

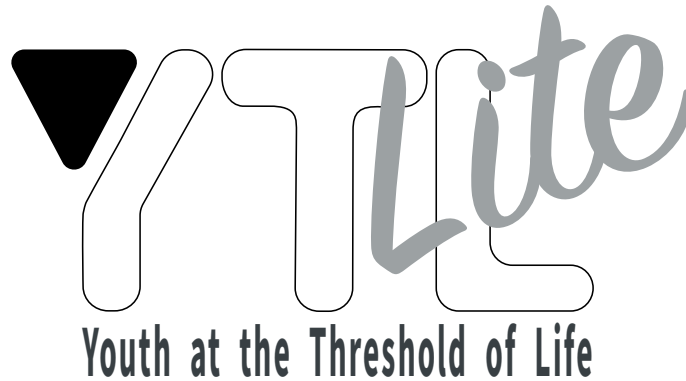
DEVELOPING MENTAL FITNESS



Youth at the Threshold of Life

2024

DEVELOPING MENTAL FITNESS



A program to instill self-esteem,
relationship building, character development and mental fitness.

YTL Lite is a shortened version of the three-volumes YTL curriculum

AUTHENTIC SELF-ESTEEM INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS MOTIVATING GOALS

Written by:
Gábor Grész and David M. Robinson

Edited by:
Edina Grész, Carol LaGue

<https://ytl.academy>

Ninth edition revised
U.S.A., 2024
All rights reserved

The following people contributed to this YTL Teacher's Manual:

Members of the YTL editorial board: Gábor Grész, David M. Robinson, Edina Grész, Carol LaGue, Angela Ellett, and the members of Crossroads, the working group of YTL's international division.

The Crossroads lesson plans were prepared by:

Dr. Marcia Ball, former associate professor at the Department of Health Sciences at James Madison University - <https://www.twr360.org/speakers/view/id,134>

Beverly Byers, consultant

Dr. Jennie Cerullo, professor at Department of Education and Behavioral Studies at Azusa Pacific University

Rex E. Johnson, professor emeritus at Talbot School of Theology - <https://www.biola.edu/directory/people/rex-johnson>

Dr. Alan Scholes, professor at the Department of Theology at the International School of Theology

Dr. Gary Stanley, professor at the Faculty of Communications at the International School of Theology

Contributing writers and editors:

Erin Balance, editor, International School Project

Rebecca S. Cotton, editor-in-chief, Women Today International, CCC

Christina Creutz, writer, Worldwide Challenge Magazine

Steven Grezlak, writer and editor, Worldwide Challenge Magazine

William Horlacher, editor-in-chief, writer, Director of Bridges International

Richard Morris, writer, Cross-Cultural Leadership Training

Kirsten Wilson, writer

Mary Ann Thurmond, partner, 35 years with leadership management firm

Jean Saunders, edited approximately 25 books for Dr. Jack P. Lewis, Memphis, TN

Reviewers:

Gábor Grész, co-founder and leader of the YTL program

David M. Robinson, co-founder of the YTL program

Dr. Dénes Bánhegyi, former national AIDS coordinator

Dick Day, professor at the Faculty of Human Ecology and Family Studies at the University of Malawi

Dr. Delanyo Adadevoh, PhD, William Beauvis

Moirá Chimombo, professor of Curriculum and Learning at the University of Malawi

Charlotte Day, member of the Faculty of Human Ecology and Family Studies at the University of Malawi

John Harris, president of Summer Night Communications

Daniel LaGue, former regional coordinator of YTL

Diana Langerock, South and East Africa Coordinator of YTL

Translated into English by: Gabriella Nagy, Edina Grész, Carol LaGue

Cover design and page layout: Renátó Grész

Cover image: Guy Gerrard, Worldwide Challenge Magazine, 1994. Used with permission.

Managing editor: Gábor Grész

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from The NIV® Bible (The Holy Bible, New International Version®). NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica Inc.®

YTL Lite is a shortened version of the three-volume educational program and curriculum in which each volume is dedicated to address a specific need or area of development.

1. YTL Volume 1 addresses the need for an authentic self-esteem.
2. YTL Volume 2 addresses the need for intimate relationships.
3. YTL Volume 3 addresses the need to find motivating goals.

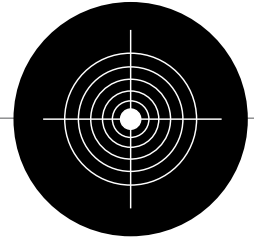
The purpose of *YTL Lite* is to make the massive content of the three volumes of YTL more usable.

*“...by starving the sensibility of our pupils we only
make them easier prey...a hard heart is no infallible
protection against a soft head.”*

C. S. Lewis: *The Abolition of Man*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why YTL? _ _ _ _ _	ix
Lesson 1: You Are Valuable! _ _ _ _ _	15
Lesson 2: Emotional Intelligence (EQ) _ _ _ _ _	27
Lesson 3: Friends for Life _ _ _ _ _	35
Lesson 4: Waiting for the One _ _ _ _ _	51
Lesson 5: Goals, Decisions, Character _ _ _ _ _	61
Lesson 6: Communication and Media _ _ _ _ _	71



Why YTL?

Youth at the Threshold of Life (YTL) educational program and movement exists to help young people become healthy adults, gain a more meaningful complete life, and through this to contribute to a more livable society.

A ‘healthy adult’ means—beyond the obvious physical and biological health—that the following three characteristics are present in the life of a person to have a meaningful, complete and whole life:

1. **AUTHENTIC SELF-ESTEEM**—Are able to see themselves realistically; their self-observation is based on stable foundations; they see themselves as valuable, but they

don't under- or overestimate themselves; than have solid character. Healthy adults are aware of themselves.

2. **INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**—Are able to establish mutual, equal, vulnerable and lasting relationships with others and receive and give acceptance. Healthy adults are aware of their connections to others.
3. **MOTIVATING GOALS**—Have a goal and task, a purpose in the world they live in. Healthy adults are able to set motivating goals that give meaning, hope and significance, and place them in society through their work and profession. Healthy adults know their role in the world.

These three characteristics of a healthy adult are rooted in the following basic emotional, and spiritual needs we all have and want to experience:

1. **I AM VALUABLE! A SENSE OF WORTH.** It's a basic human need to feel valuable. Our sense of worth prompts us to ask existential questions like *Who are we?* and *Why do we exist?* The most basic question of life is related to defining ourselves. Until you can define yourself and discover your worth and who you are, you will not be able to find your place in an intimate relationship or in society. Since our basic human need is to know who we are, we must first understand our strengths and weaknesses. In order to realistically see your worth, you will also need a strong sense of what is good and bad. Without the ability to differentiate between good and bad, you will not be able to realistically see your strengths and weaknesses, your mistakes and virtues. If someone is not able to see and love themselves for who they are (which is very different from self-worship or self-loathing), they will not be able to love and accept others either.
2. **I BELONG! A SENSE OF SIGNIFICANCE.** *'I belong!'* comes with the desire to know whether we matter to anyone. Am I acceptable and lovable? Do I belong to anybody or anywhere? In this universe everything is connected. Life wouldn't be possible without the chemical elements connecting to each other. Without connections there would be no life, not only in the physical, biological and chemical sense, but also in the emotional, spiritual and human dimension. We were created to be connected. We can experience acceptance only through our relationships and love. If someone is incapable of establishing a lasting, vulnerable and intimate relationship, they will not have a sense of belonging.
3. **I AM CAPABLE! A SENSE OF COMPETENCE.** Our need for a sense of competence makes us ask *'Is there any purpose for my existence?'* *'Why do I live at all?'* *'What is my role in this world?'* *'Am I capable of achieving anything?'* It is a basic human need to understand why we exist. We must identify our purpose in life that provides a framework for the un-repeatable and unique few decades that we spend here on Earth. Identifying our purpose in life empowers us with the sense that we have an important role to play in this world and we are capable of fulfilling this role. As we discover this purpose—in whatever work or profession—it will motivate us to maximize our abilities and develop our skills. Ultimately, this process will lead to a better, more developed society which solidifies our well-being and existence.

In order for the generation that is entrusted to our care to grow up as healthy adults, we need to help them meet these three needs mentioned above. YTL provides educators and parents with resources in this handbook that are aimed at achieving the following purposes.

OUR PURPOSES

01

AUTHENTIC SELF-ESTEEM

To develop the self-esteem of students by strengthening their self-awareness, building strong foundations on which to base their self-worth, giving them tools to understand and control their emotions (EQ) and developing their character.

In order to have an **authentic self-esteem** we need to have a good amount of self-awareness, we need to be able to **intelligently control our emotions** and we need to have **solid character**.

- a. **Self-Awareness:** To have the right self-awareness: first, we need to see ourselves as unique valuable beings; secondly, we have to realistically understand our strengths and weaknesses; thirdly, we need to accept the fact that both good and bad exist in us. To help our students with self-awareness we need to strengthen the following: their sense of worth, their sense of competence and their acceptance of themselves. If people are unable to accept themselves or they don't know themselves, they will be unable to connect to others or discover their own goals in life.
- b. **Emotional Intelligence (EQ):** Our students need to develop their ability to intelligently control their emotions. They need to be able to understand their own emotions and use them for their own advantages.
- c. **Character:** We have to help develop a solid character in the life of our students. We must teach them the difference between good and bad, useful and harmful. We also need to equip them to be able to choose the good and useful instead of the bad and harmful. It's not only our ability to choose well, but it is our character that determines who we are and how others perceive us. Our character is inseparable from who we are. Character is the ability to distinguish between good and bad and to choose what is good and not what is bad.



The **FIRST VOLUME** of the YTL Teacher's Manual discusses this topic. You can have access to download the first volume for free from this website <https://ytl.academy/authentic-self-esteem/> or by scanning this QR code.

02

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

To help our students grow in their ability to build and maintain mutual, impartial, and lasting friendships and intimate relationships.

This goal can be achieved by:

- Showing the significance of accepting and valuing others; we present the importance, hindrances and tools for building life-long **friendships**.
- Presenting the beauty of the committed, happy and lasting **love-relationships**, by explaining the place of sex in the mutually faithful, life-long relationship and by introducing the dangers of promiscuity.
- Equipping our students with the tools of effective **communication** and conflict-resolution.



The **SECOND VOLUME** of the YTL Educator's handbook discusses this topic. You can have access to download the second volume for free from this website <https://ytl.academy/intimate-relationships/> or by scanning this QR code.

03

MOTIVATING GOALS

To help our students discover their goals and find their place in society; to be able to identify and take the steps necessary to achieve those goals; and to be able to make the right decisions to avoid potential traps that could hinder them from achieving these goals.

This goal can be achieved by:

- Helping our students recognize that they have **a role** to play/a task to accomplish in this world. Helping them realize how to turn these roles into plans to accomplish these goals.
- Helping them make the right **decisions** and follow through on those decisions with discipline. For this they will need to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad, useful and harmful.

- c. Teaching them how to recognize and avoid the **traps** that could hinder them from reaching their goals.



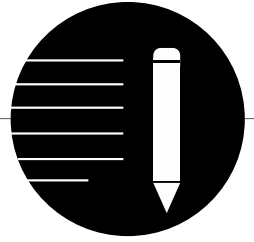
The **THIRD VOLUME** of the YTL Educator's handbook discusses this topic. You can have access to download the third volume for free from this website <https://ytl.academy/motivationg-goals/> or by scanning this QR code.

SUMMARY TABLE:

BASIC NEEDS Determining how to become a healthy adult	YTL'S PURPOSES
1. I AM VALUABLE!	1. AUTHENTIC SELF-ESTEEM [VOL. 1]
2. I BELONG!	2. INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS [VOL. 2]
3. I AM CAPABLE!	3. MOTIVATING GOALS [VOL. 3]

A healthy individual builds healthy relationships and a healthy society.

LESSON



01.

You Are Valuable!

The Purpose of the Lesson

By the end of this lesson your students should be able to understand that they are special, unique and know their value, and then write an *I Am* poem.

I am special!

Have your students write down something special about themselves on their Student Notes by completing the sentence: *"I am special because I _____."*

Example: *"I am special, because I am the first person in my family to play the guitar."*

Most of us have at least one person in our lives who thinks we are special. I believe that person is right! I think that each one of us is special.

1. I am special because I am unique

- If a potter makes 10,000 vases that are all the same size and shape and decorates them in exactly the same way, each one would probably not cost very much to buy. But if the same potter made a special vase in a unique and unusual shape with beautiful decorations unlike any other, that vase would command a much higher price.
- Each of you is like that specially created vase. You are valuable because there is no one exactly like you in the whole world. Each of you has fingerprints that are unique to you. Every drop of blood in your body carries genetic information (DNA) that is specific only to you. No one has your exact thoughts and feelings. You have a combination of ideas, opinions, tastes, talents, and feelings that are unique to you—that makes you special.

2. I am special because I am wonderfully made

Take a look at your hands. It would not be easy to invent any tool that would be more useful than the human hand. Think about how your body turns the food you eat into energy. Think about your heart beating. It has continued to beat approximately 70 times per minute since before you were born. If you are 12 years old, that is almost 450 million times without failing! You really are an intricate and marvelous, wonderfully made creation. Something so intricate and marvelous must be very valuable.

The following facts prove how unique our body is:

- Our nerves are sending the signal from our brain at 170.992 m/h;
- 1 hair can hold 0.2 pounds of weight;
- If we would unfold the human lung it would cover a football field;
- Our livers have 500 different functions;
- In our whole life we produce so much saliva that it would fill up two swimming pools;
- Our nose can differentiate 50,000 different kinds of smell;
- The size of our eye remains the same from our birth until we die, but our ears and nose are growing during our whole life;
- We use 200 different muscles when we take one step;
- Approximately 30 million cells die in our body every single day;

- Every 27 days our whole skin renews;
- We can't tickle ourselves; we won't laugh;
- Hugging speeds up healing because it produces oxytocin;
- Our stomach acid is strong enough to dissolve a razor blade;
- Our fingerprints are unique (even in twins) and begin to develop at three months;
- When we smile, 17 different muscles are used.

Creating a personal poem

Now that you understand how special you are, I want you to write a poem about yourself that will be totally unique to you. Every poem will be different, just like every person is different. You can keep this poem and read it when you may have doubts to remind you of how special you are.

On the Student Notes, have your students create an '*I Am*' poem about themselves. Read aloud the first two words of each line, have them copy those words down, and then fill in the qualities about themselves that are contained within the parentheses:

I AM

1st Stanza:

I am (two special characteristics you have)
 I wonder (something you are curious about)
 I hear (an imaginary sound)
 I see (an imaginary sight)
 I want (an actual desire)
 I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

2nd Stanza:

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)
 I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)
 I touch (an imaginary touch)
 I worry (something that really bothers you)
 I cry (something that makes you very sad)
 I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

If you have time
and students who
are willing to share,
you may have a
couple of students
read their poems or
portions of them.

3rd Stanza:

I understand (something you know is true)
I say (something you believe in)
I dream (something you actually dream about)
I try (something you really make an effort about)
I hope (something you actually hope for)
I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

STUDENT NOTES



You Are Valuable!

I AM

I am _____ . *(two special characteristics you have)*

I wonder _____ . *(something you are curious about)*

I hear _____ . *(an imaginary sound)*

I see _____ . *(an imaginary sight)*

I want _____ . *(an actual desire)*

I am _____ . *(the first line of the poem repeated)*

I pretend _____ . *(something you actually pretend to do)*

I feel _____ . *(a feeling about something imaginary)*

I touch _____ . *(an imaginary touch)*

I worry _____ . *(something that really bothers you)*

I cry _____ . *(something that makes you very sad)*

I am _____ . *(the first line of the poem repeated)*

I understand _____ . *(something you know is true)*

I say _____ . *(something you believe in)*

I dream _____ . *(something you actually dream about)*

I try _____ . *(something you really make an effort about)*

I hope _____ . *(something you actually hope for)*

I am _____ . *(the first line of the poem repeated)*

Factors influencing our self-image

Have the students write down the three factors influencing our self-image.

1. Outward Appearance—“How Do I Look?”

Mention that there are three general areas we tend to evaluate in ourselves as well as others. Say that the first area in which we evaluate ourselves is outward appearance...The question we ask ourselves is “*How do I look?*”

- What is acceptable? What is not?
- Why does outward appearance play such an important role in our self-image?

2. Accomplishments—“What Have I Achieved?”

What achievements do you think people your age are looking for? (Sports? Money? Girlfriend/Boyfriend? Grades?)

- Is there anything wrong with basing a person’s self-worth on these things? If so, what?

3. Position, Influence, Importance—“How Important Am I?”

- Is it better to be a person who leads or a person who follows? Why?
- Is a person who is a natural leader a better person? Why or why not?
- Why can some people always get their way and others cannot, no matter what they do?
- What is good about getting your way? Is there anything bad about it?

The Ugly Duckling

Read the story. Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 students each and have them discuss the questions found after the story:

Once upon a time in a land far away lived a wonderful, loving mother duck. She had laid five eggs and was patiently awaiting the day when they would hatch. She would periodically count the eggs to make sure they were all still there, she was so excited about them. One day as she was counting, she just could not imagine what had happened. She counted “*One, two, three, four, five, six.*” No matter how she tried, she came up with six eggs! And one was bigger than the rest. How did this happen? “*Oh well,*” she thought to herself, “*One more at home just increases the joy!*” So she sat down on her eggs and continued to wait.

One happy spring day the eggs began to crack open and the little ducklings stumbled out. They were all fluffy and sunshine yellow, except for one. He

was big and gray! The mother duck noticed the difference, but put it out of her mind and loved him the same as all the rest. The little ducklings, though, were not that kind. They teased him and made fun of him. Even the other barnyard animals would point at him and laugh or call him the ugliest duckling they had ever seen! As the days went by he felt lonelier and lonelier; no one would play with him, sometimes they even pushed him down in the mud. He felt sadder than ever before.

One day as he was walking through the yard he saw some very beautiful birds swimming on the lake. They glided along as if the lake were made of glass and then took off into the air so gracefully that it almost made him cry. *"If only I could be as beautiful as they are,"* he thought.

The winter came and everyone huddled in their warm nests waiting for the spring to come. The ugly duckling dreamt about what it would be like to be a beautiful swan like the ones he saw on the lake that day so long ago. When he woke up, he was still gray and ugly.

"Oh, what must I do to be beautiful?" he cried out.

An owl in a nearby tree answered, *"The solution is in your hands. If you become beautiful on the inside, you will be beautiful on the outside, too!"*

"Really? Okay, I'll try and think nice thoughts about others and be kind to those around me even when they are mean," he said with determination.

He did just as he said he would. For the rest of the winter he was kind to his friends and family even when they treated him badly and he refused to think bad thoughts about them even though they deserved it.

The spring came at last and the ugly duckling excitedly jumped up and ran out the door. He started stretching his wings and smiling at the beautiful flowers and budding trees all around him. It was great to be alive. He ran to the lake in order to take a swim and noticed some of the swans coming toward him.

