within Europe, gender norms and societal expectations regarding STBs have evolved significantly over time, with notable intra-European differences. Historically, more conservative Southern European countries maintained stricter gender roles, which often perpetuated patriarchal attitudes and higher tolerance for certain STBs. In contrast, Northern and Western European countries have gradually adopted more egalitarian views, influenced by feminist movements and progressive social policies, leading to greater awareness and lower tolerance of STBs (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). These changes reflect broader cultural shifts across Europe, where gender norms are increasingly challenged, leading to varying approaches to addressing and preventing STBs.

Supportive Environments

Creating supportive environments that challenge traditional gender norms and promote acceptance of diverse gender identities and expressions is essential. Schools and families that foster open communication, inclusivity, and support can significantly enhance the mental health and well-being of all youth, particularly those from marginalized groups (Russell & Fish, 2016).

Evidence-based suggestions for dealing with gender norms and societal expectations

To effectively address the influence of gender norms and societal expectations on STBs, evidence suggests a multifaceted approach that includes educational, policy, and community-based strategies.

Promoting Gender Equality through Education

Incorporating gender equality education in school curricula is crucial to challenge traditional gender norms from an early age. This includes teaching critical thinking skills to help students recognize and question stereotypes and promoting empathy and respect for all genders. Such programs should also address the harmful impacts of rigid gender roles on both men and women, emphasizing the benefits of more flexible and inclusive gender norms (Kollmayer et al., 2020).

Practical Considerations

Educate to foster critical thinking, challenge stereotypes, and promote empathy for everyone.

Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Norm Change

Programs that specifically engage men and boys in conversations about masculinity and gender norms can reduce STBs by challenging the traditional notions of masculinity that often underlie these behaviors. Initiatives that promote positive forms of masculinity—those that value equality, non-violence, and emotional expression—can lead to significant behavioral changes (Flood, 2020).

Practical Considerations

Ensure active engagement of boys and young men in the discussions!

Implementing Policy Reforms

Policies that support gender equality, such as equal pay legislation, parental leave for all genders, and protections against gender-based violence, help to shift societal expectations and reduce the prevalence of STBs. These policies also need to be complemented by public awareness campaigns that challenge deep-seated cultural norms and promote gender equity (Heise et al., 2019).

Community-Based Interventions

Community-driven approaches that involve local leaders, religious figures, and other influential community members can effectively challenge and transform harmful gender norms. These interventions are most successful when they are context-specific and involve both men and women in the process of change (Rachel Jewkes, Flood, & Lang, 2015).

Intervention Plan: Gender & Stereotypes

Learning Objectives:

Objectives

- Understand how gender stereotypes influence personal identity and interactions with others.
- Explore common stereotypes about masculinity and femininity, and recognize how these ideas appear in everyday situations (such as at home, in school, and at work).
- Reflect on ways to challenge (traditional) gender stereotypes and promote respectful, open-minded environments.

After the session, participants will be able to:

- Assess how traditional gender norms impact relationships, society, and self-expression.
- Assess how we can support individuals who challenge gender stereotypes.

Overview of the Module (Course of Events)

Module	Brief Description	Time
Introduction	PreWorks Video is shown to participants, and the facilitator introduces themselves.	5 min
Position Game	Participants move around the room based on statements/questions about gender and stereotypes.	15 min
Dialoge	Focus on stereotypes, masculinity/femininity, and societal pressure. Groups reflect and discuss.	25 min
Break	Short break.	10 min
Workshop: Case Work	In small groups, participants discuss different cases on gender and stereotypes.	40 min
Closing Activity	Participants share their key takeaways and reflect on their learning.	5 min

Materials Needed for This Module:

- Space large enough for movement (Positioning Game)
- Beamer/Screen for the introductory video
- Printed visual materials for theoretical exercises
  (e.g., images for gender roles, infographics) - — see *Additional Materials*
- Printouts for Positioning Game (Statements/Questions)
- Case materials for small group discussions (printable scenarios, age-appropriate).
- Pens, paper (A3/A2), and sticky notes for group reflections

Group Rules

Set some rules for the workshop today. These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

1. This is a safe space. There is no place for homophobia, transphobia, racism or other forms of discrimination.
2. We are here to learn together. There's no such thing as stupid questions: ask away! Be curious.
3. Talk from your own perspective. Avoid generalizations.
4. Mutual respect is important. We can have different opinions, but we will talk about them with respect and care for each other.

Activity Descriptions

In the following section, the activities Position Game, Dialogues, Break, Workshop: Case Work, and Closing Activity are described in detail. Each activity serves a specific purpose within the session structure—whether it's to activate prior knowledge, encourage critical thinking, create space for reflection, or bring the group together at the end. Clear instructions, objectives, and practical tips are provided to support effective facilitation and adaptation for different age groups or group dynamics.

Introduction (5 min)

Go over the group rules together (see above). These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

Positioning Game (15 min)

General Description: The Positioning Game is an interactive activity designed to encourage participants to reflect on their opinions and engage in thoughtful discussions. The game involves moving physically around the room to express agreement, disagreement, or neutrality with various statements. The objective is to foster open conversation, encourage diverse perspectives, and create a safe space for individuals to share their views while respecting differing opinions.

1	**Intro**	Explain the game: Participants will move around the room based on how they feel about statements. Agree = one side, Disagree = other side, Neutral = middle.
2	**Statements**	Read a statement. Participants move to their chosen spot. Allow a few seconds to reflect.
3	**Discussion**	Ask why participants chose their position. Encourage sharing different perspectives.
4	**Repeat**	Go through 4 statements, with short discussions after each.
5	**Conclusion**	Wrap up with final thoughts from the group.

Important note

> stay away from difficult theoretical terms in this introduction: not everyone knows what is meant by gender already. Instead, focus on easy language that is common knowledge within the group.

The statements and questions provided aim to help people explore and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. They are designed to spark self-reflection and promote a broader understanding of gender equality and individuality. By responding to these statements, participants can think about their own beliefs and attitudes towards topics like gender identity, societal expectations, and personal freedom. These discussions also encourage empathy and open-mindedness, helping them recognize that everyone has different experiences and perspectives.

Statements/questions for age group 13-15

- I think it is cool when someone who is not a girl wears something pink.
- I think boys can be just as strong as girls.
- In our family, everyone takes care of each other.
- I think everyone should be able to be themselves and wear/do what they want.
- Nail polish is only for girls.
- I believe it's okay for a boy to cry if he's feeling upset.
- I think girls can be just as good at sports as boys.
- I feel that everyone should have the freedom to express themselves however they want, without judgment.
- I think boys and girls should both do the same chores at home.
- I think makeup is something anyone, regardless of gender, should be able to wear.
- I've been told that something I like is not something a "boy" or "girl" should like.
- I believe that emotions don't have a gender -everyone feels the same things.
- I think that girls can be leaders just as much as boys.
- It's okay, if someone doesn't want to follow the "rules" about how a boy or girl should act.

Follow-up/discussion questions:

- How do you think changing traditional gender roles could impact relationships and society as a whole?
- How can we support others who want to break free from gender norms?

Statements/questions for age group 15-23

- I think men have the same capabilities as women.
- I think everyone should be able to be themselves.
- I think everyone should be able to dress or look the way they want.
- Women are better at taking care of people than men.
- In a family, everyone helps out with the chores, and responsibilities are divided equally.
- In a family, everyone takes care of each other.
- I think ideas about masculinity and femininity are limiting people in their lives.
- I think women experience more discrimination than men.

Follow-up/discussion questions:

- How do you think changing traditional gender roles could impact relationships and society as a whole?
- How can we support others who want to break free from gender norms?

Statements/questions for age group 23-30

- I would describe myself as a feminist.
- In a family, everyone helps out with the chores, and the responsibilities are divided equally.
- In a family, everyone takes care of each other.
- I think ideas about masculinity and femininity are limiting people in their lives.
- I think women experience more discrimination because of stereotypes than men.
- Men and women should have equal opportunities in the workplace.
- I think it's important to challenge traditional gender roles to create fair societies.
- I feel that men are often discouraged from showing vulnerability or emotion.
- I think gender stereotypes often limit personal growth and expression for both men and women.
- I think society should do more to support men in taking on caregiving roles.
- I think everyone should be free to define their own gender identity, regardless of societal expectations.
- I believe that gender equality benefits everyone, not just women.
- I think the pressure to conform to gender norms can negatively impact mental health.
- I think the conversation around gender should include non-binary and gender-fluid individuals, not just men and women.
- I think that men should be encouraged to embrace activities traditionally considered "feminine" and vice versa…

Follow-up/discussion questions:

- How do you think changing traditional gender roles could impact relationships and society as a whole?
- How can we support others who want to break free from gender norms?

Dialogue (25 min):

Divide participants into small groups and provide pictures. Encourage them to discuss the following:

- *Norms + Stereotypes:* Describe a home/family you picture in your mind. Does it follow traditional gender roles (e.g., mother and father; father fixing things, mother cooking)?

- *What Goes Where?:* Brainstorm words under "man/masculine" vs. "woman/feminine". What stereotypes arise?

  e.g., Doctor vs. Nurse → It explores gender stereotypes by asking participants to associate word pairs like "doctor" and "nurse" to the "man" vs. "woman" categories, highlighting how society often links certain professions to specific genders.

  1. *Gender 101:* Introduce the concept of gender using easy-to-understand visuals and definitions (identity, expression).

This could mean drawing the layout or structure of a house (home). It might include details like rooms, furniture, and people in the house. The point is to reflect on how gender roles play out in the home, such as who is doing what task (e.g., cooking, fixing, cleaning).

The sorting of words (e.g., "doctor" vs. "nurse") can be done orally or by writing them down. Participants might be asked to share their associations (orally), or the facilitator could provide a list of word pairs to be categorized (written).

- Engineer vs. Teacher
- Soldier vs. Nurse
- CEO vs. Secretary
- Flight Attendant vs. Pilot
- Mechanic vs. Homemaker
- Politician vs. Stay-at-home Parent
- Athlete vs. Cheerleader
- Gardener vs. Nanny

You could say: "Think about a home in your mind. What roles do you imagine people playing in that house? (e.g., Who is fixing the house? Who is cooking?)" And for the sorting activity: "In this exercise, you will hear several words. For example, doctor and nurse. Think about which gender you associate with each role and why".

Afterward, facilitate a group discussion based on the exercises:

- How do gender stereotypes influence career choices?
- Do gender roles at home change? How? Have you noticed changes yourself?
- How do fixed roles (stereotypes) affect children's development and choices?
- What positive changes have you seen in breaking down gender stereotypes?

Break (5 min)

The break offers participants a chance to rest, reset, and process what they have experienced so far. It is important to create a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere to encourage informal conversation, but remain attentive to group dynamics. Some participants may want to step away quietly, while others may seek connection. Facilitators should stay available and approachable during this time, as sensitive topics may prompt individual questions or emotional reactions.

Workshop: Case Work (40 min):

Workshop: break-out groups on different cases/different subjects

Warm-Up Circle: "Step Forward If..." (5 min)

Purpose: Activate thinking and connect experiences. Stand in a circle. Read out statements related to gender, stereotypes, and expectations. Participants **step into the circle** if they relate. After each, pause to notice who's stepped in.

- Step in if you've ever been told to "act like a man" or "be more ladylike."
- Step in if you've felt pressure to dress or behave a certain way based on gender.
- Step in if you've stood up for someone being judged for being "different."
- Step in if you've ever felt like you had to hide part of who you are.

Facilitator tip: Keep it quiet, reflective — not for debate, just for awareness.

Build the Change Wall" – Interactive Problem-Solving small groups (35 min)

Each group works through a problem-solving wall-building challenge — using physical materials like paper blocks, cards, or sticky notes to "construct" ideas for real-world gender equality based on the cases.

Each group will "build a wall" that unpacks the case into 3 parts:

1. Red Bricks – The gender-based problem/stereotype (what's wrong here?)

2. Orange Bricks – The impact it has on the person or society (why does it matter?)

3. Green Bricks – Possible solutions, actions, or positive responses (what can help?)

Each group works through their case by:

- Writing down key problems on red bricks
- Describing the effects on orange bricks
- Brainstorming real solutions on green bricks

They stick each "brick" onto the wall in sections: bottom = problem, middle = impact, top = solution.

Goal: Build an actual visual wall of change, stacked from problem to solution.

Encourage conversation: "Why does this happen?" "Who's affected?" "What can be done, even in small ways?"

These cases are designed to help people think critically about gender norms, stereotypes, and equality in everyday situations. The goal is to spark reflection on how gender expectations influence how people are treated and how they express themselves. By engaging with these cases, they can explore the real-world challenges that arise from gender bias and develop empathy and a deeper understanding of how to support equality and individuality.

Cases for age group 13-15

Case 1: Expressing Emotions
A boy starts crying after losing a game and some classmates say, "Boys shouldn't cry."

Case 2: Leadership and Gender
Imagine your country has just elected its first woman president. Some people say, "Women aren't strong enough to lead."

Case 3: Changing Roles at Home
In your family, certain chores are divided by gender -like mom cooks and dad fixes things. What if these tasks were shared equally?

Case 4: Girls in Boxing
A girl at your school joins a boxing club and competes in matches. Some people say, "Boxing is too rough for girls," or "She's trying too hard to act tough."

Cases for age group 15-23

Case 1: Stay-at-Home Dad
Your friend's dad stays home to take care of the kids while the mom works full-time. Some people say that's "strange."

Case 2: Beyond the Gender Binary
A friend doesn't identify as just a boy or a girl and prefers the term "non-binary." Some people don't understand and ask, "What does that mean?"

Case 3: Non-Consensual Photos
A girl is changing after gym class when someone secretly takes a photo of her and shares it in a group chat. People say, "It's just a joke."

Case 4: Public Harassment
Two men are holding hands in the street, and strangers shout insults at them.

Cases for age group 23-30

Case 1: Masculinity and Femininity in the Workplace
A man is criticized for being too "soft" and emotional in his job, while a woman is told she should be more assertive to succeed.

Case 2: Stereotypes and Identity
You meet someone who doesn't fit the typical "masculine" or "feminine" image and identifies as gender-fluid. How do you respond to them, and how can society do a better job of accepting people outside of gender norms?

Case 3: Breaking Traditional Roles in Family
A woman says she doesn't want to have children. Some people tell her, "But that's what women are supposed to do," or "You'll change your mind."

Case 4: Unwanted Touching
At a party, someone keeps putting their arm around another person who clearly looks uncomfortable and tries to move away. People nearby notice but don't say anything.

Case 5: Gender Expression and Safety
A person who is read as a man is wearing a skirt in public, and someone throws trash at them while yelling slurs. Why is this violent behavior happening?

Closing Activity (5 min):

Ask participants to reflect on what they learned and share one of everyone. Use sticky notes to capture responses and share them on a wall for everyone to see: "what will you take from this workshop and how will you apply in your life?"

Troubleshooting for Trainers

Challenge	Facilitator Response
A participant expresses discriminatory views (misogynistic, homophobic, etc.).	Stay calm and encourage open dialogue. Set clear boundaries that discriminatory language or behavior is not acceptable in the space. Emphasize that the workshop aims to create a safe space for all.
A participant becomes emotional or upset.	Offer them a moment to process and check in afterward. Ensure the group respects their feelings, and adjust the conversation if needed. Provide a supportive environment for participants to express discomfort.
The discussions become heated or off-topic.	Gently steer the conversation back to the topic. Emphasize mutual respect and the importance of listening to different perspectives.

Additional Materials

Please refer to the **PreWorks** online library for additional materials, presentations, and photo banks designed for different age groups. There you'll find extra worksheets, images, and supportive resources.

Material Bank for Module 1
> Photo Bank – Young Adolescents
> Photo Bank – Adolescents & Young Adults
> Photo Bank – Adults
> Gender Person
> Module 1 Presentation

Module 2
Digital Self

Module 2: Digital Self

Background

Youth often engage in online self-presentation to explore and shape their identities, a process significantly influenced by peer feedback on social media platforms. This self-presentation, where individuals curate their online personas, can lead to enhanced self-esteem when interactions are positive, but also heightens the risk of anxiety and depression when faced with criticism or the pressure to conform to idealized standards (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Media literacy education is crucial in this context, as it equips young people with the skills to critically evaluate online content, understand the constructed nature of social media profiles, and navigate the pressures of self-presentation. Developing media literacy enables youth to recognize the unrealistic standards often portrayed online and to manage their self-presentation in a healthy manner (Livingstone, 2014).

Practical Considerations

Encourage the development of media literacy.

Social media algorithms play a significant role in shaping the content that users see, often reinforcing existing beliefs and behaviors by prioritizing content that aligns with users' past interactions and preferences. This can create "echo chambers" where users are exposed primarily to information that confirms their existing views, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives (Pariser, 2011). Reflecting on online interactions and understanding the workings of these algorithms is essential for developing a more balanced and informed online presence. Encouraging users to actively seek out diverse viewpoints and be critical of the content they consume can help mitigate the effects of algorithm-driven echo chambers (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Practical Considerations

Help youth understand the concept of "echo chambers" and the biases associated with them.

Maintaining digital well-being involves setting boundaries for social media use, fostering mindfulness in online interactions, and actively curating a positive online environment. Strategies such as regular digital detoxes, setting time limits on social media use, and prioritizing in-person interactions can help mitigate the negative psychological impacts associated with excessive social media use. Additionally, recognizing and avoiding echo chambers requires conscious efforts to engage with a variety of sources and viewpoints, challenging the tendency to consume content that merely reinforces existing beliefs (Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017).

Practical Considerations

Focus on establishing boundaries and practicing mindfulness, ideally through direct personal interactions.

