

# Targeted session: Acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in relationships

## Session overview

This session looks at behaviours that are acceptable and unacceptable in relationships and how we might respond to these whilst developing an awareness of the different contexts, and introducing the concept of coercive control.

## Information for practitioner

The relationships we are looking at may be intimate, partner relationships or could be relationships with family or friends – in fact with anyone.

There is a particular emphasis in this session on the examples relating to online relationships.

During this session the young person – and practitioner – are expected to share examples. Be mindful not to blame our own behaviours that we may reflect on during the activity.

## Pre-session action

Select a *“Looking after yourself”* exercise in advance for the close of the session.

### Resources needed for this session

- Statement cards
- Hierarchy cards

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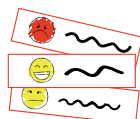
## Session

Check in with the young person as to how they have been since your last session together. Any thoughts or feelings that you may need to reflect on and address before you begin this session.

Inform the young person what we are going to do in this session, sharing the overview.

### Relationships

In most relationships there is always a bit of ‘give and take’ as we may do things one person wants to do on occasion and then do things that we want to do on other occasions. Problems can occur when someone expects us to do everything they say. When they do this, it doesn’t always seem unreasonable so can be difficult for us to see that things might not be right.



Statement  
and hierarchy  
cards

### Activity

Place the statement cards across the spectrum of acceptable, to feeling uncomfortable, through to unacceptable behaviour. Discuss each one considering whether the behaviour is fixed in place or moveable depending on the context.

This gives you as practitioner the opportunity to discuss some of the intricacies as there are examples that may be more complex and need unpicking to be able to consider the situation and context.

Both of the following examples could sit in different places across the acceptable to unacceptable spectrum depending on the discussion.

For example, *“Says I should do what they want to do”*. This could be that you might always do what you want and now they want a choice, or it could be that you always have to do what this person wants and you rarely/never have choice.

Another example would be “*sharing funny memes*”. This may be seen as harmless but what if we offend someone? Are they always funny?



Consider the following questions in an open discussion with both practitioner and young person to share examples.

- **What would you do if you came across a behaviour you felt was unacceptable?**
- **Does the intention behind the behaviour make a difference?**

For example, sharing a meme because someone is intentionally laughing at you or sharing without realising it was hurtful.

- **Depending on who it is, does it change how you react and feel?**
- **How does it differ if the behaviour was a ‘one-off’ compared to something that happens again and again?**
- **How might such behaviours affect how in control you feel about things?**
- **How do you challenge that in a kind way?**
- **Have you ever said or done anything that someone else might have felt was unacceptable?**
- **How does it feel to think about that now?**



#### **Reflection on this session:**

It is easy to not notice increasingly unacceptable behaviours when they come gradually, one after another. Coercive control starts in this way – these behaviours become normalised, bit by bit and any attempt to say how you feel is dismissed and you are made to feel like you are wrong. It is possible to not even notice that it is happening, so much so that what behaviours would have seemed totally unacceptable at the start of the relationship feel normal.



#### **Looking after yourself exercise to close**



**ACCEPTABLE**



**FEELS  
UNCOMFORTABLE**



**UNACCEPTABLE**

I feel safe most of the time

Tells me what to wear

Sharing funny memes

Leaves me out sometimes

We don't often agree

They give me choices

I look forward to seeing them

We make decisions together

I keep my opinions to myself

Says I need to do as I am told

I feel listened to

We make decisions together

Sometimes talks to me,  
sometimes ignores me

They are the only person  
who understands me

Phones me to check where  
I am or what I am doing

They would rather we spent  
time only with each other

Wants to know who I have  
been talking to

Enjoy spending time with  
lots of people

Tells me no one believes anything I say

I never know what mood they are going to be in

Says sorry when we they do something wrong

Says "you would if you loved me"

Have fun together most of the time

They stick up for me when someone is being unkind

I'm worried they will tell someone what I have said

Says I should do what they want to do

Scared they won't want me anymore

Takes photos and shares them without me knowing

We share passwords to things as we don't have secrets

Makes jokes about me in front of others

Questions where I was and who I was with when I shared a post on snapchat

Tells me to block certain people online (friends, family, ex-partner)

Tells me that I've sent intimate pictures before so should just send them

Says they will send intimate pictures of me to other people if I don't send more

If I don't answer messages straight away they get cross at me



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