

Clark Baim and Lydia Guthrie

Foreword by Fergus McNeill



Changing Offending Behaviour

A Handbook of Practical Exercises and Photocopiable
Resources for Promoting Positive Change



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The relationships ladder

Relationship skills, interpersonal skills, empathy, self-management

Time: 30 minutes to 1 hour or more

Materials: worksheet and any other materials as needed

Aims

- To help the client to explore and understand the process of meeting someone and forming a relationship with them.
- To ensure the client understands the concept of consent.
- To practise the client's self-management and relationship skills.

Method

This exercise focuses on the common ingredients in healthy relationships and the related theme of consent. This exercise can last several sessions and can be revisited where needed.

Begin with an opening question: Can you give an example of a relationship – either based on real life or hypothetical – where both people have equal power and responsibility in the relationship? And now some examples where power and responsibility are unequal?

Examples may include: a couple in a relationship, brother/sister, parent/child, colleagues, friends, managers/supervisees, offender/victim, etc.

Next, ask the client/group to define: What is an adult? What do we mean by describing behaviour as adult? (Bring in the idea of adults having personal responsibility and other responsibilities extending beyond the self.) What defines a child other than simply age? How do their responsibilities differ?

In the next phase of the discussion, explore the definition of 'consent'. Help the client/group reach a definition of 'true consent' (e.g. that 'consent' is not consent if the person fears negative repercussions for saying no, for example, if they are afraid that if they say no they will be hurt, ridiculed or left alone

in a strange place, etc.). Encourage the client/group members to explore the distinction between true consent and 'consent' which is coerced (i.e. not true consent). Encourage the client/group to think about and discuss the ways in which adults may, under certain circumstances, not be able to give informed consent to sexual contact.

Next, introduce the 'relationships ladder': use the worksheet, or create an image of a stepladder on the floor, using string perhaps. Describe the first rung of the ladder as being the very start of a new relationship. Have group members provide all of the details, for example, 'Who is meeting?' 'Two people of the same sex?' 'Man and woman?' 'Teenage boy and girl?' Steer the options so that the relationship will be representative of a consenting sexual relationship in an age group similar to those in the group. Then ask 'Where do they meet?' 'What do they talk about when they first meet?' 'What physical contact is there between them?' etc. Continue the process for each rung up the ladder, the top rung representing the two people forming a lasting commitment to each other. At each rung of the ladder, ask the group to talk about how the move to the next rung is negotiated. Who directs the move? Is it mutual? What would happen if one person tries to force the relationship 'up the ladder'? What would happen if one person wanted it at a different level than the other? Encourage group discussion on the theme 'What are the hallmarks of a healthy relationship?'

Variations

If you choose to focus more intently on the theme of consent: Encourage discussion about the ways in which the behaviour of others can be misinterpreted as consent, and where

responsibility lies when one person is unable to give informed consent. If a client raises the issue of how the age of consent differs in various countries around the world and changes over time, encourage discussion about why in this country the age of consent is what it is. Encourage the client/participants to discuss the implications of differences in age (e.g. age gaps of more than three years for teenagers), and similarly differences in levels

of maturity, power and authority, and how these affect consent.

Use any audio-visual or other multi-sensory means to conduct the exercise. For example, if an actual stepladder is available, you could bring that into the room in order to demonstrate how the relationship progresses 'up the ladder' and how each step is a mutual negotiation.



Worksheet: The Relationships Ladder

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Who is meeting? Where do they meet? What do they talk about when they first meet? What physical contact is there between them?

Continue the process for each rung up the ladder, the top rung representing the two people forming a lasting commitment to each other. At each rung of the ladder, consider how the move to the next rung is negotiated. Who directs the move? Is it mutual? What would happen if one person tries to force the relationship 'up the ladder'? What would happen if one person wanted it at a different level than the other? What are the hallmarks of a healthy relationship?

How does this exercise relate to me and my experiences of relationships in the past? How can I use this concept in my current or future relationships?