Cyberbullying and online sexual harassment are pervasive issues that significantly impact the mental health and well-being of youth. These behaviors can lead to severe psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Kowalski et al., 2014). Promoting digital citizenship is crucial in addressing these issues, as it encourages responsible online behavior, empathy, and respect for others. Educational programs that teach youth about the consequences of cyberbullying, the importance of privacy, and the ethical use of digital platforms are essential for fostering a safer online environment (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Responsible content creation is a critical aspect of digital citizenship, involving the ethical production and sharing of content online. Youth should be encouraged to consider the potential impact of their online actions on themselves and others, including issues of consent, privacy, and the broader societal implications of digital content. Educational initiatives that teach the principles of digital citizenship can empower youth to engage in responsible and respectful online behaviors, reducing the likelihood of harmful interactions and promoting a positive digital culture (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

Research indicates that youth use social media for self-presentation and identity exploration, receiving peer feedback that influences self-esteem (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). While positive online interactions can provide support and a sense of belonging, excessive social media use is linked to anxiety, depression, and stress due to pressures to maintain an ideal image (Vannucci et al., 2017). Cyberbullying further exacerbates psychological distress, including depression and anxiety (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Online behaviors often spill over into offline actions, affecting social skills and real-world interactions (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014). Digital literacy is crucial for safe online identity management, yet many youth lack privacy awareness, highlighting the need for education (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010). Parental involvement and educational programs are essential in fostering healthy digital habits and mitigating negative impacts (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011).

Practical Considerations

To address cyberbullying, incorporate digital citizenship education to promote responsible online behavior and awareness of its impacts. Educate individuals on privacy and security online, and involve parents and guardians in guiding safe digital practices. Foster environments that support open discussions about cyberbullying and consistently update policies to adapt to evolving technology.

Social Media

Social media generally refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, and interact with content within virtual communities and networks. These platforms are designed to facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and user-generated content, often in real-time, across vast audiences. Social media encompasses a wide range of services, including text-based platforms, image-focused applications, and those that combine various forms of media.

Historically, the concept of social media can be traced back to the early 2000s with the rise of platforms such as MySpace and Friendster, which allowed users to create personal profiles and connect with others. The launch of Facebook in 2004 marked a significant evolution in social media, emphasizing not only personal connections but also the sharing of diverse content, including text, images, and later, video (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Following this, Twitter popularized microblogging, a format that limits text posts to a concise 140 characters (later expanded to 280), emphasizing brevity and immediacy in communication (Murthy, 2013).

Image-focused social media platforms such as Instagram (launched in 2010) and Pinterest (launched in 2010) represent another important evolution, centered around the visual presentation of content. Instagram allows users to share photos and videos, often curated to reflect aesthetic or lifestyle themes, while Pinterest serves as a digital pinboard where users can collect and organize images related to their (Hochman & Schwartz, 2021).

These platforms differ not only in the type of content they prioritize but also in how users interact with and perceive the content. Text-based platforms like Twitter facilitate rapid information exchange and public discourse, while image-focused platforms like Instagram tend to emphasize visual storytelling and personal branding (Highfield, 2016). Understanding these distinctions is crucial for analyzing how different social media environments influence user behavior and identity formation.

Excessive Social Media Use

Excessive social media use refers to a pattern of behavior characterized by over-reliance on social media platforms, leading to negative consequences in various aspects of an individual's life, including mental health, physical health, and social interactions. The threshold for what constitutes "excessive" use can vary, but it generally involves spending a disproportionate amount of time on social media at the expense of other activities, leading to impairment in daily functioning (Andreassen, Pallesen, & Griffiths, 2017).

Criteria and Components of Excessive Use

Excessive social media use is often assessed using criteria similar to those for behavioral addictions. These include the following aspects (Griffiths, Kuss, & Demetrovics, 2014).

- **Increased Preoccupation** with social media, where individuals think about social media use very often/constantly. Craving for social media use and Relapse after attempts to cut down or quit.
- **Tolerance**, where increasing amounts of engagement time are needed to achieve the desired satisfaction.
- **Withdrawal symptoms** when not using social media, such as irritability or anxiety.
- **Conflicts** in personal or professional life due to the prioritization of social media use.

The main components of excessive use include the following (Kross et al., 2013; Vannucci et al., 2017):

- **Frequency and Duration:** Spending several hours per day on social media platforms, often at the expense of sleep, work, or face-to-face interactions.
- **Content Engagement:** Excessive use often involves not just passive scrolling but active engagement, such as frequent posting, commenting, and checking notifications.
- **Emotional Investment:** Users may become emotionally dependent on the validation received through likes, comments, and shares, which can contribute to a cycle of use and gratification.

Dimensions and Content

Excessive social media use can be multidimensional, affecting various areas of life (Andreassen et al., 2016):

- **Cognitive:** Constant thoughts about social media and its content, which may interfere with other cognitive tasks.
- **Behavioral:** The compulsion to check social media repeatedly throughout the day.
- **Emotional:** Dependency on social media interactions for mood regulation, often leading to mood swings based on online feedback.

The content consumed can also play a role in excessive use. Platforms that focus on image-sharing, such as Instagram, can exacerbate issues related to body image and self-esteem, while platforms like Twitter may contribute to stress due to the constant influx of news and opinions (Meier & Gray, 2014).

Effective Interventions and Tools

Several interventions have been shown to be effective in managing and reducing excessive social media use:

- **Digital Detox:** Temporary breaks from social media can help reset usage patterns and reduce dependency (Vanman, Baker, & Tobin, 2018).
- **Mindfulness Training:** Programs that teach mindfulness can help users become more aware of their social media habits and reduce compulsive behavior (Apaolaza, Hartmann, D'Souza, & Gilsanz, 2019).
- **Behavioral Interventions:** Techniques such as setting specific times for social media use, turning off notifications, and using apps that track and limit screen time have proven effective (Hofmann, Reinecke, & Meier, 2017).

Educational programs that promote digital literacy and self-regulation skills are also crucial. These programs help users understand the potential risks of excessive use and develop strategies for balanced and healthy social media engagement (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010).

Impacts of Social Media Use on Mental Health

Social media usage may adversely affect mental health. High levels of social media use are linked to increased anxiety and depression in emerging adults (Vannucci et al., 2017). This is particularly true for individuals who engage in frequent social comparison and/or experience cyberbullying (Vannucci et al., 2017; Woods & Scott, 2016).

Social media use, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to poor sleep quality and subsequent mental health issues. This effect is attributed to the blue light emitted by screens and the psychological arousal from engaging with social media content (Levenson, Shensa, Sidani, Colditz, & Primack, 2016).

Exposure to idealized images on social media platforms can lead to body dissatisfaction and negative self-esteem. This effect is mediated by the tendency to engage in upward social comparisons (Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian, & Halliwell, 2015).

Social media can exacerbate the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO). FoMO is defined as a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. FoMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing. FoMo can lead to higher stress levels and decreased life satisfaction. Individuals with high FoMO are more likely to engage in problematic social media use, which in turn affects their mental health negatively (Przybylski, Murayama, DeHaan, & Gladwell, 2013).

Social media consumption can negatively impact mental health through various behavioral patterns.

- **Duration and Frequency of Use:** Many studies consider the threshold for excessive use to be spending more than 2-3 hours per day on social media platforms. Studies suggest that high frequency of social media use is associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. For instance, Lin et al. noted that young adults who spend more than two hours daily on social media are more likely to exhibit depressive symptoms compared to those who use it for less than 30 minutes per day (Lin et al., 2016). This relationship persists across different age groups, with adolescents and young adults being particularly vulnerable (Keles, McCrae, & Grealish, 2020).

- **Types of Social Media Use:** Different types of social media use can have varying effects on mental health: Passive consumption of social media, such as scrolling through feeds without interacting, is linked to negative outcomes. Passive use fosters social comparison and feelings of envy, leading to decreased well-being (Verduyn, Ybarra, Résibois, Jonides, & Kross, 2017). Active engagement, such as commenting and messaging, has mixed outcomes. While it can foster social connection, it can also lead to stress and anxiety, particularly if interactions are negative or conflictual (Frison & Eggermont, 2017). Problematic or addictive social media use, characterized by compulsive behaviors and interference with daily life, is associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Andreassen et al., 2016).

- **Problematic and Addictive Behaviors:** Social media use is considered excessive when it becomes problematic, defined by compulsive checking, prioritizing social media over other activities, and difficulties reducing use despite negative consequences. Excessive social media use often results in neglect of personal, academic, or professional responsibilities. Excessive users experience significant interference in daily routines, reduced productivity, and strained relationships (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). These patterns are often assessed using tools like the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), which evaluates symptoms such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Andreassen et al., 2017).

Evidence-Based Suggestions for Appropriate Social Media Use

- **Limit Usage Time:** Restricting social media use to less than 30 minutes per day has been shown to significantly reduce feelings of loneliness and depression (Hunt, Marx, Lipson, & Young, 2018).

- **Promote Active and Positive Engagement:** Encouraging active, positive interactions on social media, rather than passive consumption, can mitigate some negative effects. Positive engagement can foster social support and enhance well-being (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012).

- **Mindful Usage:** Practicing mindfulness and being aware of the emotional responses triggered by social media can help individuals manage their usage more effectively. Mindfulness interventions have been shown to reduce problematic use and improve mental health outcomes (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Lewis, 2015).

- **Digital Detox:** Periodic breaks from social media, known as digital detox, can help reduce anxiety and improve overall mental health. Structured detox programs can provide individuals with tools to manage their social media habits more healthily (Dempsey, O'Brien, Tiamiyu, & Elhai, 2019).

