

Topic: Cultural Adjustment – Youth Orientation

Activity: Romantic Relationships

Objective

- ✓ Participants will be able to compare customs regarding romantic relationships
- ✓ Participants will be able to explore sexual relationships and where legal lines are drawn
- ✓ Participants will be able to discuss boys and girls being friends
- ✓ Participants will be able to understand that “no” means “no” every time
- ✓ Participants will be able to define the legalities of marriage in the United States

Lesson Time

30 minutes

Materials

- ☐ Flipchart paper
- ☐ Markers and Tape
- ☐ Copies of *Dating and Marriage in the United States*, one per participant (see sample included; consider translating if appropriate)

Introduction

Ask participants to think about what romantic relationships, dating, and marriage are like in their family, home country, or country of asylum. Have participants get into pairs or small groups to discuss their knowledge and experiences prior to their arrival in the U.S. (Place the participants into same-gender pairs or small groups if that would be most appropriate.)

Practice

1. Bring the large group together and ask for highlights from the discussion. Record these on flipchart paper in front of the room. Keep this hanging for later comparison and discussion. When working with a smaller group of participants, the facilitator may find it more effective to keep the group together and actively participate in the discussion.
2. Distribute copies of the *Dating & Marriage in the United States* handout to participants. Have participants take turns reading one sentence each aloud from the handout. After each sentence, ask participants what the sentence means and how this differs from their previous experiences in their family, home country, and country of asylum.
3. Have participants again get into their pairs or small groups to discuss romantic relationships, dating, and marriage in the United States.
4. Lead a large group discussion addressing any of the Reflection Questions (below) that did not come up in the course of the discussion previously.

Reflection Questions

- What are the legal measures in the U.S. regarding dating that are new to you? How do you feel about these legalities?
- What are your concerns about dating?
- Why is learning English important when you are considering dating?
- What would you do if you were on a date and you felt unsafe?
- Can boys and girls be friends?

Variations

- Discuss gender roles in the United States versus where participants are coming from. This could include girls wearing pants, long hair on both girls and boys (and in school as well), household chores (washing dishes, doing laundry, mowing the lawn, taking out the garbage, etc.), and jobs (“men’s” work versus “women’s” work, such as a cook in a restaurant). Address how defined roles and rules for the separate genders in the U.S. may not exist or may be fairly flexible.
- Discuss or brainstorm some things participants should keep in mind when they are trying to be safe. Some ideas include: stay in groups with friends you can trust; avoid situations where you feel unsafe; avoid people you consider or sense as troublemakers; know about places of safety in school and in the neighborhood; make it clear when you are not interested in unwanted behaviors or actions; avoid situations that may cause problems; get help from a trusted adult.
- Discuss “good touch” and “bad touch” with participants. Explain to participants that in the United States, it is very important to report “bad touch” (touch which makes the individual feel uncomfortable) to an authority figure: a foster parent, a teacher, someone at the Resettlement Agency, or another trusted adult. Stress to participants that even if the individual is an elder, this is illegal behavior in the U.S. and does not have to be tolerated.
- Participants brainstorm ways to say “no” when someone is making unwanted physical advances. See the following link for suggestions:
www.svgbc.com/svgsyoungeaders2002/BlankPage1.htm.

Dating & Marriage in the United States

In the United States many teens date. There is no specific age when this process begins; rather, it is based on maturity levels and individual family values. In the U.S. it has been a tradition that whoever asked for the date plans the date and pays for it. Traditionally, boys asked girls on dates and therefore picked up the girl at her home, met her parents, opened the car door for her and paid. However, times have changed and either the boy or the girl can ask the other for a date. These issues should be discussed prior to your date so there are not any misunderstandings. People have different expectations when it comes to dating. To ensure a positive outcome, you should discuss the specifics of the date beforehand, such as what time you will meet, how, the location, where you will be going, how you will get there, who will pay, and what time you will be home.

In the U.S. it is illegal for adults to have sexual relations with minors. The age of a minor depends on the state, but can range from 16 to 18. If you break this law, you may be sent to jail.

Another important factor that you must keep in mind when you are dating is that “no means no” and that inappropriate touching means any time the other person does not want to be touched. If a person says they do not want to go out with you or would not like to have sex with you, they mean it. You must respect them *the first time they say it* and not push them any further. If you try to force them into doing something they do not want to do, they can report you to the police, which may result in jail time.

The age for a legal marriage in the United States again depends upon on the state. In most states, if you are between the ages of 16 and 18, you must have permission from your legal guardian in order to get married, and younger than that is illegal altogether. When getting married in the U.S., there is usually no dowry or bride price involved.

Edited from the URM Program, Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota