

Healthy Relationships

This curriculum was developed by the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation which has provided supported education since 1984. The Center's work is guided by the most basic of rehabilitation values: that persons with psychiatric disabilities have the same goals and dreams as any other person. By developing skills and supports, individuals can assume meaningful and valued roles in the community.

Within the Center's Services Division, our objective is to provide effective and innovative programs for people to engage with work, school, social, residential, and spiritual environments of their choice. There is an increased need to target these efforts with young adults who are seeking to obtain or maintain valued roles and develop tools to balance coexisting demands across domains of wellness. Institutions of higher education prioritize students' wellbeing largely in the context of their academic aptitude and persistence. Yet students' academic success can be jeopardized if they are also lacking the skills and self-efficacy to build strong, interpersonal connections and community, as belonging and wellbeing are central to academic perseverance (Eisenberg, et al., 2016). Our definition of student success, as it relates to this session and the Healthy Relationships course, is whole-person oriented and spans across various dimensions of wellbeing – social, academic, intellectual, physical, environmental, emotional, occupational, and spiritual (SAMHSA, 2016).

This curriculum has evolved out of a need to support students' ability to not just survive but to thrive in higher education. A institutional need and desire to retain students in higher education and the legal precedent to respond to Title IX criteria that instructs higher education institutions to support all persons (complainants, respondents and witnesses) involved in the process.

This Facilitation Guide provides you with 25 structured lesson plans to choose from as you develop your program to address the unique needs of the individuals you work with. Classes are intentionally ordered, however, there is also great flexibility built into the curriculum. The goal of course is to “make the students your content” and shift toward topics they've identified as pressing and priorities. The thoughtfully curated exercises for each class session invite whole-person reflection and growth with an emphasis on supporting the participants to achieve their wellness goals across all domains of wellness.

These curriculums have been implemented and adopted by various secondary and post-secondary education institutions, and organizations around the globe by facilitators like you who value and understand the importance of supporting an individual's' whole personhood. Throughout your experience of developing and expanding your curriculum, you can rely on our curriculum development team at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University for technical assistance and support, as well as the facilitators around the world for their wisdom having done what you're doing.

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Class 1: Eight Domains of Wellness and SMARTER Goals

At A Glance

In this class, students and instructors will develop a community agreement. This agreement supports how students and instructors participate in class activities. Support all participants to interact in an equitable, inclusive, and respectful framework. Hold participants accountable for their contribution to the class dynamics.

Students will be oriented to the curriculum content, expectations, and objectives. They will also explore the eight dimensions of wellness outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and evaluate their satisfaction with, and set goals around their wellness. Students will also learn about the framework of readiness for change and the core elements that support change readiness and sustainability.

Key Objectives:

- Identify and explain course expectations and objectives.
- Facilitator and students set an intention of what a community agreement is and together develop one.
- List and define eight domains of wellness.
- Explain interconnectedness of domains and influence of collegiate life on wellness.
- Evaluate and describe satisfaction with personal wellness across eight dimensions.
- Describe the acronym SMARTER and discuss how it is effective in setting goals.

Class 2: Personal Values & Belonging

At A Glance:

Reflecting on meaningful values provides biological and psychological protection from the adverse effects of stress (Creswell, 2013). In this class, students will be examining their personal values. Students will identify ways in which individual values show up in our everyday lives and can influence the relationships we seek and develop.

In this class, students will discuss why quality connection is so vital to our psychological and physiological wellbeing by exploring the difference between small talk and interpersonal closeness. Students will then use questions—provided by the facilitator—that encourage discussion about meaningful topics inspired by Aron et al.'s study on developing intimacy.

Key Objectives:

- Students will be able to define values.
- Examine the benefits of identifying personal values and use a value card sort to do so.
- Explain the reasons why quality interpersonal connections support our psychological & physiological health.
- Students will ask each other questions to cultivate meaningful discussions & deepen connections with their peers.
- Students will maintain agency around what they choose to disclose & practice mindfulness while listening to their peers.