Media Literacy

Media literacy is the skill set that enables individuals to access, critically evaluate, create, and act upon information across various media forms. This skill involves understanding the messages conveyed through media, analyzing their intent, and recognizing biases, allowing users to become more informed and active participants in society (Livingstone, 2004). Media literacy has become increasingly important with the rise of digital information, as it helps individuals discern credible sources, understand media influence, and avoid misinformation. Studies show that people with higher media literacy are better equipped to engage in civic discourse and make informed decisions (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013).

Promoting Media Literacy

Media literacy can be promoted through educational programs, public awareness campaigns, and tools that teach critical thinking. Studies show that including media literacy in school programs helps students understand media's role in society and develop safer online habits. Policymakers also play a part by setting standards for media education and supporting initiatives against misinformation (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

Digital Well-being

Digital well-being is about using technology in ways that positively support mental, emotional, and physical health. It involves a balanced use of digital tools, avoiding overuse and dependency, which can negatively impact mental health. Given the widespread use of technology today, digital well-being aims to reduce problems such as anxiety, social comparison, and sleep disruption arising from heavy digital engagement (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

Promoting Digital Well-being

Digital well-being can be improved by encouraging healthy habits, such as limiting screen time, using apps that monitor digital use, and prioritizing offline activities. Programs that teach balanced digital habits, especially for adolescents, can lessen negative impacts on mental health (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). Parents and educators also play a vital role in setting examples of healthy technology use and helping young people develop self-control in digital spaces (Odgers & Jensen, 2020).

Cyberbullying and Online Sexual Harassment

Cyberbullying is the use of digital technology to intimidate, humiliate, or harm someone, often happening on social media or messaging platforms (Kowalski et al., 2014). Sexual harassment on the internet can take various forms and partly overlaps with cyberbullying. This includes, for example, unwanted sexual comments or advances in digital spaces. Unlike offline harassment, such actions can be carried out anonymously online and quickly reach a wide audience (Smith et al., 2008).

Impact on Victims

Victims of cyberbullying and online sexual harassment often experience anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. In severe cases, victims may develop suicidal thoughts. The online nature of harassment can make the trauma last longer since harmful messages or images may stay online indefinitely, impacting victims' mental health over time (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010).

Prevention and Intervention

Preventing cyberbullying and online harassment requires educational programs, digital tools for reporting abuse, and promoting positive online interactions. Schools can use awareness programs to teach empathy and responsible online behavior. Clear reporting options for victims, along with support from educators, tech companies, and policymakers, can help create safer online environments and reduce digital harassment risks (Cross, Lester, & Barnes, 2015; Williford et al., 2013).

Intervention Plan: The Digital Self

Learning Objectives

Objectives

- Understanding the impact the digital self has on an individual´s life and how it affects well-being and safety
- Critically reflecting on the way genders are presented in social media

After the session, participants will be able to:

- Reflect on the questions: "What is my digital self?" and "What do I want to show to others — and why?"
- Explore what constitutes sexually transgressive behavior on social media and what actions can help prevent it.
- Consider how to protect themselves in the digital world and apply practical strategies for online safety.

Overview of the Module (Course of Events)

Module Digital Self	Brief description	Time
Introduction	**PreWorks Video** is shown to the participants, and the facilitator introduces themselves and the rules for the workshop.	5 min
Icebreaker	Quick reflection: My last post on social media.	5 min
Activating Photo Task: Who am I on social media?	Presenting individual views on one's digital self by using different pictures.	25 min
Break		10 min
Protecting Your Digital Self -Workshop	Map out ways to project oneself on social media by using prepared cases.	40 min
Closing Activity	Name one thing that you learned.	5 min

Materials needed for this Module

- A spacious room that allows all participants to engage comfortably
- Beamer/Screen for the introductory video.
- Photos for Activating Photo Task (printed out). Please look for the pictures in the Additional Materials.
- Cases for the Protecting Your Digital Self -Workshop
- Pens, markers, and paper (A3/A2)/Sticky notes for collecting thoughts.

Group Rules

1. This is a safe space. There is no place for homophobia, transphobia, racism, or other forms of discrimination.
2. We are here to learn together. There are no such things as stupid questions: Ask away! Be curious!
3. Talk from your own perspective. Avoid generalizations.
4. Mutual respect is important. We can have different opinions, but we will talk about them with respect and care for each other.

Activity Descriptions

The following section provides detailed descriptions of the activities: Introduction, Icebreaker, Activating Photo Task, Break, Protecting Your Digital Self – Workshop, and Closing Activity. Each activity plays a distinct role within the session structure, whether it is to build rapport, activate self-reflection, introduce key concepts, or support group engagement and closure. Clear instructions, defined objectives, and practical tips are included to help facilitators implement the activities effectively and adapt them to different age groups and group dynamics.

Introduction (5 min)

Begin the Workshop by welcoming everyone and presenting yourself.

Examples of welcoming opening phrases:

- "Today, we aim to understand what digital self means to oneself and what I want to show to others and why."
- "Today, we aim to understand what the digital self means to oneself and what impact it has on individuals' lives."
- "Have you been wondering how the digital self affects individuals' wellbeing and safety? Today, we are learning about these."
- "Today we are learning about the concept of transgressive behavior."
- "Do you know what transgressive behavior is on social media? Today we are going to learn about that."
- "Today we aim to understand how different genders are presenting themselves on social media and how it can affect individuals' wellbeing."

After this, show the **PreWorks video** for participants. *Ask the participants to think for themselves about what they see in the video from today's session's point of view.*

When the video is shown, **set the rules for the workshop today** (see above). These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

After presenting the rules, ask: "Can everyone agree to these rules? Is there anything anyone would like to add?" After everyone approves the rules, the workshop can start.

Activities

Icebreaker (5 min)

To warm up, the participants start with the **Icebreaker Task**. Ask participants to recall the last thing they shared on social media (a photo, post, reel, or tweet) and reflect in one sentence on why they chose to share it. Use a ball that is thrown from one person to the other one who has not already answered, giving people the freedom to not answer if they do not wish to. Use max 5 minutes on this task.

After everyone has given (if wanted) the answer to the Icebreaker's question, move to the **Activating Photo Task, Who am I on social media? (25 min)**

Activating Photo Task: Who am I on social media? (25 min)

The purpose of the Activating Photo Task is to view the pictures of different kinds of genders, relationships, and stereotypes, and reflect on what the person in the picture wants to transmit to the audience, as well as on what kind of thoughts and feelings the picture evokes in the viewers. It is also important to keep the task inclusive (gender, ethnicity, disabilities, etc.).

Divide the participants into pairs or groups of 3, depending on the number of participants. Please note that smaller groups require more time to go through all the groups´ outputs at the end of the workshop.

Give every group about 3-5 pictures, depending on group size. Please look for pictures in the chapter Additional Materials. Please make sure to collect the material afterward so it can be reused in future workshops. Give the pairs or groups an A3/A2 piece of paper and pens/markers to collect thoughts, for example, in word clouds or phrases/key words.

Pairs or groups have 15 minutes to discuss the following questions based on the pictures. After they have discussed the questions, they choose one picture that they want to present to the other participants. Insights on this one picture are then summarized in keywords on an A3/A2 piece of paper.

Ask the groups to focus on the question **"What do you think that the person who posted this wants to communicate?"**. Focus on the common discussion part, so nobody feels obliged to share their personal feelings. Please note that the questions are supposed to be thought-provoking.

Age groups 13-15:

- What do you see in the picture?
- How does the picture make you feel?
- What do you think the person in the picture is trying to communicate?

Age groups 16-23 and 23-30:

- What do you see in the picture?
- What kind of feelings does the picture cause in you?
- What do you think the person in the picture wants to share/communicate?

After 15 minutes, the pairs or the groups present their thoughts and insights to the others about the one picture they have chosen. Insights are summarized in keywords on an A3/A2 piece of paper. As a facilitator, apply the integrated theory related to the topic as part of the discussion. (10min)
After this task take **a break.**

Break (10 min)

The break offers participants a chance to rest, reset, and process what they have experienced so far. It is important to create a relaxed and inclusive atmosphere to encourage informal conversation, but remain attentive to group dynamics. Some participants may want to step away quietly, while others may seek connection. Facilitators should stay available and approachable during this time, as sensitive topics might prompt individual questions or emotional reactions.

After the break, dive deeper to the main topic of prevention of sexually transgressive behavior in social media in the Workshop **Protecting Your Digital Self** (40 minutes).

Protecting Your Digital Self (40 min)

Before starting this activity, it's important to make sure that the participants understand what these key concepts mean. Define sexually transgressive behavior and cyberbullying by using these definitions:

"Sexually transgressive behavior is a worldwide problem that affects all genders, but particularly girls, women, and sexual minority youths. STB includes any behavior that crosses the boundaries of appropriateness and acceptability and is potentially harming others, such as taking pictures, making inappropriate comments, touching and kissing without consent, harassing, assaulting, and raping."

"Cyberbullying is the use of digital technology to intimidate, humiliate, or harm someone, often happening on social media or messaging platforms." (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner 2014).

"Online sexual harassment, a form of cyberbullying, includes unwanted sexual comments or advances sent online. These behaviors differ from offline bullying because digital harassment can be anonymous and reach a wide audience quickly" (Smith et al. 2008).

The focus on this activity is on the question **"How to protect oneself in the digital world and know how to act, if one is subjected to cyberbullying or sexual harassment?** The participants are divided into pairs or groups of 3, depending on the number of participants. Please note that smaller groups require more time to go through all the groups' outputs at the end of the workshop.

Provide each pair or group with case materials featuring Instagram profiles. Please find the Instagram cases in the Additional Materials.

Please make sure to gather the material back to use it multiple times (in other workshops). Give the pairs or groups a A3/A2 piece of paper or sticky notes and pens/markers to collect thoughts.

Age groups 13-15:

Ask the pairs or the groups to look at the comments on Instagram -cases and to discuss the following questions: What do you think would be an empowering comment?

- What kind of comment is sexually transgressive behavior?
- What would you do if you got a sexually transgressive comment on your own profile?

Based on the pairs' or groups' discussions, they write their own definition of STB and their thoughts on what to do if they encounter STB on social media. (20 minutes)

After the pair/group work, begin the workshop's closing part. Each pair or group briefly presents their insights to the others. Facilitate the discussion with them, focusing on the question, "What should you do if you encounter STB?". As a facilitator, provide information and clear instructions (based on the practices in your area or city) about where to get help and where to report the harassment. (20minutes)

Age groups 15-23 / 23-30:

Ask participants to look at the Instagram profiles-cases. Ask participants to discuss what kind of comments are considered as STB in these cases, and also how they would handle and react to the different situations of STB.

- How would you react and act if the STB targeted you personally? ("What would you do?", "What options do you think you have?"). Share your thoughts with your partner or group.
- As a pair or group, write out your conclusion about what to do if you encounter STB on social media or notice that someone else encounters it.

Once the Protecting Your Digital Self activity is finished, guide the group into the workshop's closing phase. The pairs or groups present their insights to the larger group, focusing on the question: What can you do if you encounter STB on social media or observe someone else experiencing it? As the facilitator, integrate relevant theory into the discussion to deepen understanding of the topic. (20 min)

Closing Activity (5 min)

Ask each participant to share one key takeaway from the workshop, something they found most important or meaningful. You can prompt them with the question: "How are you going to apply this to your own life?"

Troubleshooting for Trainers

Challenge	Facilitator Response
A participant shows a dismissive attitude towards STB, e.g., laughing at an STB-related comment.	Intervene clearly and firmly. Remind the participant of the group rules and the seriousness of the topic.
Group dynamics are not functioning well.	Pause the activity if needed. Remind the group of the rules and the importance of respectful collaboration. Create space to reset the tone.
Bullying occurs within the group.	Intervene immediately and firmly. Remind participants of the group rules. If the behavior continues, clearly state that bullying is not acceptable. Ask the person(s) to leave if necessary.
One person dominates a group discussion.	Join the group and gently guide the conversation. Direct questions to quieter participants. Kindly remind the dominant individual that all voices are important and should be heard.

Additional Materials

Please refer to the PreWorks online library for additional materials, presentations, and photo banks designed for different age groups. There you'll find extra worksheets, images, and supportive resources.

Material Bank for Module 2

> Photo Bank – Young Adolescents
> Photo Bank – Adolescents & Young Adults
> Photo Bank – Adults
> Cases > Cases for Young Adolescents
> Cases > Cases for Adolescents & Young Adults
> Module 2 Presentation

Module 3
Safe Relationships and Safety Strategies

Module 3: Safe Relationships and Safety Strategies

Background

Appropriate vs. inappropriate sexually motivated behaviors, recognizing signs of abuse, examples of STBs, exploration of support systems, characteristics of safe relationships, self-empowerment, sexual positivity, and well-being.

Safe relationships are characterized by mutual respect, trust, and open communication, where all parties feel secure and supported. These relationships ensure the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of the individuals involved, with clear boundaries and a consensual understanding of roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, unsafe relationships involve elements of control, manipulation, abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual), and often a power imbalance that jeopardizes the well-being of one or more individuals. Healthy relationships contribute to positive mental health, while unsafe relationships increase the risk of psychological distress, violence, and adverse outcomes (Banyard, Plante, & Moynihan, 2004).

Historically, the conceptualization of safe relationships has evolved. In the early 20th century, relationships were largely dictated by societal and gender norms, with little emphasis on emotional safety or mutual respect, particularly for women and marginalized groups. The rise of human rights movements in the latter half of the century, including feminism and LGBTQ+ advocacy, gradually shifted the understanding of relationships, emphasizing consent, equality, and the importance of emotional and psychological well-being. Research from the 1990s onward has reinforced the need for safety and equality in relationships, particularly in the context of intimate partner violence prevention and the promotion of gender equality (Connell, 2012).

Parenting, Family, and Early Childhood Prevention

Early experiences and parenting practices play a crucial role in shaping relationship safety later in life. Research highlights that early childhood environments significantly influence an individual's understanding and expectations of relationships. According to a review by Mikulincer & Shaver (2012), attachment styles formed in early childhood—secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized—have profound impacts on later relationship dynamics and safety.

Children exposed to healthy, secure, and supportive parenting tend to develop secure attachment patterns, characterized by trust, effective communication, and healthy boundaries in relationships. Conversely, children who experience inconsistent, neglectful, or abusive parenting are more likely to develop insecure attachment styles, predisposing them to relationship difficulties, including increased vulnerability to abusive or unsafe relationships in adulthood (Bowlby 1969; Cassidy & Shaver 1999).

Family-based interventions can effectively foster healthy relationship models and prevent future relationship abuse or dysfunction. For instance, Programs such as the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and the Incredible Years series have demonstrated efficacy in promoting positive parenting practices, reducing harsh discipline, and increasing supportive parent-child interactions (Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day 2014). Furthermore, attachment-based interventions and Circle of Security aim to strengthen secure attachment between caregivers and children, positively influencing children's emotional regulation and relational capacities (Dozier, Bernard, Roben, Steele, & Steele 2017).

Integrating social-emotional learning, promoting resilience, and teaching skills for forming positive relationships has a significant impact on long-term relational health and safety (Yoshikawa et al. 2013).

This underscores the importance of preventive approaches early in life, empowering caregivers and other responsible adults to create nurturing environments that enhance children's ability to build and maintain safe, healthy relationships throughout their lives.

Risk of STB in Relationships

STB in relationships is influenced by a combination of individual, relational, and environmental factors. Individual factors include a history of trauma, substance abuse, and exposure to violence, which increase the risk of perpetrating or being victimized by STB (R. K. Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, & Shai, 2010). Relationship factors, such as unequal power dynamics, lack of communication, and high levels of conflict, can also contribute to the risk of STB (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012). Environmental factors like societal norms that condone violence, limited access to education, and poverty exacerbate the risks, particularly in marginalized communities

Population/Groups at Risk for STB

Certain populations are disproportionately at risk of experiencing STB in relationships. Adolescents and young adults, particularly those who lack access to comprehensive sexual education, are vulnerable due to limited knowledge of consent and healthy relationship dynamics (DeGue et al., 2014). LGBTQ+ individuals face additional risks due to societal stigma, discrimination, and higher rates of bullying and mental health challenges. Additionally, individuals in lower socioeconomic strata or those with histories of childhood abuse are more likely to engage in or be victims of STB (Russell & Fish, 2016).

The sequelae of STB in Relationships

The consequences of STB in relationships can be severe and long-lasting. Victims of STB may experience emotional and psychological trauma, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can impair their ability to form healthy future relationships (Dutton & Painter, 1993). The physical consequences may include injury and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), while relational consequences can include isolation, loss of trust, and the perpetuation of abusive cycles (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral, 2009). In the long term, survivors of STB often face challenges in reestablishing a sense of safety and security in their relationships.

Evidence-Based Suggestions for Safe Relationships and safety strategies

Preventive Measures

Evidence-based preventive measures for fostering safe relationships emphasize education, community engagement, and policy interventions. Comprehensive sexual education programs that include discussions on consent, communication, and gender equality have been shown to reduce the incidence of STB (Kirby et al., 2007). Peer-led interventions and bystander programs also play a crucial role in promoting awareness and intervening in potentially unsafe situations, thus preventing STB before it occurs (Banyard et al., 2004). Furthermore, community-based programs that focus on changing social norms and challenging toxic masculinity have demonstrated success in reducing relationship violence (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Safety Strategies in Practice

Effective safety strategies in relationships involve creating environments where open communication, respect, and boundaries are prioritized. Techniques such as assertiveness training, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution skills can empower individuals to navigate relationships safely (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004). Safety planning for those at risk of STB includes identifying safe places, creating a network of trusted individuals, and having access to resources like helplines and shelters (Sullivan & Bybee, 1999). Additionally, the use of technology-based interventions, such as mobile applications that provide real-time support and resources for individuals in unsafe relationships, has gained traction as an innovative approach to relationship safety (Stockman, Hayashi, & Campbell, 2015).

Intervention Plan: Safe Relationships and Safety Strategies

Learning Objectives

Objectives

- Understanding the difference between appropriate and inappropriate sexually motivated behaviors.
- Recognizing the characteristics of safe, respectful, and healthy relationships.
- Learning strategies to identify unsafe or unhealthy behaviors or situations.
- Developing language and communication skills for expressing personal boundaries.

After the session, participants will be able to:

- Reflect on the difference between appropriate and inappropriate sexually motivated behaviors.
- Identify key characteristics of safe and respectful relationships.
- Recognize behaviors and situations that may indicate an unsafe or unhealthy relationship.
- Acquire suitable words for expressing my own boundaries.