"What's your name?" asked one of them.

"Ugly duckling," he replied a little embarrassed.

"You're kidding, aren't you?" said one of the swans.

"Take a look in the lake and see why we find it hard to believe that is your name," another swan said kindly.

So our friend the ugly duckling went over to the edge of the lake and looked in. His mouth fell open as he wondered in amazement. *"Could it be? Was that really him in there?"* A beautiful, snowy white swan with a long, graceful neck stared back at him from the water!

In reality, he never had been a duck, he had always been a swan. Baby swans are always gray and ugly.

- Was the ugly duckling really ugly? On what did he base his self-worth? Was his view of himself the true picture of who he was? Why or why not?
- What did the other ducks say about the ugly duckling? Why do you think they said these things?
- How did the ugly duckling feel when they said these things?
- Have you ever judged someone by their outward appearance or been judged because of how you looked or talked or behaved?
- What happened by the end of the story? What moral can we draw from this story?
- How could the truth illustrated in this story be applied to your life or help someone you know?

The source of value

Show a \$20 bill and ask the following questions:



How much is this piece of paper worth? What gives value to this paper?

- The paper gives it value?
- The time when it was printed gives it value?
- Does the amount of wear and tear give this paper its value?
- Will the value of this bill change if I fold it and crinkle it?
- Will its value be less if I step on it?

Where does the value of this paper come from? The government of the United States determines how much this piece of paper is worth. The paper and the ink itself is almost worthless. The value of this \$20 bill does not come from the material it was made of, but it comes from the government that's behind it.

The same is true of us, humans. Every single human is infinitely valuable. Regardless how "crinkled" or "dirty" or how many stepped on "it," "its" value has not changed. Mankind, as creation, carries value.

- What happens when we don't feel that we are valuable?
- How can we change how we feel about ourselves?

The basis of a healthy self-image

Just as the strength of all three legs are needed for a stable stool, each of these “legs” have their own needed purpose. It is like a three-legged stool.



Leg #1: A true “sense of belonging” / “I Belong.”

We know we are loved; we feel accepted and secure.

Leg #2: A true “sense of worth” / “I am Valuable.”

We know we are valued and important to others.

Leg #3: A true “sense of significance” / “I am Capable.”

We feel competent, we can do it, no matter what it is! We have something to contribute.

Story of Punchinello

On YouTube you can find *Max Lucado: You Are Special!* animated story. If you can, please watch this together with your students:



Building a strong foundation

Max Lucado: *You Are Special!* story illustrates well our struggle to find the path to our sense of worth. Let’s watch this story together!

Let us return to the three legs on our stool. Where can we find the basis of a healthy self-image?

A true “sense of belonging” / “I belong.”

Where can we find unconditional love and acceptance despite of our failures and shortcomings? Dr. Larry Crabb says, “*Security is being loved at our worst. We need the unconditional love of another to find personal self-worth.*” This is due to the fact that we fail so often, but should that failure deny us a sense of security? This is why many feel the need to consider what God has to say. If you hold the view that he created us—he is the originator of the “self.” God says to us:

"I already accept you. You belong to me as you are. Because my Son died for your failures, I can accept you."

A true "sense of worth" / "I am valuable."

Where can we find a true sense of worth and experience that we are valuable even when we are not at our best? Martin Luther once said, *"God does not love us because we are valuable; we are valuable because he loves us."* Our failures, our faults, our mistakes and shortcomings often overwhelm us. We can't experience a true "sense of worth" without experiencing love despite our worst failure. If God forgives us (because His Son, Christ died for us) we can receive his forgiveness and see ourselves as he sees us—forgiven and valuable. One who experiences this kind of love can see that though, after failing at something, *"I failed, but I am not a failure. I am more than the sum total of my performance and others' opinions of me."*

A true "sense of significance" / "I am capable."

Where can we find strength, power and purpose even when we feel that we are at the end of our rope? If we accept the biblical view of God as personal, loving and caring, then we will have a new sense of courage and hope if we are in proper relationship to him. He not only offers his forgiveness, acceptance and love, but his power to maximize our talents and gifts.

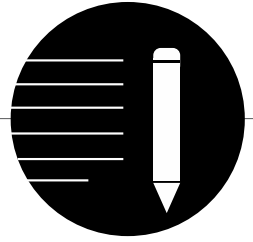
Develop Good Habits!

Here are some helpful suggestions. If you turn them into habits, you will develop a more positive sense of self-worth.

1. Do not label yourself negatively. (I am clumsy, stupid or ugly.)
2. Do not compare yourself with others. Remember that you are unique. Enjoy your uniqueness. Give others the dignity they deserve, too. God made them as rare and unique as you are. Enjoy the difference.
3. Do not forget that everybody has problems and weaknesses you cannot see. Some people look like they are perfect, appearing to have no weaknesses, only strengths. Do not believe your eyes; they are human just like everyone else! Remember that even the most confident people have insecurities about something.
4. Associate with friends who are positive, who like being around you and who enjoy life.
5. Learn to laugh; look for the humor in life and experience it.
6. Have realistic expectations of others, taking into account each person's talents, gifts, abilities, potential, motivational pattern and interests.

7. Be positive. See how long you can go without saying or thinking something negative about another person or situation.
8. Relax and take it easy. Don't get mired in worry.
9. Read the Bible to discover truth. As you contemplate it you will begin to experience good/stable emotions (even in difficult times) and be able to appropriately handle whatever situations come into your life.
10. When you fail, admit it to God (and others when appropriate), refuse to condemn yourself and ask God for the strength to continue on the right way.

LESSON



02.

Intelligent Emotion?

“Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism.”

—C. S. Lewis

IQ or EQ?

Intelligence. This is a big word that indicates an important ability. Yet, when we look at the Latin original we find that it has a deeper meaning than the one we use it for. The word intelligence is a compound of two words: inter and legere. Inter means “*between*,” while legere means “*to decide*.” Therefore, intelligence is the ability to choose and decide, the ability to opt for the better.

Intellectual intelligence (IQ=Intelligence Quotient) is the ability that helps us understand different principles, truths, facts and the meaning of things, which afterwards can be applied in real life.

Emotional intelligence (EQ—Emotional Quotient) is the ability to understand feelings, emotions, social situations and effectively use these emotions in the handling of different situations. Emotional intelligence helps us to handle our own emotions well, to build our relationships and not to erode or destroy them, and to make good decisions even in emotionally charged situations. With the help of emotional intelligence you not only manage your own feelings in an intelligent way, but you can also better understand the feelings and emotions of others. Even Aristotle noted how important the intelligent management of emotions is when he said: *“Anybody can become angry—that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”* It means that emotional intelligence helps you intelligently manage your emotions.

Self-awareness

The cornerstone of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. This is the basis that enables a person to work with all the other skills and competencies. It is particularly important to be able to adequately show the importance of certain words to the students. When it comes to self-awareness there is a huge difference between *I know something* and *I am aware of something*. We say that we know something when that information was acquired through thinking. You are aware of something when you experience or sense that information and it has a continuous effect on you.

It’s humiliating for a person when this self-awareness is impaired, and they suffer from a *“no clue”* syndrome. An example is when a boss thinks that the meeting he held went very well while the employees were all bored to death or when a teacher thinks highly of the class he gave, but the students hate listening to him. It results in very embarrassing and terrible constraints both in your work and relationships if you don’t have the right level of self-awareness.

Emotional awareness is taking responsibility for our own emotions

Emotional awareness is the part of our awareness that enables us to recognize our feelings, understand their effect on us and to continuously evaluate how these emotions affect others. If you cannot understand and process your own feelings you will have trouble understanding the feelings of others. The ability to understand feelings is an important one and we should encourage our students to develop this ability because emotions are the entry point—or doors—to have deep and meaningful relationships. Some people are very good at finding the door handles and going in and out through this door. Such people will be able to connect at a deeper level where it is not only facts and information that you share with others but also your emotions.

The following test reveals how others see us in this specific area and it will show us the gaps between how we see ourselves and how others see us.

EQ Evaluation

— Test —

Rate yourself in the following areas based on how you currently see yourself. Mark the column with an “X” that you think fits best. Ask 2 to 4 family members to describe you. This will help you understand how others see you in that specific area. (Give everyone a blank copy.)

SELF-CONTROL											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I can express my emotions in a proper way and there are no emotional outbreaks that are not contained. I am polite.											I hide my feelings or may have outbursts of anger. I express myself very rudely.

TRANSPARENCY											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I am honest and have integrity. I am willing to admit any mistakes. I will confront others with their immoral actions.											I am not honest. I hide mistakes or even blame them on others. I am rarely critical about immoral actions.

ABILITY TO ADAPT											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I can handle changes in a flexible manner. I can meet several expectations while not losing sight of what truly matters.											Changes knock me off of my feet. I avoid changes. I am very worried when I have to do or take responsibility for several tasks at once.

PERFORMANCE											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I set goals and then reach them. I am motivated to improve their own performance. I continuously learn and develop myself. I am open to constructive feedback.											I rarely set goals for myself. I keep postponing doing their work. I am satisfied with what I have reached. I consider it a threat when someone gives me constructive feedback. I don't seem to be motivated in my tasks.

ABILITY TO INITIATE											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I am ready to take new opportunities. I undertake acceptable risks. I initiate in my work and relationships.											I am passive. I am afraid of risks. I wait on others to initiate conversations or relationships. I only follow the specified directions and I do not initiate by myself.

OPTIMISM											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I persevere in achieving my goals despite the upcoming difficulties and obstacles. I don't live in a fantasy world of negation or empty faith. I am active and positive.											I give up quickly when I encounter difficulties. I have a negative approach to life or their tasks. I easily lose heart when problems occur. I feel like a victim.

COMMUNICATION											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I easily connect with others in different situations and social settings. I involve others and act at ease during conversations.											I find it difficult to connect with others or get in touch with me. Conversations pose a difficulty and I rarely involve others in conversation.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I handle conflicts well, I want to understand the viewpoint of the person.											I cannot handle conflicts well. It is difficult for me to understand others and empathize with my position. I am defensive.

EMPATHY											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I show empathy towards others and my situation. I am sensitive and attentive.											I lack empathy. I cannot identify with the difficulties of other people. I am insensitive and indifferent.

TEAMWORK											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I am an excellent team player. I can get the team to progress without overruling others. I am a good listener.											It is difficult for me to work with a leader or on a team. I am not a good listener. I resist the recommendations of other people and cannot respond well to leadership.

SELF-AWARENESS											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
I am aware of themselves. I understand my own feelings. I see my strengths and weaknesses correctly.											I am not aware of myself. I don't understand my own feelings, nor the feelings of others. I am not aware of my own strengths and weaknesses.

The Golden Rule and skills of EQ

The Golden Rule of EQ is to apply the Golden Rule of the Bible that was presented 2000 years ago for our relationships—even today.

The Golden Rule of the Bible and EQ says:

“Do to others what you would have them do to you.” (Mt 7:12)

- What skills are needed so we can apply the Golden Rule of EQ well?
- What kind of relationships will we have if we apply this rule?
- What will these relationships be like? What will characterize them?

The two categories of EQ

Emotional intelligence has two main areas: personal (individual) and social skills. A person who has appropriate social skills will initiate conversations, pay attention to others and will also ask questions.

Personal skills: self-awareness, self-management, self-control, optimism, flexibility and transparency.

Social skills: understanding others, conflict management and the treatment of other people.

Emotional awareness

Students should name and understand the different emotions—identify them and understand their triggers.	Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize how I feel and why I feel that way. Through emotional awareness we recognize that there is a connection between our feelings, actions, words and thoughts, which ultimately have an impact on our overall performance. Letting our emotions loose could even have fatal consequences. If we expressed our anger each and every time we felt it, we could easily kill someone; for example, road rage. Emotional awareness also means that: • You identify your emotions • You acknowledge them (it's not someone else who 'makes us feel them') • We keep our emotions under control. We identify our emotions by giving them a name and identifying the events that triggered them. Emotions are not good or bad, but they can be positive or negative. It is the way we express these emotions that can be good or bad. You might not have grown up learning to express your emotions properly.
--	--

The real power: self-control

Story:	Self-control is the competence of emotional intelligence that enables you to delay your desires, remain calm in emotionally charged moments, resist anger-driven aggression and outbursts and the ability to deal with failures. Emperor William once inspected his empire. He met an old man and asked him who he was. The old man answered: <i>"I'm a king!"</i> <i>"What kind of a king?"</i>—asked the emperor. <i>"Well, the greatest king on all the earth"</i>—the old man responded. <i>"I rule over the greatest kingdom ever"</i>—he continued. <i>"What kind of kingdom do you rule?"</i>—asked the emperor. <i>"Well, it is nothing else than myself"</i>—the old man concluded. Indeed, the only area in the world upon which we have full control and power is ourselves. Yet most people are incapable of exercising self-control; they are slaves to their own emotions, desires and feelings which often cause great damage.
---------------	--

Self-control
The first personality trait that reveals a lot about ourselves is self-control. Read what we mean by this term.
The training of police dogs: Their training is related to their purpose. Police dogs cannot perform their duties without self-control.

Discussion:

Self-management means that

1. You are able to recognize and understand your own feelings, thoughts and attitudes.
2. You are capable of managing your feelings so that they facilitate and do not obstruct the reaching of your goals and the implementation of your value system.
3. You are capable of delaying the gratification of your desires in order to reach your goal.

Self-control

- You are able to resist temptation and delay the instinct that prompts you to action.
- You remain calm.
- You understand what causes the negative feelings or aggressive behavior.
- You can live with failures.
- You resist letting anger, rudeness or temper determine your behavior.

The training of police dogs involves many different situations—they are exposed to all kinds of temptation: food is offered to them, cats are made to walk in front of them, etc. Yet, they can only move when they are given permission.

- Why do police dogs have to learn the difficult skill of self-control?
- What happens if you don't control your rage or anger?

Responsibilities, goals and tasks entrusted to us require similar self-restraint. We cannot be captives of our anger, instincts and impulses.

Discuss as a group how you would deal with the following situations:

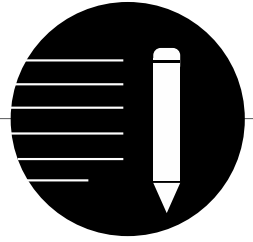
- While traveling on the bus or standing in line someone knocks your shopping bag out of your hand and its contents spill all over the ground.
- After living together for 7 months your roommate tells you that they think you are very lazy.
- It turns out the day before the deadline that your partner in the group study project didn't do their part.

Emotions are difficult to control because they are powerful and can often overrule us. Sometimes the best thing you can do is to expect them and prepare in advance for how you are going to behave in specific situations. A wise person knows how to avoid wounds caused by outbursts of anger. They know what situations can trigger strong emotions and they try to avoid them. There are some things that can help us prepare for such situations, for example:

1. Decide in advance that you will not react immediately. Count to three.
2. Be totally honest. Many times you may need to wait for the right moment to tell the truth, as well as say it as objectively as possible so the other person can accept it.
3. Learn from your mistakes.

Change is usually very difficult and comes with pain. It can fill you with uncertainty and frustration. During change you need to learn to contain your emotions. Change also prompts you to grow and develop. For example, you need new skills in your new job, and while you handle these new difficulties you must control your emotions. The complexity of life is only going to increase as there is progress in your career, work, family, housing situation, etc. Your ability to manage this complexity to a large extent depends on how capable you are of disciplining yourself. The sacrifices you can make today are for the sake of your future. If you want to advance in life you will always need discipline.

LESSON



03.

Friends for Life

I am not an island!

John Donne, an English poet and clergyman (1572-1631), said that “*No man is an island entire of itself.*”¹ I would like us to think together for a moment about this quote:

- What do you think he meant when he said no person is an island?
- How would it feel to be an island?
- In what ways are we connected to other people?
- When we say that no one is an island, we mean that people need other people.

¹John Donne, “Meditation XVII,” in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions: Together with Death’s Duel*, ed. William Henry Draper, Abbey Classics (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1926).

When we are young (as well as when we are very old), we need other people to provide our basic physical needs for food, clothing and shelter.

People provide more than physical nurturing for each other. Humans are social creatures, and we function best when there are others around us. Other people can teach us or provide us with the information we need to accomplish our goals. They give us support when we go through difficult times and celebrate with us when we are glad. They also share activities and experiences with us. Through them we gain perspective on life and on ourselves that we would not have without them. We can do these same things for the people in our lives.

The ability to form attachments

From the moment of our birth—in fact, even before it—you learn how to form attachments. You are completely dependent on your mother. Children are always around their mother when they are small; this is how they feel safe and experience their love. They cannot survive without the presence and love of their mothers. Later children take objects to preschool and daycare that represent the love of their mother to them. It is only later that they develop the ability to experience and feel safe about their mother's love and love her back even when she is not around. The ability to form an attachment means that you can carry the subject of your emotion without that subject actually being present. Children will learn to be aware of and to feel the maternal love and love their moms back, even when she is not there. This enables them to attend school and make friends with their classmates. This skill will allow the 3-year-old child to play alone and a 40-year-old to go to work.

Adults can form attachments. Attachment is your ability to establish an emotional connection with another person. It's when you are able to connect in the most profound way, when you can share your feelings, dreams and fears without being afraid of rejection.

Attachment is one of the most fundamental and deepest human traits in life and in the universe. A human soul cannot exist without connections. There is an interesting law of nature that physicists refer to as maximum entropy. It states that the available energy in a closed system (such as the universe itself) is continuously dispersed. As the available energy levels reduce, entropy increases. Without an external energy input the closed system is becoming increasingly more chaotic.

In the same way, when people are alone they exclude others from their life, their internal world becomes more of a mess until it reaches the point of maximum chaos. This can be prevented only by introducing new energy into the closed system from the outside, by drawing strength from new relationships. Research has shown that when you live in a loving relationship, connected to others, you thrive and develop. In isolation people slowly perish. If you are lonely and isolated you experience pain that is working for your benefit, just like any other pain. It signals that your soul is thirsty for a connection.

The following symptoms indicate that you have difficulty in forming attachments and developing deep emotional connections:

- depression
- sense of insignificance
- feeling guilty—you cannot accept forgiveness
- addiction

- distorted thoughts like ‘I’m bad,’ ‘I’m not lovable,’ ‘my sins are worse than the sins of others,’ ‘my problems overwhelm other people,’ ‘nobody can be trusted,’ ‘everybody wants to control me,’ ‘people only pretend that they care about me’
- a sense of emptiness when you feel neither the love of others nor that you could love others
- a fear of intimacy
- panic
- anger or cynicism—anger is a natural reaction for isolation
- if you keep giving without ever accepting help from others, you deny your own weakness and neediness
- living in a fantasy world—you create an imaginary world where there is no pain, because in reality you would need connections

You can start developing an attachment to others only if you can humbly acknowledge your neediness and are ready to accept things from other people. We learn all too well how to protect ourselves in relationships when we have been hurt a few times. We isolate ourselves from others and block attachments from forming with defense mechanisms such as the following:

- denial—we deny our needs
- depreciation—we devalue the love that is available
- projection—we project our needs onto others instead of owning them
- the development of typical reactions—e.g., people who are very lonely want to look very independent, strong and confident
- obsession—we busy ourselves so there is no time for relationships
- idealization
- substitution—relationships get substituted with things (e.g., items, hobbies, entertainment, sex, alcohol, etc.)

