**PROCEDURE**

1. In advance, prepare slips of paper using photocopies of the enlarged lists provided in the Leader Resource; each slip should have one of the "ways" (which mirror the two lists below). Also, make photocopies of the Handout (1 per youth). Label 2 sheets of newsprint with the headings "Ways I open myself to hurt in dating" and "Ways I help keep myself safe in dating." (Note that although the primary aim of this activity is helping teens have healthy relationships now, it also touches on how current actions affect future relationships. In other words, choices made now can affect the health of relationships later in life.)

2. "Dating is a way to spend time with someone you want to know better, to learn what you like in a person, and to practice building healthy relationships. Because dating often involves your heart and your emotions, it can be painful when a relationship ends or becomes unhealthy. We're going to discuss ways to protect yourself from unnecessary hurt and to avoid being or staying in an unhealthy relationship."

3. Post the newsprint sheets and distribute all of the prepared slips. (Some youth may end up with more than one slip.) Ask for volunteers in turn to read aloud the text on their slips. After each is read, discuss as a group whether that action helps keep someone safe in a dating relationship or makes her or him vulnerable to hurt. The text in brackets includes points you should work into the discussion if they are not mentioned by any of the youth. Tape each slip on the appropriate newsprint sheet.

**WAYS TO BE MORE VULNERABLE TO HURT**

A. Dating someone you don't know very well or know only in a brief or limited situation [such as at camp, over the internet, or on a vacation].

B. Trusting people just because they are cute, fun, or exciting [not connecting trust with character].

C. Relying on or putting strong trust in people too soon [before you know if they are trustworthy].

D. Ignoring your "sixth sense" or any warning bells your mind is sending you about a person's character [letting emotions take the lead].

E. Dating someone who ignores, dismisses, or belittles your feelings, your values, or the things important to you [ignoring the importance of self-respect].
F. Spending more time with someone alone than in groups or public places. [Physically intimate situations foster physically intimate activity and could increase the chances of rape and other sexual crimes.]

G. Allowing yourself to be pressured to do things you are not comfortable doing [letting yourself be talked into things, rather than standing up for your own values and standards].

H. Continuing to date a person who is controlling, manipulative, jealous, or demanding [ignoring or making excuses for this harm].

I. Being sexually active to try to get someone to like or care about you, to keep her or him from breaking up, or to get love, closeness, and intimacy. [Being sexually active can give a false sense of closeness that a relationship has not really achieved, and it changes the focus of a relationship from getting to know a person to spending time with each other’s bodies.]

J. Being sexually active and thinking that it will not affect your emotions, thoughts, or decisions. [Sexual activity increases jealousy and other negative emotions in a relationship; mistrust grows when relationships end; guilt and regret often follow sex between teens; concerns about pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted disease can create continued stress; depression and suicide are sharply higher among sexually active teens than those not sexually active.]

K. Being sexually active and becoming pregnant or acquiring a sexually transmitted disease, or having the worry that one or both might happen. [Pregnancy and STDs are life-altering; concerns about pregnancy and/or STDs can create ongoing stress.]

L. Being unaware that using another person as a source of sexual gratification may affect someone similarly to an addiction to pornography. [With any addiction, a person is never fully satisfied and thus often continues to escalate the frequency and severity of the action.]

M. Being unaware or ignoring research showing that people who have casual sexual relationships are more likely to justify infidelity when they enter a committed relationship, such as after marriage [ignoring the fact that habits such as self-control are qualities that we choose to build throughout our lives, not just when we reach adulthood].

N. Ignoring concerns expressed by family and friends who know you well about a relationship or potential relationship [not adequately considering the concerns of those who know and care about you].

Ways to Help Stay Safe

A. Dating people you know well and who have gained your respect for the way they treat others, especially during a conflict. [It takes time to get to know a person’s character and how they act and react when emotions are high.]

B. Knowing someone you date in more than one setting, including one where you can see how he or she handles everyday responsibilities [broadening your knowledge of a person beyond fun, positive activities].
C. Paying attention to how a person listens to you and respects your feelings or values when you share something important to you. [These behaviors are an indication of how someone will treat you in the future; someone who respects another person shows that respect, even when disagreeing.]

D. Pacing a relationship so that your emotions and physical desires don’t push you ahead of what your thoughts are telling you about a person. [Not letting your emotions overrule what your head is telling you is wise.]

E. Seeking dating partners who encourage you to be honest, respectful, responsible, and caring [recognizing when a person has or doesn’t have a positive influence on your character].