Overview of the Module (Course of Events)

Module Section	Brief Description	Time
Introduction	PreWorks Video is shown to participants, and the facilitator introduces themselves..	10 min
Icebreaker	Introduction to the topic, raising awareness of widespread (mis)perceptions about relationships and security.	5 min
Group Discussion	Exploration of relationship dynamics through guided questions	20 min
Break		10 min
Interactive Workshop	Navigating Support Systems in Gender Conflicts Case studies, Break out-Group Discussion, Support Mapping Activity, Role Play and Scenario Refinement	40 min
Closing Activity	Participants share key takeaways	10 min

Materials needed for this Module

- Enough space to move around
- Beamer/Screen for the introductory video
- Printed Case materials for small group discussions (printable scenarios, age-appropriate/ moderation kit)
- Paper, pens, and sticky notes for brainstorming/reflection/ flipchart

Group Rules

Set some rules for the workshop today. These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

1. This is a safe space. There is no place for homophobia, transphobia, racism, or other forms of discrimination.
2. We are here to learn together. There are no such things as stupid questions: Ask away! Be curious!
3. Talk from your own perspective. Avoid generalizations.
4. Mutual respect is important. We can have different opinions, but we will talk about them with respect and care for each other.

Activity Descriptions

The following section provides detailed descriptions of the activities: Introduction, Group Discussion, Break, Case Study Simulation, Breakout Group Discussions, Support Mapping Activity, Role Play and Scenario Refinement, and Closing Activity. Each activity plays a distinct role within the session structure, whether it's to build rapport, activate self-reflection, introduce key concepts, or support group engagement and closure. Clear instructions, defined objectives, and practical tips are included to help facilitators implement the activities effectively and adapt them to different age groups and group dynamics.

Introduction (10 min)

Go over the group rules together (see above). These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

Activities

Icebreaker: Add the Beginnings of Sentences (5 min)

Aim: To introduce the topic through personal associations without being too direct or too private.

Procedure:

1. briefly explain: "I'll tell you a few sentence starters in a moment. If you like, add to them spontaneously - out loud or quietly to yourself. There is no right or wrong."
2. read out the following sentence beginnings (one after the other) - depending on the size of the group, you can invite the participants to add to them out loud, to speak freely in the room or simply to think briefly.

Example sentence beginnings:

To start - understanding relationships

- "For me, a healthy relationship means ..."
- "In a friendship, it is particularly important to me ..."
- "I find it difficult when in a relationship ..."
- "I realize that a friendship is good for me when ..."
- "A relationship feels insecure when ..."

On the topic of boundaries & safety

- "I feel safe when ..."
- "For me, setting boundaries means ..."
- "I think it's brave when someone in a relationship ..."
- "For me, a clear 'no' is ..."
- "I realize that boundaries are being crossed in a relationship when ..."

On the subject of mutual respect

- "Respect in a relationship is shown by ..."
- "I would like my partner to..."
- "You can build trust by ..."
- "I don't think it's okay if ..."

Group Discussion (20 min)

Facilitate a group discussion using a series of age-appropriate questions. While the group shares ideas out loud, one person (or several participants) visually captures the conversation by creating a mind map on paper. This allows the group to see how their thoughts connect and evolve, turning spoken input into a visual representation of shared understanding.

Questions for age groups 13 - 15:

- Which characteristics make a relationship feel "good" to me? (e.g. loyality).Think about how you get along with family, friends, teachers, or teammates -not just romantic relationships.
- Which characteristics make a relationship feel „bad" to me (e.g. dishonesty,...)? You can also think about things you see in the relationships of other people that you see as problematic.
- Do I know what makes me feel comfortable or uncomfortable with others? (Let's talk about "boundaries"). Can I talk about what I'm okay with or not okay with when I need to?
- How do I show respect for other people's personal space or feelings?

Questions for age groups 15-23:

- What does a healthy relationship mean to me? How do gender dynamics and sexual boundaries play into that?
- How can I respect and navigate others' sexual boundaries in different situations? And what about my own boundaries?
- What does "sexual transgression" mean to me?
- How do I identify sexual transgression in my own relationships?
- How can I create and maintain healthy gender dynamics in my relationships?
- How do I show respect for other people's personal space or feelings?

Questions for age groups 23-30:

- How can I ensure I am respecting other people's boundaries in both personal and professional situations?
- Am I in touch with my emotional boundaries, and how do I recognize when they are being pushed? / How do I recognize when my emotional boundaries are being pushed too far, and what happens when they are crossed?
- How do I respond to the emotional boundaries of others, especially when they are different from my own? What can I do to respect them?
- How do I communicate my emotional needs and boundaries to others, and how comfortable am I with that?
- What does a truly meaningful relationship look like to me?
- When I need emotional space, do I give myself permission to step back, or do I feel guilty?
- How do I navigate the complexities of respecting others' emotional boundaries when their pain or vulnerability triggers my own?

Case Study Simulation (40 min)

Present a case study involving a gender-related conflict. Briefly introduce the situation to the group, providing enough context for participants to understand the key issues and perspectives involved. (3 min)

Cases for Age groups 13-15 :

Jane, a 13-year-old student, participates in online gaming and often streams her gaming sessions. After a few successful streams, she begins receiving sexually suggestive comments and explicit messages from some followers. She feels uncomfortable and unsafe but isn't sure how to report the behavior or whom to talk to. Jane worries about the potential backlash from her community if she calls out these individuals.

Emir, a 15-year-old, is excited to hang out with his friends at the skate park, but his girlfriend, Emily, has already planned a movie night. When he tells her, she gets upset, saying he's choosing his friends over her. Jake feels torn—he doesn't want to hurt Emily, but he also misses his friends. Under pressure, he starts feeling guilty, wondering if he's a bad boyfriend. Caught between love and friendship, he struggles to find balance.

Case for Age groups 15-23:

Mia, a 22-year-old student, is walking home from class when a stranger makes an inappropriate comment about her appearance. She feels uneasy but doesn't know whether she should speak up or ignore the situation. Mia considers reporting the incident to the police, but is unsure whether it's serious enough to warrant such action. She also doesn't want to risk escalating the situation and feels uncertain about who to talk to for support.

Alex, 19, feels uncomfortable as his boyfriend, Liam, ignores his boundaries—reading his messages, demanding constant updates, and pressuring him into affection. When Alex voices concerns, Liam dismisses them, saying it's just love. Feeling suffocated but afraid of hurting Liam, Alex starts realizing that love shouldn't come at the cost of his personal space.

Case for Age groups 23 - 30:

Sophie, a woman working in a male-dominated industry, experiences ongoing inappropriate comments and unwelcome attention from a colleague. She feels uncomfortable but is unsure about how to address it. Her work environment doesn't seem supportive, and she's unsure who to turn to.

Lucia, 26, loves her boyfriend, Mark, but feels little desire for intimacy. While he craves affection, she sometimes prefers emotional connection over physical closeness. When Mark asks if something's wrong, she struggles to explain, questioning whether she can meet his needs without compromising herself.

Breakout Group Discussions (10 min)

Divide participants into small groups (3-4 people). In the groups, participants discuss:

- Who would be helpful for the person to turn to (e.g., friends, HR, legal resources)?
- What specific advice or actions should the person consider to address the situation?
- What could be helpful to sort out the situation for themselves?

Each group member contributes at least one idea or resource. After the group discussions, have each group **share** its key insights with the larger group.

Support Mapping Activity (7 min)

Create a Mind Map where participants can add **sticky notes** and contribute ideas. The map will have the central node as "Sophie's" Support Network" and branches that represent:

- Personal Support (e.g., friends, family, mentor)
- Professional Support (e.g., HR, supervisor, legal advice)
- Community Resources (e.g., helplines, women's shelters, online support forums)

As a group, **brainstorm together**, where participants suggest possible people or organizations Sophie could rely on, placing them around the central node. Discuss the different types of support systems and the importance of building an inclusive network.

Role Play and Scenario Refinement (20 min)

Role Play (Optional): Invite volunteers to take on the roles of Sophie, a trusted friend, and an HR representative in a brief 20-minute role play. The scenario is Sophie reaching out for help.

It is recommended that the trainers or workshop leaders take on the role of advisor. It is often embarrassing, especially for young people, to play a role in front of others. In the role of the person seeking help, it is somewhat easier than in the role of wanting to give good advice.

It is also possible to carry out role plays in small groups as an alternative. As the pressure to perform quickly arises in role plays, the participants could be asked to give one piece of good advice and one piece of bad advice in the role of the advisor. After the role play, the group discusses:

- What worked well in the role play?
- What could have been handled differently?
- How would Sophie feel after talking to these people or taking these actions?

Closing Activity (5 min)

In this final activity, participants take time to reflect on what they've learned during the session and consider how they can apply it in their daily lives. The goal is to encourage personal insight and turn awareness into concrete next steps. This moment of reflection also helps to reinforce key messages and empower participants to take action beyond the workshop. Together reflect on the following questions:

- How confident do you feel about identifying support in a gender-related conflict now?
- What is one action you can take to strengthen your support network?