Class 3: Balancing College Stressors & Identifying Supports

At A Glance:

In this class, students will identify facets of life that students are asked to balance (e.g., family, friendships, academic responsibilities, finances, roommates). Introduce students to the graph of productivity versus the levels of stress. Share and discuss the common signs and sources of collegiate distress. Identify the personal impact of stressors and the disruption to balance they can cause. Explore strategies for de-escalating the level of stress (i.e., what supports did you use: people, places, activities, things).

This class introduces transformative resilience as a skill that can be built and the different factors involved in resiliency. Building wellness and resiliency skills creates a foundation for supporting students with their goals. Students will learn about the seven factors of resilience and then utilize the Photovoice methodology to illustrate how each factor manifests in their everyday lives.

Key Objectives:

- Define stress and differentiate between stress, distress, and eustress.

- Students explore the sources and signs of collegiate stress and distress, as reported by the American College Health Association surveys.
- Students share, discuss, evaluate, and practice strategies for stress management.
- Identify and describe the factors of resilience.
- Describe the specific skills and environmental factors needed to foster resiliency.

Class 4: Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships & Social Networks

At A Glance:

Students will explore tools for evaluating the “healthiness” of relationship(s) as well as how unhealthy relationship(s) behaviors impact overall wellbeing. Students will practice by identifying both healthy and unhealthy behaviors in popular culture.

Students will discuss the interconnectedness of social norms across cultures and how their social networks are built and maintained (modality: in-person, social media, gaming, apps & temporal: “old friends” “high school friends”, “new friends”). Students will also examine their personal satisfaction with their social network (peer & friend connections) and how that influences their overall wellbeing and sense of belonging.

Key Objectives:

- Identify markers for categorizing relationships as healthy and unhealthy.
- Explain how culture and power dynamics exist within and influence intimate relationship(s).
- Review strategies of how to identify healthy and unhealthy patterns that arise in relationships.
- Explain the relationship between social and cultural norms influence expectations for how social networks are built and maintained.
- Examine personal satisfaction as well as facilitators and barriers to building and maintaining friend and peer connections.

Class 5: Intersection of Identities

At A Glance:

Students will discuss their own social identities and how this impacts their sense of belonging and connection in relationships, environments and culture. Students will examine areas of their social identity, in particular the intersectionality of identities and areas of social identity that may be invisible. Students will explore ways to share personal information about identity across various cultures, environments, and relationships.

Students will explore the benefits and the challenges of personal disclosure in relationships, as well as the various levels of disclosure depending on the type of relationship. Students will navigate and explore the impact of power dynamics within relationships.

Key Objectives:

- Identify categories of social identity and describe their relationship to belonging.
- Explore the intersection of these identities and the impact of that on our experiences.
- Examine how we hold both visible and invisible parts of our identities and how sharing these pieces fuels connection.
- Recognize levels of disclosure; what is in our control and what is not as it pertains to social identities.
- Identify areas where areas of personal disclosure would be important to maintain overall wellbeing.

Class 6: Impact of Stress on Learning

At A Glance:

Students will explore the influence of stress on processing, retaining, and retrieving material. Additionally, students will examine the varying causes of acute and chronic stress in students, specifically in historically excluded students. Students will evaluate how different mindsets can impact students' engagement in academics, relationships, employment, and extracurricular activities.

Students will develop or reintegrate mindfulness and coping strategies for navigating stress in the classroom. Identify short- and long-term stress prevention and management strategies. Explore accessible ways for students to stay present in the classroom while attending to the stress in a lecture, exam, or other academic settings/situations. Students will explore their own window of tolerance for optimal arousal and how they respond to stress when they exit this window.

Key Objectives:

- Discuss the impact of stress on processing, retaining and retrieving information.
- Explore ways in which information can be consolidated and readily retrieved.
- Identify personal window of tolerance.
- Students will be introduced to Dan Siegle's Hand Brain Model for understanding stress responses.
- Examine prevention and management strategies for maintaining optimal amounts of stress.

Class 7: Initiating Conversations & Navigating Communication Barriers

At A Glance:

Students will explore the relationship between wellbeing and belonging as it relates to peer relationships and a sense of community within personal and group dynamics. Through discussion and interactive practice, students will explore

the personal strengths they bring to interpersonal connections, develop strategies for fostering relationships, and identify barriers to initiating new connections or deepening current connections.