The respect of boundaries

In an intimate relationship you can connect to the other person, yet you can also establish and clearly see where each of your boundaries are—you know where you start and end personally, as well as where the other person starts and ends. You can connect without being dissolved and merged with the other person. You know the range of your responsibilities.

Boundaries only you control:

1. **Attitude.** You are responsible for your own attitude, but not for the attitude and reactions of others. You cannot control the attitude people choose to have nor can you take responsibility for things that are beyond your control.
2. **Feelings and thoughts.** Just like in the previous case, you are not responsible for the feelings of others, but you indeed are responsible for your own feelings. “I only feel the way I do because someone did/said this or that to me” is a myth you often hear. Basically, when you say this you claim that there is nothing you can do, since the way you feel is caused by the behavior of others; i.e., you are not responsible for your own feelings. However, unless you allow or want it, no one is strong enough to implant feelings into you. You are responsible for your own

emotions. You are the one who decides whether you allow certain feelings to rule over you or not. If you know and respect your own boundaries it means that you are also aware of why you feel a specific way and you also take responsibility for it. Your feelings are your own and not the feelings of other people.

3. **Actions.** You are responsible for your actions because they fall within your own boundaries. However, you are not responsible for what others do. Your actions are done by you, not someone else, so the other person is not responsible for them, only you. At the same time, the actions of another person are within their own boundaries, so you are not responsible to do what they should be doing. Everyone must tend to their duties. For example, if your neighbor has not shoveled the snow off their property you can offer your help, but fixing their problem is not your responsibility.
4. **Decisions.** If you decide to give someone an item, say yes to a favor, accept a task, undertake a responsibility, etc., you do so because this is the decision you made. It is very rare that you are at gunpoint, ordered to make certain decisions that you don't want to make. With your decisions you also assume responsibility for their consequences. Many decisions are made so that people wouldn't have to engage in conflicts.

When you know your boundaries and respect them, it means that you can clearly see and are comfortable with your responsibilities, feelings, thoughts, decisions, and you don't feel responsible for the decisions, feelings and thoughts of others. Unless you clearly see these boundaries, your decisions will be based not on what is right, but on how others think or feel about that decision. You make these decisions to please others, not because this is what you want to do, but because you are afraid how the others will react. If you feel responsible for the feelings, decisions and reactions of others, you will also allow others to control you. The feelings of another person exist within their own boundaries. People who control and manipulate others with their anger, sadness and resentment are manipulative, immature and childish.

Below are some warning signs that you struggle to acknowledge your own boundaries and the boundaries of other people:

- You continuously seek approval from others. While we do need external affirmation, it does not mean that you need the approval of others in order to manage your life and decisions.
- Fear about the lack of approval and confirmation.
- You live life subjected to permission from others.
- You cannot accept when someone says no to you. People who cannot receive 'no' as an answer for a request do not respect the boundaries, thoughts, decisions and feelings of the other person. Such people can be manipulative, dangerous, disrespectful and even aggressive.
- It is the '*You cannot do this*' or '*This can't be done*' syndrome. People who say such sentences are bound by some sort of a power and they stifle any and all creativity with their rules. They cannot get rid of the constraints that are imposed on them by their parents and build their own habits and rules.
- Inferiority complex.
- Competition.
- It's an unequal relationship in which one gives up everything for the sake of the other person.

- The difficulty of dealing with different opinions. In such cases you think that conflicts and disagreements are bad, and you will only end up wounded and hurt afterwards. Conflicts may be necessary even if at times they result in pain.
- Black and white thinking. Everything is simple for people who follow this way of thinking. If the rules say it then they do it. They are unable to balance truth with love. In their world there are only rules that exist. They see everything in black and white, just like a young child does. Adults, however, understand that life is colorful and mysterious and black and white are only two shades of the many existing colors.
- Judgment. It's when you place yourself above others. You only feel good when you are in the judgment seat and measure the deeds of others against your own truth.
- Impulsiveness. It is the characteristic of people with no boundaries that they deny or rebel against all authority, rules and expectations. These people are very quick-tempered and they follow nothing but their impulses.

Intimate relationships can be built only if we can connect while mutually respecting the boundaries of the other person.

Friends for Life

“Two are better than one,...If one falls down, his friend can help him up.” —from the Bible².

Most of us would agree with the statement above. We were not created to live alone. We all need friends. Friends become friends through common experiences or just because of being in the same place at the same time. While they share their opinions, experiences, ideas, hobbies and time with one another their lives are enriched.

What are the characteristics of a good friend?

A good friend is someone who is loyal to you. A friend is someone with whom you can share your feelings, hurts, secrets and most intimate thoughts, without fear of rejection. A friend accepts you and remains committed to you regardless of your performance or weaknesses. You can trust this person. Friends make sacrifices for each other; they are willing to sacrifice their time, energy or schedules for each other. It is the committed friend who helps meet our need for love and acceptance.

Reasons why people do not have friends

- a. Comparison.
- b. Low Self-esteem.
- c. Retreat and Withdrawal.
- d. Selfishness.
- e. Gossip.
- f. Lack of Accepting Others.

²Ecclesiastes 4:9-10.

Story of Damon and Pythias

The story of Damon and Pythias takes place in the fourth century B.C. in Syracuse, a city-state in Sicily. According to the Roman orator Cicero³, the two men were followers of the philosopher Pythagoras.

Damon and Pythias were best friends. From the time they were boys, they had done everything together. They had played together and studied together. They were as close as brothers and trusted each other completely.

Pythias was an out-spoken man and often gave speeches in public. In his speeches, he said that no king should have absolute power over his subjects.

When King Dionysius heard about Pythias's speeches, he became angry. He summoned Pythias and Damon to appear before him. When the friends arrived, Dionysius ordered Pythias to take back what he had said. Pythias replied, *"I cannot do that. I speak only the truth, and no man should be stopped from speaking the truth."*

Dionysius grew even angrier and decided to execute Pythias for treason.

Pythias still did not offer to change his views, but he did ask the king for permission to go back to his home and set his household in order before he was executed.

The king laughed out loud. *"If I let you leave the city to go home, you will never return!"*

Pythias responded, *"I will return. I will leave you a pledge to guarantee it."*

"And what will you leave in pledge?" asked the king.

At this point, Damon stepped forward. *"I will be the pledge,"* he said. *"Everyone knows about my friendship with Pythias. You can be certain that he will return as long as you hold me in prison."*

"You understand," said the king to Damon, *"that if Pythias does not return within the set amount of time, I will execute you in his place."*

"I understand," said Damon. *"But, Pythias will return. He has given his word."*

So Pythias left for home, and his friend Damon was thrown in prison. After several days had passed, Dionysius went down to see Damon in prison. *"Your friend hasn't returned,"* he scoffed. *"What do you think of him now?"*

"He will return," said Damon. *"I trust him completely."*

The king shook his head and walked away. A few days later, he returned to Damon's cell. *"The time is almost up,"* he said. *"I don't think your friend is coming back. You were a fool to believe him."*

Damon looked at Dionysius and said calmly, *"If it is humanly possible, Pythias will return. He must have been delayed by trouble on the road."*

The king was amazed by Damon's confidence. But the day came for the execution, and Pythias had not returned. The executioner brought Damon up from the prison. Dionysius asked Damon one last time, *"Do you still call Pythias 'friend'?"*

Damon smiled. *"Yes. Pythias is my friend."*

³Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis* = on Duties, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1913).

Just then, the doors flew open and in came Pythias. He looked awful. His clothes were in shreds, his body was bruised and bloody, and he was covered with dirt. He stumbled forward and collapsed into Damon's arms. *"I made it in time!"* he exclaimed. *"I'm so glad you're still alive. I was shipwrecked and then ran into robbers on the road. But I knew I had to keep going."* Pythias turned to the king. *"I am ready for my execution."*

The king was amazed. Never had he seen such loyalty and trust. He canceled the execution and announced that he would let Damon and Pythias go free. *"But first," he said to the two men, "will you do me a great service?"*

"What can we do?" asked the friends.

"Please show me how I can be part of a friendship like yours."

Genuine friendship

Which character in the story do you identify with the most?

- Damon: I have a friend whom I can trust to be there when I need him or her.
- Pythias: I am committed to being there whenever my friend needs me.
- King Dionysius: I feel like I have never experienced a friendship like Pythias and Damon's, but it is something I would like to and I can see that it is possible.
- None of the above: I feel more like Damon and the king would have felt if Pythias had not returned. My friends have always let me down and I am not sure if genuine friendship is even possible.
- No matter which answer you chose, friendship is important to you. Even if you think that genuine friendship may not be possible, you probably wish that it were.

Today, we will look at some characteristics of genuine friendship and explore some ways to develop such a friendship. So, if you already have a genuine friend, you may learn some ways to make your friendship even stronger. If you do not have a genuine friend, you may learn some ways to start developing one—and you may gain some hope that it is possible for you to have one.

Becoming a real friend

It has already been mentioned that we need friends.

What are the most important qualities that characterize a true friendship?

- Lasting commitment to each other
- Loyalty to each other
- Trust in each other
- Keeping the promises you made to each other
- Sincere and deep care for the physical and spiritual well-being of the other person
- Willingness to make sacrifices for the other person

- Open and honest communication
- Compassion and understanding
- Respect (to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of the other person)
- A sense of responsibility (for your actions and their consequences, to acknowledge if you made a mistake)
- Forgiveness (to forgive another person if they make a mistake)
- Effort (to work on improving the relationships)

When it comes to finding a true friend, we most often pay attention to our own expectations. *‘How great it would be to have a friend who listens to me, understands me and gives me company so I wouldn’t feel so lonely.’* Unfortunately, you don’t have the power to change others, so you cannot force other people to fulfill your demands for a friendship. However, you can change your actions. You have the power to develop into a person that people would like to be friends with. If you want friends, become one.

How to recognize a fake friendship

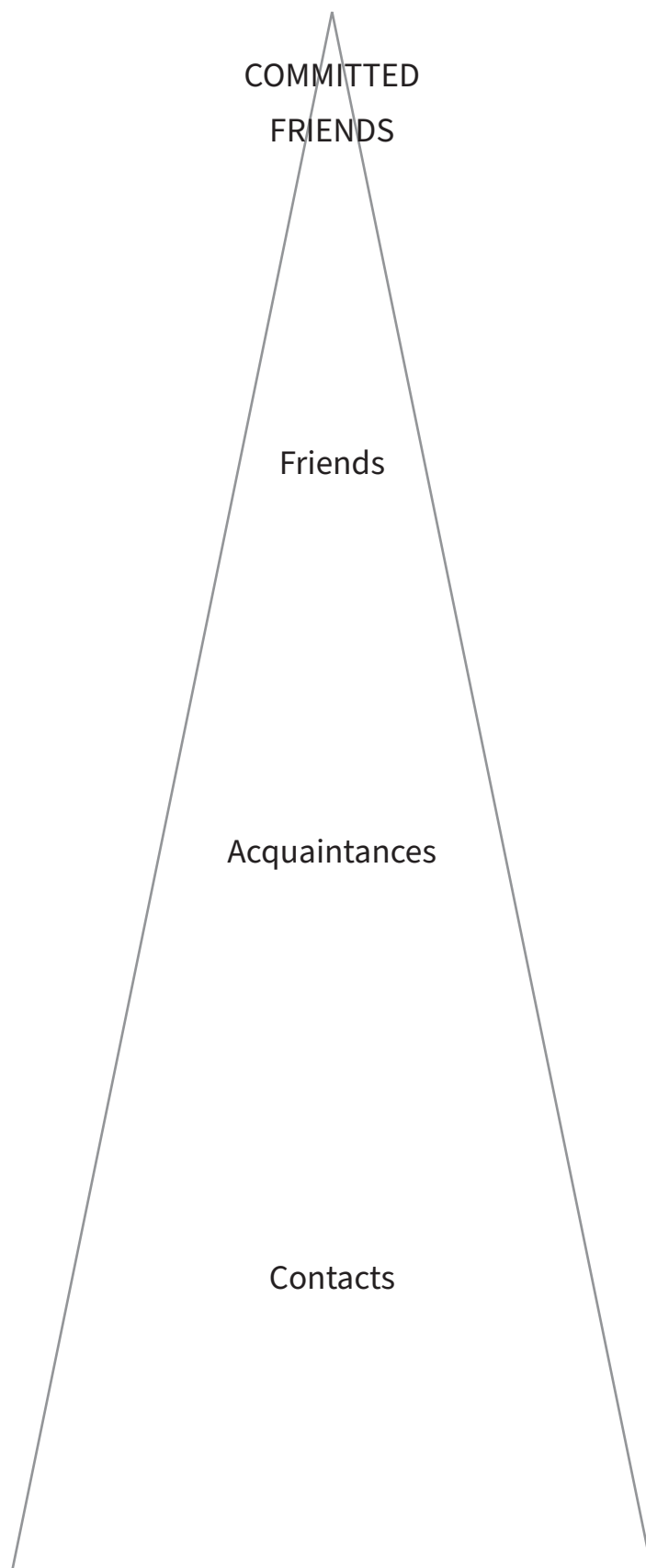
Real friendship is a great asset. Unfortunately, not all ‘friendships’ are real. There are people who call themselves your friends, but they are far from being real friends.

Let’s collect some of the warning signs that might indicate such fake friendships:

- They use the other person for their own benefit and purposes
- They don’t keep their word
- They are not loyal to you
- They don’t trust their friends
- They don’t (or hardly) undertake lasting commitment to the other person
- They apply pressure on the other person to give up on their principles
- They don’t ever initiate and never want to spend time together

Developing Friendships

Friendships are not all the same. Consider the following categories of friendships as we look at the different levels of communication:



Feelings

At this level, friends are willing to share their true feelings to one another. There is regular and meaningful conversation. Not only ideas and general information are shared, but also opinions and feelings about things. These are the people we trust and with whom we can be totally transparent. A committed friend is one who knows everything about us and still totally accepts us. This kind of person listens to our wildest ideas without scolding or laughing at us. He also knows how to share constructive criticism in such a way that we listen and consider it. With this kind of friend, the relationship consistently becomes deeper and richer. Most people only have one or two people as committed friends.

Few thoughts and common interests

Most people have only a few friends. We share with them not only facts, but also thoughts and opinions. We regularly initiate meaningful conversations with them. In this kind of relationship, we begin to show our real selves to the other person. We talk about things we like and dislike, we discuss our views about different issues. This kind of relationship is deeper than relationships in either of the previous two categories and it continues to deepen over time. We might say, "I don't really like Joe because he is so negative all the time." "I think Mr. Smith is a really good teacher," or "I think drugs are for losers, what do you think?"

Facts

These are people like classmates, teachers, neighbors, etc. There can be quite a number of people like this in our lives. We see and talk with them regularly, but we only talk about facts. We spend more time talking with acquaintances than with contacts, but every topic we discuss is public information that anyone could know. We don't share personal things about others or ourselves with our acquaintances. Our relationships with this group of people is a little deeper than with the previous group, but it is still on the shallow side. We say things like, "What was our homework assignment?" "What is the new girl's name?" "Where is the bus stop?" "This teacher is known for his hard tests." "Nice dress, where did you buy it?"

Clichés and small talk

These are people like the grocer or the postman whom we see regularly, but do not really know. We encounter numerous people from this group every day. We usually exchange clichés with them and not much more. We never share anything personal like feelings or thoughts with them. Our relationship with them is extremely superficial. We discuss simple topics and have short conversations which might include phrases like: "Wow, those apples are nice!" "I've never seen a fruit like this before, what is it?" or "Nice weather we're having."

Attitude

Along with an increasing depth in communication there also needs to be a “friendly, positive attitude.” This attitude enables us to focus on the other person. If we are focused on ourselves, we are worried about what the other person thinks about us and our behavior. When we are friendly or “other-focused,” we notice what the other person likes or does not like, what interests him, and what his needs are. This kind of attitude encourages deeper conversations and transparency; people open up their hearts to one another because they feel safe with each other. A committed friendship and deep communication does not come about in a day. When the attitude of positive friendliness is missing, the relationship has little chance of deepening.

1. **Be yourself.** Do not try to appear to be different from that you are. People are attracted to those who are genuine. Do not allow others’ opinions of you to stifle who you really are inside; your tastes, your sense of humor, etc. If you are nervous, the other person will also be nervous and conversation will become shallow and tense. Do not focus on your own weaknesses; focus instead on the other person and what they are saying. They are people with weaknesses just like you. Consider them an equal and not above or below you.
2. **Get to know the other person by asking questions.** People generally like to talk about themselves. Encourage them by asking a few questions. This will make it easier to find a topic you can easily discuss and, in the meantime, learn a little more about them.

The following can help you ask the most appropriate questions:

- Do not ask “yes-no” questions; these stifle conversation because there is nothing more to say. Instead of asking, “*Did you like the teacher’s lecture on friendship?*” ask “*What did you like about the teacher’s lecture on friendship?*” Learn to ask “*Why?*” You will be amazed at how much longer you can discuss a topic and how much more you will learn by using this question. At the same time, we need to be aware that this is not a question that is appropriate in every situation. If used too often, it can cause others to feel like they are being interrogated. Be sensitive to how the person might feel. Learn to use *why* questions appropriately.
- Listen to the other person. Asking questions helps to initiate conversation, but listening to the answers helps to keep it going. It is important that we do not wander off in our thinking while the other person is talking, considering our response before he has even quit speaking. Allow him to finish and then take a few seconds to formulate a reply. Show interest in the other person by looking them in the eyes, following their thought process and not rushing them or cutting them off before they are through talking. In doing this you will get to know one another better and discover the preferences and experiences you have in common, as well as differences between you. If you disagree or have different tastes, you can express that with gentleness and kindness. However, be careful when and how you do this. Sometimes it’s best to wait because it’s not good if our differences close down the ability to converse as we’re first getting to know someone.

Four personality types

In order to develop friendships, it is important to understand who we are and learn how to express our thoughts and feelings as we communicate with others. There is also value in discovering how people differ from each other. Hippocrates (460-370 BC) was the first to recognize personality differences in people and offer a theory to account for these differences. He proposed that there are four basic personality types. Some psychologists still use this model to help them understand the differences between people. These four personalities have both strengths and weaknesses. If we understand the differences and recognize which characteristics are true of us, then we will better understand our own behavior, as well as the behavior of those around us. This in turn will cause us to have greater appreciation of our relationships with others. There are strengths, weaknesses and characteristics to each of these four types. Most of the time the characteristics of one or two of these personality types are dominant for each individual.