Wrap-Up Discussion: Encourage participants to take away a commitment for action, either by expanding their own support networks or by offering help to others in similar situations.

Facilitators can choose one of the following reflection activities to wrap up the session and support participants in connecting the content to their own lives:

- **One Word for Safe Relationships:** Each participant selects one word that represents safe relationships to them.
- **Creative Expression:** Participants create a short expression—a word, drawing, or phrase—that reflects why safe relationships are important.
- **Key Takeaway Round:** Everyone briefly shares one key insight or takeaway from the session.

Troubleshooting for Trainers

Challenge	Facilitator Response
Participant Becomes Emotional	**Immediate Response:** Acknowledge the emotion without judgment. Allow space and time for the participants to compose themselves. **Offer Support:** Let them know their feelings are valid and provide reassurance. Offer to follow up privately if needed. **Professional Resources:** If necessary, refer them to professional counseling or support services. **Trainer Note:** Stay calm and grounded. Check in with the participant after the session to ensure ongoing support.
Inappropriate Comments	**Address Immediately:** Calmly explain why the comment is inappropriate and reinforce the need for respect. **Learning Moment:** Use the situation to educate the group on the impact of their words, guiding them toward respectful communication. **Redirect:** Once addressed, quickly refocus the group on the session's content.
Sensitivity in role-playing	Creating a safe atmosphere where making mistakes is allowed. Take emotions seriously and allow space for them.

Additional Materials

Please refer to the PreWorks online library for additional material.

Material Bank for Module 3 > Module 3 Presentation

Module 4
Healthy Communication and Consent

Module 4: Healthy Communication and Consent

Background

Self-expression, principles of effective communication, skills for respectful disagreement and conflict resolution, the importance of personal boundaries, and consent.

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are the cohort of people born approximately between 1981 and 1996. This generation precedes Generation Z.

Generation Z, often abbreviated as Gen Z, refers to the cohort of people born approximately between the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s. This generation follows the millennials.

Communication skills regarding sexual consent show notable differences between Gen Z and Millennials, reflecting shifts in cultural norms, education, and digital influences.

Education and Awareness

- **Millennials:** Research indicates that millennials have benefited from the early efforts of sexual education programs that included discussions on consent, but these programs were often inconsistent and varied widely by region and institution (Haberland, 2015).
- **Gen Z:** This generation has generally received more comprehensive and consistent education on consent due to the increasing focus on sexual violence prevention in schools and universities. They are more likely to have been exposed to affirmative consent policies and education campaigns such as "Yes Means Yes" (Lafrance, Loe & Brown, 2012).

Digital Communication and Social Media Influence:

- **Millennials:** While millennials adopted social media and digital communication as these technologies emerged, their formative years were less influenced by these platforms. Consequently, their communication around consent might have been less mediated by digital contexts and more reliant on direct, face-to-face interactions (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).
- **Gen Z:** Growing up with ubiquitous access to social media and digital communication tools, Gen Z tends to navigate consent conversations both online and offline. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat play a role in their understanding and communication about sexual behaviors, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings but also provide spaces for education and advocacy (Fowler et al., 2021).

Cultural Shifts and Movements:

- **Millennials:** The #MeToo movement had a significant impact on millennials, who were in their late teens to early thirties when it gained prominence. This movement led to increased awareness and dialogue around issues of consent and sexual misconduct, prompting many millennials to re-evaluate and improve their communication about sexual behaviors (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019).
- **Gen Z:** For Gen Z, the #MeToo movement occurred during their formative years, further embedding the principles of affirmative consent and respect for boundaries into their social norms. This has led to a generation more attuned to issues of consent and more likely to engage in explicit conversations about boundaries and consent (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Differences in Approaches to Consent

- **Explicit Communication:** Gen Z tends to be more comfortable with explicit and direct communication regarding consent. This generation has been educated to understand that clear, verbal consent is necessary and beneficial for all parties involved (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).
- **Understanding of Consent as a Continuous Process:** Both generations recognize that consent is an ongoing process, but Gen Z shows a greater tendency to continuously check in with their partners during sexual encounters, reflecting a more nuanced understanding of consent (Beres, 2014).
- **Impact of Technology on Consent Communication:** Gen Z uses digital tools to facilitate conversations about consent, including apps designed to record consent and platforms for discussing boundaries. This tech-savviness can help reduce ambiguities but also raises concerns about privacy and the potential for misuse (Muehlenhard et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Improving Communication Skills

- **Education Programs:** Continue to develop and implement comprehensive sexual education programs that emphasize affirmative consent for all generations.
- **Digital Literacy:** Teach all generations about the responsible use of digital tools in communicating consent to prevent misunderstandings and ensure privacy.
- **Ongoing Dialogue:** Encourage open and ongoing dialogue about consent, boundaries, and respect in both digital and physical spaces.

Intervention Plan: Healthy Communication and Consent

Learning objectives

Objectives

- Understanding what consent is and describe its key principles (5 pillars).
- Recognizing how consent applies to different interpersonal relationships.
- Learning how to communicate boundaries and give consent effectively.

After the session, participants will be able to:

- Define consent and explain its verbal and non-verbal aspects.
- Communicate and negotiate consent confidently in relationships.
- Set and express personal boundaries clearly and respectfully.

Overview of the Module (Course of Events)

Module Healthy Communication & Consent	Brief description	Time
Introduction	PreWorks Video is shown to the participants and the facilitator introduces themselves	5 min
Personal Preferences Reflection	Personal Preferences Participants reflect on and identify their personal desires, needs, and boundaries. They share and discuss these preferences in small groups, testing how to communicate them respectfully.	5 min
The Boundary Web	Participants reflect on their boundaries, contribute to a group "Boundary Web", and discuss how to communicate boundaries and ask for consent effectively. The activity ends with actionable takeaways for real life application.	40 min
Break		10 min
Consent scenarios	Participants discuss real-life scenarios involving consent, exploring both unclear and clear communication. They analyze the outcomes and brainstorm upon effective ways to ask for or give consent. The activity can optionally include role-playing for deeper engagement.	35 min
Closing Circle	Sharing takeaways and closing the module	5 min

Materials needed for this Module

- Room with enough space
- Whiteboard/ Chart
- A4 paper (number of participants x 2)
- Sticky notes
- Colorful markers
- Worksheets

Group Rules

Set some rules for the workshop today. These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

1. This is a safe space. There is no place for homophobia, transphobia, racism, or other forms of discrimination.
2. We are here to learn together. There are no such things as stupid questions: Ask away! Be curious!
3. Talk from your own perspective. Avoid generalizations.
4. Mutual respect is important. We can have different opinions, but we will talk about them with respect and care for each other.

Activity Descriptions

The following section provides detailed descriptions of the activities: Personal Preferences Reflection, The Boundary Web, Break, Consent Scenarios, and Closing Circle. Each activity plays a distinct role within the session structure, whether it is to build rapport, activate self-reflection, introduce key concepts, or support group engagement and closure. Clear instructions, defined objectives, and practical tips are included to help facilitators implement the activities effectively and adapt them to different age groups and group dynamics.

Introduction (10 min)

After the video is shown, we welcome participants and briefly explain:

- *"Today, we're going to explore what consent is, why it's important, and how we can practice it daily."*
- *"Consent is all about respect, communication, and ensuring everyone feels comfortable with what's happening."*
- *"Consent is the freedom you have to choose for something to happen or not with someone else or a group, and it has to be clear, voluntary, and respectful."*
- *"Imagine your friend wants to borrow your phone. They ask, and, if you are okay with it, you say yes. That's consent. But if they take it without asking, if they grab it from your hands, that is not consent."*

Optional:

- *"Have you ever been in a situation of any kind in which someone asked for your permission first? How did that feel?"*

Go over the group rules together (see above). These are guidelines that will make sure that the workshop is a safe space for all.

Activities

Personal Preferences Reflection ("Who am I?") (5 min)

We ask participants to pair up with someone they don't know/don't know well. Each pair takes turns asking and answering simple preference-based questions. For example:

- "What's your favorite kind of music?"
- "Do you prefer tea or coffee?"
- "What's your favorite self-care act?"
- "Have you ever lied to a friend?"
- "Have you ever wished someone bad luck?
- "Do you prefer chatting or going out for a coffee/beer and talking with your friends?"
- "Did you grow up with both your parents?"
- What was the most annoying thing your grandparents did when you were a child?"

Important: Each participant can choose to pass if they don't want to answer.

After 3 minutes, we bring everyone back together and we ask:

- "How did you feel answering/asking these questions?"
- "How did you feel knowing you could pass if you wanted to?"
- "How did it feel to share something about yourself? How did it feel to listen?"
- "What does it mean to you that you could choose whether to answer or pass?"
- "Consent is a lot like this; it is about having the choice to share or not, and about respecting others' choices."
- "Just like in this activity, consent means you have the freedom to say 'yes', 'no', and everything in between, and all options are okay."

The Boundary Web (40 min)

Begin by explaining the concepts to the group:

"Boundaries are the rules we set to protect our comfort, well-being, and values. Consent ensures that all parties agree to and feel safe in a situation."

Then, share a few examples of clear boundary statements, such as:

- "I'm not comfortable with that,"
- "Let me think about it first".

