

Unit 2

Understanding Self

Objectives

1. Assess the difference between heredity and environment.
2. Complete personal assessments. (Assignment Sheet 1)
3. Select characteristics of a positive self-concept.
4. Match tasks of emotional development to their descriptions. (Assignment Sheet 2)
5. Explain benefits of friendship development.
6. Analyze friendship traits in yourself and others. (Assignment Sheet 3)
7. Identify purposes of dating.
8. Describe guidelines for dating behavior.
9. Select dating concerns.
10. Assess qualities desired in a date. (Assignment Sheet 4)
11. Identify sources and symptoms of stress.
12. Analyze ways to respond to stress.
13. Evaluate responses to stressful situations. (Assignment Sheet 5)
14. Identify signs of depression.
15. Examine factors linked to teenage suicide.
16. Identify suicide warning signs.



Unit 2 — Understanding Self

Key Terms

chromosome: genetic structure which carries hereditary characteristics

clique: exclusive group made up of members who share similar attitudes, interests, and goals

depression: a state of sadness and emotional withdrawal that is not limited to a reaction to one particular event

dominant gene: the strongest gene in a pair of genes; noticeable effects result in the offspring

empathy: the ability to share someone's feelings

environment: surroundings; external conditions, circumstances, and things that affect an individual

gene: basic unit of heredity

heredity: the sum of traits that are passed from parents to their children

manners: polite behavior based on thoughtfulness, common sense, and courtesy

potential: that which is possible

recessive gene: the gene, in a pair of genes, whose effects are not apparent unless paired with another gene of the same type

self-concept: how a person defines herself or himself

self-esteem: how a person values himself or herself

self-image: how a person envisions herself or himself; sometimes used interchangeably with self-concept

stress: mental or physical tension caused by pressure of situations and/or change

Surviving and Thriving

Everyone has a distinct personality. Each of us is unique, a blend of heredity and environment unlike that of any other person. Understanding who you are and realizing what you're capable of becoming will help you make the big decisions adolescents must make as they face adulthood.

Who Are You—Really?

Objective 2.1

Because of family heritage, you have unique characteristics that make you “who you are.” Some inherited characteristics are visible and some are invisible. Physical traits such as bone structure, hair texture, musical ability, and certain diseases can all be traced to **heredity**. The following provides a simplified description of the way human characteristics develop.

Nature vs. Nurture

The phrase “nature vs. nurture” describes a centuries old debate as to whether humans develop and behave according to inherited traits or because they are taught or influenced to do so. Certain traits such as eye color are inherited, and thus encoded in your DNA. Scientists have long understood that children can inherit their father's big nose or their mother's curly hair. However, the **Nature Theory** states that other characteristics, such as intelligence, habits, aggressive tendencies, and personality, are also encoded in each human cell. **Nurture theorists** believe that your upbringing and **environment** shape your behavioral aspects, and genetic tendencies don't really matter.

Scientific research conducted over the last several decades has shown that those on both sides of the argument are partly right. Most characteristics are the result

of interaction between hereditary and environmental factors. Everything and everyone within your environment can affect personality development. The environment affects how hereditary factors develop, and the environment cannot make you develop beyond your inherited **potential**.



Nature—or genetics—gives people certain abilities and traits at birth. We know that these traits are nurtured or impacted by the environment in which people live, learn, and mature. But we still have a lot to learn about human genetics and how much of our identity can be attributed to DNA or to our life experiences. Thus, the nature vs. nurture argument has never really been won.

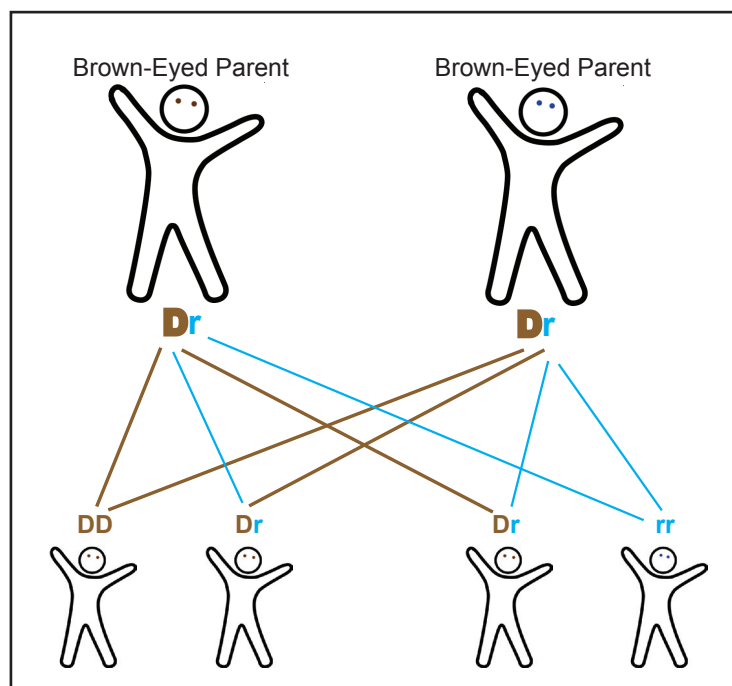
Unit 2 — Understanding Self

How Inheritance Works

Each individual receives two **genes** for every inherited characteristic—one from the mother and one from the father. Genes carry all the characteristics that are passed from both parents and their ancestors to their offspring. But the interaction between the genes from the female and male is not always 50/50. Some genes are **dominant** and some genes are **recessive**.



