

Relationships Today

Overview

This lesson offers three activities that serve to introduce the curriculum, set a welcoming tone, and create an interest in and a motivation for relationship education. The first icebreaker is an engaging drawing activity that asks participants to consider their own experiences with relationships. The drawing activity is fun, puts participants at ease, and works well to invite everyone to participate. The drawing activity transitions into a short discussion. It helps participants see that others experience many of the same issues and challenges they experience. Participants begin to explore why the quality of a romantic relationship matters: how it can affect every other area of a person's life—school and work, emotional and physical health, and later, one's children. In this initial session, participants begin to explore why having healthy relationships is so important. They learn that we are in a hopeful new place today, thanks to recent research findings about different patterns that harm or protect relationships.

The second activity encourages participants to begin to cultivate a vision of the kind of relationship they desire. Participants learn that a vision is important; it can serve as a guide for one's choices and behaviors.

The final *Red or Green Beads Demonstration* illustrates what *Love Notes* is about. Participants learn they can increase their relationship smarts by learning more about self and about relationships. And, by acquiring essential relationship skills, they can make decisions, take steps and engage in behaviors that put healthy relationships within their reach.

A viewing of the film *Antwone Fisher* is strongly recommended. It is a hopeful portrayal of one young man's journey of healing from trauma and of learning how to develop a healthy love relationship. This film engages youth from the start and provides a frame of reference for each theme in *Love Notes*. Time constraints may not allow for showing it in session. You'll be provided with a way to introduce it and options for youth to view it.

Goals

- Consider the challenges of relationships today.
- Explore how relationships affect many areas of life.
- Create a personal relationship vision (hopes, dreams, expectations, goals, etc.) and an understanding that this vision is like a blueprint to our future relationships—we are building winning relationships.
- Become aware that a body of research-based knowledge and skills to inform good decision-making and healthy relationship formation exists and they'll be learning it in this program.

Lesson at a Glance

- 1.1 **Relationships Today** (20 minutes)
Activity: *Relationships Today*
- 1.2 **Defining a Vision** (5 minutes)
Activity: *Vision Building*
- 1.3 **Choosing Reds or Greens?** (10 minutes)
Activity: *Red or Green Demonstration*
- 1.4 **Film Opportunity**—*Antwone Fisher* (17 minutes)
Activity: View scenes 1–3 of *Antwone Fisher*
- 1.5 **Trusted Adult Connection**



Materials Checklist

Resources:

- 1a. *What If...?* response sheet (pg. 23)
- 1b. *Brief Instructor Resource: Antwone Fisher* (pg. 24)

Found in back Appendix:

- *In-depth Film Guide for Antwone Fisher*

Materials:

- Lesson 1 PowerPoint slideshow and the duplicate masters for handouts are digital downloads that come with the curriculum. Easy-to-follow directions are found at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4. Note that key points for each slide are included in the notes section of the PowerPoint slides.
- Suggested: Film (DVD) *Antwone Fisher*. Available, at low cost (under \$10) from Amazon, Walmart, Target, etc.
- 3x5 cards for the *Trusted Adult Connection* activity.
- Blank paper
- Flip chart/board
- Colored markers (enough so everyone has a few colors)
- One small, clear, plastic glass, jar, or bowl
- Red and green craft beads (or small candy)
- Closed box marked "Love Notes," with slit in top for students to ask questions.
- Equipment to play music

Workbook Application:

- *My Relationship Vision* (pg. 1)

**Preparation**

- ✓ Prepare by reading the lesson and viewing the PowerPoint slides. In the notes section of each slide, you'll find key points to help keep you on track. Some instructors find it helpful to print these off.
- ✓ Fill a clear, plastic glass, jar, or bowl with small, red craft beads. Include a few green ones mixed in.
- ✓ Optional, but highly recommended: locate the film *Antwone Fisher*. (Purchase from Amazon for \$9.99 or rent instantly for \$3.99.) We recommend introducing the film and showing the first three scenes in the first session (8 minutes). Consult the

suggested options for how participants might view the entire film. Read the synopsis in Section 1.4 and the brief overview provided (Resource 1b, pg. 24). In the Appendix, there is a more detailed film guide and discussion resource organized around the key themes of this program. If you have time or can utilize one of the suggested options, we recommend that participants see the film early in the program so that as you go over different themes of *Love Notes* you can refer to it informally.

