

Redefining relationships: Happily ever after?

Age	13-18
Duration	90 min
Group Size	10-20

Overview

In this activity the participants reflect on how a healthy relationship looks like and how we are taught relationships are supposed to look like.

Objectives

- To question romanticized views of relationships
- To reflect if people have the “right to own someone” in a relationship

Materials

- Markers and Flipcharts/whiteboard
- Paper, Tape

Preparation:

- Write OK/NOT OK-signs and put them up on the wall at opposite sides of the room
- Read through the conversation
- Look through the exercises and adjust to target group if needed (for example come up with other debriefing questions).

Step by step instructions

1. Sit in a circle and show the group this question written in the middle of a flipchart: “*What does it mean to be in a romantic relationship?*” Gather people’s suggestions around the question.
2. When you have enough keywords or sentences, reveal the second question: “*What characterizes a good partner?*” Gather suggestions on another flipchart. If discussion occurs during these two brainstormings, let people share their thoughts. (20 minutes)
3. Tell everyone to stand up and push the chairs to the side. Start off with the group in the middle of the room, between the two signs “OK” and “NOT OK”. Explain that you are going to read out a few examples of situations (appendix 2) that could happen in a relationship, and that the participants are supposed to take a stand on these situations by moving to either one or the other side of the room. When people have taken a stand; ask if someone wants to explain why they are standing where they are. If there is time; let there be discussion. If not; let them know at least one opinion from each side (if people are not all on the same side). 20 minutes
4. Gather in a half circle again. Two of the leaders are now reading the conversation “And then they lived happily ever after” (appendix 2). Leave pauses between the lines so the participants have time to reflect on what was just said. (30 minutes with debriefing)

Debriefing 1

- How do you feel now?
 - What happened in the story?
 - Is this story realistic? Why/why not?
 - What does the story make you feel, and think of?
 - Is there a turning point in the relationship? If you think so, when?
 - How could the story continue?
 - If person B was one of your friends, what would you do? (Would you even know?)
5. Ask the participants to look back at the keywords you gathered in the beginning. Can they find any words that they think could lead to an unequal relationship? Make a circle around those words. If there is time, you might also ask for the contrary; if there are any words that would prevent an unequal relationship? (10 minutes)

Debriefing 2

- From where do we get information about how a relationship should look like?
- Can this happen to any kind of relationship?
- Have these exercises made you rethink any of your opinions or have you new perspectives? Why/Why not?

Tips for adaptations

- You could ask the participants to come up with a continuation of the story, for example to write a dialogue for five years later.
- You could also add other kinds of relationships in the discussion or the statement exercise, like a protective sibling or parent.
- You can end the activity by doing something, for example a poster campaign on “how can a healthy relationship look like” for your school or group house.

Annex 1: Statements

- You read your partner’s emails and text messages because you suspect that they are cheating on you.
- One of the persons in a couple is constantly checking up on the other person; asking what they are doing, where they are etc. by calling, texting, coming by.
- Your partner goes after and confronts a person that has harassed you without your knowledge, after finding out about the incident.
- You tell your partner that your ex was at the same party as you, and your partner gets mad at you for not leaving the party at once.
- Your partner becomes jealous every time you go out with your friends.
- One person forbids their partner from seeing people who they think have a bad influence.

Annex 2: And then they lived happily ever after

This story is read as Person A talking to Person B, and person B thinking out loud for the audience to share the thoughts.

The narrator can be one of Persons A or B, before starting the conversation.

(Narrator) *Two persons recently became a couple, Person A and Person B.*

Person A: Wow I love your style, you're so good-looking and such an individual. I love that about you!

Person B: We fit so well together, I am so happy!

I've never felt so close to anyone. You are the only one I trust, and who I can share my problems with and who understands them. I'm so happy that I have you, I love you so much.

I am sure that I am important to my partner, and I feel very safe in this relationship. I love you too!!

I feel like I have found my other half. We are like created for each other. You're the only person I need. We don't need anyone else, do we?

The two of us are made for each other! The rest of the world feels quite far away when we spend time together. Every minute away from each other is a minute lost for me.

You're the most beautiful person in the world! I can't understand that I, out of all people, get to be with you. To me, you don't need to dress the way you do, you are beautiful anyway. Are you dressing like that for someone else? If you want to be with only me, it would make me feel better if you didn't dress like that.

I don't want anyone to feel bad... and I don't want an argument for this sort of thing.

To wear something else is really not a big deal, I might as well.

You spend so much time with your friends. But we have such a great time together... am I not enough for you? I don't like the way you talk about them and the things you do together. I think they have a bad influence on you. Can't you just be your amazing self??

Lately we have been so close to each other. I don't want to ruin that. I start to see my friends less to invest more time in my relationship instead.

I do like your parents, but do we have to see them every Sunday? I'd like to spend more time with you alone, and they don't like me very much.... All they do is criticize me. I can't even relax in Sundays any more. I wish you didn't want us to spend so much time with them.

I am worried about our relationship, and fear to lose it, and with that my best friend.

My family don't like my partner anyway. I spend less time with my family but call every now and then.

(Narrator) *And then they lived happily ever after... Or did they?*

The story is taken from 'Gender Matters: A Manual on addressing gender-based violence affecting young people' p.139