Students will explore their own communication styles. Engage in discussion around when they felt heard and when they felt unheard in a conversation with someone. Examine the 12 roadblocks of communication and evaluate how each factor impacts their intimate, social, work, and academic relationships.

Key Objectives:

- Describe developing new relationships in various cultural contexts.
- Identify personal strengths, values, and abilities that guide making and keeping peer relationships.
- Identify and practice effective communication with peers.
- List and discuss the 12 roadblocks of communication.

Class 8: The Skill of Empathy & Expanding our Emotional Vocabulary

At A Glance:

Students will learn about empathy as a critical skill for emotional resiliency and wellness. Students are guided through an exercise to remember a time when they were highly distressed and what others said or did to help/ hinder their capacity to cope with that experience.

Students will explore ways to expand their emotional vocabulary as a tool to use for responding. Students will have an opportunity to examine their approaches to communication with various community members. Through interactive discussion, videos and roles plays, students will examine and practice empathy as a tool for cultivating health-promoting relationships and wellness.

Key Objectives:

- Identify and use accurate feeling words across various emotions and intensities.
- Incorporate feeling words when responding to others.
- Recognize empathic versus non-empathic responding.
- Recognize and implement behaviors associated with responding with empathy, including active listening, and identifying and using feeling words to communicate understanding about emotions.
- Explain the effectiveness of responding to someone with empathy.

Class 9: Fair Fighting & Difficult Conversations

At A Glance:

Students will examine how conflict can elicit change in our relationships and help them grow. To make sure we do this effectively, we will identify the rules for fair fighting and explore how to be a better listener when fighting occurs.

In this class, students are introduced to the mnemonic device DEARMAN, its origins in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, and its function as a tool for building and maintaining health-promoting interpersonal connections. Through role plays, students practice the skills of advocating for various needs in friend and peer relationships, “fair fighting”, active listening, and responding with empathy.

Key Objectives:

- List the principles of fair fighting and situational applications.
- Apply the guiding rules of fair fighting and explain their utility.
- Identify when fair fighting rules are not being applied and redirect the conversation.
- Describe DEARMAN as a tool for navigating difficult conversations.
- Identify various relationships in which difficult conversations arise.
- Explain the function of engaging in a difficult conversation to build and/or maintain health-promoting connections with others.

Class 10: Boundary Setting: Giving & Receiving Consent

At A Glance:

Students will learn the types of boundaries that can be set for themselves and others. Students discuss the importance of listening and responding to others through practice engaging with difficult conversations like establishing boundaries (pre-, peri-, and post-relationship). Students further explore the mnemonic device FAST for establishing boundaries in various types of relationships.

Students will continue to examine what it means to give consent: freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific. Understanding of how when people want to engage in any kind of physical, intimate, or sexual activity, they need to be on the same page about what they’re doing and how they’re doing it through clear, explicit communication.

Key Objectives:

- Explaining the purpose and function of establishing boundaries before, during and/or after a relationship.
- Define the mnemonic device FAST and describe its function.
- Students identify what giving consent means and looks like.
- Students practice asking for consent through various scenarios and differentiate between different responses and practice communicating when unsure.
- Discuss barriers to asking for consent; address how to combat and overcome them.

Class 11: The Worry Cycle of Thinking Traps

At A Glance:

Students will diagram and discuss the interconnectedness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as well as explore the impact of limited thinking patterns and language on wellbeing and academic and work performance.

Students will examine common, automatic negative thinking patterns, thinking traps, that can interrupt productivity and learning. Students will also examine the impact of negative thoughts on attention and the influence on learning and other areas of functioning. Students will practice identifying and reframing those negative thought patterns.

Key Objectives:

- Identify and recognize negative thinking patterns, or traps.
- Identify best practices for monitoring, sustaining, and redirecting attention.
- Explain the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Explore ways to counterbalance imposter syndrome thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Class 12: Shifting One's Mindset & Flipping Failure

At A Glance:

Students will explore Carol Dweck's growth and fixed mindset as a source for automatic thinking patterns. Students will examine personally held beliefs around ability that can translate to a fixed or growth mindset. Students will evaluate how a mindset can impact their engagement in academics, relationships, employment, and extracurricular activities.

Students will explore MIT's Flipping Failure website, which provides a platform for students to provide visibility to stories of academic challenge and resilience so that a shift in the conversation occurs. Changing a narrative of struggle from a source of shame to a source of learning and growth. Research shows that students' feelings of belonging increased when hearing stories from peers about challenges they faced, helping students reframe their own struggles as a normal part of academic transitions. Students will have an opportunity to reframe or shift the perspective of an experience from a time of struggle to an opportunity of learning. While appreciating the complexity of failure and the diversity of students' experiences with it, particularly in the ways that structural barriers can create or exacerbate students' challenges.

Key Objectives:

- Students explore growth and fixed mindsets and discuss where this comes up for them.
- Identify beliefs around personal ability.
- Normalize challenges and struggles in the academic spaces.
- Invite students to explore the benefits of reframing challenges to areas of growth.

Class 13: Formation of Identity through the Media

At A Glance:

Students will discuss and explore the intersection between media and issues of identity. Examine the impact the media plays in helping to shape the way these identities are formed and influence our experiences. Identity is an important step in understanding ourselves and the world around us. Explore how we learn about our own identity and the identity of others through interactions with family, peers, organizations, institutions, media and other connections we make in our everyday life.

Students will explore complex ideological questions around media and power. Students will think about how media is constructed, disseminated, interpreted and how our identities are or are not represented in the media we consume.

Key Objectives:

- Explore the intersection of media and personally held social identities.
- Examine Implicit Biases and the impact of these on our identities.
- Identify ways in which media has shaped our understanding of how social identities are valued.
- Discuss how we move forward more intentionally in our consumption of media.

Class 14: Online Profiles & Relationships

At A Glance:

Students will explore how they perceive and represent themselves online as well as how they engage in online relationships through social media in relation to their overall personal wellbeing, sense of belonging, and work and school relationships. Further, students are introduced to the topic of “e-consent” as it relates to consensual online connections and relationships.

Through interactive activities and group discussions, students discuss the new landscape of dating, dating apps, dating environments, and dating safety, consent, and mutual respect within those environments. Students will learn to assess how they are being received by their dating partner(s) and ways they’re communicating their interest/disinterest in the relationship across first and subsequent dates. Students will explore how they represent themselves online as well as how they engage in social media in relation to their overall personal wellbeing, sense of belonging, and work and school relationships.

Key Objectives:

- List common and personal experiences related to maintaining an “online presence.”
- Explain the concept of “e-consent” and the explicit and subtle ways permission is granted to communicate in various online relationships.
- List various dating apps, functions, and features.
- Identify signs or markers of interest or intimacy as well as disinterest and danger.
- Explore terminology of this new dating landscape.

Class 15: Imposter Syndrome & Self-efficacy

At A Glance:

Students will examine the term Imposter Syndrome by looking at different ways this materializes for themselves and others. Students will explore the different types of imposters and how they might identify with them. Students will then examine alternative ways of engaging with these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to counterbalance the imposter feelings.

Student will define self-efficacy and then describe the connection between wellness and self-efficacy. Explain and apply Edith Grotberg's "language of resilience: I have, I am, I can" exercise. Recognize statements of self-advocacy and apply self-advocacy strategies for support around various area of (dis)stress.

Key Objectives:

- Define Imposter Syndrome.
- Discuss how it manifests in our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- Examine different types of imposters and how those behaviors externalize.
- Students examine and apply self-efficacy-building exercises rooted in Edith Grotberg's findings in the International Resilience Project.
- Apply self-advocacy strategies using what we have identified as self-efficacy tools and supports.

Class 16: Understanding and Integrating Our Different Parts

At A Glance:

In this class, students are introduced to the model of Internal Family Systems (IFS), which posits that a person cannot be understood in isolation. This evidence-based approach assumes everyone possesses a variety of sub-personalities, or "parts," and attempts to get to know each of these parts better to achieve healing. To avoid repeating patterns, we have internalized or developed in response to these parts.

Students will be invited to examine and name their different parts. Identify when these parts are activated and what they might be trying to protect the student from. Students will explore how they might engage differently with these parts and apply the 8 C's to create some disentanglement from the various parts.

Key Objectives:

- Explore IFS model and its connection to one's self and relationships.
- Develop an understanding of our different parts and when they are activated.
- Examine the interrelationship of our parts and how they work together or in conflict.
- Apply the 8 C's to better engage and understand these natural protective parts.

Class 17: Effective Communication & Self-Advocacy

At A Glance:

In this class, students will have an opportunity to examine their approaches for effective communication with peers. Students will practice working in a team and applying communication strategies in order to complete a Lego model. Students will work through communication challenges as they arise in the activity. Students will have an opportunity to reflect on how they navigated successful communication and what challenges arose.

Students will examine the humility and communication skills involved in asking for help, also called help-seeking or self-advocating. Since help-seeking, or asking for what we need, has been found to have a profound positive impact on students' overall success and wellness in college, we are going to practice identifying areas of need and asking for help together in this class.

Key Objectives:

- Students will practice applying effective communication strategies during a team-building activity.
- Students will discuss strengths and challenges as they arose in the activity.
- Students will explore alternate approaches to increase effective communication.
- Define and describe self-advocacy and help-seeking skills.
- Implement a strategy for self-advocacy for now and future use.

Class 18: Dating Readiness & Identifying Love Languages

At A Glance:

In this class, through guided discussions and personal reflection, students will examine their own love languages and how they express love and intimacy. Love languages are used to describe how people prefer to show and receive love and affection. There are five: words of affirmation, quality time, physical touch, acts of service, and receiving gifts. Understanding your love language(s), and others', can help enhance communication and support us in meeting ours and others' emotional needs.

Students identify the basic readiness for dating and examine how that is both culturally and personally informed. Students further examine current dating language/slang, personal dating values, common ways to find a date, how to ask someone on a date, and how to establish boundaries on dates.

Key Objectives:

- Identify & describe how you show affection and love to others.
- Examine how you saw love being expressed by influential people throughout your life.
- Explore how you prefer to be shown love and affection.
- Define dating readiness and describe personal strengths and challenges around dating readiness.
- List personal dating values and potential approaches to find someone to date.

- Identify how this information can support healthy communication and intimate relationships.

Class 19: Let's get physical, or not... Understanding your Sexuality & Needs

At A Glance:

Students learn about the five circles of sexuality – sensuality, intimacy, sexualization, sexual health & reproduction, and sexual identity – and examine personal tendencies and preferences. Discuss the influence of society and culture, including media literacy, shame and stigma, and how power, identity, and oppression impact sexual wellness and reproductive freedom.

Examine students different experiences with sexual education and the impact of comprehensive vs abstinence sexual health learning. Students discuss and explore alternative approaches for engaging and educating young adults in sex education.

Key Objectives:

- Student will list and define the five circles of sexuality.
- Student will discuss the impact of sexuality in our personal and social identities.
- Students will explore the influence of society, politics, education & religion in sexual and reproductive wellness.
- Examine personal sexual health education and inform future best practices.

Class 20: The Pornography Debate

At A Glance:

In this class students will examine their personally held beliefs about pornography. Exploring the perceived and real benefits and harms of viewing pornography, the industry as a whole and its impact on our relationships. Students will engage in a critical analysis of gender norms, communication norms, and sexual norms that are promoted in some pornography. Exploring both sexting and revenge porn in there legal and social context.

Students will examine pornography through a public health lens. Using a debate style format, student will have the opportunity to argue on the affirmative or opporstition of pornography as a public health crisis.

Key Objectives:

- Student identify the benefits and harms of pornography.
- Student will examine porn industry terminology.
- Students will explore the impact of porn on social norms and interpersonal relationships.
- Debate the notion of porn as a public health crisis.

Class 21: 4-Horseman & Intimate Partner Readiness

At A Glance:

Through guided discussions and personal reflection, students examine their readiness to engage in an intimate partner relationship(s) and explore tools for evaluating their satisfaction with, and the “healthiness” of, the relationship(s) as well as how an intimate partner relationship(s) impacts overall wellbeing. Students practice engaging in difficult conversations that arise with partners, including discussing “seriousness” and exclusivity.

