

## Youth Focused Relationships and Marriage Education

Jennifer Kerpelman, Ph.D.

*Professor, Human Development and Family Studies  
Extension Specialist, Alabama Cooperative Extension  
Auburn University*



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## Why Target Youth?

“Information about courtship may be especially relevant and timely for young people in high school who are just beginning to have and understand romantic relationships.”

*(Niehuis, Skogrand, & Huston, 2005)*

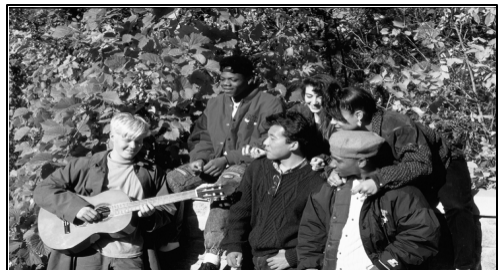
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## Content Overview

- I. Romantic relationships during adolescence
- II. Goals and objectives of relationships/marriage education targeting youth
- III. Relationship Smarts Plus:  
An example of a youth-focused relationships education curriculum.

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## I. Romantic Relationships During Adolescence



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## Benefits of Adolescents' Romantic Relationships

- Self-esteem and personal well-being
- Formation of identity
- Career Development
- Sexuality

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## Adolescents' Romantic Relationships

- Learning how to relate with a dating/marriage partner begins prior to the formation of romantic relationships
- Behaviors, beliefs and emotional characteristics that predict marital outcomes are present in couple relationships prior to marriage.

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## Risks Associated with Adolescents' Romantic Relationships

- Risks
  - Violence among adolescent dating partners
  - Maladaptive strategies to deal with conflict
  - Teen pregnancy

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## Emotions and Romantic Relationships

(Larson, Clore & Wood, 1999)

- Romantic emotions are positive and negative.
- Effects of positive romantic emotions:
  - Excitement of romance can provide an important motivator for adolescents
  - Positive emotions can cloud judgment
  - Elation when with a romantic partner may lead to underestimating sexual risks.

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## Emotions and Romantic Relationships

(Larson, Clore & Wood, 1999)

- Effects of Negative Emotions:
  - Jealousy, anger, longing and grief.
  - Can have extreme effects on adolescents' well-being and behavior.

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## Emotional Intelligence

(Larson, Clore & Wood, 1999)

- Learning what is healthy and what is not
- Able to consider a full range of factors
- Able to recognize common misattributions

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## II. Objectives of Relationships/Marriage Education Targeting Youth



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## Overarching Goal of Youth-Focused Relationships/Marriage Education

To increase/enhance knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors associated with healthy close relationships

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## Main Objective 1

**Increase knowledge about healthy/unhealthy relationships.**

~ Examples ~

Understanding of healthy dating patterns and factors related to healthy and stable marriages.

Recognizing patterns of unhealthy and abusive relationships.

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## Main Objective 2

**Strengthen skills for facilitating healthy relationship dynamics.**

~ Examples ~

Increasing level of self-efficacy in relationships.

Enhancing problem solving and communication skills.

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## Main Objective 3

**Enhance understanding of the choices and behaviors that put physical and emotional health at risk.**

~ Examples ~

Lowering levels of favorable attitudes towards risky sexual behaviors.

Lowering levels of risky sexual behaviors.

Decreasing selection of an abusive partner or staying in an abusive relationship.

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## III. Relationship Smarts Plus: An Example of a Youth-Focused Relationships Education Curriculum.



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## The Relationships Smarts Plus (RS+) curriculum

(adapted from Love U2: Relationship Smarts; Pearson, 2004)

- Research-based curriculum.
- Appropriate for lower resource and ethnically diverse youth.
- Adaptations in progress.

The current Love U2 curricula (Relationship Smarts, Communication Smarts, Sex Smarts, & Baby Smarts) can be found at: [www.dibblefund.org/love\\_u2.htm](http://www.dibblefund.org/love_u2.htm)

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## Features of RS+ are Consistent with Successful Youth Programs

- Adult facilitators instill hope in youth.
- Adolescents are viewed as community resources.
- Active adolescent participation and empowerment.
- Program flexibility to meet the needs of youth.

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## The RS+ Curriculum: Part 1 Establishing a Good Foundation

- Lesson 1: Who am I and Where am I Going?
- Lesson 2: Maturity Issues/What I Value
- Lesson 3: Attractions and Infatuation
- Lesson 4: What's Love? Three Sides of Mature Love; What's Intimacy?

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## The RS+ Curriculum: Part 2 Dating Relationships

- Lesson 5: Principles of Smart Dating
- Lesson 6: The Low-risk Relationship Strategy
- Lesson 7: Dating and Emotions
- Lesson 8: What Abuse Looks Like/Breaking Up

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## The RS+ Curriculum: Part 3 Communication

- Lesson 9: Destructive Patterns in Relationships
- Lesson 10: Skills to Counter Negative Patterns
- Lesson 11: Communication Strategies for Strengthening Relationships

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## The RS+ Curriculum: Part 4 Marriage and Planning for the Future

- Lesson 12: Why Parents' Relationships Really Matter to Children
- Lesson 13: Is Quality and Lasting Marriage Really Possible Today?
- Lesson 14: Planning for Your Future

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## Implementation

- **Fit** of the material and activities to the audience.
- **Clarity** and ease of the delivery of the material.
- **Dosage** needed to effect change.
- **Setting** effects (e.g., class make-up, location, teacher characteristics, etc.) that may affect the implementation and understanding of the material.

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## Establishing an Exemplar Curriculum and Model of Best Practices

- **Federally funded 5-year evaluation study** (Administration for Children and Families/ Department of Health and Human Services).
- **Over 250 classes will participate** (Family and Consumer Science and Health classes).
- **Three conditions will be compared: RS course only, RS course + Boosters, Control.**
- **Changes will be made to the curriculum across multiple years and its effectiveness tested with multiple groups of students and teachers.**

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## Establishing an Exemplar Curriculum and Model of Best Practices

- Feedback will be gathered from participating students and teachers.
- Based on feedback from quantitative and qualitative assessments, changes will be made to the materials and delivery methods, and to the training and support of the teachers.
- Guidelines will be established based on what is learned.

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## The NERMEN Conceptual Framework

The RS+ curriculum was examined in terms of its correspondence with the National Extension Relationships and Marriage Education Network's Conceptual Framework

- ❖ Choose
- ❖ Know
- ❖ Care
- ❖ Share
- ❖ Connect
- ❖ Manage
- ❖ Care for Self

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## Fit with the NERMEN Conceptual Framework

- **Choose:** RS+ is designed to promote the importance of intentionality.
- **Know:** RS+ stresses the importance of taking time to get to know a dating partner.
- **Care:** RS+ emphasizes the need to demonstrate affection, understanding, respect, and support for a relationship partner.
- **Share:** The dating lessons of RS+ focus considerably on the importance of developing a caring friendship with a dating partner

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## Fit with the NERMEN Conceptual Framework

- **Connect:** RS+ recognizes the influences and values of the broader social network.
- **Manage:** RS+ helps adolescents practice effective communication skills.
- **Care for Self:** RS+ begins with a focus on self, and emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and self-respect throughout the curriculum.

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## Closing Points

- Education for adolescents can promote healthy current and future relationships and reduce problems.
- Using research-based curricula that are rigorously evaluated will optimize our efforts.
- Creating model curricula and practices will ensure that more adolescents gain the knowledge and skills needed for healthier close relationships.

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