- ✓ An important element of this curriculum is the *Trusted Adult Connection* (TAC) activity found at the end of every lesson. Every young person needs a trusted adult, a go-to person to talk to about life. Be sure that each participant can identify someone; if they do not have someone, it is important to help them find someone with whom to share and discuss what they are learning in this program (possibly colleagues in your program or school). Instructions for introducing the TAC are at the end of the lesson, after the section on *Antwone Fisher*. Be sure to introduce the *Trusted Adult Connection*, even if you do not use the film.
- ✓ Select some music to play at the start and finish of each session and during activities where indicated. Music creates a comfortable setting. It is also a central element of many young people's lives and a way for leaders to connect with them. Look for popular music on the subject of relationships, but do not worry about whether it is current or hip. As the program gets going, the leader can ask participants to bring in songs that relate to the topics of discussion.

SECTION 1.1

Relationships Today

- Blank 8 1/2 x 11 paper
- Plenty of colored markers
- Music

20 minutes

In this section, participants will be asked to reflect upon a prompt and then draw a picture to represent their experiences, thoughts, or feelings. Participants will then be asked to share and interpret their drawings. The instructor will use the participants' drawings and commentaries to introduce the program and engage in a discussion of how and why healthy relationships matter to our lives. Have music playing upon entry. (PP)



Activity: Relationships Today

After the welcome, introductions, and ground rules discussion, announce that this program is about relationships and relationship decision making. Suggested script:

- ❖ *We are starting a program about relationships and relationship decision-making. And a good place to start is with your thoughts and your experiences about relationships. But rather than asking you to write or talk, I am going to ask you to draw.*

Pass out blank paper and colored markers, and ask the group to reflect for a moment on this prompt that should be written on the board or flip chart: (PP)

Relationships today are like...

- ❖ *Reflect upon your own experiences and those of friends and family around you. What is your first reaction — negative or positive — to what relationships are like today? What has been your*

Finish this thought with a drawing...

*Relationships today
are like...*

experience? Or, simply, what is your personal take on the state of relationships (or marriages) today? There is no right or wrong response here. It's your opinion that counts here!

- ❖ What are your frustrations with relationships? Or, what are your hopes and dreams? Think about a symbol, image, or picture that captures your thoughts. You can insert words. I am not looking for great art—just simple symbols, stick figures, or images to capture your thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences. Have fun and don't worry about the artwork.

Be sure to offer an example before they start drawing. There are three on the slides.

- ❖ Before you start drawing, let me give you a couple of examples of what people have drawn in the past. **(PP)**

(PP) Play music while they are drawing. Allow four to five minutes. Then ask for some volunteers, one by one, to hold up their drawing and explain. Validate each one's drawing and thoughts.



Discussion: Relationships Today

When they are done interpreting their drawings, make the following points to engage discussion: **(PP)**

- ❖ Your drawings reveal what many people experience today. Relationships can be complicated.
- ❖ Let's brainstorm. What makes it hard to maintain a good relationship? **(Leader's Note:** No need to comment or discuss at this point. Just listen to their responses, then continue.)
- ❖ Poll: Let's do a quick poll. How many want to be married or find a life partner someday? Not now, but someday. (Raise hands.) How many want to have children someday? (Raise hands.)

Relationships can be complicated

What makes it more challenging to have a good relationship today?

- ❖ *Do you want to see how you compare to large national surveys of young people?*
- ❖ **(PP, advance)** *In a recent survey of 20- to 24-year-olds, a majority (83%) said it was important to be married some day.¹*
- ❖ **(Advance slide.)** *It's also interesting that most young, unmarried parents are romantically involved at the time of the birth of their child, and the majority of them say the chances are pretty good they will stay together.²*

Most Have Not Given Up On Love

- In a recent survey 83% of 20-24 year olds said it was important to be married/find a life partner some dayDo you agree?
- Most young parents are romantically involved at time of birth and say the chances are pretty good they'll stay togetherBut do they?
- Many young fathers want to step up, but most of the relationships fall apart and fathers are then out of the picture for the most part.....Why is that, do you think?

- *What do you think? Do most stay together? (Listen to responses.)*
- *Well, here are the facts: Many young fathers truly do want to step up, stay with the mother, and be a good father to their child.*
- **(Advance slide.)** *But, what happens after the child is born is often a different story. Young parents may have desires and good intentions, but by the first, second or third year, most of the relationships have fallen apart, and fathers have drifted out of the picture.*
- *Why do you think that happens? (Listen to responses.)*

Point out that many in the group may never have had a romantic relationship yet. Some may have in the past, some may currently be in a serious relationship, and some may be parents. State that wherever they are regarding romantic relationships, each person can use the knowledge and skills taught in this program to have healthy relationships.

Begin the transition to the research findings.

- ❖ **(PP)** *The good news today is that findings from years of relationship research has told us much about what goes right and what goes wrong in relationships.³*
- ❖ *There are clear patterns of behaviors than can protect relationships and clear patterns of behaviors that can harm them.*

The Good News from Research

- There are clear patterns that protect relationships and clear patterns that harm relationships.
You'll have a chance to learn these important relationship skills and apply them to your life.

- ❖ *In this program, you'll learn how to recognize those patterns, and you will learn skills to reduce the negative patterns, thus increasing your chances of a healthy, happy relationship.*
- ❖ *And if you are a parent, these skills are essential to help strengthen your relationship. Even if a couple is not together, these skills are critical for co-parenting.*
- ❖ *Finally, research has discovered much about how to choose partners wisely, what to find out about someone, and how to be smart about handling attractions and developing relationships.*

Brainstorm: Unhealthy Relationships

Put up **PowerPoint** and ask each question, allowing for responses.

- ❖ *Can you think of people you know in unhealthy relationships? How have you seen it affect them?*
- ❖ *What happens when people go through rough times in a relationship? How does it affect your emotional state? Your physical health? Your school, work, or your child, if you have one?*
- ❖ *It's especially important to consider how unhealthy relationships affect children.*

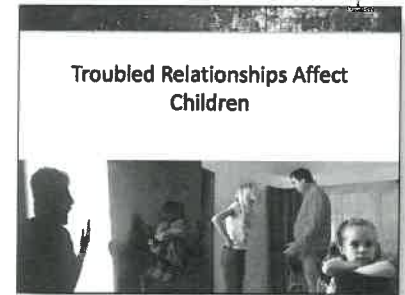
How have you seen unhealthy relationships affect people?



Parents' Relationship(s) and Children

Put up PowerPoint:

- ❖ *There is plenty of research on children who grow up with parents in troubled relationships. This includes children in homes where:*
 - *Parents fight a lot.*
 - *Arguments get physical.*
 - *Parents' relationships fall apart and are unstable; they break up, find new partners, and then maybe break up again.*
- ❖ *Those children are more likely to have difficulties in school, emotional and behavioral problems, troubled relationships themselves, and get into trouble with the law.⁵*
- ❖ *Most parents love their children and try to do their best with what they have, but being in an unhealthy relationship makes it harder to parent because of all the stresses and strains the relationship causes.*
- ❖ *If you grew up in a home where the parent/adult relationships were unhealthy or abusive, you probably remember how bad it felt.*
- ❖ *The good news is that we have skills today that are easy to learn that can keep relationships safe and healthy. You'll be learning these.*



SECTION 1.2

Defining a Vision

- Music
- Workbook: *My Relationship Vision* (pg. 1)

5 minutes

Activity: Vision Building

Introduce with the following script: (PP)

- ❖ *It's important for everyone to have a vision, a North Star of sorts, in one's mind about the kind of relationship you ultimately want to have.*
- ❖ *Right now I want you to close your eyes and imagine yourself several years from now. Assume that you've finished school, have a job, a place you call home, and if you have a child, imagine that your child is doing well.*
- ❖ *Now, imagine your love life. If you could have it exactly the way you want it to be, what would it be like? What is your partner like? What are you like together? What are you like as a family if you have children?*



Ask participants to open up their workbook to *My Relationship Vision* (pg. 1). Ask them to write down several short statements describing their vision. The instructor should read a couple of examples: *"I have someone who's gonna be there for me."* *"There're no lies and we don't cheat on each other."* *"She's my rock—encourages and supports me."* *"Chill with each other—we have fun together."* *"We can really talk and listen to each other."* *"We take care of our child together."* State that everything they write in their workbook is private and that you will not be reading it.

Play soft music while they are writing. Have volunteers share a couple of lines if they feel comfortable and time allows. Conclude with this point: (PP)

Everyone needs a vision of what they desire

It can guide your choices and actions.



- ❖ *Everyone needs a vision of what they want.*
- ❖ *Your vision can guide your choices and actions, and it can motivate you to get from where you are to where you want to be in the future.*

SECTION 1.3

Choosing Reds or Greens?

- 1 small, clear, plastic glass or jar
- Red and green craft beads

10 minutes

This demonstration is used to explain what the *Love Notes* program is all about. Have one small, clear, plastic glass or jar filled mostly with red beads, with a few green mixed in.⁴

Activity: Red or Green Demonstration⁷

Hold up the glass or jar and announce: **(PP)**

- ❖ *I am going to demonstrate what Love Notes is all about.*
- ❖ *Pick out a red bead and say: Imagine that this red one represents a poor relationship choice for you. If you picked a red one, it would mean you got involved with the wrong person — maybe someone with many problems or simply someone who is just not right for you, someone you just can't be yourself with, or someone unwilling to work on things. Or, worse, maybe it would be someone who could hurt you or a child you might have.*

Choosing Reds or Greens?



- ❖ (Holding up a green bead.) *If you chose a green one, it would be a good person for you. Not a perfect person, because nobody is perfect, but someone with whom you were compatible, enjoy, and someone with whom you feel safe and can be yourself.*
- ❖ *Now, if you could pick, which bead would you pick? Pause for response. Of course, a green bead.*
- ❖ *Let's say that this container represents all your future relationships. Hold up. How could you pick out a green? And what if you were blindfolded?*

Invite one participant to close his or her eyes and to pick one. After he or she pulls out a bead (most likely red) ask:

- ❖ *What could you do to increase your odds of choosing green?*
- ❖ *Yes, take off the blindfold and open your eyes and **decide** not to choose a red one. Gaining knowledge opens your eyes.*
 - *And, you could ask for help from people who can see (trusted adults, for example).*
 - *You could take your time, checking things out until you know more about someone. That would help you better determine if a person was red or green.*
 - *You could also decide not to go with a red. And you could, by your choices, add more greens to your glass to increase your odds. You can choose to seek out healthier friends and partners.*
 - *And, if you feel **you** are a red bead, you can decide to work on your issues—develop more green qualities in yourself—to put yourself on a good track for healthy relationships.*

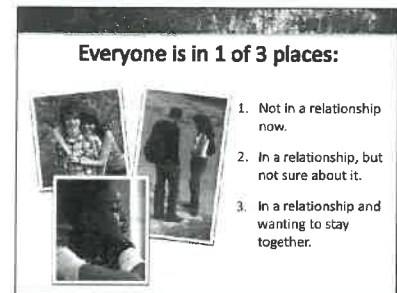
Note: If they happen to pull a green from the mostly reds, point out that sometimes we all get lucky, but at their age they are likely to have many relationships, and they can't rely on luck every time. Conclude with these words:

- ❖ *This exercise is exactly what this program is all about. It will equip you with knowledge to help you make relationship decisions and skills to achieve what you want.*

- ❖ Love Notes *will give you the tools to take off the relationship blindfolds.*
- ❖ *It will help you understand the basics of all kinds of relationships so you can have stronger friendships and connections with trusted adults/family who can help you see yourself and your future better.*

(PP) State that everyone is in one of three places:

1. ***Not in a relationship.*** *What can you do to make wise relationship decisions in the future and increase the odds of choosing a “green” partner?*
2. ***In a relationship, but not sure about the future.*** *What needs to happen, change, or improve for this relationship to continue? How can you evaluate to really know if it’s worth it? And, if not, how can you end it safely?*
3. ***In a relationship and wanting a future together.*** *What knowledge and skills do you need to keep your relationship healthy? And if you’re a parent, what skills do you both need to have a real chance at a successful future together for yourselves and for your child?*

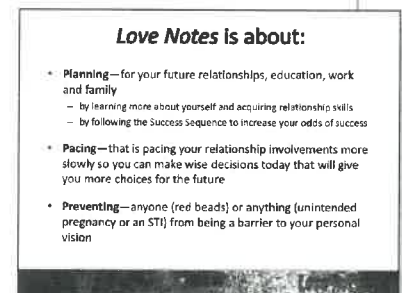


Point out that this program is meant to increase one’s love smarts no matter what one’s relationship status is. (PP)

- ❖ *You won’t leave here with all the answers, but you will leave this program equipped with some skills in how to build better relationships and make smart sexual choices.*
- ❖ *This program is an opportunity to think about what you want for yourself and your future. You need to have a **vision** of what you want in life, a **plan** for how to get it, and an understanding of the impact that your relationship and sexual choices have on those plans.*

(PP) Love Notes *is about:*

- ❖ ***Planning*** *for your future relationships, education, work, and family.*
 - *By learning about yourself and acquiring relationship skills.*



- *By making clear relationship and sexual choices that will help you avoid risks.*
- *By learning the Success Sequence so you can follow your plan.⁵*
- ❖ **Pacing.** *That is, pacing your relationship involvements more slowly.*
 - *So you can make wise decisions today—especially wise sexual decisions—that will give you more choices for your future.*
- ❖ **Preventing** *anyone (red beads) or anything (unplanned pregnancy or an STI) from being barriers to your personal vision and plan.*

A final word of advice:

- ❖ *We are going to be together for a number of sessions. You'll be learning a lot that can help you examine relationships and make decisions.*
- ❖ *Don't immediately run off after a session and use what you are learning to criticize a family member, partner, or friend.*
- ❖ *Be patient. Let this time be for you to learn about healthy relationships, to practice some really helpful relationship skills, and to work through your workbook to make important decisions.*
- ❖ *Later you'll be learning communication skills for how to bring up issues more effectively.*

A Young Mom's Experience

Conclude this section by reading aloud *Jessie's Frustrations*. Introduce it by saying you want to read something written by a young mother who got involved too quickly. She describes how she and especially her child have been affected. When finished, use the special note for parents. (PP)

Jessie's Frustrations



Jessie's Frustrations

*Basically, if your ex doesn't like your new boy/girlfriend, he or she can become quite an annoyance—be it through unnecessary phone calls, unsolicited visits, telling the child untruths to get them to dislike your new boy/girlfriend, even taking you to court out of spite. They can do all of these things and you can do little to stop them, because they are in your life through the child. I have a loser for an ex. He took me to court and called so much I had to change my number and get a court order for him not to be able to call. He then showed up places that I was going to be so he could harass me. He told my daughter all sorts of lies. And you know what? As much as I would **love** for him to just leave me alone, I get to see him every other weekend as I drop my daughter off so he can spend the weekend trying to turn her against me. And guess what—there is almost nothing I can do about it. My own brother was one of these nightmare ex-boyfriends to the mother of his child. He physically assaulted more than four of her boyfriends (causing them to break up with her) and continues to harass her. They have been apart for ten years and she sees no end to the torment.*

*What can she do? Unless he actually physically assaults her or their daughter, she can do nothing. He continues to come around despite restraining orders. Our situation is common. Some young parents worry that their partner will leave, but others have the exact opposite fear—that he **won't** leave. But, what I worry about most is that my daughter sees all these things and gets confused and scared. I wish she weren't being dragged through this situation. My unstable love life has affected her. I got involved way too fast with him—before I really knew what he was like.*

Make these important points:

- 1) *This story shows how one's love life is not neutral. How one goes about their love life has far-reaching consequences—for better or for worse. She got involved with a red bead through and through. And while this story is from a mother's experience, there are fathers with equally frustrating experiences of getting involved too quickly with a red bead.*
- 2) *This program is about increasing your love smarts, whatever one's gender and whatever one's sexual orientation.*

Special Note: For pregnant or parenting youth, it is especially important to stress the usefulness of healthy relationship skill education. It matters to the child and to the parents, whether they stay together or are apart.

- ❖ *Multiple relationship transitions—going from one poor relationship to another—can truly jeopardize a child's wellbeing and place them at risk for problems.⁶*
- ❖ *Parents need tools to be able to assess their relationship: Is it healthy? Are there danger signs? Should it end? Or, what needs to change or improve to move toward a future together?*
- ❖ *Some relationships end. Parents can strengthen their ability to choose a partner more wisely next time. And, they can acquire skills to be able to build a healthy relationship from the start.*
- ❖ *All parents need good communication and conflict management skills to co-parent whether they are together or apart. And, those skills help maintain a healthy relationship.*
- ❖ *Making smart relationship decisions and learning smart relationship skills is important for parent and children alike.*

SECTION 1.4

Film Opportunity

- Film *Antwone Fisher*
- Resource 1a: *What If...?* (pg. 23)
- Resource 1b: *Brief Instructor Resource: Antwone Fisher* (pg. 24)
- Appendix: *In-depth Film Guide for Antwone Fisher*

17 minutes

The film, *Antwone Fisher*, is employed to engage participants and hook their interest in the *Love Notes* program. Importantly, it is an inspiring media resource for addressing trauma and healing and it represents every concept within *Love Notes*. Read the synopsis below, as well as the *Brief Instructor Resource: Antwone Fisher* (Resource 1b, pg. 24), and then continue to the instructions for getting started. You may consult the *In-depth Film Guide for Antwone Fisher* in the appendix. Experience has shown that this film is a powerful way to hook participants into the program (although we acknowledge that time constraints may not allow it). Below, you'll find how to introduce the film, show the first 8 minutes, and then several options for how youth can see the rest of it. If you can find a creative way for your youth to view it, it will be well worth it.

Film Synopsis for the Instructor:

This film, which is based on a true story, stars Denzel Washington as Navy enlistee Antwone Fisher's psychologist. It is an inspiring portrayal of the healthy relationship concepts of *Love Notes*. Antwone Fisher was born in prison to a troubled mother. His father was killed two months before his birth by an ex-girlfriend. He was placed in an orphanage and then a foster home. In his foster home, Antwone experienced cruel emotional, physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Antwone's abandonment and abuse created a rage and anger within him that translated into serious violence problems. After being kicked out of his abusive foster home, he was homeless and on the streets and realized his only option was to join the military.

Viewers readily see how one's growing-up experiences can impact behaviors and attitudes, thus setting a person up for challenges in life. But this film portrays Antwone's road to healing. It is a hopeful film that shows one can change his or her path with awareness, support, courage to face the past, and willingness to learn new skills and ways.

Along the way Antwone falls in love with Cheryl, another Navy enlistee. Their developing relationship illustrates many of *Love Notes*' themes: knowing yourself and taking your own growth and development seriously, handling attractions, building blocks and ingredients of positive relationships, the seven principles of smart relationships, a realistic concept of love, the components of true intimacy, safe and healthy relationships, sexual choices and planning, and the benefits of a low-risk deciding, not sliding, approach to relationships. It also addresses the importance of communication and conflict management skills. Most important, it underscores the importance of following a success sequence—education, employment, and marriage (if one so chooses) before having a child. It underscores how children are affected when parents slide into poor relationships and sexual choices, and when parents *slide* rather than *decide* to address serious personal issues.

Activity: Antwone Fisher

Introduce the film with this script before playing Scenes 1–3 (eight minutes): **(PP)**

- ❖ *How many of you have seen the film Antwone Fisher? This film relates to many of the themes we'll be dealing with in Love Notes. It's based on a true story. Right now I am going to play the opening scenes for you.*
- ❖ *The film begins with Antwone's recurring dream.*

When scenes 1–3 are finished continue with these points:

- ❖ *After Antwone walked from the field and went into the barn, he found a large table set with food and a loving family all around. He dreams and desires what most children want, namely the love and protection of a healthy family.*
 - *But as you saw, he wakes up from his dream in a cold sweat. His life is very different.*
 - *Antwone grew up abandoned and abused. It created a rage and anger within him that translated into problems with violence. This film portrays Antwone's journey into*

Antwone Fisher—What if he...



- had not dealt with his past?
 - had not developed skills to deal with his anger?
 - had not taken it slow with Cheryl?
- How would Antwone's life have turned out?

adulthood—his challenges, his pain, and his triumphs. He also falls in love along the way. We'll see how his life unfolds.

Viewing Options

Listed below are several suggested viewing options given time and other constraints:

1. Place the DVD on reserve in the resource center of your program or school.
2. Request they view it at home (accessed via internet, Netflix or streamed through Amazon). The *What If...?* assignment (Resource 1a, pg. 23) can be turned in for bonus points or a grade.
3. Set up a mini-retreat or extra session with popcorn. Consider lunchtime, after the program or during school. The film can easily be viewed in two or three parts.
4. Show the two additional segments identified below in the next sessions.

Here are recommendations for a couple of segments to show in session if other options do not fit or work for you and time allows it.

Scenes 4–9: *Length 18 minutes.* Deals with his past and how it affects his behavior today. (Emphasizes *Love Notes'* themes of knowing yourself, examining your baggage, and how parents' unaddressed problems, destructive and unstable relationships, along with unplanned pregnancy, play out for a child.)

Scenes 12–18: *Length 19.30 minutes.* Deals with his budding romance with Cheryl. Scenes 23–25 complete it. Practically every concept of healthy relationship development, including the all-important concepts of deciding, not sliding, pacing and timing, and the success sequence are represented in their relationship.

Note: It is likely that after seeing the opening three scenes on the first day or after seeing scenes 4–9, they will want to figure out a way to see the rest on their own. If they view the rest on their own, you can offer the extra credit worksheet.

Pass out the *What If...?* response sheet (Resource 1a, pg. 23). To complete, they are simply to reflect on the questions and jot down an informal response on the sheet.

Note: In the appendix there is the *In-depth Film Guide for Antwone Fisher* that relates to each theme and points to corresponding lessons. Instructors should **not** feel that they have to spend time discussing the film in each lesson. It's just provided to help you now and then make references and connections with concepts in the program.

SECTION 1.5

Trusted Adult Connection

- 3x5 index cards

An important part of this program is providing conversation starters to nurture support and connection between each young person participating in this program and their parent and/or a trusted adult. *Trusted Adult Connection* (TAC) activities will be provided for each lesson. They convey all the core concepts, provide talking points, and use an easy activity to engage conversation. In a school setting, credit can be given for completion. In a community-based program, perhaps some small bonus for completion.

To introduce this element of the program, point out the following:

- ❖ *Everyone needs a go-to person. There is much to handle in life and many decisions to make to put, and keep, you on the path towards reaching your goals.*
- ❖ *In the film, Antwone found a go-to person in the form of his Navy psychologist, played by Denzel Washington. It's not that people need a psychologist; that's not the point. But everyone does need at least one caring and trusted person in his or her life to bounce ideas off, for support, for comfort, for direction, or for wisdom.*
- ❖ *In this program you will be asked periodically to share a concept or idea from the program with a parent or trusted adult you've identified. We'll call these "Trusted Adult Connection Activities." Do not worry if you have trouble identifying someone. We will help you find someone.*

(PP) Give each student a 3x5 card and ask them to write their name on it. Ask everyone to try to identify a trusted adult they might consider for the connection activities. It can be a parent or other adult family member or relative, a teacher, neighbor, friend's parent, group leader, coach, or mentor. If they can identify someone, they should write down the name. If they cannot identify a person, ask them to write, "I cannot identify someone right now." **Special note:** This step is to help the instructor know if there are participants who may not have a go-to person.

Offer to help him or her find a person to connect with, at least for the duration of this program, so they can discuss the issues and concepts raised in the *Trusted Adult Connection* activity sections. Recruit colleagues at the school or in the program. Experience has shown the "trusted adult" enjoys this as much as the youth benefit from extending these conversations outside the session.

Trusted Adult Connection activities are at the end of the lessons. Ask participants to obtain the signature and date after doing the connection, so you can check they've completed it. Offer credit (school setting) or some small bonus for completing them.

