

CUSD Cares Podcast

Healthy Relationships

Season 2, Episode 5– March 2021

Brenda Vargas:

Welcome parents to another edition of CUSD cares podcast. Today, we welcome two very passionate leaders in our community that work for the Domestic Violence Coalition. Welcome Samantha Hinchey and Lizette Roeder. Our topic today is healthy relationships, especially in youth specifically because we know that our youth, they are kind of trying it out as they have relationships with others, whether it's someone that they have feelings for or just a friend that they have, we want to make sure that we define and educate our parents and caregivers about what are things to look for as your youth may be involved in a romantic relationship. So, as we preface this, we know that this developmental stage, youth, when I share the word youth, it's that time during puberty, for some youth it's at different times, it could be as young as by the end of elementary school, and for others it's well into middle school or junior high and even possibly high school. So it's different for everybody. So please keep that in mind, but we know that in the search to be autonomous and want to lead really independent lives and not need us as parents and/or adults, you know, to support them, they're certainly practicing or trying to practice healthy relationships, but they have something that maybe as when we were their age, we didn't have, and that is, you know, the wonderful world of social media and that influence, and we know that influence can be very great. So as we get started and Lizette, what kind of relationships actually exist, I think would be the first basic question?

Lizette Roeder:

So I think that if I were to go into a high school and I'm going to just focus on high school or middle school classroom, and I ask them, can anyone tell me what type of relationships exist? A lot of them are going to be like romantic boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, and that tends to be kind of our scope of what a relationship is, right? But if we look at the way that relationship is defined, it's defined in a way in which two or more concepts, objects or people are connected and stay in the state of being connected. So therefore, if we think about it, relationships are around us all day, every day, and it goes beyond romantic. So we have family and that can be any combination thereof, step parents, foster kids, legal guardians, actual nuclear family, mom, dad, brother, or sister, romantic. That can be any combination as well, boyfriend boyfriend, girlfriend boyfriend, spouses, professional. You know, so your colleague boss, my coworker, and your relationship with yourself, which is probably the most important one, you know, how do I view myself? How do I treat myself and all these relationships, regardless of which kind they are going to exist in the spectrum, which is healthy, unhealthy, or abusive.

Brenda Vargas:

So how do we, as parents and caregivers define what a healthy relationship should look like? I know that may sound like a basic question, but how do we communicate that to our youth?

Lizette Roeder:

Yeah. So it sounds like a basic question, but it really isn't because once again, if I went into, like, if I zoom crashed a classroom right now, I'd say like, respect is key. And that's, that tends to be once again, how we kind of focus on what healthy is; being respectful and being honest with each other, but a healthy relationship actually has multiple components. Yes, definitely respect. Are you being respectful of that person as a whole, for what they believe, what they like, what they dislike, then there's trust. Do you have the trust in the person that they're going to be forthcoming with you, give you good advice, but also listen and keep your secrets and using your parents within that group and that relationship then there's honesty and equality. Equality, I think is one of those hard to understand, because we also have to talk about the fact that friendships are going to be influenced by cultural dynamics. You know, if I come from a very traditional ethnic family and I'm expected not to date till I'm 18, and I'm expected to do certain things during the date or in relationship, that is going to have an influence on that dynamic of how I view myself in that relationship. And then there's also good communication and last but not least personal identity. Healthy relationships have independence. You have to be your own person to be able to still maintain your interests, your likes and dislikes. And if you are in a healthy relationship, it should not be something that creates jealousy or issues, but instead it is something that is celebrated because every single one of us is like an intersection of tons of different, wonderful things.

Brenda Vargas:

When that's such an important piece for youth, as they, I guess, explore possible relationships with others, right. We know at that time they become, their peers are more important than anyone else in their lives during that adolescent period. So oftentimes they don't want to hang out or possibly spend the majority of their time with family or neighbors. Right. It's mainly with friends. So making sure that they have that good identity, as well as that independence to be who they want to be.

Lizette Roeder:

Yes. And that's going to change, you know, it's the formative years. and then of course, it's going to be influenced, like you said, by their social circle, by their friends, by what they're seeing at home as well. That's very important, but because it's changing doesn't mean that they don't know who they are at the core of their being. It just means that they're still trying to explore their boundaries. You know, what makes me feel good? What does not make me feel good? And I think that's something as adults, we tend to forget where it feels like so long ago when we were exploring what our boundaries were.

Brenda Vargas:

Well, and they're always challenging those boundaries. Right? But that is part of that developmental age. You bring up some just really important pieces to the need for us to keep in mind as we're helping support our children through this time, as they're exploring different relationships, you know, of all of the key components that need to be in place, but one of the most important pieces is what they see at home, right? What's being modeled for them, that even though they may understand it, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent, let's just say in this case that it is maybe not the most positive relationship, it's hard for them to unlearn what they see.

Lizette Roeder:

Yes. And that's one of the reasons why one of the most important things that we can model is boundaries, boundaries, and consent. And boundaries are not just physical. It's not about, you know, what feels good and what does not feel good as far as touch or an intimate relationship, but boundaries can be broken up into physical, emotional, digital, and financial. And digital is a very big one for our

youth, for the teens, right? What I mean by a digital boundary is have those conversations, or at least bring it up so they can start thinking about, is it okay for my partner to post where we are, to share certain photos of me, to tag me, is it okay for them to friend my family members, do I want them on my mom and my dad and my cousins, Facebook, Patriot, Instagram pages, you know, how late can they text me? Maybe you can text me whatever time you want, but if it's past 10:30 and I don't answer, there should not be a reason for you to treat me badly or to become increasingly angry over the fact that I am not responding to your message at 10:30 PM. Sam?

Samantha Hinchley:

Yeah. I just wanted to follow up with that. I think that's such a great explanation, but I wanted to say that, like, one of the things that we don't do in our society is teach people how to build boundaries for themselves. And what Lizette is talking about is so important because technology is so part of our daily lives at this point, that not only are they learning how to have boundaries with technology, but just learning boundaries period. Boundaries that they will take with them into every relationship that they have moving forward from teachers to coaches, to friends, to family, to boyfriends, girlfriends, coworkers, whatever, it will go a long, if they learn how to do it, when they're young, it will stay with them forever and they will build healthier relationships.

Brenda Vargas:

And we know that with this digital footprint and them having this currency, right? Their mobile device is their currency. And for a lot of us, it is. But just because someone is available, doesn't mean they should be. So keeping it that simple, I think, and not having to be always, I guess, on quote unquote, right. On and available on the cell phone that leaving someone on red, you know, it's not in any way meant to be mean or unresponsive, it simply means you're taking time for yourself or other family or other things wherever you want to be fully present for that's in front of you.

Lizette Roeder:

Correct. And that, once again connects to personal identity, right? Having that you in the relationship, which is very important, and as Samantha mentioned, and I completely agree. And that's one of the things he used to tell teens when I used to work as a youth advocate is, you know, all your relationships can be healthy, unhealthy, or abusive. And the more that you learn to recognize what healthy looks for you and what healthy is, the better relationships you're going to have throughout your life, because it can have an unhealthy relationship with your boss. You can have an unhealthy relationship with your coworkers. You can have an unhealthy relationship with siblings. So it goes beyond romantic and we model that, they're going to notice that yes, relationships are a big part of my everyday. And therefore it's good to think about boundaries.

Brenda Vargas:

Well as we continue to talk about boundaries, because I think this is going to trickle throughout every single piece that you guys are going to share with us on how to express concern and maintaining what you guys have referred to as brave space?

Lizette Roeder:

Yes. So if you are an adult, a parent, a trusted adult in their life, one of the very first things that we want you to do is listen, listen, and validate. You're going to hear some difficult things that may arouse very negative feelings in yourself, but you need to make the space where you are listening to what they're

saying, to try to not interrupt as they're speaking to you and to validate, you know, show concern, you don't deserve to be treated like this. This is not your fault. Just telling them that will open up a space where they feel like it's okay to continue to talk. So the thing about making, you know, a brave space is do's, don'ts not creating that ultimatum, but instead giving them those alternatives to think about at the end of the day, whether address this matter in the turn, not as parents and as adults, they have the right to stay in the relationship if they want to whatever type of relationship that may be. And so it is very important that we validate, that we show concern. And here's a very big one too- talk about behaviors, not the person. If we are seeing a potentially harmful relationship, we want to make sure that we are addressing behavior. Becky she's treating you horribly is not the right way to approach it. Instead, I have noticed that when you and Becky hang out, they don't seem to take your opinion into consideration much. And so you're addressing the behaviors and therefore you can present a healthy alternative. It really is about presenting healthy alternatives, listening and validating. And that's how you can be present.

Brenda Vargas:

Thank you, Lizette. That was a great quick example I noticed, right? We can usually, you know, finish that statement with something that is observable, that we see and really important, even though I know for most parents, for parents out there, our children, no matter what age they are, they're always our babies and we want to protect them. But we know that especially in youth and as they become young adults and have their own lives, we know that they're gonna make the decisions on their own. And we would love to tell them what to do. However we know sometimes they don't listen and/or they are going to simply make their choice themselves with, or without our support, which is hard for a lot of parents to accept. But framing what you see, behaviors that are observable based on what they're sharing with you or based on what you see is I think going to be really important and reiterating what Lizette just mentioned, which is integral in making sure that we don't make it about the person. And we make it about the behavior that that person is showing and/or demonstrating. That could be pretty powerful, especially if it's reoccurring behavior over time, it then becomes very obvious what is happening as opposed to mom, dad, you just don't like, so-and-so, that's why you're telling me that. Or you don't want me to hang out with them or you just want me to stay home.

Lizette Roeder:

No, it is. And that's exactly what they're going to hear. If you start, you know, with, Oh, well, I don't like Chris. I don't like Becky or that you understand that respect, listening and that validating are important. And then of course the empathy, and one thing I would like to add, and this point, remember that our body language also will tell them if we are listening. I have two teens, well, they're not teens anymore. They're young adults, but having those conversations were definitely difficult. And I had to take nice deep breaths and it's okay to let them know. It's just everything I'm listening, but I need time to process, and we're going to get through this. I'm going to help you. I think that we do need to remember as we try to navigate the world of being an adult.

Brenda Vargas:

And I'm glad you mentioned watch your body language. We communicate 80% with our body language before we even open our mouth and say anything. And it's something that just, we do naturally, you know, we can't help it. And I know, cause I've been in this situation myself as a parent, you know, even though my words might not be saying X, Y, or Z, or even saying anything, my body certainly is communicating some kind of message. So just being very mindful of that, such great tips for parents to look for. What, especially when it comes to youth and teens, what local and national resources are

available for them, because we know often they won't come to us first. They go to each other, right? They go to their peers. What resources are out there for teens and/or youth that we might just want to leave, maybe a card laying around or that information somewhere where they see it. If you have one of those pegboards at home and with wealth of information and/or something that we can put on social media platform, just so that they know it's available. Where should they reach out to Lizette?

Lizette Roeder:

So thankfully they're are really good organizations, both at a local, state, and national level. It just depends on who the audience is. Right? So if you are a parent who wants to know more about how to help and how those conversations can stand and healthy relationships, I definitely recommend Love Is Respect. That is a national organization, and they have a website that is just awesome. They also have a text message option for teens who have questions about whether their relationships are healthy or not. Or if they are in a teen dating violence situation, they can also get help through their texts and or helpline. And their number is +1 866-331-9474. Or they can text.

Brenda Vargas:

Say that one more time.

Lizette Roeder:

Yeah, not a problem. 1 866-331-9474. But you know, as an elder millennial, I'm not a big fan of making phone calls. So the younger generation might matter as well. So they can text LOVE IS to 22522 and they can get the help that they need in that manner.

Brenda Vargas:

I'm going to repeat that text line just to make sure folks heard it out there. They can text the word LOVE IS to 22522. Is that correct?

Lizette Roeder:

That is correct.

Brenda Vargas:

All right, folks, we know our youth predominantly don't use their phones to call. They would rather text and if that's what people are comfortable with, let's meet them where they're at. So text LOVE IS at 22522. That's a great resource. Thank you, Lizette so important. You know, I think it's so important the work that you ladies do with the others on your staff, educating our community about this topic, about domestic violence, about healthy relationships. Is there any last bit of information that we need to share with parents and or caregivers?

Lizette Roeder:

Yeah. So I just want to make sure that we address that we do have a helpline climate coalition to end sexual and domestic violence. but don't feel that because you are a teen or young adult that you cannot call, we will still have resources for you. So please feel free to reach out to the coalition. But the helpline has a wealth of resources and they will be able to guide you, and send you to a local program that does work with teen youth.

Brenda Vargas:

Lizette. And that helpline is (602) 279-2900. And it's for anybody, even if you're seeking guidance or support for someone else they can call. Correct? Because we might see something that our youth may not see. And so we might be getting that information in advance probably to assist and support us too.

Lizette Roeder:

Yes. So if there's one last thing to share with the people that are listening today is that we want our teens and our youth to feel ready and empowered to leave any unhealthy relationship, because again, healthy relationships should go beyond the romantic realm. And there are relationships every single day that we juggle and that we tackle. So it's important that we start modeling that talking to them about them. And again, having them feel empowered to leave a relationship if it is unhealthy.

Brenda Vargas:

That's right. Responsible decision making is important in order to keep ourselves well. And that includes being and having healthy relationship with others. Well, ladies, I am, again, grateful, grateful that you both were able to take some time out today to join me. The work that you do is so incredibly important. I know that it will reach the right people. And, this is just information that I think is important for us as a community to stay well and support each other to have. We are very lucky to be in Chandler and have you guys at an arms reach, I should say, cause you always make yourself available. So thank you both for your time and to all our parents. Thank you for being vulnerable enough to hit play on this podcast recording. As I know, even if this doesn't impact you, we certainly don't know who will cross our path, that we will be there to support. And we just want to make sure that you have the necessary information to receive and really to do good and to do good in our community. So thank you and join me next time for another CUSD Cares podcast.