Melancholic

Definition. The word melancholy was originally used to mean “sad, gloomy or depressed;” now, however, its meaning has changed to “pensive, to consider or to think deeply.” Melancholy personality types express deep thoughtfulness. They like time for themselves – for quietness. They are very feelings-oriented. Their emotions can lift them to the heights of ecstasy or bring them to the depths of despair. They like to take time to just think. They enjoy socializing, but are not pushy and prefer others to initiate interaction with them.

Strengths. Melancholy people are insightful, sensitive and conscientious. They are able to build good relationships because they are loyal, sensitive and have effective communication skills. In their work they can be described as precise, meticulous, analytical, well organized and self-disciplined. They are self-sacrificing, quiet, unobtrusive people who are often gifted in the arts, poetry and music.

Weaknesses. Melancholy people are moody and often depressed. They tend to become isolated from others because of their hopeless attitude, negativity and reluctance to participate and are perfectionists. Due to their self-sacrificing nature, they are often unresisting and compliant which results in their being easily “walked on.” They can be very critical, touchy and even vengeful. Melancholy personality types tend to be fearful and suspicious of new people and situations, especially if they have had disappointing experiences in the past. They can also be perceived as unsociable.

Phlegmatic

Definition. A phlegmatic person is typically calm and unruffled and, therefore, is often perceived as unemotional. They are very hard to motivate or arouse to action. They like to read and do things like crossword puzzles. They are good-humored and relaxed. They will sit back and take it easy with a smile on their face. The song title they exemplify is “*Don’t worry, be happy.*”

Strengths. Phlegmatic people are diplomatic people and good to have around when things become stressful. They are easy-going and likable. They are well-organized people who are practical and dependable with details. Phlegmatic personality types are patient and accepting. They have a very dry sense of humor; things will be funny to them that amuse no one else. They easily build relationships with many different types of people.

Weaknesses. The weaknesses of phlegmatic people include being unmotivated, lazy and blasé. They are indecisive and tend to be selfish. Their characteristic nonchalance causes them to be perceived as uncaring, cold or unfriendly. They can watch too much television and tend to be spectators rather than participants in life.

Summarizing thoughts on the two introverted temperaments:

The phlegmatic and the melancholy tend to use their energy inwardly to reflect, think and conceptualize. Their aim is to understand the world, not change it as the extroverted temperaments tend to do. In the work place, the phlegmatic cooperates with co-workers while the melancholy ensures the quality of the work.

Sanguine

Definition. Sanguines are cheerful, confident and optimistic individuals. They enjoy singing in the shower. When writing letters they use numerous exclamation points. They nickname all their buddies. They are commonly known as the “life of the party.”

Strengths. They have the ability to carry hope and joy and make others feel important. Their optimism and hope prevents them from being troubled by anything for very long. They are never at a loss for words and are quite capable of demonstrating an exuberant flow of them in conversation. They are compassionate and joyful people who are often spontaneous. They always have a multitude of friends wherever they go. They are good salesmen and can talk almost anyone into anything.

Weaknesses. They tend to be undisciplined and disorganized. They exaggerate and use too many superlatives which often results in lying. They usually talk too much and are interruptive, having an opinion about everything. They are loud. They become insecure easily when they are not encouraged. They can be viewed as shallow and self-absorbed because of their loudness and constant desire to be the center of attention.

Choleric

Definition. This word comes from the word “cholé” which was used in medieval times for “gall.” At that time the gall bladder was considered to be the source of all anger. While this personality type is easily angered and quick-tempered, he is best described as prepared and disciplined. Choleric people tend to be highly motivated, self-starters who work hard. They persevere through the difficulties associated with work and everyday life while continuing to do too much.

Strengths. They are decisive, confident, unafraid and courageous. They are also extremely productive. They are natural-born leaders who will always speak their minds. Choleric personality types are good developers of multifaceted projects. They are reliable and responsible, they never procrastinate. They exhibit strength, toughness and perseverance.

Weaknesses. Choleric people are often irritable and will go into angry rages. They can go from hot to cold very quickly. They can be critical and bossy. They will often be insensitive and run roughshod over others when under pressure. They are often sarcastic. They tend to be goal oriented to the detriment of their relationships or their own health. They have a tendency to use people to achieve their own ends. They are characterized by their rushed and active attitude toward life, often not considering their own emotions. Emotions are, in fact, the least developed segment of their lives.

Summarizing thoughts on the extroverted temperaments:

These two personality types tend to use their energy outwardly by focusing on things, activities and people. Their aim is to change the world. In the work-place the choleric “overcomes barriers” in order to achieve their goals while the sanguine “influences and motivates others” to accomplish things.

The ultimate friendship

(Judeo-Christian content follows.)

Is it possible to be loved and accepted at your worst by a friend who is faithful to the end and always committed to your good? Elvis Presley once said, *“I feel intensely lonely at heart. On stage I might be a sex symbol, but when I close the door I weep like a little baby.”* All of his close friends said he longed to know whether or not he was valuable in and of himself. Image is definitely not everything. All of us have a need to know that we are valuable, worthy of love and important.

Many believe and have experienced that our needs for love, acceptance, value and importance are met by entering into a friendship with God. They believe that God wants to meet the deepest needs in our lives and has already taken steps to do so. By creating us in his image, as mentioned in the book of Genesis in the Bible, he shows us that we have innate value and importance to him. He made us like himself—having a mind, will and emotions. Other parts of creation did not receive this distinction. While they were pronounced “good” by God, it was only the human male and female that were pronounced “very good.” His image was created in us!¹ We are objects of his love and have both value and importance. Jesus demonstrates this when he summed up his purpose in stating, *“I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly!”*²

Because we are created in God’s own image, we are free to exercise our own will. We are people, not robots that only respond to stimuli. Yet, according to the Bible we misused our choices. Instead of desiring a relationship with God as a loving father and freely following him as God, by choice, we went our own way and friendship with God was broken. The Bible calls this sin. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory (approval) of God.³ In other words, in going our own way we missed the mark of his perfect plan for us. We “fall short” of the abundance he wants us to experience because we sinned. We refused to maintain a friendship with him and we went our own way.

Yet God stayed loyal. He pressed on in his commitment to us. We still had value to God. This fact was never more clearly shown than in the life of Jesus Christ. God demonstrated his commitment to us by sending his Son, who died in our place while we were his enemies because of our sin. *“Greater love has no man than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”*⁴ This is exactly what he did to take away the penalty of our sin; Jesus died for us to be forgiven and to restore the broken friendship between us and God. *“God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died in our place.”*⁵ *“Christ died for our sins...was buried...and rose from the dead on the third day. After this he appeared to Peter, then his twelve friends and then, more than five hundred eyewitnesses saw and met with him.”*⁶

¹Genesis 1:26.

²John 10:10.

³Romans 3:23.

⁴John 15:13.

⁵Romans 5:8.

⁶1 Corinthians 15: 3-6.

In order to enter into a friendship with God, we have to do something. The Bible says, *“To those who receive him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in Christ’s Name.”*⁷ What does this mean? It means that we must make a decision with our mind, our will and our emotions to receive that which Jesus offers us. He died to allow us to be forgiven of sin, and he rose from the dead to give us his life, his resurrected life to enable us to live new lives! Receiving him by faith means that with our emotions we desire Jesus to come into our lives; that we desire a friendship with him. It also means that with our minds we accept certain things to be true: that he died to forgive us, that we need him, and that he rose from the dead to give us a new life. Faith is ultimately a decision of our will; we must accept him into our lives. We can turn to him in faith and pray, *“Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as Savior and Lord. I want a friendship with you. I want you to take control of my life and make me the kind of person You want me to be. Thank you for forgiving me. Amen.”*

(End of Judeo-Christian content.)

Conclusion

Friendships are a vital part of life. Not having friends is one of the saddest and most painful experiences one can have. Teens are at a point in their lives when friendships are particularly important. They are beginning to develop lasting relationships. Helping them in this critical area can result in lifelong satisfaction and security within their relationships, both in developing and maintaining those relationships.

⁷John 1:12.

STUDENT NOTES



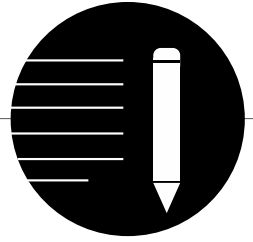
Am I a loyal friend?

Test

Take the test and think about why you are a loyal friend in certain areas and why you are not in others.

- ☐ I dedicate time for my friend on a regular basis.
- ☐ I will meet up with my friend, even if I have been invited to a more interesting event.
- ☐ I receive a lot of encouragement from my friend.
- ☐ We have a lot in common.
- ☐ We never run out of topics to discuss.
- ☐ I can share my deepest thoughts and feelings with my friend, because they never laugh at me.
- ☐ I can always count on them for help when I'm in trouble.
- ☐ They can always count on me when they are in trouble.
- ☐ I wish my friend the best and I'm not envious of their successes.
- ☐ My friend always wishes me the best and is not envious of my successes.
- ☐ I would never intentionally harm my friend.
- ☐ I want to assume the best, even when the circumstances are against it.
- ☐ I forgive my friend when they hurt me.
- ☐ I honestly tell my friend when they make a mistake or do something bad, and I know that they are grateful for this.
- ☐ I never lie to my friend.
- ☐ I will defend my friend if I have to.
- ☐ I say only good things about my friend, even if they are not present.
- ☐ I encourage others to think highly of my friend.
- ☐ I am always happy to help my friend whenever needed.
- ☐ I involve my friend in my plans.
- ☐ My friend is the best part of my life.
- ☐ I can hardly wait to meet my friend again.
- ☐ I like to surprise my friend in a meaningful way.
- ☐ I feel their absence when I cannot meet with my friend.
- ☐ I feel a void when we cannot spend enough time together.

LESSON



04.

Waiting for the One

Why is there a need for marriage, the life-long covenant between a man and a woman?

The biggest social problem of our times is caused by the disintegration of families, the falling apart of close family ties and the failure of marriages. Cohabitation, the doubling and tripling of the proportion of children born outside marriage and the radical drop in birth rates all indicate a dramatic transformation in societal values and relational networks. Marriage, the cohabitation and covenant system that ensures social stability and growth, has faltered. Confidence in marriage has eroded, but the new, alternative forms of cohabitation haven't delivered as expected. Relationships don't last longer, neither do birth rates increase.

A fundamental condition for intimacy is security

Intimacy means that you can be real in the relationship; you can reveal who you are and know that the other person accepts you and is committed to you throughout a lifetime, irrespective of your condition. Without this security there is no intimacy, no reality, only an obligation to perform and to present the expected image. These two people need an environment that enables them to communicate, which can be found in a mutually faithful, exclusive and lifelong commitment called marriage. Marriage is a covenant that provides appropriate security for the partners. Only in those marriages which have been entered into at the right time with the right partner, will the partners be able to communicate with each other and solve their problems. A good marriage means acceptance and affection for the spouses that they can get from no other relationship. Marriage provides security and a guarantee which is represented by the public oath and a certificate that is approved by society. It signifies that you belong to your spouse, it expresses your love, affection and total commitment that you are prepared to persevere and stand by their side. Real love is ready to take this commitment. Real love does not seek a frivolous attachment, but it wants to be connected to the other person exclusively and at all costs. Real love seeks full commitment, because it wants intimacy; it wants to give everything and get everything: an emotional, physical, economic and social commitment.

If what you want is cohabitation without the commitment of marriage, then you don't dare to fully take responsibility for this person with all the consequences. The commitment expressed by marriage provides that accepting environment in which you can build a fully transparent, honest and loving relationship. Marriage is a fundamental condition to such a relationship. The foundations will be missing for establishing a deep, intimate and long-term relationship without security, commitment, legal commitment, social recognition and financial responsibility that is undertaken for the other person. People often argue that 'it's only a piece of paper; it does not matter anyway.' If it really doesn't matter, then why don't you get it and use it to strengthen your relationship? Well, in fact, a marriage certificate does matter a lot. This is why people are afraid to take this commitment, because they want to maintain an escape route to make their exit from the relationship easier. They take responsibility for the other person in front of each other and the entire society only to a limited extent. But this full commitment is necessary, not only for the couple, but also for their children. Children need safety and long-term commitment to perform their very best. Children can feel even the slightest uncertainty in the relationship between their parents. Marriage can ensure the social attachment that provides both financial and physical protection for a child.

The three types of love

It's difficult to define what true love is like. Love is more than passion and feelings, which is why throwing around "*I love you*" or "*I'm in love with you*" are not the most obvious choices to express it. Let's examine the different types of love that you can see in human relationships, along with the characteristics of true love. While reading about them, examine how they are present in your own relationships.

1. 'I'll love you, IF...'

The first type of love is the 'I'll love you, if...'. This kind of love is received or given when certain requirements are met. You must earn it somehow. For example: 'I will love you if you meet my requirements for a lover...', 'if you satisfy my desires...' or 'if you sleep with me.' This kind of love is offered in exchange for things, actions, feelings desired by the other party. Ultimately, this type of love

is selfish. Its objective is to get something in exchange for love. This type of love is always subject to conditions. All is well until the conditions are met.

2. “I love you, BECAUSE....”

The second type of love is ‘I love you, because....’ In this case the person is loved because they have or did something. It is caused by a particular condition or quality that is present in the beloved. For example: ‘I love you, because you are pretty’ or ‘I love you, because I feel safe by your side.’ Maybe you know girls who are in love with a guy only because they are sporty and good-looking. It’s not the guy they love, but his status, position and popularity. If you are loved this way, soon you will have to work hard to earn the ‘I’ll love you, if” type of appreciation.

3. ‘I love you. PERIOD.’

There is also a third type of love. It’s so shocking and beautiful that everyone should experience it. It says that ‘I love you no matter what you are like deep inside. I love you and I don’t care if you change. You can’t do anything that would quench my love for you. I love you. PERIOD.’ This type of love is not blind. It may know a whole lot about the other person. And despite the fact that you know their weaknesses and mistakes, you accept them as they are. This kind of love can be experienced only by someone who is whole and full; by someone who doesn’t have to constantly take away from their relationships to tuck into the holes of their own deficiencies. A person who is whole can freely give in a relationship without requesting anything in return. This is a ‘giver’ type of love. It gives freely of itself. In this relationship there is no room for fear, disappointment, force, envy or jealousy. This type of love will bring about changes in the other person. No one demands such changes, they are a natural response for unconditional love. There is freedom from meeting any expectations, which prompts you to give something in return for being totally accepted. This type of love frees you from pressure; it frees you to get the best out of yourself.

The characteristics of ‘I love you, PERIOD’

This kind of love is characterized by three qualities: forgiveness, commitment and acceptance.

Forgiveness brings hope to the relationship. We all struggle with different weaknesses, faults and wrongdoing. Inevitably, we hurt each other. Forgiveness gives you hope that the other person will accept and carry your weaknesses; they will turn an eye away from our mistakes and that they will forgive your sins. Forgiveness is not critical, rather it always offers a fresh start. Forgiveness seeks the benefit of the other person even when they don’t deserve it.

Commitment is a decision that you accept the other person, together with their faults. This is the fruit of your will, a decision of your senses. Commitment is subjecting your emotions to your will when these emotions become uncertain or clouded. It means long-term perseverance and full dedication towards the other person in front of the whole society. It’s a manifestation of grace that fills the relationship with hope. It makes your relationship safe and secure because both parties can rely on each other, no matter what happens. True love is incomplete without this commitment, because only the ‘I love you, period’ type of love expresses that you committed yourself to persevere and stand by the other person, irrespective of what happens and what changes might come.

Acceptance enables you to give your best performance. Love does not mean that you disregard the problems, but that you are set to resolve them. These conflicts usually stem from different demands and expectations and the clash between them. If you accept the other person and love them as they are, you place them before yourself. Ultimately, it will prompt them to perform their very best. People who live in an environment of acceptance are capable of accomplishing more.

True Intimacy

The building blocks for trust and commitment

Being in an intimate and close relationship means that you are real and can be your true self. **You can be your true self only if you experience trust and commitment from the other person.** Trust and commitment break down the walls that you have built to protect yourself from hurt and to conceal who you really are. Trust and commitment help you open up to experience healing and real intimacy.

A true understanding of intimacy will have a positive effect on a person's character. The process begins in infancy when our basic needs for trust and security are met. These lead to the confidence necessary for a child to develop independence. This sense of autonomy provides the self-assurance needed to be able to initiate and build relationships. Through the affirmative experiences associated with initiating relationships, our self-identity and self-perception are positively influenced.

An accurate and confident sense of self-worth also leads to true intimacy. Intimacy in turn leads to generosity, the fruit of which is a character of integrity.

Another vital element in fostering intimate relationships is trust. It is important for us to understand how essential trust is in our lives and how trust expressed to one another can influence us in a positive direction. A child who grows up with a lack of trust will be unable to reach his full potential.

According to psychologist Eric Erikson, *"The most basic building block needed for our development is trust."*¹ We need to recognize our need for others and be able to trust others in order to be healthy adults. This trust begins to develop the moment we are born.

Intimacy does not equal sex

It is easy to deceive ourselves into trying to obtain intimacy in a false way. One form of false intimacy can be promiscuous sex. According to a survey, one of the top reasons teenagers get involved in sexual relationships is that they want to experience love, care and intimacy. Many people in society today are involved in sexual relationships because they lack the fulfillment of a truly intimate relationship. In a committed married relationship, true intimacy is first experienced on an emotional level. The sexual act in a marriage relationship is really an overflow of the emotional intimacy experienced by the couple. Emotional intimacy means we recognize and understand our own feelings and then share these feelings with our spouse. It means being completely vulnerable with one another without fear of rejection. A prerequisite to this form of intimacy is that we feel secure within ourselves. If we are incapable of being vulnerable or won't allow our spouse to be vulnerable, we can stifle the experience of intimacy in marriage. The result of this will be that our soul does not experience intimacy, and we will be forced to try and fulfill this need through our bodies or five senses. False intimacy results when we try to fulfill emotional needs in the wrong way in the wrong place. False intimacy is when we respond to and try to satisfy emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs physically.

¹Eric Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1950).

The role of communication in intimate relationships

The most important tool in getting to know one another is communication. It also plays an enormous role in the development of intimacy.

Intimacy includes much more than the physical realm. People who love one another strive toward emotional, mental, social, moral and spiritual intimacy—not just physical intimacy.

Sex: Joy, Purpose, Responsibility

It might seem strange to say it, but sex does have a purpose. Just as a pen is designed for the specific purpose of writing (it wouldn't be much good as a screwdriver), sex was designed with a specific purpose in mind.

The same principle holds true for sex. If we want to have a happy sex life, we must first answer the question, *"What is the purpose and role of sex?"* Only when we know the answer to the purpose of sex, can we fulfill its intended purpose and reap its rewards.

It seems that the media goes from one extreme to the other when talking about the purpose of sex. First, they suggest that we should have sexual relationships with whomever we want. After all, we are free and we only live once! Many advertisements, music videos, popular music lyrics, newspaper reports, articles and advice columns promote this message. Then they tip the scale to the other side and scare everyone with the shallowness of short-term relationships, the trauma of divorce and the dangers of sexually transmitted infections.

The media cannot find a balance between these two extremes. We get conflicting messages. On the one side we are encouraged to have sex whenever we feel like it because our libido is so strong we are unable to resist it. On the other hand, we are warned not to have casual sex because it is so dangerous it could even kill us! Society is deceiving itself by encouraging young people to do something that produces consequences from which it is also trying to protect them.

You should know—as with any wonderful thing—sexuality can also be dangerous. These dangers are not insignificant. Just like anything else that entails the possibility of enjoyment, sex can also cause great harm.

What is the purpose of sex?

The first purpose of sex is to express and illustrate the unity, love and commitment between a man and a woman.

In many countries there is a law that requires all ingredients to be listed on the label of every packaged food product sold within the country. Wouldn't it be good if sex had a label like that? As a matter of fact, it does and this label was written 3,500 years ago by God. He, after all, created sex and through the ancient prophet Moses, He communicated much of the meaning and purpose of sex. This writing is found in the first book of the Bible, Genesis.

He writes the following about the culmination of the creation process: *"God created man in his own image...male and female he created them."*² From this we can see that sexuality was an essential part of mankind planned by God from the very beginning. It is a natural part of being human to be

²Genesis 1:27.

either male or female. Not much later Moses describes the unique way in which God created man and woman for each other.

God created man and woman to be incomplete without each other. That is why Moses said “...*a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall become one flesh.*”³ Sexual expression is the most fundamental way a man and woman become “one flesh.”

Many people start a sexual relationship with the aim of finding intimacy and acceptance. How sad this is. If they understood the purpose of sex, they would not expect to gain something out of it that it was never intended to provide. People who seek to gain intimacy through sex are like parachute jumpers who use only a bed sheet. The experience of sex resembles true intimacy and acceptance, but it is in fact only the expression of these things.

The second purpose of sex is to give joy and pleasure to a married couple.

Actor Ricardo Montalbán once said, “*A good lover is someone who can satisfy one woman throughout her lifetime and who can be satisfied by one woman for his lifetime. A good lover is not someone who regularly changes partners, for even a dog can do that.*” The secondary purpose of sex is to give joy and pleasure. Sex is a gratifying and wonderful experience, but the secret to its enjoyment is not in experiencing it with many partners, but rather in really enjoying it with one partner throughout life. Great sex is not taking as many women to bed as possible or going to bed with as many men as possible; it is making sex exciting, delightful and filled with variety for an entire lifetime with the same person.

The third purpose of sex is procreation.

Finally, the third purpose of sex is procreation. This is not its primary goal, as many people may think, but it is an important aspect of sex. The miracle of sexual union is that a new life can be conceived in the process. What a wonderful fulfillment of sexual unity to produce a new life! This new life is a fantastic expression of the unity that exists in the relationship of a husband and wife.

The potential of creating a new life exists in each man and woman. Conception is the result of an act that requires total emotional, intellectual, and conscious commitment; and which encompasses the totality of our senses, including reaching the peak of emotional ecstasy. Of course there is great cause for joy when the result of this kind of sexual intercourse is a child. In addition to experiencing unity in sex and the physical pleasure that goes along with it, we have also become tools in the hand of God to create a new human being!

Dreams.	Let's examine what safe sex is like; when it poses the least risk to your lives. We have already seen that sex is good, but it can surely ruin your life.
Write the words below each other, which can be normally grouped into three categories:	But before getting into this topic, I would like you to share your dreams. Describe in a few words where you would like to be at the age of 30. • Family—child, wife, husband. • Finances—money, house, car. • Career—job, recognition, success.

³Genesis 2:24.

Summer vacation by the lake

The main character of our story is Steve. During the summer holidays, Steve goes to the lake with his friends. The weather is fantastic, the water is pleasant, the beer is flowing and the girls are beautiful. The guys are sitting on the beach and are eying the girls, checking out each one. There are gorgeous girls walking up and down on the beach. Steve spots a beautiful girl who is just coming out of the water. He cannot take his eyes off her. Steve's friends also notice his interest. They start teasing him, because they know that Steve has not slept with a woman.

"Steve, it's really lame that you are still a virgin. Here is your chance. You can prove that you are a real man if you walk up to her and pick her up." Steve gathers all his courage and he walks up to the girl. She is very kind, she shows interest in Steve and they agree to have a date later in the evening at a local bar. Everything goes according to plan. Steve walks her home from their date and she invites him in for a drink. Then they do "it." Let me now draw you a picture of what has just happened. Obviously, I'm not going to draw the actual intercourse, but I will show you how this relationship was birthed. In the drawing, the letter 'B' symbolizes Steve and the letter 'G' symbolizes this 'nice' girl.

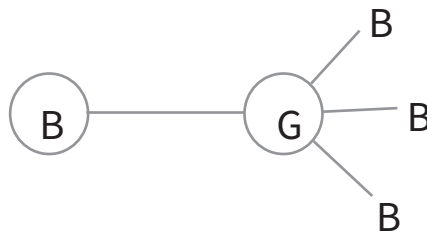
Draw this diagram on the whiteboard, and then continue drawing as you are telling the story.



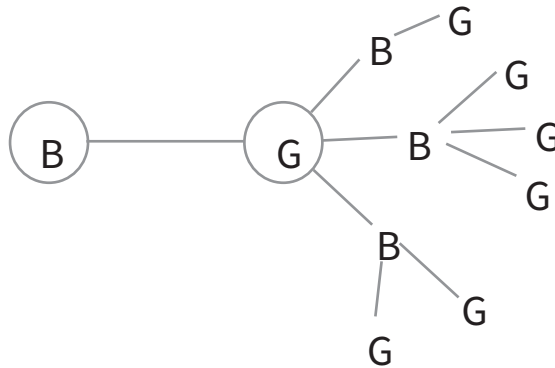
The line meant that there is a "relationship" between them, more precisely that they had sex with each other. You could think that there is nothing wrong with it since Steve had fun and the girl also wanted to do it. They merely spent a pleasant evening together.

However, there is a problem. This girl is a very "agreeable" girl. She has been "agreeable" with many other guys. Just this past year she has already slept with three other guys.

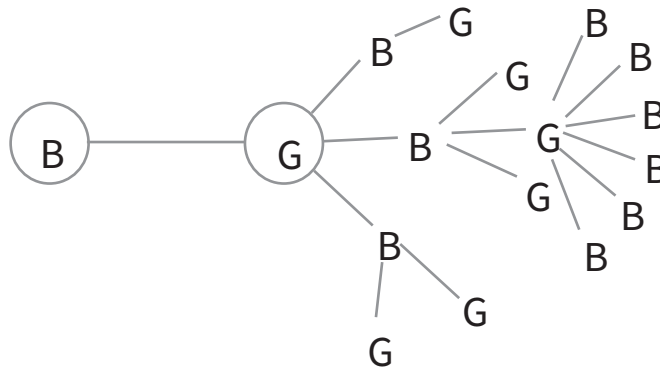
Let me draw you a picture of what happened when this girl was "agreeable" with these boys.



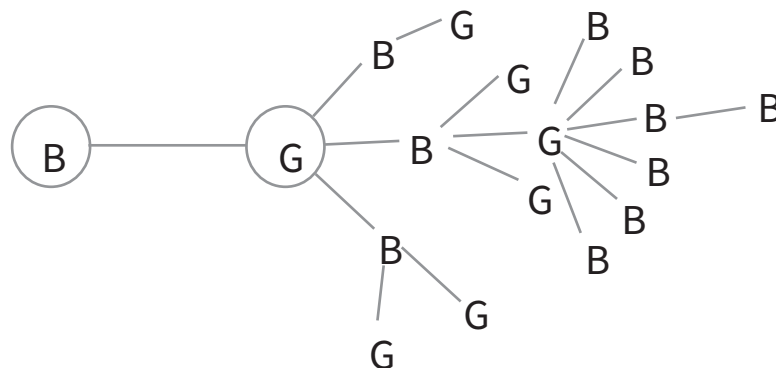
These "boys"—with whom this girl has been intimate in the past—were also with other girls that they were intimate with earlier.



Among these many “agreeable” girls, there was a particularly “agreeable” girl, whose occupation was to be professionally intimate with men, therefore she had many intimate encounters.



However, among the clients of this “professionally agreeable” girl, there was a guy who was bisexual.



This drawing could be continued forever. Let’s suppose that one of the participants carries HIV or another STI. What happens then? The infection could reach Steve immediately, even with only one single intimate encounter without him ever realizing it.

Dr. C. Everett Koop, former USA Surgeon General said that “*When you have sex with someone, you are having sex with everyone they have had sex with for*

the last 10 years, and everyone they and their partners have had sex with for the last 10 years.”⁴

Committed covenant: marriage

Throughout history the leaders of different nations have used covenants/treaties to ensure the protection and security of their countries. The seal of their covenant was their children who entered into marriage with the children of kings from allied kingdoms. It was the guarantee that during attack from an enemy they would help each other. A source of ancient wisdom expresses it in the following way: *“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor”* (Ecclesiastes 4:9). A covenant relationship provides safety and security for both parties.

Marriage is a covenant relationship in which the partners commit to ensure the protection, security, well-being and prosperity of the other person. This covenant enables both parties to trust in each other. Without this trust, the most basic human need for security is damaged. It is only when you feel safe that you are free to be yourself and experience the fullness of your created being. This is how you can give your full self to the other person. You need this freedom that originates from safety to be able to focus on the other person. When this covenantal trust is broken, so is the sense of security and freedom. True love is exclusive and it can only survive if there is trust, commitment and security. Sexuality can only be fulfilled when it is embedded in a covenant-based, mutually loyal and committed relationship such as the safety of marriage.

Sex without a covenant-based relationship

Getting to know each other really well takes time. After a single evening that you spend together you cannot say that you know each other. The basis for getting to know each other is quality time together. Getting to know each other consists of several parts. You have to get to know how the other person thinks, what his values are, his convictions and habits. You want to know his inner being. When sex comes into the picture too early, the hormones begin to rule the relationship so powerfully that they obscure important factors and take over the emotional aspect. Basically, they prevent you from getting to know the other person properly.

These two paper hearts represent two young people who are just getting to know each other. As they come closer to each other (just like these two hearts), they are also getting to know each other better. The more these two hearts overlap, the more they get to know each other.

⁴Marc Fisher, “Surgeon General Mince No Words on AIDS,” The Washington Post, February 26, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1988/02/26/surgeon-general-minces-no-words-on-aids/13b3b578-dca0-43bc-a853-8567f8a73152/>, accessed April 24, 2021.

It can frequently happen that after a short dating period sex comes into the picture and it ‘seals’ the relationship. Let us symbolize this by stapling the two hearts together. In most cases, such fast-evolving sexual relationships end in a break-up, just like these paper hearts are now separated. A break-up obviously comes at a cost; you are hurt in the process and leave a piece of your heart with the other person. The more you get involved in such relationships, the more pieces of your heart are taken away.

In closing, let’s look at some practical suggestions on how to prepare for marriage while you are still dating.

Dating

Dating is a good thing, but it can also be very confusing. The purpose of dating is for a boy and a girl to get to know each other as part of a deepening friendship. As they get to know each other better, it can lead them to a deeper commitment or, to the contrary, a decision to break up.

Date ideas

Sport date:

Tennis, football game, basketball game, swimming, horseback riding, pool, bicycling, skiing, jogging, table tennis, badminton, running

- Advantages: fun, healthy, others can participate with you
- Disadvantages: your date may not be interested in sports; your self-confidence could be undermined if your partner defeats you; one of you may be overly competitive and then the game will be no fun for anyone.

Low cost date:

Go together to the library and read to each other from your favorite books, eat ice cream, go out for a coke and a chat, take a walk in the park, play video games, go to the beach, play board games, put together a jigsaw puzzle, play the guitar or some other instrument, paint a picture together, take photos, make popcorn and talk, sing songs, play your favorite popular songs for each other, make a snowman.

Arts date:

Attend opera, ballet, musical, museum, arts festivals, concerts, theater or cinema showings, go dancing (perhaps there are student rates or free offers—always check for great deals).

Serving date:

Visit orphanages, sick people, hospitals, or homes for the handicapped and encourage those who are there. Help people that struggle to get out by doing their grocery shopping for the week, walking their dog, helping with their housework, doing odd jobs around their home, gardening, taking out their trash, clearing their sidewalk of snow.

Food date:

Have a meal with your friends where everyone brings something, cook a meal together, cook for each other, make a cake together for someone else, have a picnic, go to a restaurant.

We all have an idea of Mr. or Mrs. Right. You might even have an image of them on your wall. You probably know exactly what you want from them, and you also have clear ideas about how they should behave. The problem begins when reality doesn't match this image. A perfect partner is generally defined by three categories: looks, personality and popularity.

There is something missing from this 'triplet.' It's the most important category of all—character. Your character is your inner essence, your true being. You might be dating someone with perfect looks, but if they have a weak character the relationship will break down very soon. Beauty fades with age, but character remains forever. Many people think that it's worth making compromises about inner characteristics for the sake of external features (beauty or popularity). These people believe that their partner will change over time, only to wake up one day to realize that external looks don't matter that much and neither does popularity. They will come to see their partner for who they really are. We are not saying that external characteristics don't matter. Obviously, you want to date someone who looks attractive to you. The question is how you can get to know someone's character.

Positive character traits.⁵

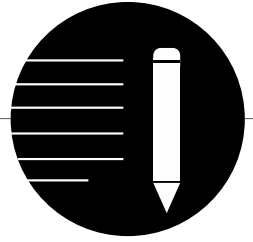
1. Love means commitment to the other person.
2. Joy, an inner happiness that is independent of the conditions.
3. Peace, an inner sense of security that enables you to stay calm, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, without fear and worry, because you trust that your life is safe in God's hands.
4. Patience that enables you to wait for the right time.
5. Kindness when you care about the needs of others.
6. Goodness to do what is right.
7. Faithfulness when you keep your word, irrespective of what it costs you.
8. Gentleness when you focus on the emotional needs of others by paying attention and trying to understand them.
9. Self-control. It means that you can separate your instincts from your actions. You don't serve your instincts, but you are morally and mentally strong. This is reflected in the person's eating habits and practical life. This is the ability to rule over your physical desires, sex included.

These are the positive traits that can make you happy if your partner possesses them. Such traits are not linked to the 'triplets,' but they remain for a whole lifetime.

Marriage is the best framework that keeps the lifelong love commitment of a man and a woman safe, regardless how their looks, performance or positions change throughout their lives.

⁵The list was compiled based on Galatians 5:16-23. See Barry St. Clair and Bill Jones, *Dating: Going Out in Style* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993); Josh McDowell and Paul Lewis, *Givers, Takers and Other Kinds of Lovers* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1980); and Lawrence J. Crabb, *The Marriage Builder* (Carol Stream, IL: NavPress, 1982).

LESSON



05.

Goals, Decisions, Character

Jason and the Time Thread

Some people live in the past, some people live in the present, but many people live in the future. They imagine how perfect their life will be when they get out of school, get a job, get married, have kids or achieve whatever they think the perfect life is. They cannot enjoy today because they are too busy looking for tomorrow. Here is a story about a boy who could not wait for tomorrow.

Once upon a time there was a boy named Jason. Jason was a strong boy who could run like the wind. He was a loyal young fellow who liked nothing better than to spend time with his friend, Lisa. Even though she was a girl, Lisa was just as much fun as any boy. (In fact, Jason often thought—although

he told no one—that when he grew up he would marry Lisa.) Jason was a good boy all in all, a fine friend, but he did have one problem. Jason was rather impatient.

Jason's favorite times were school holidays. When he was in school, he was always thinking about what he would do when classes were over for the day, or when they were over forever. Jason's teacher often reprimanded him for daydreaming in class.

"What are you dreaming about now, Jason?" his teacher would ask.

Jason often replied, *"I'm thinking about all the things I'll do when I grow up."*

Jason's teacher would smile and tell Jason, *"There will be plenty of time for that. Why don't you just enjoy being a boy for now? Being a grownup isn't all wonderful, you know."*

Jason was not so sure about that, so he kept thinking about the future. One day, he was sprawled out under a tree, dreaming about growing up and marrying Lisa. When he opened his eyes, there on the grass next to him lay a silver ball, from which dangled a golden thread.

Curious, Jason reached out and touched the thread.

"I wonder what it is," he said.

Just then, an old woman appeared in front of Jason. *"This silver ball holds your life thread,"* she said. *"If you leave it alone and do not pull at it, time will pass normally. If you want to speed things up, all you have to do is pull out the thread a bit, and an hour will go by like a second. You must be extremely careful, though, because you cannot push the thread back into the ball if you change your mind. Once the thread is pulled out, that time is gone. Now, you may have this ball if you want it, but you must be aware of the consequences and be certain to use it wisely. Do you want it?"*

Jason grabbed the ball and put it in his pocket. Of course he wanted it! Wouldn't you? He actually refrained from touching the thread for a couple of days. Then, on the third day while Jason was at school, he wished he were outside playing instead of inside listening to the teacher. He knew that the day outside was sunny and warm; so Jason reached into his pocket, found the silver ball, and pulled at the golden thread.

When Jason looked up, the teacher was saying, *"All right, class, it is time to pack things up for the day. School is dismissed."* Jason dashed out the door and spent a delightful afternoon climbing trees with his friend Lisa.

From that point on, Jason tugged at the golden thread anytime there was a bad moment he wished to escape or a fun moment he wanted to reach more quickly. After a couple years of school, Jason decided that moving along to an actual job would be much more exciting. He gave the string a good, long pull and found himself an apprentice in a carpenter's shop.

Jason enjoyed his work as a carpenter and rarely pulled the string, except when he needed payday to come a little sooner. By this time, he and Lisa were in love and Jason simply could not wait to be married. A couple of tugs at the string brought him to their wedding day. As Jason looked out over his friends and family who had gathered for the wedding, he noticed that his mother's hair had grown rather gray. He felt a bit guilty that he had pulled the string so often.

Now and then, Jason thought of the old woman's warning to use the golden thread wisely, and for a time, he would resolve not to pull at it. However, something always came up that spurred him to tug at the thread just a bit.

Once Jason and Lisa had children, Jason gave the thread a little tug whenever the babies would cry or become ill just to spare them any pain.

When an oppressive government threw Jason in prison for speaking out against it, Jason shortened his sentence by a good yank at the string. He was back home in a flash, but now he was a middle-aged man; and the thread was no longer gold, but silver. Jason's hair had started to turn gray, and his face had wrinkles.