Step 1: Personal Reflection (10min)

Give each participant a worksheet or a blank sheet of paper with reflection prompts:

- "What are my physical boundaries?"
- "What are my emotional boundaries?"
- "What are my digital/social media boundaries?"
- "How do I feel when someone crosses these boundaries?"
- "How do I feel when my boundaries are respected?"

Participants reflect individually and write down their thoughts privately. This allows them to engage with the prompts at their own pace and in a personal, meaningful way.

Step 2: Creating the Web (10min)

On a chart or whiteboard, draw a web with the word "Boundaries" in the center. Invite participants to anonymously contribute examples of their personal boundaries—either by writing them on sticky notes, which the facilitator collects and adds to the web, or by sharing them aloud if they feel comfortable.

As the contributions come in, categorize them into themes such as physical, emotional, and digital boundaries.

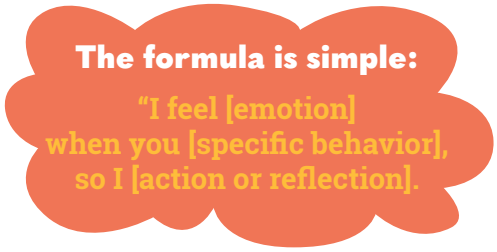
Highlight boundaries that are commonly shared among the group, as well as any challenges that appear.

Use this as a starting point to discuss how asking for and giving consent can help protect and respect personal boundaries in everyday interactions.

Follow up with two guiding questions for group reflection:

- "How can we ensure that others respect our boundaries?"
- "What phrases can we use to communicate our boundaries?"

Explain the importance of speaking for yourself by introducing the "I feel" formula, which is a powerful way to express your own feelings without blaming or attacking others, and foster a respectful dialogue.



To close the activity, invite participants to brainstorm and write down one actionable step they can take to practice setting boundaries or asking for consent in their daily lives. Encourage them to choose something realistic and personally meaningful.

Offer examples to guide their thinking:

- *"I will say 'Let me think about it' when I feel pressured to agree immediately."*
- *"I will ask, 'Are you okay with this?' before taking an action involving others."*
- *"I feel uneasy when you hug me without asking, so I would like you to ask me first next time."*

Participants may choose to keep their responses private or share them with the group, depending on their comfort level.

Consent Scenarios (40 min)

Begin by saying:

"We just explored what consent means and that you have the freedom to say 'yes,' 'no,' or anything in between. Effective consent rests on five key pillars: freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific. In this exercise, we will explore scenarios that either lack these pillars or fully incorporate them."

Divide the group into smaller teams of 3–5 participants. Provide each group with a written scenario tailored to their age group (see examples below).

Instruct each group to discuss and interpret their scenario in two ways:

a) Without consent – ignoring boundaries, making assumptions, or failing to communicate clearly.

b) With consent – applying all five pillars of consent: voluntary, enthusiastic, specific, informed, and reversible.

Hand each group a card or sheet with their scenario and offer clarification if needed.

Each group then prepares and acts out both versions of the scenario for the rest of the participants.

Round 1: Without Consent (Red flag)

Participants discuss the scenario without applying the principles of consent.

Example: Someone borrows an item without asking or assumes physical affection without checking.

Round 2: Using Consent (Green Flag)

Groups discuss the same scenario, this time applying the 5 pillars of consent (freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific)

Participants ask for permission, use clear language, and pay attention to verbal and non-verbal cues.

Facilitator Role:

Circulate among the groups to observe their interactions and ensure they remain focused on the task. Take note of key behaviors, emotional responses, or group dynamics that may be useful to highlight during the debriefing discussion.

Scenarios for Age groups 13-15:

Borrowing a personal Item: One person wants to borrow a friend´s phone

- Without consent: The borrower assumes the friend won't mind and takes the phone without asking.
- With consent: The borrower politely asks, waits for a response, and respects the friend´s decision.

Joining the Dancefloor: A new student wants to join a group of friends dancing all together at the school's party.

- Without consent: The student just joins without asking.
- With consent: The new student actively asks to join it.

Giving a Hug: A friend wants to hug another friend after receiving good news.

- Without consent: The hugger assumes the friend is okay with it and hugs them without asking.
- With consent: The hugger asks first: "Can I give you a hug?" and respects the response.

Scenarios for Age groups 15-23 and 23-30:

Negotiating a Date Time: Two friends are planning a coffee date, but one has a busy schedule.

- Without consent: One person insists on their preferred time without considering the other person´s needs.
- With consent: The friends discuss options, listen to each other's availability, and find a mutually convenient time.

Initiating Physical Affection: A couple spends time together, and one partner wants to kiss the other.

- Without consent: The person leans in without asking or checking body language.
- With consent: They ask, "Would it be okay if I kissed you?" and wait for an enthusiastic response.

Sharing a Social Media Post: A friend wants to share a group photo from a recent outing on their social media account.

- Without Consent: The person assumes everyone in the group is okay with it and posts the photo without asking for permission.
- With Consent: The person sends the photo to the group chat and asks: "Hey, I'd like to share this photo on Instagram. Is everyone okay with that?" They wait for everyone's response and respect anyone's request not to post the photo.

Bring the group back together in plenary, ideally forming a circle to support open discussion. Begin the debrief by asking participants to reflect on the activity with questions such as:

- "What happened in each version of the scenario?"
- "What differences did you notice between unclear and clear consent?"

To encourage deeper reflection, follow up with guiding questions like:

- "How did you feel when consent was absent in the scenario?"
- "How did it feel when consent was explicitly communicated?"
- "What impact did non-verbal cues (such as tone and body language) have on the interaction?"
- "What does this teach us about the importance of clear communication in consent?"
- "How can you apply what you've learned in real-life situations?"
- "What strategies can you use to ensure consent in your relationships and interactions?"

Allow space for participants to share openly and support one another's reflections.

Note: This activity can also be role-played.

Supporting Emotional Safety and Normalizing Consent Practice

Throughout the activity, create an environment where participants feel supported and safe. Gently remind them that participation is always voluntary and that their well-being comes first. Use affirming language to check in and encourage personal boundaries. For example, you might say:

- *"Is this activity okay with you? Shall we continue?"*
- *"Please remember that if you don't want to share more, you don't have to push yourself."*
- *"If something feels triggering or upsetting, you're welcome to come and talk to me during the break or afterwards."*
- *"Share only what you feel comfortable sharing. This is a space where that's fully respected."*

Be prepared to acknowledge any discomfort that may arise during the activity and create space for emotional responses. Validate participants' feelings by openly naming that these topics can be challenging, especially for those with personal experiences. You might say:

- *"If you've experienced something similar, it's completely okay to feel discomfort. We're here to support you in finding ways to handle such situations."*
- *"It's okay not to feel okay when someone crosses your boundaries. Please remember: the fault is not yours."*

Also, remind participants that consent is a skill, not something everyone instinctively knows. Encourage a non-judgmental learning mindset by saying:

- *"Nobody is born knowing how to apply consent in everyday life. That's why we're here: to learn and practice."*
- *"Practicing consent is a continuous process. You don't have to get it perfect. We're here to grow together."*

This framing helps reduce pressure, builds emotional safety, and supports a compassionate learning environment.

Closing Activity (5 min)

Invite participants to sit together in a circle for the final reflection. Ask each person to complete one of the following sentences, based on what resonates most with them:

Encourage participants to share only what they feel comfortable with and thank them for their contributions to the group's learning and reflection.

Troubleshooting for Trainers

Below are some common participant reactions during consent training, along with guidance for facilitators on how to respond effectively.

Challenge	Facilitator Response
Discomfort or Resistance	**Reaction:** Some participants may feel uncomfortable or defensive, especially if they perceive the conversation as accusatory or unnecessary. **How to Handle:** Normalize the discomfort and explain that these conversations can be challenging but are essential for learning. Emphasize that the goal is to foster respect and understanding, not blame or shame. Allow space for discussion and validate concerns without compromising the core message.
Dismissiveness ("This isn't relevant to me")	**Reaction:** Some may believe consent is common sense and not worth discussing. **How to Handle:** Provide real-life examples that show how misunderstandings around consent can lead to harm. Ask open-ended questions that encourage participants to reflect on their experiences. Explain that understanding consent benefits everyone, even those who believe they already practice it well.

Challenge	Facilitator Response
Challenging or Contrarian Attitudes	**Reaction:** Some may push back with "what about" arguments (e.g., "What about false accusations?" or "What about men's rights?"). **How to Handle:** Acknowledge the concern but gently steer the conversation back to the main topic. Reinforce that consent benefits everyone and is not about blaming one group.
Emotional Reactions (e.g., guilt, shame, sadness, or anger)	**Reaction:** Participants may realize past behaviors were problematic and experience guilt or regret. Others may feel triggered by personal experiences. **How to Handle:** Create a safe, supportive space for discussion without judgment. Offer resources or break-out spaces for those who need emotional support. Encourage a growth mindset -learning about consent is an opportunity to improve, not an indictment of the past.

Additional Materials

Please refer to the PreWorks online library for additional materials, presentations, and worksheets.

Material Bank for Module 4

- Worksheet 1 Personal Preferences Reflection
- Worksheet 2 The Boundary Web
- Worksheet 3 Consent Scenarios
- Module 4 Presentation

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PreWorks 2026

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HUT creative studio