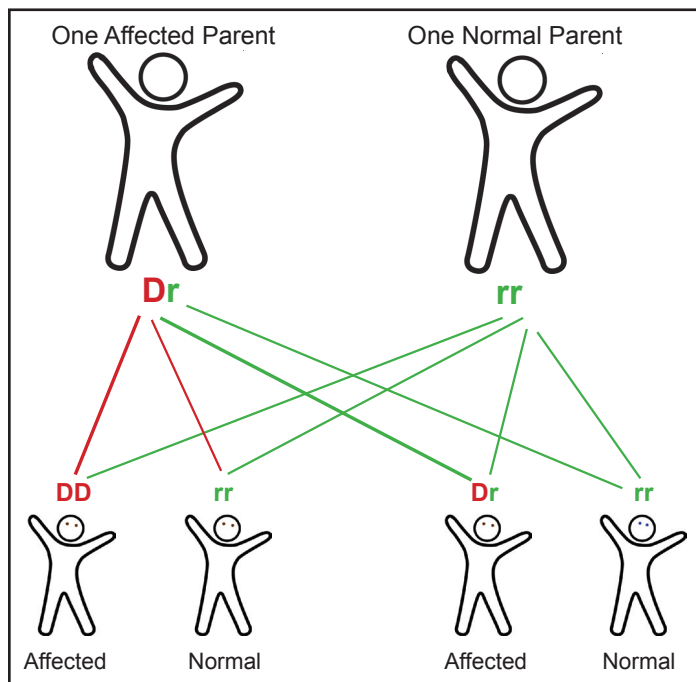
Usually, people are unaware of which recessive genes they carry until they have a child with an apparent genetic inheritance. For example, a person with brown eyes may carry a recessive gene for blue eyes. If this is true of both parents, each of their children has one chance in four of having blue eyes. For use in this example, D = Brown-eyed gene (dominant) and r = Blue-eyed gene (recessive).



A string of hundreds of genes makes a **chromosome**. A normal, healthy body cell has 46 chromosomes, or 23 pairs of chromosomes. For any particular trait, parents can carry dominant genes, recessive genes, or both types. A dominant gene (D), is stronger than its weaker, recessive counterpart (r). If both parents carry the same dominant and recessive genes, each of their children has a one-in-four chance of having the recessive characteristic. A person who has a particular gene as a part of his or her genetic makeup is called a **carrier** of that gene.

Surviving and Thriving

Huntington's disease, a brain disorder, occurs when a child inherits a mutated gene from an affected parent who carries a single faulty gene (D), which dominates its normal counterpart. A child's chances of inheriting either the dominant faulty gene (D) or the normal recessive gene (r) from the affected parent are 50 percent.



Scientific studies have shown that addictions such as alcoholism and gambling are at least in part genetic and not just the result of upbringing or environment. But we do not currently *know how* much genetics has to do with it. For example, children of alcoholic parents are four times more likely to become alcoholics than the children of nondrinkers, but environmental factors could be influencing these cases. However, just because a person is genetically predisposed to alcoholism does not mean they will inevitably become an alcoholic. Teenagers at risk should be aware of their predisposition and should take steps toward early prevention.

Facts About Human Genes

- The structure of DNA was discovered in 1953.
- If you unraveled all the chromosomes from all of your cells and placed the DNA end to end, the strands would stretch from the Earth to the moon about 6,000 times.
- We have 30,000 to 40,000 genes, each with coding for important functions.
- Finding every gene in the human body is like finding details on every person in every country of the world.
- We still don't know the function of more than 80 percent of our DNA.

Source: Mount Sinai Hospital, Joseph and Wolf Lebovic Health Complex

Unit 2 — Understanding Self



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

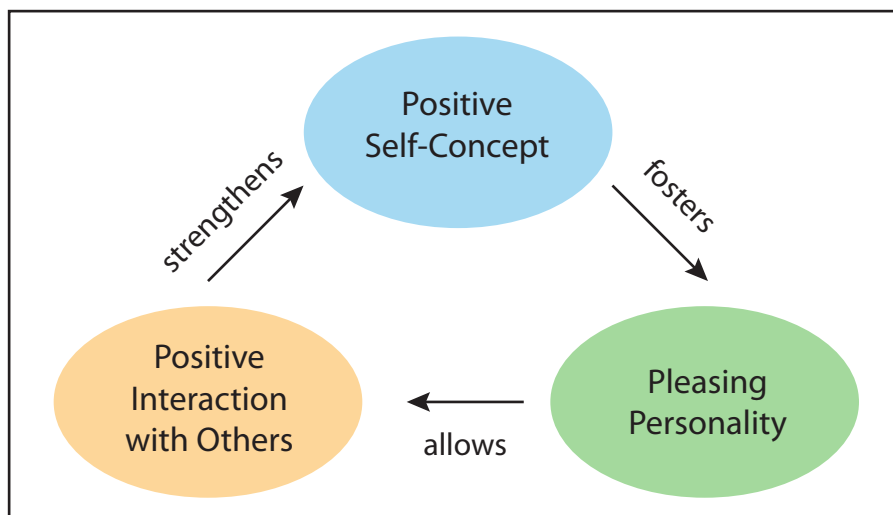
1. What do nurture theorists believe?
2. What is the overall premise of nature theory?
3. How is it possible for two brown-eyed parents to have a blue-eyed child?

Children first begin to develop a positive self-concept through their interactions with their parents, siblings, teachers, friends, and others with whom they regularly interact. If we receive positive messages, we will develop a positive self-image and have high self-esteem. If others focus on our weaknesses, we may grow up with a negative self-concept. A negative self-concept can be erased by encouragement and praise. The potential for developing a positive self-concept always exists, and a poor self-concept can be changed. The more positive our self-concept, the happier we will be and the result will be more positive interaction with others.

Characteristics of a Positive Self-Concept

Objective 2.3

Self-concept has to do with the way we think about or evaluate ourselves. Things other people say or do to us, along with their opinions and judgments of us, influence our self-concept. Our perceptions of the ways in which we are similar to or different from others also shape our self-concept. A positive self-concept affects our overall wellness, and it influences the way we view our body, interact with others, and make decisions.



Surviving and Thriving

Ways to help instill a positive self-concept in others include:

- Offering positive feedback for a task well done
- Treating everyone with respect
- Identifying and recognizing strengths
- Listening to others
- Setting a good example
- Fostering effective time management skills
- Offering constructive criticism with a positive encouragement

A person with a positive self-concept:

- Is confident of personal possibilities and potentials
- Has high self-esteem
- Recognizes and accepts individual strengths **and** weaknesses
- Explores options in order to make wise decisions
- Is assertive enough to stand up for personal beliefs
- Avoids destructive health habits
- Compliments and supports others
- Asks for help when needed



“I’m too fat.” “My feet are too big.” “I’d be happier if I were taller, had curly hair, a smaller nose, bigger muscles, and longer legs.”

Do any of these statements sound familiar? Self-image changes as a person’s body grows and makes the transition from adolescence into adulthood. Because of this, teenagers sometimes develop a low self-esteem. Some people may begin to think they need to change the way they look in order to feel better about themselves. But what’s actually needed is an adjustment in a person’s self-concept.

If you start having negative thoughts about your appearance, tell yourself to stop. Even those who appear to be perfect have physical flaws they can’t change and need to accept. Work to improve the way you feel about yourself by focusing on your best features. You may want to speak to a counselor if you have trouble stopping your negative thoughts.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. Name three ways to help instill a positive self-concept in others.
2. Explain how having a positive self-concept affects you.

Unit 2 — Understanding Self

You've Got to Have Friends

Objective 2.5



Being able to make friends is a vital part of social and emotional development. Friends are people we can confide in, trust, and pursue common interests with. Friends affect our personal growth by providing an opportunity to learn about social relationships and a means to foster a positive self-image. Friendship development is a skill that can be used throughout a lifetime.

As the old saying goes, “Friendship isn’t a big thing—it’s a million little things.” Benefits of developing close and lasting friendships include:

- **Social skills** — You learn how to get along with others, act in various roles, practice good **manners**, and respect differences among different people through the process of establishing friendships.
- **Emotional support** — True friends provide support by having mutual understanding, genuine interest, respect, **empathy**, trust, and good communications between each other.
- **Understanding of self** — Friends serve as a sounding board to test your self-identity.
- **Group interaction** — Many adolescents join groups to find friends who share common interests, attitudes, and goals. When groups are open, the members’ opportunity to grow expands. When the group becomes a **clique** and excludes new members, opportunity to grow is limited.
- **Comfort with the opposite sex** — Interacting with friends of the opposite sex helps you feel more comfortable and secure around them in romantic relationships.

International Friendship Day

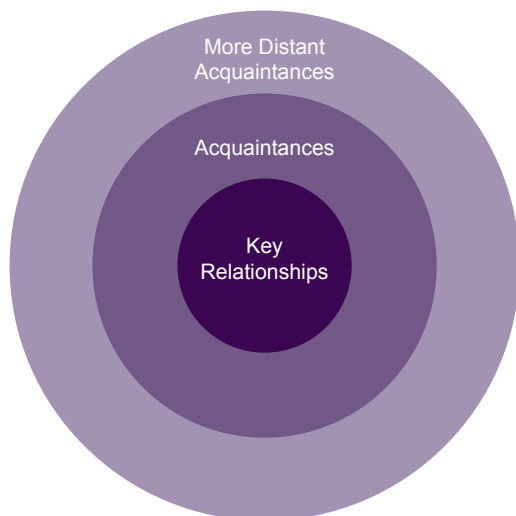
Several nations around the world recognize the first Sunday in August as International Friendship Day—a time to recognize close friends and the positive way they impact our lives. Although this holiday originally began in the 1920s in the U.S., interest in celebrating Friendship Day in this country dwindled, largely because many considered it to be too gimmicky. However, this event remained popular in other countries, such as Australia, India, and Malaysia. With the emergence of social networking, the holiday continues to gain popularity as a way to promote the message of world peace. On May 4, 2011, the United Nations passed a resolution declaring July 30 as “International Day of Friendship.”

Surviving and Thriving



Levels of Friendship

All relationships are not created equal. We tend to use the word “friend” to describe anyone from “someone I’ve been close to ever since we were in kindergarten” to “a guy in my class who once loaned me a pencil.” Social networking sites encourage us to label people as “friends” no matter how well we know them. Most people actually have different levels of friends — a wide circle of acquaintances and a more narrow circle of key relationships.



Acquaintances are people who share a loose connection. They may be people who hardly know each other, or people who have a stronger relationship but aren’t emotionally connected. There is often an external factor keeping the relationship together, such as a job, project, or location. Acquaintance relationships can form quickly. They may be temporary relationships, but they may also be long-term relationships that do not go very deep. Some acquaintances are closer than others.

Examples:

Alec and Steven work together at the bank. They are friendly when working, and sometimes have lunch together, but otherwise they don’t see each other outside of work.

Deon and Miranda went to high school together, but no longer live in the same town. They follow each other on social media, but that’s their only connection.

Key relationships are close and meaningful. A key relationship is a person who is close to you emotionally, and who has an influence on your life. Key relationships take time to develop.

Examples:

Kellen and David played high school football together and became close friends. After graduation, Kellen stayed in their home town and is training to become an electrician, while David went to college on a football scholarship. They still speak and email regularly, and when Kellen’s mother died, David came back to their home town to attend the funeral and support his friend.

Grace and Courtney have been friends since they started preschool together. They occasionally drift apart due to different interests, but they always find themselves back together. Grace recently said “Whenever I’m sad, or happy, or excited, the first thing I think is ‘I’ve got to tell Courtney!’”

Unit 2 — Understanding Self



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. In what way does having friends improve social skills?
2. How does the ability to make friends affect a person's self-image?
3. Compare acquaintances to key relationships.

Why Dating is Beneficial

Objective 2.7

During adolescence, young men and women become more interested in each other. Dating—making social plans, “going out,” or “hanging out” with someone—can involve fun recreational activities while providing a way to create meaningful and worthwhile relationships.

Positive dating experiences improve self-confidence. For example, having someone accept your invitation to share an activity can reaffirm your **self-esteem**. Dating also improves social skills, such as initiating and contributing to conversations and using good manners. A sense of trust and compassion are particularly important to the development of intimacy. While dating, you have the opportunity to display trust and to interact in caring and compassionate ways, which is important for future intimate relationships.

Through dating, you also learn to foster friendships that could potentially develop into deep and lasting relationships. Dating helps you make informed decisions about your level of compatibility with someone

who could potentially become your spouse. Thus, the dating period becomes an important time to begin thinking about your life goals and identifying the things that are most important to you.

Dating also can create a feeling of acceptance in associating with your peers. However, not everyone feels ready to date when reaching a certain age. If most of your friends are dating and you do not feel any urgency to date, there's nothing wrong with that. For example, some people would rather put off such things as pursuing a romantic interest so that they can focus on other goals and interests. All too often, people talk themselves into pursuing an unhealthy relationship, just so they can say they have a partner. If you don't feel you're ready, simply go out and meet new people until you meet someone you are interested in dating. And if you are ready to date, but haven't found the right person, remember that it's better to be single than to be involved with someone who isn't right for you.



Surviving and Thriving

Originally developed in the late 1990s, speed dating provides a way for singles to meet several new people in a short amount of time. In these round-robin events, singles of one gender stay seated in one location, and then eligible partners from the opposite sex visit one-on-one with each person for a determined amount of time. When each mini-session is up, each person moves on to the next person in the sequence. At the end of the process, each person lists those he or she may be interested in and the moderators check for potential matches. Critics of speed dating argue that this system requires participants to make snap judgments of others. Supporters say that speed dating provides a way for busy professionals to save time, and that first impressions are important.

Dating: Some General Guidelines

Objective 2.8

Going out on a date provides an opportunity to show your good manners. While it's not necessary to "put on an act" in order to impress a date, following some socially acceptable guidelines can help the date go smoothly.

Be definite when asking for a date. Before asking someone for a date, know the day and time you want to go out, what you will be doing, where you are going, and how you will get there. Choose an event or activity that both of you will enjoy. Be prepared for a "yes" or "no" answer. While a "yes" answer is preferred, a "no" answer should be accepted with respect. The person may already have plans.

Give a definite answer when asked for a date. The person asking for the date needs a definite answer in order to make further plans. If you need to ask permission or check your family's calendar before giving a definite answer, tell the person when you can let them know. Always respond as soon as possible. Thank the person for the invitation, even if you decline the offer, and be considerate of the other person's feelings.

Keep the date if it is accepted. In most cases dates should not be broken. If you have an emergency or illness or if you have a reason to believe the date would include activities that are not acceptable, a date may be canceled. Break the date only when absolutely necessary. Let the person know as soon as possible and state the reason for breaking the date.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. Explain how dating improves self-confidence.
2. Critique the following statement:
Your dating period is a good time to think about your future goals.
3. Why should a person not be concerned if they do not feel they are ready to begin dating?

Unit 2 — Understanding Self

No matter the interaction, body language is important. That applies to everything from going on a job interview to going on a date. If you think about it, a first date is much like an interview—sending the wrong message through body language can bring an abrupt end to either one.

- Folding your arms across your chest may make you appear defensive.
- Stuffing your hands in your pockets suggests a lack of confidence.
- Sitting with legs crossed and swinging your leg may be a sign of nervousness.
- Avoiding eye contact conveys disinterest.
- Touching your face while speaking could indicate a lack of honesty.
- Rubbing your neck or playing with your hair could be a sign of boredom.

Source: *The Importance of Body Language*, Yangutu.com

Always follow basic safety rules when going on a date. Dating can be pretty scary for teenagers as well as their parents. Let the parents know where you are going, who you will be with, and when you will return. If you are a minor, your parents have a right to know how to locate you in the event of an emergency. Avoid risky situations where things might happen that you will regret later. Stay in public places, such as a mall or a movie theater. In general, group dates provide a sense of security, while encouraging more social interaction. Make sure you know what to do if your date becomes abusive or violent. (See Objective 9 for specific concerns about dating.)

Dress appropriately for a date. You don't always need to dress up in your best clothes for a date, but you should dress appropriately for the planned activities. Also, clothing and good grooming send a nonverbal message and communicate how people feel about themselves. Young women, especially, should think about the message their clothing may send and avoid wearing clothes that are too revealing. However, it is also not necessary to appear overly modest.



Show respect and common courtesy. It is inconsiderate to keep others waiting, and being on time is a way of showing respect. Never honk the horn when picking someone up, even if you know your date well. Instead, walk up to the door and meet your date's family. Knowing the person whom their child is dating can ease parent anxieties. Also, keep in mind that people from other cultures may have different customs and expectations. Never assume what others may consider to be dating appropriate behavior.

Be considerate of your date's financial situation. If your date is paying for your meal, ask him or her for menu suggestions if you're unsure how expensive to order, or stay within a medium price range. Likewise, if you and your date have agreed to pay your own way, choose a restaurant or activity that you both can afford.

Surviving and Thriving

If someone is buying you a meal (whether it's a date, a friend, a boss, or even a parent), one good rule of thumb is to let them order first, and then pick something within the same price range. You can also ask for suggestions. "What are you planning to order?" or "What is your favorite dish here?" sound better than "How much are you willing to spend?"



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. Why is it important to give a definite answer when someone asks if you'd like to go on a date with them?
2. List at least three general safety guidelines when going on a date.
3. Why is it important to dress appropriately for a date?

If a curfew has been set, honor it. Make sure you and your date get home on time. If you are going to be late, call and let parents know. Abiding by curfews will show parents that you are responsible and will help instill trust.

Scientists in the United Kingdom found that women who wear outfits that reveal 40 percent of their flesh were noticed more often by men than women who exposed more skin. For this study, each arm accounted for 10 percent of the body, each leg for 15 percent, and the torso for 50 percent. According to a majority of the study's male participants, revealing too much skin triggered fear of possible future infidelity.

Source: *Science Solves an Old Dilemma*, Femail Online, www.dailymail.co.uk

Dating Concerns

Objective 2.9

While dating is primarily a fun social activity, certain pressures can be associated with it—especially for teens. Your teenage years are a time when your body experiences physical and biological changes, which only add to the pressures of trying to develop social relationships. Typical dating concerns include *what age to begin dating, what to wear, how to behave, where to go, what events to experience, how to get there, what parents will allow and how they will react, and what your friends are doing and what they will think*. Being aware of possible concerns of dating can help you deal with the pressure that often arises.

The **ability to communicate** with the other person can be a concern when beginning any relationship. Naturally, after several dates and more time spent together, communication usually gets easier. However, studies show that **drug and alcohol abuse** increases among teenagers who spend **more than 25 hours a week** with a boyfriend or girlfriend. On the other hand, teenagers who spend less than 10 hours a week on dates are about one-fourth as likely to get drunk or try

Unit 2 — Understanding Self

marijuana and other drugs. It's also safest to **date someone close to your own age**. When a teenage girl dates a boy more than two years older, the likelihood that she will develop a smoking or drinking habit increases. Drinking or using drugs can impair your judgment, which could lead to an extremely dangerous situation. **Finances** also pose a concern when dating. Even if you and your date agree to pay your own way, paying for gas, going to movies, eating out, attending concerts, and all of the other usual dating activities can get expensive.



Sexual activity—whether or not it is consensual—carries health risks. Young adults ages 15 to 24 contract nearly half of the new cases of **sexually transmitted infections** (STIs). While the use of condoms greatly reduces the chance of **pregnancy** or contracting an STI, contraceptives do not eliminate the risk completely. The safest bet is to abstain from sex until you are in a committed relationship. Never confuse raging hormones for love—they are two entirely different things.

What is a committed relationship? It means different things to different people. Being committed does not have to mean you plan to be with someone for the rest of your life. What does it mean to you?

A few people end up marrying their high school sweethearts and living happily ever after. Most people, however, end up dating several people before finding the person who will eventually become their spouse. Unfortunately, this means that **breakups** become inevitable. In such situations, people often get their feelings hurt or develop feelings of inadequacy. But a breakup isn't the end of the world. In an emotional time such as this, it's best to surround yourself with the support of close friends and family members.

Regardless of the situation, if any relationship problem seems insurmountable, be sure to seek guidance from a parent, teacher, school counselor, religious leader, or any other trusted adult—particularly if you are having thoughts of suicide.

Unfortunately, it's sometimes difficult to end an abusive relationship because the victim fears for his or her personal safety. Most cities have organizations that can help a person who experiences abuse. In addition, a victim can call a national resource center. For more information or to find help in your area, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or www.the-hotline.org. If you're ever in immediate danger, call 911.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. Are teens better off dating someone close to their own age? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the risks associated with sexual activity?

Surviving and Thriving



Stress: Its Sources and Symptoms

Objective 2.11

Stress is the mental or physical tension caused by pressure of events and/or change. A little stress in life is a good thing because otherwise people would have little motivation to do anything productive. In the opposite extreme, *hypostress* occurs when things are too monotonous and a person becomes bored. *Eustress* is a type of stress that provides strength and enthusiasm. Athletes, for example, experience eustress before competition. Stress also induces the “fight or flight” response, which provides the jolt of adrenaline needed to help a person to quickly react to danger.

Stress is physically caused by disruptions in the patterns of neurotransmitters, or chemicals in the brain. *Serotonin* regulates sleeping patterns and other bodily functions to the same rhythm. People who are under stress can experience a lack of sleep. *Noradrenaline* regulates energy levels and enthusiasm. When this neurotransmitter fails, a distressed person won't feel like he or she has any energy. *Dopamine* regulates the brain's pleasure center. Its failure will cause people to lose pleasure in things they used to enjoy. The disruption of these

neurotransmitters further lowers a person's tolerance to unhealthy stress. Poor eating habits and a lack of physical exercise also compound the problem.

But too much or prolonged stress can be very hard on people. If stressors are not addressed and are allowed to build, a person will become *distressed* and begin to experience symptoms that can disrupt the enjoyment of a normal, healthy life. *Hyperstress* can result from being overloaded or pushed beyond the stress level of what the person normally can handle.

For teenagers, the causes of negative stress, or stressors, can include a number of things, such as having too much to do in a short amount of time, experiencing family dysfunction, feeling ill-prepared for a test, competing in sports, dealing with school demands, experiencing a chronic illness, changing schools, having poor self-esteem, enduring the death of a friend or loved one, losing a job, financial problems, breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, feeling alienated or not fitting in, or placing too high of expectations on oneself.



Unit 2 — Understanding Self

The feelings that accompany unhealthy levels of stress may include aggression, anger, withdrawal, depression, panic or anxiety, irritability, moodiness, or an inability to concentrate. The physical symptoms of unhealthy stress may include:

- Tiredness
- Headaches and backaches
- Shoulder and neck tension
- Upset stomach, ulcers, or diarrhea
- High blood pressure
- Eating disorders
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness
- Insomnia/excessive sleep

People who suffer from too much stress may not have all of these symptoms. Symptoms of stress can mimic or perhaps be a sign of something more serious, such as heart problems. A person should contact their doctor if symptoms persist.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. Explain the difference between *hypostress* and *hyperstress*.
2. Why is it that a little bit of stress is good for people?
3. Name three sources of stress a typical teenager may face.

Dealing With Stress

Objective 2.12

People cope with stress in various ways. Unfortunately, some people turn to poor coping strategies when trying to deal with too much stress. Negative responses to stress can be devastating because they lead to even more stress — they create health issues, create new problems in a person's life, and may lead to depression.



Negative responses to stress include:

- Gambling
- Overeating or binge eating
- Starving yourself (anorexia) or purging (bulimia)
- Cigarette smoking or other tobacco use
- Underage alcohol consumption

Surviving and Thriving

- Binge drinking
- Misusing prescription, over-the-counter, and illegal drugs
- Compulsive spending
- Procrastinating
- Shoplifting
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Verbally lashing out at others
- Intentionally cutting and other ways of harming yourself

Once sources of negative stress have been identified, a more healthy approach is to learn to assess your stress levels and recognize when stressful situations are getting out of control. Teenagers as well as adults can benefit from learning stress management skills.

Positive strategies for managing stress include:

- Eat nutritious foods and drink plenty of water to nourish your immune system.
- Avoid too much caffeine, which can increase feelings of anxiety.
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.
- Do not abuse prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
- Exercise regularly to release pent-up physical energy.
- Take short, periodic breaks when involved in stressful activities. Listen to music or spend time with a pet.
- Practice deep breathing and use visualization to relax the mind.
- Get an adequate amount of sleep and maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- Learn to rest and relax to let your mind and body rejuvenate.
- Find other interests to help you put your problems in perspective. Hobbies, sports, volunteer work, and music can help you temporarily escape the pressures you feel.
- Be flexible by understanding your limits and those of others.
- Manage time wisely. Setting priorities and doing one task at a time will help you have a sense of accomplishment.
- Think positively.
- Delegate appropriate tasks; don't try to do everything alone. Sharing tasks will make your load lighter and reward those who help you.
- Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks.
- Don't be a perfectionist in situations where "good enough" will do just fine.
- Avoid making too many changes in your life at one time.
- Find support from family, friends, or professionals trained to help people deal with stress.



Unit 2 — Understanding Self

- Talk about your problems and feelings.
- Do yoga, tai chi, or an exercise form that emphasizes breathing and body control.
- Learn to say “no.”

The same triggers in the brain that turn on stress can be trained to turn it off. Instead of becoming overly stressed, people can use their mind to help decrease their breathing rate, lower the heart rate, and calm down. This “relaxation response” can make stressful situations seem much less overwhelming and can restore the feeling of being in control.

The Chinese martial art of tai chi provides a means for dealing with stress. Tai chi is among the “soft” or “internal” martial arts, as opposed to “hard” martial arts that emphasize brute strength, such as karate. Although the actions appear simple, it takes concentration and physical strength to maintain the balance and control needed to perform tai chi properly. The graceful, precise, and slow-flowing movements of tai chi encourage relaxation and meditation through deep breathing and mental focus. Thus, it promotes good health and happiness. Tai chi is popular worldwide and is a form of exercise that anyone can learn to do.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. List two negative coping strategies.
2. List two positive coping strategies.
3. What may happen if a person is not able to develop positive coping strategies?

Signs of Depression

Objective 2.14



Depression affects about one in five American adults, and it is a common cause of disability in the United States. Depression affects nearly twice as many women as men. However, it is not limited to adults—many teens and children also suffer from depression. Approximately five percent of children under age 18 suffer from chronic depression and 10 percent of them will have depression at some time in their life.

Many people sometimes feel sad or emotionally drained. But when people have these feelings for long periods of time or when they accompany loss of interest in work and family, they may need professional guidance to combat depression. Unfortunately, a depressed person may deny needing help. Some people view the need for counseling as an indication of weakness, rather than a sign of self-awareness. In addition, in some societies, mental health issues still carry a negative stigma.

Surviving and Thriving



- Difficulty performing everyday tasks
- Withdrawal from human interaction
- Thoughts of suicide

Teen depression can look very different from adult depression. Symptoms of depression in teenagers can include:

- Irritability, hostility, or angry outbursts rather than sadness
- Unexplained physical ailments such as aches and pains
- Extreme vulnerability or sensitivity to criticism, rejection, or failure
- Isolation from certain people or associating with a different crowd

The good news is that most cases of depression are highly treatable. However, adults are much more likely to seek treatment for depression than teens, because teenagers are less likely to recognize signs of depression and often must rely on adults to help them get the assistance they need.

General signs of depression in adults can include:

- Sadness, emptiness, and hopelessness (expressed through verbal and nonverbal messages)
- Low physical and mental energy (signs of which may include the inability to complete normal activities, to concentrate, or make decisions)
- Irregular sleep patterns
- Changes in eating patterns, appetite, or body weight
- Loss of interest in work, family, and life (evident in spending more time alone)
- Neglecting appearance and personal hygiene

Is It Depression—Or Something Worse?

Manic-depressive illness, or bipolar disorder, is a type of mental illness that can affect children and teenagers. As the name implies, symptoms of manic-depression include mood swings, which fluctuate from mania or euphoria (elevated mood) to the typical signs of depression. Many teenagers who experience a period of major depression develop manic-depression within five years. Those who develop manic-depression as adults often have less severe symptoms than those who develop the illness as adolescents. If parents have manic-depressive illness, their children are at an increased risk of developing it as well.

Unit 2 — Understanding Self

Help for Depression

- Learn as much as you can about depression. Knowledge helps you understand and react appropriately.
- Remember that depression is a medical condition. The depressed person is not faking illness to cover for laziness.
- Remind your family member or friend of medical appointments. Depressed people sometimes stop taking their medications when they start feeling better.
- Listen and provide support. Be patient, understanding, and encouraging. Do not dismiss the person's feelings. Point out realities and offer hope.
- Take care of everyday tasks. Help the person with maintenance chores, such as carrying out the trash.
- Encourage regular schedules for sleeping and exercise and eating well-balanced meals. Depression creates physical problems because usual routines are interrupted.
- Treat suicide threats seriously. If you suspect danger, be supportive and call a physician. Get help immediately.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. Compare and contrast depression and sadness.
2. List three symptoms that an adult suffering from depression may experience.
3. How does depression differ in teens and adults?