When the bills for a house full of children grew too troublesome one night, Jason pulled out a good length of thread. In the morning, the children were all grown with jobs and families of their own. Jason and Lisa had the house to themselves once again.

When he looked at the thread, he found that it had turned from silver to gray. In the mirror, Jason saw that he was now an old man. His hair was completely gray and his face was more wrinkled than ever. Lisa, too, was old and in poor health. At this point, Jason was cautious about pulling the thread because he knew he must be getting close to the end. Whenever Lisa was sick, Jason pulled a bit at the thread anyway, because he could not stand to see her suffer. When money troubles arose, Jason tugged at the thread because, by now, he knew no other way to handle his problems.

One day, while Jason was worrying about his predicament, he took a walk in the forest. How could he pull less at the small amount of thread remaining to him? He sat down in a small clearing and closed his eyes to think. When he opened his eyes, he saw the old woman who had given him the magic ball. She smiled at him and asked, *"So, have you had a good life?"*

- Do you think Jason had a good life? Explain your answer.
- What do you think his response will be to the old woman's question, *"So, have you had a good life?"*
- Would you have taken the ball from the old woman? Why or why not?

"I don't know," Jason answered. *"The silver ball has helped me to escape sadness, pain and boredom. I have never had to wait for anything I wanted. It seems, though, that my life has gone by too quickly. I feel as if I have had no time to reflect on anything that has happened, and the thread is almost gone; I am afraid to pull it any more, because if I do, I may die. No, I am not so sure that the silver ball has been a good thing after all."*

"Why, you ungrateful man!" exclaimed the old woman. *"I give you such a gift and you don't even appreciate it! What would you have me give you? I can grant you one wish."*

- What do you think Jason asked for?
- What would you ask for?

"Honestly," said Jason, *"What I'd like is to live my life again, but this time without the magic ball. I know that means that I'll experience the bad as well as the good, but at least then my life won't pass by so quickly and be so meaningless."*

"So be it," said the old woman, and she stretched out her hand. Jason placed the ball into her hand, leaned back and fell asleep.

He awoke as a young boy again, in his own bed, with his mother shaking him. *"Get up, Jason,"* she was saying. *"You'll be late for school."*

“Mother,” he said, “I had an awful dream. I was old and my life was almost over, and I had nothing to show for it, not even memories.”

Jason’s mother laughed. *“Oh, Jason,” she said. “You’ll always have memories. Now why don’t you go make some? I see Lisa waiting for you outside. Hurry and get dressed, and the two of you can walk to school together.”*

A few minutes later, Jason dashed out the door to join Lisa. It was a beautiful day. The sun had never looked so bright. Lisa’s smile had never looked so big, and even school didn’t seem like such a terrible prospect. In fact, Jason was actually looking forward to it.

The importance of small decisions

- What does this story teach us about making decisions?

“Small” decisions can have “big” consequences

- Do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?
- When small decisions are combined with other small decisions, can they have a big effect?

When they are combined with other “small” decisions

Jason made a lot of small decisions about when he would pull the thread. There was no single pull of the thread that seemed to cause his problem. It was not such a big deal at the time to get out of school early, get a job early or get married early. Collectively, however, they added up to the feeling that he had wasted his life or at least not experienced it to the fullest extent possible. The “small” decision to drink some alcohol combined with the “small” decision to try to find your way home alone can have disastrous consequences. On the other hand, the “small” decision to study for an hour instead of watching television combined with the “small” decision to get a good night’s sleep could have great results when you take your test the next day.

- Did you notice any habits being reinforced by Jason’s choices in the story?

Sometimes you have to make sacrifices now to achieve what you want in the future

This idea is called delayed gratification, and Jason did not understand it. He felt that experiencing pain and inconvenience was a waste of his precious time and chose to fast forward through those difficult or boring moments. He did not understand that hard work could give him satisfaction in his job. Jason was unaware of the fact that taking care of a crying child or a sick wife would give him the opportunity to express his love for the people in his life. He never realized that the long-term gain would be worth the short-term pain.

- Can you go back in time to change a bad decision you made, once you see the consequences?
- How does that relate to the idea of delayed gratification?

Making Good Decisions

Basic ideas

1. Making wise decisions involves a five-step process. If applied consistently, this process helps you live a healthier, more fruitful and more satisfying life.
2. Mature decision-making also includes the following:
 - a. You don't make decisions based on your emotions.
 - b. You know your values and priorities.
 - c. You take responsibility for your decisions.

Background information

The ability to make good decisions is the result of applying a systematic decision-making process. Mastering this process takes a long time and regular practice. Most teenagers are prone to make decisions quickly and instinctively, based on their momentary feelings and reactions. The purpose of this lesson is to help the students learn the basic elements of logical decision-making. The lesson includes four case studies that describe situations that students can encounter in real life. By following the five-step process, the students acquire tools which enable them to apply a new approach in their problem-solving so that they can make good and healthy decisions.¹

Involving a helper

In this lesson, you will need the help of another adult. The students will be divided into two groups—boys and girls—which will be led by adults of the same sex as the participants. It means that if the teacher is female, she will need a male leader to lead the group of boys and vice versa. Start the lesson by dividing the boys and the girls into two different classrooms.

Case study

Once the girls and the boys are settled in different groups, read this case study to the girls.

For the Girls

Vicky has recently been spending a lot of time with Zack. She started dating him because of his great sense of humor. In addition to being handsome, he seems to care for Vicky and her feelings. However, Vicky started questioning

¹Nancy M. Roach and Leanna L. Benn, *Me, My World, My Future: For Junior High* (Spokane, WA: Teen-Aid, 1987).

the relationship when she noticed that Zack drinks a lot when he goes out with his friends.

Late one night last week Zack went to see Vicky when her parents weren't at home. She immediately smelled alcohol when she opened the door for him. It made Vicky feel uncomfortable, so she stepped outside to talk. She wanted to respect the effort he made to see her. As they were chatting, Zack embraced her and started kissing her passionately. He said that because her parents weren't home, it would be a great time for them to have sex. But Vicky wanted to hold off and told this to Zack. He tried for a while to convince her, but then he finally accepted her rejection and left.

Zack has been very kind and polite to Vicky ever since, but she feels tense when he is around. He has told her a couple of times how much he likes her and that he would like to sleep with her. He is known to have had sex with some girls before. Vicky doesn't know whether he will continue to date her unless she gives in. She has been thinking of breaking up with him, but he is really nice when he is not drunk.

If she broke up with him, she would be the only girl among her friends who doesn't have a boyfriend and it would make her stick out.

- What should Vicky do? What would be the first piece of advice you would give to her?

[Ask the students about their first impressions of this situation. Ask them what they would say. Leave some minutes for the answer. Afterwards ask volunteers to read their written advice out loud to the other girls. Ask them to indicate the best response and give their reasons.]

For the Boys

Charlie is an average guy. He doesn't think he is someone special, so he mostly goes with the flow. He hangs out with the same group of people all the time. A girl called Esther recently joined their group. She started paying special attention to him. She would sit close to him and would listen without interrupting him. Charlie has never had anyone show this type of interest in him before.

He finally works up the courage and asks her to go out on a date. They finish their date by her house then she suggests kissing goodnight.

They begin kissing and continue for a long time until they can't stop. He is about to undress her when they hear someone approaching. The spell is broken, the opportunity is lost, and he goes home reluctantly. In the following days all Charlie can think of is Esther and their next meeting.

You are also a member of their group of friends and Charlie confides in you about the situation. As he is talking about Esther and this situation, Charlie acknowledges a sense of guilt for almost being caught and he is afraid that

Once the girls and the boys are settled in different groups, read this case study to the boys.

he would get her pregnant. He asks for your advice. You have every reason to believe that Esther has been sexually active for a while, but Charlie has not.

- What should Charlie do? What would be the first piece of advice you would give to him?

[Ask the students about their first impressions of this situation. Ask them what they would say. Leave some time for them to answer. Afterwards ask volunteers to read their written advice out loud to the other guys. Ask them to indicate the best response and give their reasons.]

The five-step process of decision-making

If the participants complain about the lack of time, remind them that in real life they would not normally spend so much time making such decisions.

Interrupt the activity once the three minutes are up. Ask which group would like to read their answers first.

[Divide the students into groups of 4 people. Ask them to determine the problem that Vicky/Charlie is facing. Note that there could be more than one problem; it could be a series of related issues. Give the students THREE minutes to discuss it.]

1. Identify the problem

- Whose problem is it? Who does the problem affect? Who should be the one solving this problem? Try to figure out everything you can about the problem.
- What thoughts or actions play a role in the problem of Vicky/Charlie?
- Vicky/Charlie is your friend and has asked for your advice. He/she bears the weight of solving the problem; you can only assist him/her.

What kinds of questions would you ask yourselves and of Vicky/Charlie if you wanted to have a better understanding of the situation? Write down all your questions.

2. List all the possible solutions.

- What are the possible solutions to your problem? There are always more than two solutions, so ask for help to see other possible paths if you feel stuck.

[Ask the students to list the possible options they can discuss with Vicky/Charlie. Sometimes seemingly dumb or stupid suggestions can help you come up with better ideas that you wouldn't have thought of otherwise. This is why you have to be creative and resourceful. Sometimes the best solution is rather obvious, but even then you need some time to think it through.]

The students are now learning how to assess a situation and later they can apply this skill in other settings.

Do not get lost in the discussion on the best possible choice. The students are not to solve Vicky/Charlie's problem, but to learn a new decision-making process.

[Allow three minutes for the groups to come up with a recommendation. Afterwards ask them to share it with the others.]

3. Evaluate and assess all the possible solutions.

Consider the outcome of these different solutions. Check whether these solutions:

- are lawful;
- are moral;
- help to achieve the previously set goals;
- have a favorable effect on others;
- build and nurture the relationship.

[Adolescents are not used to thinking so methodically. They could become frustrated when they have to carefully consider the various aspects of a situation. If you see any signs of frustration, let them know that they are now working on becoming wiser. And as with all things and valuable habits, it is not easy at first.]

[One possible way to quickly consider all your options is to have each group look at only the consequences of choices they themselves have listed. The options mentioned by several groups should be distributed randomly among them.]

[Allow three minutes for the groups to evaluate the various options and choices and ask them to share their findings. Even if they had only one option, let them share.]

4. Decide on the best possible solution.

Make sure that when you make a choice, you set a goal for yourself or clarify a direction you want to go toward. It should contribute to helping you reach your goals; to really get there you will have to do something. You might have to talk to someone about this new decision, you might have to change your attitude or get rid of a bad habit, establish a new one or learn a new skill.

[Now the groups will have only two minutes to decide about the best possible solution. In the following two minutes the groups share their recommendations to Vicky/Charlie.]

5. Plan the execution of your decisions.

- How does the decision affect your situation today and your life tomorrow and later?
- Can you accept the consequences of your decision and the responsibility that comes with it?

[Give three minutes to the groups to outline a plan for Vicky/Charlie that they can follow if they want to implement the decision suggested by the group. Ask each group to briefly describe its recommendation.]

There are **three general problems** that often prevent us from following the advice of others.

1. Your emotions overrule your good senses.

Emotions play an important role in a decision, but you cannot rely **exclusively** on them. Emotions can conceal facts that are important aspects of the situation or problem that you are facing. Emotions come and go, which is why you have to make sure that your decisions are not based on the feelings you have at one particular moment. If you think that your emotions can prevent you from making wise decisions, you should talk to someone who is not so closely affected by the problem. It's always good to share your problems with your friends, but it could be also useful to talk about them with an adult whom you trust.

2. You are uncertain about your values or have forgotten about them.

If you know what is important to you, it makes the decision-making easier in a particular situation. For example, if you value honesty, you will immediately know that when you are solving the problem at hand, lying is not an option. If it is important for you to know what God thinks about your situation, the Bible will serve as an important resource for solving your issues and in confronting difficult situations.

3. You don't take responsibility for your decisions.

Sometimes you make good decisions and sometimes you make bad ones. Yet the fact is that these are still your decisions. You must take responsibility for your decisions and their consequences, whether they are good or bad. It means that you should be happy if you made a wise decision that has a positive effect. But it also means that you are to learn from your bad decisions in order to make better and better decisions about your life.

Questions and Answers

Question: *I often have to decide things in a rush and I don't have time to go through the five steps.*

Response: Let me give you two suggestions. First, you must clarify your values and goals in advance. Set boundaries regarding sex, relationships and other areas of your life. Your boundaries indicate what you are willing to do, how far you are willing to go and what is a clear stopping point for you. If you set invisible 'posts' that delineate your emotional, spiritual, relational and sexual boundaries, you can more easily prevent being caught up in the heat of the moment. Secondly, practice the five-step process on a regular basis. It helps to get used to the process so you don't have to think about each step all the time. And when you come under heavy pressure you can quickly think through the decision you want to make.

The Golden Rule

Introduction:

- Do you think that some decisions were right and some were wrong? What is the reason for it? How can you determine what is right and what is wrong?

Some people think that the right behavior is governed by the Golden Rule:

“Do to others as you would have them to do to you.”

or in different words

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Discuss these rules in pairs.

- How do you think these rules help you to make good decisions?

Doing the right thing usually corresponds with a positive answer to the following two questions:

1. Is it in line with the Golden Rule? Would I want to be treated like this?
2. Should others also act this way in a similar situation?

Finding good traits

Discuss in groups:

You may need to list some possible traits like honesty, being responsible, etc.

[Divide the participants into 5 groups and assign to each of them one of the following roles: doctor, religious leader, government leader, mother and teacher.]

Today you will take a closer look at five important professions. In each group, list the characteristics you think people need in order to be good at this type of work.

[Then ask the participants to write down the desired characteristics of the profession assigned to them.]

- What are the characteristics of a good doctor? What traits does a good mother have?

[When all the groups have completed the task, ask them to share their lists with the others.] Write on the whiteboard all the characteristics suggested by the 5 groups.

How to develop your character?

Let the participants mention several reasons why it could be difficult to make the right decision. Then complete the list with the following:

A number of qualities such as honesty, respect and kindness, etc., were listed by several groups. These characteristics—often referred to as virtues—are important for people of any profession. If these virtues are in someone’s life you call that person a man or woman of character.

The famous Greek philosopher Aristotle defined character as the right way of life which is manifested in how you relate to others and yourself. However, the most frequently quoted version of the Golden Rule comes from Jesus of Nazareth: *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (which is often expressed in the following way: *“Do unto others as you would have them do to you”*). Jesus basically said that men and women of character treat others according to the Golden Rule. You could also say that they respect others and treat them as special. This is a definition that you should apply also for yourself. You are to treat even yourself this way, because you are special.

Character and behaving consistently in the right way does not happen on its own; it must be developed and you must practice it regularly. It takes a long time and many different life situations for you to develop character. You reach mature adulthood when you are able to distinguish what is right and what is wrong and choose the right thing no matter the consequences.

Act according to what you want to become and soon you will be what you act like.

Let’s examine the two fundamental elements of character development.

You can develop your character by making the right decisions even in difficult situations.

- Is it hard to do the right thing, to act with integrity? Why is that?
- You can be misunderstood.
- You may be left all alone if others don’t identify with your choices.
- You might have to give up on something you like or enjoy doing.
- It could be painful or uncomfortable (for yourself or others).

Choosing to be brave

- What does it take to do the right thing when doing the wrong thing seems to be easier or more enjoyable?

It takes courage to make the right decision in a difficult situation. Courage means that you decide to face the difficult situation, because it is the right

Background history:

Much of the country of Holland lies below sea level. In order to keep the North Sea from rushing in and flooding the land, the people of Holland have built great walls called dikes and have kept a careful watch over the dikes for many centuries, making sure they stay strong. Even a tiny hole in a dike can be a very dangerous thing.

thing to do, even if it is unpleasant or painful. If you act with courage you might be afraid of the consequences, but you deliberately choose to do what is right.

Brave behavior

A long time ago lived a Dutch boy called Peter who was 8 years old. One afternoon his mother asked him to take food to a sick friend of theirs who lived on the other side of the dike. He nodded in agreement when his mother asked him to be back before it got dark, then he set out happily.

Peter visited the sick friend and he stayed for a while to chat. When the time came for him to leave, he started walking back home along the canal. He noticed that the autumn rain made the canal swell and it was beating heavily against the dike.

He was almost home when he was stopped by the sound of leaking water. Peter looked down and spotted a very small hole in the dike where water was leaking through.

Just like any other Dutch child, Peter knew that this was extremely dangerous. The small leak could very easily become a large hole and it could break the dike, resulting in half of the country being flooded.

Peter knew what he was supposed to do. He climbed to the hole and stuck his finger to stop the water.

And he was successful! Peter smiled and said to the water: *"Until you see me, you will not flood my beloved country!"* With that, he started shouting for help.

Unfortunately, nobody heard his cry for help. It was getting dark and chilly. Peter's arm started to grow tired. He was wondering whether his mom would worry about him for not going home at all. Maybe she thinks that he decided to spend the night at their friend's.

Time passed and his arm went numb and it was hurting badly. His eyelids were becoming heavy, but he didn't fall asleep. Every now and then he rubbed the arm with the finger tucked into the hole. Peter knew he must persevere, he must stop the water from breaking the dike. So he spent the entire night outside, sitting by the dike.

Early the next morning a man on his way to work heard someone sigh in the bottom of the dike. He looked down and saw the boy clinging to the dike.

'Are you hurt?' he asked Peter.

'No, I'm holding the water back!' responded the boy. *'Tell others to come quickly and help.'*

The men ran and quickly called others to help who brought their tools to fix the dike. The dike was finally intact again. Brave Peter was taken home to

his parents and soon he was revered by people as a hero who saved the lives of many Dutch people.

They even erected a monument for him, which can still be visited in The Hague.

A summary of the story

It doesn't really seem to be an act of bravery to be standing/squatting in a ditch, putting your finger into a hole. Peter, however, needed courage when he decided to plug the hole. He was only 8 years old and he had to spend the entire night alone, out in the cold and dark to prevent the dike from breaking. He knew he had to do the right thing and did it even though it caused him serious discomfort and pain.

In this course there will be many situations studied and discussed where it is very difficult to make the right decision, far more difficult than what Peter had to confront. At times others want to persuade us to engage in inappropriate actions such as taking drugs, stealing, cheating on homework or having sex at an extremely young age. These are the situations in which you can exercise courage and be proud of yourself for making the right decision, for developing your character.

- What kind of an adult do you think Peter has become? Why?

If Peter continued to make the right decisions as he did that night by the dike, he probably grew up to be a man of character. Developing your character is not a one-time event.

You become a person of integrity by continuously making the right decisions. With each right decision you make, you fill your bravery tank that you can resort to in difficult situations.

It takes time to become a man or woman of character, to know and even exercise doing what is right. Developing your character is a process that never ends. No matter how much you perfect it, there will be areas in your life where you can and should continue to grow and learn.

Everyone makes bad decisions at times. Developing your character means that you learn from these mistakes and next time you make better choices. It means that you have to do the right thing again and again in the various situations that life brings to you.