F. Spending time with the person you’re dating in groups rather than alone, and at public places rather than in private spaces. [Friend groups and multiple friendships are valuable relationship-building experiences, and they help reduce the pressure on couples to become physically intimate before they wish to.]

G. Not giving your trust to others until you know them well. [Learn whether a person can be trusted in small and less important areas before trusting him or her with important areas of your life.]

H. Not allowing yourself to be pressured or controlled. [Take control of your own decisions, rather than being talked into things you are not comfortable doing.]

I. Recognizing that dating is a learning experience. [Teen relationships are often short-lived. This is okay, and even beneficial, when youth are learning what’s important in relationships.]

J. Building a relationship on knowing, trusting, and relying on each other [recognizing the protection these qualities give to a relationship].

K. Treating your sexuality as a valued part of yourself and sex as something to be protected until you are a part of a relationship of love and commitment. [A person can feel used, abused, misused, or unvalued when giving sex without the protection of a committed, loving relationship. A person who is part of a relationship that is built on trust and commitment is less likely to react to the heat of the moment.]

L. Recognizing that there are physical, emotional, and spiritual implications to being sexually active [not ignoring potential consequences of sexual intimacy—physically, such as pregnancy and STDs; emotionally, such as worry, regret, anger, or depression; and spiritually, such as guilt or separation from or incongruence with your beliefs].

M. Being aware that you are building habits while dating in how you treat others and how you let them know that they can treat you [recognizing the qualities you choose to reinforce in a relationship and the healthiness of mutual respect].

N. Listening to family and friends who know you well when they express concern about a relationship or potential relationship [considering the concerns of those who know and care about you].
4. After the discussion of how each point either helps or hinders the building of healthy relationships, distribute the copies of the Handout for reference. Ask:
   - Which of these ways spoke most powerfully to you or do you think you will use to help protect your heart?
   - What sorts of personal qualities demonstrate that someone is safe to trust with your heart and your emotions? [responsibility, honesty, respectfulness, trustworthiness, compassion, considerateness, thoughtfulness, and others]
   - How can being physically intimate with a dating partner make a breakup more painful and open you to deeper hurt? [The intimacy may have created an impression that the relationship was more meaningful than it really was and that the other person’s feelings toward you were lasting ones. To help keep our emotions safe, physical love is best expressed in a relationship that has the safeguards of enduring (unconditional) love and commitment.]
   - Can you think of reasons that teens might not achieve enduring love and commitment in a dating relationship? [They are still learning and experimenting with social and emotional skills and relationships; they are not ready to settle on one person yet; they are not ready for life commitment; they are focusing on college or other life goals.]
   - Why are the people we choose to date and the decisions we make while dating important?
   - What can you do to better protect yourself from hurts when you date?
   - How can you help your friends to be wise and protect themselves from hurt when they date?

Ways to Open Yourself to Hurt

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B. Trusting people just because they are cute, fun, or exciting

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D. Ignoring your "sixth sense" or any warning bells that your mind is sending you about a person’s character

E. Dating someone who ignores, dismisses, or belittles your feelings, your values, or the things important to you

F. Spending more time with someone alone than in groups or public places

G. Allowing yourself to be pressured to do things you are not comfortable doing

H. Continuing to date a person who is controlling, manipulative, jealous, or demanding

I. Being sexually active to try to get someone to like or care about you, to keep her or him from breaking up, or to get love, closeness, and intimacy

J. Being sexually active and thinking that it will not affect your emotions, thoughts, or decisions.

K. Being sexually active and becoming pregnant or acquiring a sexually transmitted disease, or having the worry that one or both might happen

L. Being unaware that using another person as a source of sexual gratification may affect someone similarly to an addiction to pornography

M. Being unaware or ignoring research showing that people who have casual sexual relationships are more likely to justify infidelity when they enter a committed relationship, such as after marriage

N. Ignoring concerns expressed by family and friends who know you well about a relationship or potential relationship
Ways to Help Stay Safe

A. Dating people you know well and who have gained your respect for the way they treat others, especially during a conflict

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D. Pacing a relationship so that your emotions and physical desires don’t push you ahead of what your thoughts are telling you about a person

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F. Spending time with the person you’re dating in groups rather than alone, and at public places rather than in private spaces

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L. Recognizing that there are physical, emotional, and spiritual implications to being sexually active

M. Being aware that you are building habits while dating in how you treat others and how you let them know that they can treat you

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