Trusted Adult Connection Activities

- Everyone needs a go-to person
- 3x5 cards:
 - a) identify a person _____
 - or
 - b) I cannot identify someone right now _____

Notes

- ¹ Child Trends Research Brief, (July 2009), "Young Adult Attitudes about Relationships and Marriage: Times May Have Changed But Expectations Remain High," Scott, M., Schelar, E., Manlove, J., Ciu, C.
 - ² Fragile Family Research Briefs: "Parents' Relationship Status Five Years after a Nonmarital Birth," No. 39, June 2007. See fragilefamilies.princeton.edu/publications.asp. *Child Trends Data Bank* October 2016, "Births to Unmarried Women: Indicators of Child and Youth Wellbeing."
- Major researchers include Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, University of Denver, Center for Marital and Family Studies and John Gottman, University of Washington, The Gottman Institute.
- ³ Wathen, Nadine C. & MacMillan, Harriet L., "Children's exposure to intimate partner violence: Impacts and interventions." *Pediatrics Child Health*, October 2013. 18(8).
 - ⁴ This demonstration is credited to Natalie Jenkins, co-author and president of PREP Inc. Adapted with permission from *Within My Reach*, PREP for Individuals.
 - ⁵ Sawhill, Isabel V. (2014) *Generation Unbound*. Brookings Institution Press; Wang, Wendy & Wilcox, W. Bradford, June 2017. "The millennial success sequence: Marriage, kids, and the 'success sequence' among young adults." Institute for Family Studies.
 - ⁶ Carlson, Marcia C. & Meyer, Daniel R. eds. "Family Complexity, Poverty, and Public Policy." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Volume 654, July 2014. See also Fragile Family Research Briefs: "Parents' Relationship Status Five Years after a Nonmarital Birth," No. 39, June 2007; "Union Formation and Dissolution; Child Trends March 2005, Facts at a Glance, publication #2005-02.

What If...?

Antwone had some serious baggage from the past. It influenced his present life, especially seen with his anger and aggression. As you are viewing the film, reflect on the questions below and then afterwards jot down your responses:

- What if Antwone had not gained an understanding about his past?
- What if Antwone hadn't had someone wise to talk to about his relationship with Cheryl? If he had not taken it slowly with Cheryl?
- How do you think his life would have turned out? Make a prediction.

Brief Instructor Resource: *Antwone Fisher*

The film presents three important themes:

- **The first theme is the importance of self-awareness and self-development.** It is useful to examine one's growing-up experience and to consider how it impacts one's current life. From that kind of examination, one can identify what has helped, what has hurt, and what needs to change in order to move toward one's goals. Sometimes it involves healing past hurts. In this film, Antwone Fisher courageously confronts his painful past and begins the process of healing and dealing with his anger and aggression. The help of the U.S. Navy psychologist, played by Denzel Washington, is pivotal in this process. The film is inspirational because it shows that with awareness, skills, and a conscious effort, one can change his or her path.
- **The second theme is the impact of parents' troubled relationship on children.** This film vividly shows how it can tragically affect children when parents slide into poor relationship choices and have numerous problem behaviors they haven't addressed. In this case, Antwone is taken away and put into foster care. His biological parents, it is alluded to, have had substance abuse issues and were involved in the criminal justice system. While most foster families provide a loving and safe haven, that is not always the case. Antwone felt abandoned, rejected, and faced a childhood of abuse at the hands of his foster family.
- **The third theme involves Antwone's relationship with Cheryl.** It illustrates how to build a positive and healthy relationship and reinforces the core concepts of this curriculum. For example, healthy romantic relationships often develop slowly. Antwone and Cheryl enjoy the excitement of their infatuation. They take time to get to know each other, spending time talking and doing fun things. They take pleasure in their gentle affection—but pace their physical intimacy slowly while learning about each other and their pasts. They build trust and a genuine friendship while they practice good communication skills. Finally, Antwone's loyalty to Cheryl presents an excellent example of trust, faithfulness, and commitment in action.

Note: An *In-depth Film Guide for Antwone Fisher* examining scenes relating to all of the concepts in *Love Notes* is found in the Appendix.