The rules of our group

You can develop your character if you really commit to it and choose to practice the right thing, even at a price. Wouldn't it be great to live in such a community where everyone strove for doing what is right?

But you can always practice making the right decisions and develop your character even in this class.

- What rules or guidelines can you set for the class to express that you want people to treat each other according to the Golden Rule?

If you pay attention to adhere to these rules in the class and in other areas of your life, you are on the right track to becoming a man or woman of character.

Taking Responsibility

Your decisions today will determine how much you can handle responsibility when you are older.

- What influence does the water have on a fish and a log?
- How can the fish have the same 'experience' as the log?

You can live your adolescent years like a fish or like a log. Fish can swim upstream or downstream in rivers. When they stop swimming, the current carries them downstream. If they swim upstream, they can counterbalance the natural flow of water and take advantage of all that the river offers. Logs, however, are just drifting on the surface. They have no choice in deciding where to go; they end up where the river takes them.

The question you are to answer is this: Will you participate in the planning of your future or are you just drifting into it like a log in the river?

If you undertake responsibility for yourself and your behavior, you will become like a fish rather than a log. You will make decisions, you will strive to make your dreams come true, and you will create opportunities for yourself instead of letting others make decisions for you.

Respect

We have seen that everyone wants people to take responsibility for themselves and everyone wants to be treated with respect. We tend to trust people who act responsibly and we also feel good in the company of people who respect us.

Doesn't it make sense that others feel the same way about you? If you act in a responsible manner, others will trust you. If you respect others, they will be happy to be around you, won't they?

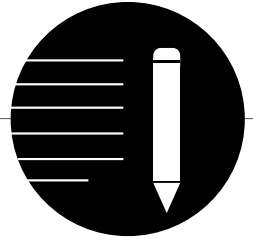
These ideas are in line with the Golden Rule that we already discussed. Can you recall the Golden Rule?

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Just as this rule can help you understand what is right and what is wrong during character development, it is also one of the greatest secrets to any relationship, whether with your friends, siblings, parents or the opposite sex.

When you act responsibly and treat others with respect, they will trust you more and pay you the respect you desire.

LESSON



06.

Communication and Media

Communication pyramid

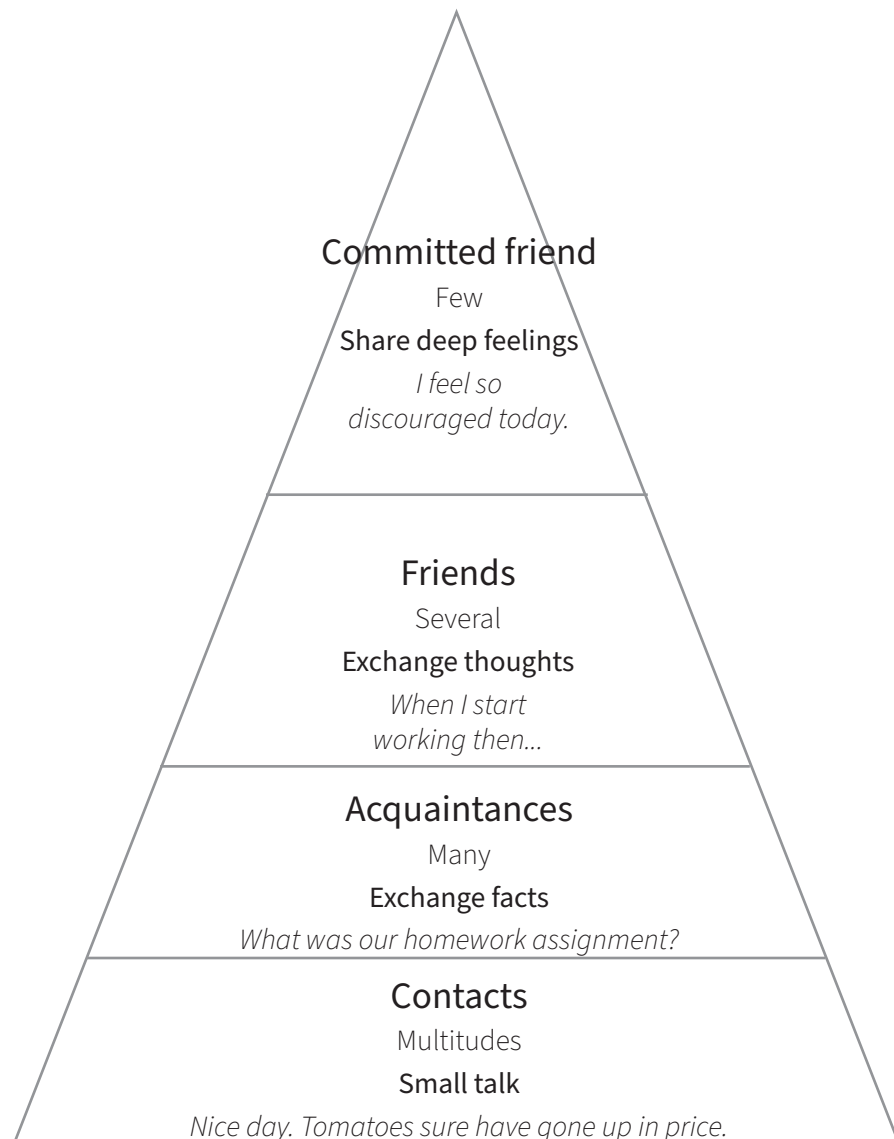
Life is full of disagreements and misunderstandings. One of the keys to being happy and successful in life is to understand and practice some principles of good communication. In this lesson we will review some of these principles. We will focus on two aspects of communication that affect our relationships with one another.

The first issue we want to address is that along with varying personality types there are varying levels of relationships and the types of communication they involve. **As the relationship deepens, the level of communication grows.**

Draw a pyramid on the whiteboard with four levels.

Have students draw a pyramid on their papers and take notes as you proceed. Start at the top of the pyramid as you begin describing the different levels.

Write in the name and brief description of each one as you talk about it. Ask the students to give you examples of what kind of conversation this might include. (Descriptions of each level are below the example pyramid.)



The four reactions

Lets look at a more personal example of how to solve conflict. After that we will discuss how to develop important skills in this critical area of our life. The principles we will discuss in this lesson are valid in every relationship, including friends, classmates, teachers, parents, etc.

Divide the class into groups of four people. Place a piece of candy (or some other item most

Game

[The envelope should contain four pieces of paper, each with one of the following statements on it:

students would want to have for themselves) in the center of the group, along with an envelope containing four slips of paper. Each member of the group should take one piece of paper out of the envelope and read it silently. They should behave in the group as their paper instructs.

1. Once the discussion begins, do not give your opinion or any ideas to the group about how the candy should be divided. They will not listen anyway. Do not even talk to them. Turn away and do not participate in the conversation.
2. Make sure you end up with the whole piece of candy for yourself. You deserve it.
3. Timidly state your opinion and then give in to the others; do not insist on your own way. They are stronger than you so you might as well let them have their way. Do not take any of the candy if someone else wants it.
4. If you think at least one other person in the group wants the candy, too, try to come up with some solution; that is not what you would really like, but is better than nothing.]

Withdrawal

The first slip of paper illustrated a person who withdraws during conflict. This person hates being in arguments. They would rather leave the room or just sit there mutely while the other person goes on and on about what happened or how they feel. This person is usually saying a lot of things to himself, but the words never get out of his mouth. This person could be afraid to say what they think or they may know that there is no point to saying anything because the discussion will end up in a yelling match that won't get them anywhere.

I win, you lose

The second slip of paper illustrated a person who thinks they are always right. They may be loud and demanding or just good manipulators. They always want to be the one who has the last word in a fight. They always insist that their way of looking at the situation is the only way it could be viewed and everyone else should agree with them. They do not really care what others feel about the situation or their viewpoints, they only care about what they feel and think.

Compliant

This is the third slip of paper. This person may share his viewpoint quietly, politely, but quickly gives in to others' opinions if they are in disagreement. This person has a definite opinion, but does not voice it as strongly as it is felt. A compliant person would rather let someone else have their way than endure an argument. The stress of trying to convince others of a better way is not worth it. Just let them do what they want.

Compromise

This was illustrated by the fourth piece of paper. This type of person sees that they cannot expect to get 100% of what they want, the way they want

it, so they are willing to settle for something less. This solution is many times not satisfactory to either party and leaves them with a feeling of settling for something less than they wanted. Both may leave the discussion unsatisfied and a little begrudging of the other person.

Conflict management

Mutual agreement

This type of conflict resolution was not illustrated in our game. Mutual agreement means that the problem is openly and honestly discussed by both parties. Each listens and hears what the others are saying and as they go through a series of give and take, they come to a conclusion that is satisfying to all parties involved. When they go away from this discussion each person has a good feeling that this was indeed the very best way to resolve the conflict. It could not have been any better. Their relationship stays intact. This kind of result takes time and commitment on the part of all those involved. It is not easy to discuss situations in which both parties are very attached to the outcome. There are three things that might help us be more like this last person.

1. Attitude

Three aspects of attitude are important to note here. You should enter a conflict discussion with the attitude of wanting to find a solution to the problem that is a mutually satisfying solution, not just the solution you prefer. This means you have to be open to hear the other person's point of view and be willing to look at the problem from his or her perspective.

Second, you need an open, accepting and humble spirit. Remember that whatever someone does always makes sense to that person! In conflict situations, the difficulties usually lie in the fact that there are two or more "logical" people with "logical" ways of doing things. In resolving conflict, we need to find out where our "logic" differs from each other and resolve the situation accordingly. You may also need to realize that you could be wrong! It may be that your interpretation of what happened is totally inaccurate. You need to be willing to discover that the wrong assumptions were made and, therefore, the wrong conclusions were reached. Humility includes being strong enough to be able to face the true facts and, if appropriate, admit that we are wrong!

Third, it is important to put our emotions aside for the moment and stick to the facts. Emotions can very quickly cloud a very simple and straightforward issue. When talking through a difficult situation with others, strive to talk about it objectively. Think of the issue as an outsider might and approach the discussion in that way.

2. Approach

Check the facts. Ask questions. Find out if your assumptions are correct. Enter the discussion with a desire to discover the reasons that whatever was said or done made sense to them at the time. Be prepared to explain your reasons in the same way.

We need to be careful with our words. Words can hurt others if they are said in haste and without forethought. Objectively explain how you felt about what happened. This will help the other person keep from feeling defensive about your accusations.

Use phrases like:

- When...happened, I felt like...
- When you said...I felt...
- It seemed like...
- I'm sure you had a good reason for..., but when it happened I felt...
- I'm sure you didn't realize this, but that...had sentimental value to me...
- I'm sure you weren't aware that...
- To make sure I understood you correctly, let me repeat back to you what I heard you say...
- By that do you mean...
- How did you feel about...
- What can I do to make it right?

Do not use condemning language like:

- You did...
- You made me...
- If you wouldn't have...
- You should have...
- Why didn't you...?
- How could you...?

3. Action

We need to take action and express our feelings to the right person. When a conflict arises there are several things to keep in mind:

Do not gossip!

When a conflict arises make sure you do not complain to someone else about it before you have gone to the person directly in an effort to resolve your differences. Telling other people before resolving an issue with someone amounts to gossip and will make it harder to resolve the issue at a later date. Gossip can also influence your reputation or other people's reputations

(positively or negatively) with information that is untrue. The stories that begin to circulate in this manner can be very detrimental and are nearly impossible to rectify.

Pick a time and place

Sometimes it is appropriate to discuss the issue as soon as the conflict arises. At other times emotions are so high it is better to set a later time to talk it through. One person may have done something of which the other person is unaware. In this case, this person who is hurt needs to go to them and schedule a time and place to talk. Occasionally, we become aware that our relationship with someone is not what it used to be. We need to determine if that is true and then set a time to talk further about it.

We need to say, *“Our friendship means a lot to me and I don’t want something like this to get in the way of it. Let’s sit down and talk this over.”*

“Our relationship is worth more than letting a thing like this get in its way. Let’s get together and work this out.”

“It seems you have been avoiding me. Have I done something to hurt you?”

“You seem distant lately, have I done something to make you doubt our friendship?”

Try to pick a time when neither one of you is rushed or feeling under pressure because of other things in your lives. Choose a quiet place where you can remain undisturbed for the duration of your discussion. Turn off your phone.

Define the issue

Start by affirming the importance of your relationship. Then begin by both of you clearly stating the problem. Sometimes determining the problem is the hardest part of the discussion. Be calm, objective and non-accusative.

Resolve the issue

Remain cool and calm as you continue to discuss the issue and do not allow your emotions to get the upper hand. Do not stray from the subject. Talk about the problem with the goal in mind of finding a solution that will be satisfactory to both of you. Resolve hurt feelings by giving or asking forgiveness when it is appropriate. Be straightforward in expressing how you feel without condemning the other person. Allow them a chance to ask for forgiveness, but even if they choose not to do so, you can take the first step and forgive them silently in your heart. Even though this may not seem fair, the fact is that you will suffer for it if you refuse to forgive. If you cannot or do not forgive someone for hurt they have caused you, the hurt will fester and imprison your soul. Over time you will become filled with bitterness and anger toward life in general. This attitude will soak into all of your relationships and bring them to ruin. We have all met bitter, angry people and it is no fun to be around them.

Ancient wisdom speaks about not letting the sun go down on your anger and of forgiving 70x7 times, if necessary. The point is that forgiveness really is good for the soul! Anger or desire for retribution does not remove the pain of what happened to us, but it can actually cause even more damage.

If the disagreement involved how you handled a certain situation or used certain items, talk through what happened and what each of you thinks would be the “logical” thing to do any time this situation occurs in the future. Go through a process of give and take until you both agree on the best way to handle this issue. You might want to each state to the other person what you agreed upon to be sure what you heard is what they meant.

Two in a relationship can mature through resolving their conflicts together.

Practical application

Living free of conflict gives us more energy to devote to living our everyday lives. We won’t wake up every morning worried or burdened by things from the past that, over time, seem to grow into ever larger and more pressing issues in our lives. These things have a way of developing vines which eventually wind around our hearts and choke our whole lives and relationships with bitterness and anger. If you want to be a person who experiences the most out of life, let go of the anger and your right to revenge. The payment it demands for your allegiance is much more than it is worth.

[Take a little time to practice some of the things we talked about today. Divide the class as noted and have them discuss these hypothetical situations.]

Sam and Joe

Sam and Joe have been best friends since they were young. Sam has always been more daring than Joe, which is one of the reasons Joe has always liked being around him. It makes life more fun and interesting! Lately Sam has been getting in with a “bad crowd.” They smoke and drink and there is gossip that they even do drugs. Their influence is starting to show in Sam’s life. He doesn’t study like he should, he’s belligerent and uncooperative in school and at home. Sam just does not seem to have the joy of life that he had in the past. Joe is feeling like their friendship is starting to unravel after all these years.

- In Joe’s place, what would you do?
- How would you approach Sam?
- Would you address his change in behavior, as well as your friendship?
- Why or why not?

Difficult conversations

- Why do we avoid people who are always negative, angry, are difficult to get along with and who look down on others?
- Why do we tend to become angry or start defending ourselves when we are confronted with things that we should change?
- Tell each other about conflict situations in small groups and discuss how you would handle them.

Effective confrontation

If you have decided to have a difficult conversation, don't control the response of the other person, but honestly seek to learn from them. Also, you shouldn't let your emotions take control over you. Non-verbally: be calm in your demeanor, look the other person in the eye, talk quietly and gently, and listen to them without any interruptions. Verbally: don't defend yourself and agree with as much as you can. Seek to assume the best intention from the other person. If necessary, ask them to clarify their message. Listen to what they consider to be the facts. Share with them how you felt and listen to how they felt, too. There are a number of good principles in the famous chapter (1 Corinthians 13) on love in the Bible, written by apostle Paul:

*"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."*¹

Engage in the conversation with an attitude of openness to learn.

- Don't think that you are right about everything.
- Resist the temptation to express everything that has been bothering you.
- Share your problem in a way that will NOT FORCE the other party into defense.
- Separate between the three conversation types.
- Three key principles: 1. Forgiveness is the basis for all relationships. 2. You will need humility, sincerity, transparency, straightforwardness

¹1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

and love. 3. You should maintain a good self-image and seek to have a positive effect on the self-image of the other person.

It is important to clarify a few things before engaging in a conflict-resolution conversation.

- Is it absolutely required?
- Could it be that you only need to be more patient with one of their weaknesses?
- Will this conversation help them see the issue(s)?
- Am I too prone to confront others or do I rather avoid conflicts?
- Do I share the truth in love, or do I want to only humiliate the other person?
- Do I want to take revenge for pain that was inflicted on me?
- Do I honestly want to communicate something where change could be helpful to the other person and also to the relationship?

Positive manner	Negative manner
clarification	argument
listening	accusation
asking for change	making claims

Media: The Price of a Blessing

The Gift and Cost of the Internet

In our globalized world that is driven by technological development, children must grow up in an environment and face challenges that are unprecedented in human history. It means totally new difficulties and challenges, not only for the children, but also for their parents and teachers. Children must be equipped and prepared to tackle all the problems that we are leaving behind as a legacy for them.

Never has a single generation had to grow up in the crowded, yet isolated setting of an information jungle, and mostly without healthy and intact families. They are threatened by global problems, their future is blurred, uncertainty prevails everywhere and fundamental values are absolutely lacking. They have no support since the adult society is mostly dysfunctional. General forms of support—available for previous generations—are now gone.

One of the sources and drivers of these social trends is the internet, which has become a building block of indispensable systems. It carries tremendous benefits and blessings while it fundamentally rewrites everything that defined human communication and the environment for thousands of years.

The internet fundamentally influences human communication, conflict management and connection building habits. Your abilities, emotional intelligence, values, learning habits and even your sexuality are influenced heavily. With a single click you can become ‘friends’ of a previously unknown person who grew up in a completely different culture, yet you can share your life with them almost immediately. We see that the internet destroys the cultural, ethnic, social, gender-based and value-driven boundaries that have separated people until now. This also brings people closer together. Nevertheless, this sudden openness, diversity and opportunity could be a pitfall for someone who is unprepared and/or immature. It can lie about a reality that does not exist (for example, having virtual friends instead of real ones).