Identify the Gottman’s Institute 4-Horseman in communication and share the antidotes to each. Discuss how knowing the destructive behaviors in relationships and the healthy responses lead to more effective communication in intimate relationships.

Key Objectives:

- Describe personal readiness to engage in an intimate partner relationship.
- Explain how culture and power dynamics exist within and influence intimate relationships.
- Explain how to approach a difficult conversation with a partner(s).
- Explore the Gottman 4-horsemen, how these appear and why.
- Examine the antidote to each horseman.
- Practice interrupting patterns of destructive behaviors by applying the antidotes.

Class 22: Identifying Motivators & Readiness for Change

At A Glance:

In this class, students will examine their personal intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Effective application of personal motivators to support engagement and progress toward student’s academic, social, vocational, and wellness goals.

Students will also learn about the framework of readiness for change and the core elements that support change readiness and sustainability. Students will be oriented to the relationship between identifying satisfaction and making change. Examining the four indicators needed for making change.

Key Objectives:

- Define and describe intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.
- Identify strong personal motivators and demotivators and apply motivators.
- Describe DiClemente & Prochaska’s readiness for change model and the factors involved in making a role change.

- Evaluate and describe personal readiness (and/or past experiences with readiness) to progress towards personal

Class 23: Substance Use & Misuse & Cohabitation

At A Glance:

Student will explore how neurotransmitters are impacted by substances. Students will have an opportunity to consider the effects and influences of substances and substance use, including language students utilize to describe use, addiction, and recovery. Students will also cultivate awareness around their personally-held biases and attitudes and the impact those have on relationships.

Students examine the roles and responsibilities they assume as roommates, as well as evaluate the skills, strengths, preferences, and needs they bring to cohabitation relationships. Examine personal readiness, preferences, and strategies for on-campus living with/without a roommate.

Key Objectives:

- List various substances and describe positive and negative effects from use.
- Recognize and interrupt stigmatizing language in a health-promoting, productive manner.
- Identify and respond to personal biases and attitudes.
- Describe personal cohabitation strengths, needs, preferences, and challenges.
- Define “environmental wellness” and environmental boundaries and describe how roommates/cohabitants personally influence wellbeing.

Class 24: Social Rhythms & Mind-Gut Connection

At A Glance:

Social rhythms are patterns of behavior and time cues that can influence our daily functioning. Students will explore their individual social rhythms, rhythm synchronizer, and rhythms disruptors. They will also examine their individual time-keeping cues, discuss the impact disruptions in social rhythms have on executive functioning and productivity, and strategize how to reset social rhythms for wellness and academic/work persistence. Apply and practice approaches that personally invite wellness and positive performance.

Explain and discuss the mind-gut connection and the neurotransmitters involved. Examine the impact of stress and emotions on gut health. Identify the top mood foods and benefits. Discuss the personal impact of wellness around food intake and challenges faced with engaging with top mood foods.

Key Objectives:

- Define “zeitgebers” and social rhythms.
- Explain the relationship between social rhythms, wellness, time management, and work/school productivity.

- Explain sources and signs of a disruption to personal social rhythms.
- Discuss the gut as one of our social rhythms and wellness tools.
- Describe the mind-gut connection.
- Identify top mood foods.
- Examine barriers to top food intake and strategies.

Class 25: Highlighting Peers & Internalizing Personal Strengths

At A Glance:

In the final class, students review the skills and tools they learned, practiced, and developed throughout the course and evaluate and share which approaches to managing and maintaining health-promoting relationships they'd like to stop, start, or continue.

Students will be invited to participate in a community building activity that asks them to reflect and express positive attributes of their classmates. Offering parting words of support the students can then take with them.

Key Objectives:

- Identify and describe personal approaches, strategies, and tools tried and/or used to build and maintain various domains of wellness.
- Examine satisfaction with changes made and new approaches tried throughout the semester.
- Share with peers their strengths
- Reflect on what peers shared about themselves.