The internet basically rewrites what it means to acquire knowledge. For thousands of years to acquire knowledge a person had to dedicate time and become engrossed in books, natural processes and in the human soul, which has mostly been replaced by the unorganized and uncontrolled data mass that is available with a single click. The way in which knowledge is acquired, organized and applied fundamentally influences human development and character. Nicholas Carr writes in his book *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*² that “The gifts of the internet are very real. But these gifts come with a price.... The internet nourishes the human thought, but it also shapes the way a person thinks.” People increasingly rely on the internet to acquire and recall knowledge and information. The brain adapts to the immediate gratification provided by the internet, which can deprive you from the character-shaping work that acquiring knowledge offered for thousands of years. The problem is not that information is available and can be stored, but that our approach has changed. The internet can become a substitute for real knowledge and it can lure you with the false illusion of actually possessing knowledge. “Computers have changed the way people process information in themselves for good. Information is no longer something you know, but it is something that exists in a remote location as an independent entity. Information that used to be ‘carried’ in the heads no longer requires your body to exist,” a professor of post-modern sciences, Katherine Hayles, writes.³

Globally, teenagers spent 6.5 hours a day on the internet. 77% of 12-15 year olds go online 47.5 hours per week in the U.K. Young people in that same age bracket dedicated only 40 minutes per day to reading books. Almost without exception they all have profiles on some social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.) and on average they have about 500 “friends”—only 10% of whom they actually know in person.⁴

The cost of the Internet #1. It can distort human relationships and it can hinder the development of your connection building capabilities

The internet can make human communication superficial and impersonal, it can alienate people from normal (flesh and blood) relationships and thus weaken people’s emotional intelligence, conflict management capabilities and healthy tolerance levels. It can obstruct the birth of happy and valuable human relationships, and it can easily lead to depression. In the online world you don’t need to learn how to express your feelings face-to-face or learn how to handle conflicts. This is how it hinders the development of skills required to build lasting and meaningful relationships. In the virtual world, body language has a decreasing role; this fine perception that allows you to sense the subtle reactions of the other person remains undeveloped. Virtual connections can be easily ended, just as easily as they

² Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (London: W. W. Norton, 2010).

³ H. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁴ *Hungarian Youth 2012: A Collection of Essays* (Budapest: Kutatópont Research Center, 2013).

were formed. The breaking up of a relationship is much harder in the physical reality; it requires much more courage than a single click on social media. It therefore changes the value of relationships. Young people do not have to struggle with awkward conflicts and they do not need to become vulnerable anymore. They can relieve their external pain and loneliness, but it deprives them of the inner work that would enable a relationship to enter a deeper stage. It is rather easy to hide information in an online, impersonal relationship where you can reveal only what you want. The danger of getting exposed is negligible, unlike in real life, personal relationships where your emotions, anger, joys and sorrows are much harder to hide. It damages the process and the reality of getting to know each other. Students can hide in a closed emotional bubble they consider to be safe and protected.

Similarly, if internet connections are the predominant form of relating to others, it can distort the role of emotions in relationships and hold back the development of emotional intelligence. With the emergence of keeping in touch through social media, 'emotional incontinence' is increasingly more prevalent. It is nothing more than the release of emotions without control and proper timing. Traditional human relationships that are personal and involve the close interaction of people in the same space are being replaced by virtual relationships that make the expression of your current emotions less restrained. An important stage in the development of emotional intelligence is to learn to perceive, understand and control your own emotions and the effects of your communication as you receive feedback from others. This is confirmed by the fact that while people are increasingly connected online and there is no way of avoiding the relational network of others, yet it is the loneliest and most alienated society in history. You hear about the 'atomization,' the breaking up of society, at the same time you get to 'know' more and more people.

People seek intimacy and genuine connections since we were created for that. You need intimate relationships in which you can be real and reveal yourself without the risk of rejection. Intimacy in a relationship is created by commitment. You can only be your true self when you are certain that the other person will accept and love you no matter the circumstances. There is no intimacy without this commitment. However, this intimacy cannot be found in superficial online relationships.

The cost of the Internet #2. It leads to low self-esteem and a confusion of values

The internet has undeniably become a value-shaping instrument. Along with values, however, it also shapes self-esteem. Even adults obsessively share pictures and posts on social media that could be humiliating to them.

Many people are compelled to share every moment of their lives. They are driven by a desire for recognition and attention. This is why they share these mostly unimportant, uninteresting and sometimes embarrassing posts.

Social media becomes a place of emotional gratification. Your value system, self-esteem and inner convictions will be shaped by the place where emotional gratification occurs (where people listen to you, where you can share your thoughts unconditionally and without the risk of rejection). This is how it works in everyone's life. You will ask for the advice and opinions of people that you tell your problems to without the risk of being rejected. You were created to be connected. It is in relationships that people are shaped, changed, developed and get hurt, as well as receive healing.

For teenagers, it is particularly important how they relate to their peers. It is through their peers that teenagers become independent from their parents, get their value system shaped and find their

place in society. Acceptance or rejection from peers fundamentally determines how teenagers feel. In the past they received feedback on their looks, behavior and performance from people they were directly connected to. At times, it was difficult enough to accept and process this, simply because of the personal and direct nature of the feedback, however, these responses were much more moderate and controlled. Today teenagers can get feedback; from thousands of people about their appearance, performance, feelings, behavior and opinions. The vast majority of this feedback is impersonal and remote. If they share a post that gets many likes, they are satisfied. On the other hand, if they receive less positive feedback than a friend of theirs, it can easily push them into despair and depression. People's appearance, performance, opinions and decisions have become numerically measurable and comparable to that of others. It makes their self-esteem subject to a calculation. The number of likes shows how much more fun, popular, pretty, and smart they are in comparison with their classmates. Or to the contrary, how much uglier, stupid or rejected they are than them.

In the past only school performance was evaluated with grades. Today outward appearance, emotional expressions, opinions and thoughts have also become measurable in numbers. These evaluations are mostly given by people with whom the young people have no daily contact. The number of "likes" they get for their thoughts, fashion, hairstyle, make-up or shared emotions can easily drive them to an endless race and urge to meet the different expectations. The comments on posts and numbers of "likes" do not lie. One person becomes more beautiful, uglier, more popular or unpopular than the others. An evolving personality without a strong and stable self-esteem and values will not be able to adequately rank these feedbacks, evaluations and rejections/confirmations that they receive from online social platforms. Therefore, such feedback can fundamentally influence their self-esteem and value system.

False behavioral and self-esteem patterns transmitted through the internet can often distort the value system and self-esteem of people. Following patterns and role models play a very important role in everyone's life. This is supported by the increasingly uniform and monochrome world where global fashion makes everyone wear the same outfit, makes you mirror the same habits and makes you use the same communication patterns as everyone else. Flocks of people often follow boring patterns that lack any imagination. This alone would not cause huge damage, but celebrities and influencers elevated by the mass media convey values through their personal example that do not enhance, but actually destroy the building blocks of society.

We no longer respect and follow the examples of self-sacrificing heroes; they have been replaced by idolized, insignificant and fleeting celebrities and influencers. Their behavior, habits, clothing, opinions, style, and value systems set the trends to be followed. Role models presented and deemed to be followed by the adult society form the values and convictions of the emerging generation.

Significant external media pressure can make a still evolving personality want to become someone who they are not, because it sets the media standard regarding which people and what values are to be followed. Anyone considered to be worthy of attention will pass on their values and behavior to society and the younger generation. And because these are not examples of working and studying hard, fighting for successes, being committed to relationships, making sacrifices or being selfless, loyal and honest, there is a significant shortage in these values.

"There has been a gigantic increase in depression and anxiety for American teenagers which began right around between 2011 and 2013. The number of teenage girls out of 100,000 in this country who were admitted to a hospital every year because they cut themselves or otherwise harmed themselves,

that number was pretty stable until around 2010-2011, and then it begins going way up (CDC sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). It's up 62% for older teen girls (age 15 to 19). It's up 189% for pre-teen girls (girls age 10 to 14). That's nearly triple. Even more horrifying, we see the same pattern with suicide. The older teen girls (15 to 19 years old), they are up 70% compared to the first decade of this century. The pre-teen girls (10 to 14) who have very low rates to begin with, they are up 151%. And that pattern points to social media. Gen Z, the kids born after 1996 or so, those kids are the first generation in history that got on social media in middle school. How do they spend their time? They come home from school and they are on their devices. A whole generation is more anxious, more fragile and more depressed. They are much less comfortable taking risks. The rates at which they get drivers licenses have been dropping. The number who have ever gone out on a date or had any kind of romantic interaction is dropping rapidly. This is a real change in a generation. And remember, for every one of these, for every hospital admission, there is a family that is traumatized and horrified. 'My God, what is happening to our kids?'"⁵

You become the person you follow. You follow the person you spend the most time with. If young people spend a third of their day on the internet, they will become whom they follow online.

The cost of the Internet #3. Real sexual intimacy can become compromised

The internet has made all kinds of pornography available to all generations and at any time. For earlier generations buying a Playboy magazine required great effort. Today the most extreme pornography is available with a single click, even for school children, even on the phone in each of their pockets.

Damon Brown, author of *Porn and Pong* writes the following: "It seems so obvious: If we invent a machine, the first thing we are going to do—after making a profit—is use it to watch porn. When the projector was invented roughly a century ago, the first movies were not of damsels in distress tied to train tracks or Charlie Chaplin-style slapsticks; they were stilted porn shorts called stag films. VHS became the dominant standard for VCRs largely because Sony wouldn't allow pornographers to use Betamax; the movie industry followed porn's lead. DVDs, the internet, cell phones. You name it, pornography planted its big flag there first, or at least shortly thereafter."⁶

The spread of internet pornography has been consistently confirmed by rather frightening statistics. There are many sources that demonstrate that a major part of internet traffic consists of visiting sex-related pages. Most searches are done on this topic and a significant percentage of all content is made up of pornography.⁷

Why is internet pornography so dangerous?

How is internet porn different from pornography previously available in the newspapers and in adult cinemas? 1. It is constantly available without much effort and it can be easily kept in secret; 2. You can select and filter the content and watch it simultaneously on several open tabs; 3. It has an endless novelty effect, which drives you to always want more and more. Watching porn on the internet provides the brain with newer and newer images, thereby continuously releasing newer doses

⁵Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage, 2013).

⁶Damon Brown, "PCs in Ecstasy: The Evolution of Sex in PC Games," *Computer Games Magazine*, November 23, 2009. See also, Damon Brown, *Porn & Pong: How Grand Theft Auto, Tomb Raider and Other Sexy Games Changes Our Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2008).

⁷Since statistics get published and updated frequently, no detailed research results are provided here. Instead, we provide a summary of trends going back several decades that also serve as a forecast for the future.

of dopamine. Today a young guy may see more pornographic images in 10 minutes on the internet than his grandfather would have in over 5 lifetimes.

1. Porn conditions sexual behavior

It is extremely easy to condition sexual habits during the critical period of sexual development in all mammals. The type of impulses a brain receives will determine the neural pathways built in it. Early sexual experiences carve sexual habits, desires and expectations in the brain. Exploiting the natural sexual genetic qualities of men, porn teaches men a new kind of sexual behavior. While there is an increasing amount of dopamine⁸ produced in the brain, watching porn online develops the behaviors and practices as follows:

- a. the person watching the porn is alone
- b. they get into the habit of peeking and stalking
- c. easy click and search
- d. there are several tabs open at the same time
- e. a desire for continuous novelty
- f. the need for being shocked and surprised

On the contrary, sexual involvement with another human requires the following:

- a. being together
- b. touching the body of the other person directly
- c. smelling the other person
- d. pheromone is secreted/excreted
- e. there is emotional connection with another real person

Many young guys report that their sexual desires and attitudes have considerably shifted towards extreme sex or deviant behavior due to pornography.

2. Porn leads to erection problems and it desensitizes you

The constant availability of new pornographic images can rewrite your natural desires. The brain becomes increasingly insensitive and it yearns for newer and newer dopamine doses that will not be produced if you only look at the previously watched porn scenes. It will require ever wilder and more perverted ones. Pornography is the reason for most erection problems that cannot be traced back to physical causes. As soon as men stop watching porn, their erection is restored within a few months.

3. Porn reprograms the brain; it leads to addiction and it adversely affects your brain performance

Internet pornography reprograms the brain. Watching porn causes physical and measurable changes in the human brain.⁹ High-speed internet pornography makes particularly big changes in the brains of teenagers and young men.¹⁰ “Modern science enabled us to understand that the addiction

⁸Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that plays an important role in the brain's reward cycle as well as in the sensation of joy and in the development of addictions.

⁹Carla Clark, “*The Truth about Porn Shrinking Your Brain*,” <https://brainblogger.com/2014/06/03/the-truth-about-porn-shrinking-your-brain/m>, accessed July 21, 2016.

¹⁰“Adolescent Brain Meets Highspeed Internet Porn (2010),” <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/videos/adolescent-brain-meets-highspeed-internet-porn-2013/>, accessed July 21, 2016.

and dependence underlying pornography is chemically identical to that of heroin addiction.”¹¹ By using the already well-known reward cycle of our brain, high-speed internet porn with its newer and newer images and videos can get you addicted to porn. The process is the following. Experiencing joy makes the brain excrete dopamine. In this exuberating state a protein called DeltaFosB¹² accumulates in the brain that has the following three effects: 1. It turns off control; 2. It demands even more dopamine because it becomes insensitive to the previous levels. Therefore, a higher dose is required to reach the same experience as before; 3. It builds new neural pathways in the brain that will determine how the brain functions.¹³

All addictions are based on the same chemical mechanism and follow a similar process. When the addiction is developed, porn consumers start to exclude everything else from their lives and they show enthusiasm only about pornography. As the new neural paths are formed, there are physical changes in the brain that are coupled with the weakening of the person’s will. The president of the *Italian Society of Andrology and Sexual Medicine*, Dr. Carlo Foresta correctly says that “Online pornography destroys the sexual abilities of young boys.”¹⁴

Internet porn is particularly destructive to the brains and sexuality of teenagers. It is much less probable that a 50-year-old man becomes a porn addict, because his erection can be restored sooner if he stops watching porn compared to a 20-year-old. How is this possible? Most likely the 50-year-old has been watching such content for a much longer time, has a much lower testosterone level and there was less dopamine produced in his body; his vascular system and his body is also 30 years older. The difference comes from the following. A teenager today has his sexuality developed watching porn on high-speed internet. The 50-year-old grew up differently. The young brain conditions and adapts itself to the porn available on the high-speed internet. A man who was an adolescent in the 70s masturbated at the sight of a lady in a swimsuit he saw in a glossy magazine or the classmate who accidentally touched him in school. Today a young guy will see hardcore porn and it will prompt him to masturbate, but he will be alone in front of his screen, he will be peeking and stalking, seeking novelties all the time and there will be several tabs open on his screen that will bombard him with wild content. This is how he becomes sexually wired. Compare it with the 50-year-old man who hardly saw a female breast in his adolescence. Nowadays a teenager encounters multiple amounts of these sexual triggers just with a single click.

There is another factor that contributes to this. The brain of a teenager is completely different from the brain of an adult. The power-balance is somehow tipped in their brains. The brain of a teenager produces much more dopamine than the brain of an adult. It is much more sensitive to dopamine. New and novel things will make the dopamine level skyrocket in young people. Their brain produces more DeltaFosB chemicals that are responsible for building a ‘roadmap’ in the brain and for conditioning the person sexually. Younger men are much more exposed to addictions for these reasons. Furthermore, the development of their frontal lobes has not been completed yet (this process is reached at the

¹¹ Jeffrey Satinover, “Jeffrey Satinover Statement to Congress on Pornography,” May 9, 2008, <https://www.scribd.com/document/44914401/Jeffrey-Satinover>, accessed April 24, 2021.

¹² DeltaFosB is a protein also known as the “molecular switch for lasting addiction.” For more information, see <https://www.pnas.org/content/98/20/11042.full>, accessed July 21, 2016.

¹³ There are hundreds of scientific research papers that support this view. See the following website: <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/>, accessed July 21, 2016.

¹⁴ Carlo Foresta, “Too Much Internet Porn May Cause Impotence,” <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/porn-induced-sexual-dysfunctions/experts-who-recognize-porn-induced-sexual-dysfunctions-along-with-relevant-studies/too-much-internet-porn-may-cause-impotence-urology-professor-carlo-foresta-2011/>, accessed April 24, 2021.

age of 25), and their distress signals are also weaker. The frontal lobe is responsible for controlling impulses and urges and it reminds you of the consequences of improper and dangerous behavior. This is the explanation of why young people are prone to engage in risky activities. A teenage brain is like installing a racecar engine into a rusty old car without brakes. It can have devastating consequences if you continuously stimulate it in the reward cycle with newer and newer doses of dopamine without a fully developed frontal lobe that could provide some control. This cycle is like an explosion; there are many new neural pathways formed, which become cemented afterwards. This is the time when habits, abilities, memories and adaptation practices are formed. The neural paths that are used at this time will become connected. Young people who watch porn online can become conditioned for harsh sex scenes and constant novelty, even before their first kiss.

“It is among teenagers that pornography does the most destruction. The reason for it is that their brain processes information still without the screening and analytical assistance of the frontal lobe.”¹⁵

“Pornography is inherently a poison. It destroys the one who is watching it. It destroys the one doing it, together with the spouse and children of both the spectator and the porn film actors. It has a toxic effect on sexuality and relationships. The more you watch it, the more toxic it becomes and the harder porn or at the younger age you watch it, makes you all the more vulnerable.”¹⁶

The above parts were written not to induce fear about the use of the internet. You simply need to know about the potential dangers, because this is the only way to protect yourself and your children from its effect. The problem is not with the internet per se. It's not the internet that must be held accountable, but the person who abuses and misuses it. Tools themselves are great, but you can use them for the good and for the bad. The solution is not prohibition.

Our children will grow up in this world and they must learn how to use the internet properly so that it would help and build them, instead of destroying or taking them captive. They need guidance and boundaries to be able to do this. These rules and boundaries provide an opportunity for victory and the joy of freedom, they will guide them about how to prosper as an adult. Children can safely break rules within the family, but as an adult there is a higher price to be paid. Many parents make the mistake of setting rules without having a connection with their children. It's like you want to withdraw money from a bank account where you never made any deposits. First, you need to build trust with your children so you could take money out of it in the right moment. Every rule makes a deduction from this 'trust account,' since it requires trust from the child to accept it. You should openly discuss the rules for using the internet and decide about them together. These boundaries (time limit and content restraint, as well as the use of content filtering programs) provide freedom to act. However, the violation of these rules must have consequences that were agreed upon in advance. The trust of a child is heavily undermined if the parent is unpredictable, impulsive and creates ad hoc rules and punishments out of anger. With such a parent the child never knows where they stand, because the parents themselves have no clear understanding of boundaries.

¹⁵Andre Mayza, “The Optimization of Brain Improvement in GKBI Intelligence,” Sudirman, Jakarta (10-9-2009), <https://tipsandtrick-health.blogspot.com/2009/09/pornography-lower-intelligence.html>, accessed April 24, 2021.

¹⁶MaryAnne Layden, Judith Reisman, Jeffrey Satinover, and James B. Weaver, “Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction and the Effects of Addiction on Families and Communities,” U.S. Senate Hearing, Sub-committee on Science, Technology & Space, November 28, 2004, <http://www.obsenitycrimes.org/Senate-Reisman-Layden-Etc.pdf>, accessed December 8, 2009.