Teenage Suicide

Objective 2.15

Being a teenager is challenging. A teenager must learn to balance time and energy between school, jobs, friends, and family. Besides having many present commitments, a teenager is usually beginning to prepare for the future: deciding what to be, have, and do. All of these decisions, commitment, and planning happens at a time when the body is going through several physical changes. All of these changes happening at one time can add up to one thing—stress.

Most teenagers learn to manage stress. But for some teenagers, stress can be too hard to handle. The teenaged brain is not yet fully developed, and troubled teens may be too overwhelmed to completely understand the consequences of their decisions. These teenagers may resort to suicide as a way to escape stress and “solve” problems. In the United States, teenage suicide is a growing problem. The rate of teenage suicides has nearly tripled in the last 25 years. Suicides are the third leading cause of death for people age 15 to 24 years. Factors that may contribute to teenage suicide include:



Surviving and Thriving

- **Family problems** — A teen may feel he or she is to blame for the problems of parents, especially those who have relationship problems. When a teen hears parents arguing over issues involving the family, the teen may assume responsibility.



- **No emotional support** — A teen who feels unloved, neglected, or abused and who feels he or she has no one for support may feel very alone. Parents who do not listen or pay attention offer little emotional support to a teenager.
- **Loss of familiar** — A teen may feel fearful, lonely, or scared about losing familiar friends and activities when the family changes location or loses significant status (for example, due to job loss or divorce).
- **Unrealistic expectations** — A teen who is a perfectionist, thinking he or she must be a success at everything, will react to failure with disappointment. They may even think, "I'm no good; I'm not worthy of loving." Failure is a more serious threat when parents have unrealistically high expectations or when the teen thinks they do.
- **Family history** — A teen who is raised with family members suffering from depressive disorders or who have attempted suicide is more likely to attempt suicide.

- **Specific events** — A teen may react to events that cause sadness and depression by suicide. For example, the death of a close family member, rejection, failing a test, the breakup with girlfriend or boyfriend can trigger suicide.
- **Poor self-esteem** — A teen's low self-value may cause the feeling that the world would be better off without him or her.
- **Mood disorders** — Personality traits and genetic factors contribute to mood disorders. But prolonged depression may be the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain. Natural substances that allow brain cells to communicate with one another may malfunction as a result of stress, medication, or other medical illnesses.

If you suspect that someone you know is thinking about committing suicide, never assume that the person is joking. Take action immediately—tell a teacher, coach, parent, pastor, or other adult about it, even if a suicidal person has asked you keep it a secret. Remind the person how much they mean to you, how devastating their death would be to their family and friends, that their terrible thoughts are only temporary, and that no problem is insurmountable.



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. What are some of the factors that can affect mood disorders?
2. What are some examples of specific events that could trigger a suicide attempt?

Unit 2 — Understanding Self

Warning Signs of Suicide

Objective 2.16

Suicide accounts for all too many needless deaths. Teen suicide attempts are often preceded by clear warning signs. It is critical to learn what warning signs to look for. Among teens, these possible signs include:

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities
- Rebellion—violent actions, rebellious behavior, running away, destroying possessions, or even harming pets
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance
- Extreme personality change or mood swings
- Complaints of continual boredom
- Problems concentrating
- Lower grades in schoolwork or loss of interest in school activities
- Frequent complaints about physical problems related to emotional well-being, such as headaches, fatigue, stomachaches
- Problems on the job
- Loss of interest in fun activities
- Dangerous or risky behavior
- Disliking praise or rewards
- Organizing life as if leaving, including giving away possessions
- Sudden happiness after time of depression

- Legal and illegal drug and alcohol abuse—nearly one-third of the deaths and more than one-third of emergency-room treatments for drug problems involve suicide attempts.

Not all of these warning signs will be present in cases of possible teen suicide. People who appear very successful and happy can have suicidal thoughts.



Surviving and Thriving

Indications of a suicide plan

A person planning to commit suicide may begin giving away their possessions, throwing personal things away, or expressing bizarre or twisted thoughts. Be sure to let a parent, teacher, or counselor know if you ever hear a person blurt out “I want to kill myself” or “I wish I were dead.” A person may drop subtle hints that he or she is strongly contemplating or even planning suicide by saying such things as “I want you to know something, in case something happens to me” or “I won’t be a problem for you much longer.” Troubled teenagers often try to share their thoughts with their friends. In many cases, they are looking for help.

Most people who kill themselves have a diagnosable disorder. It is also important to note that many of the teen suicide warning signs are also indications of depression. Recognizing warning signs, offering support and seeking help for someone who is deeply depressed can help prevent suicide—and save a life.

IMPORTANT: Always take a suicide threat seriously. Never use “reverse” psychology (telling someone to do the opposite of what you want them to do) with a potentially suicidal person. Someone who threatens to commit suicide should receive immediate help from a responsible adult and/or professional counselor. If someone threatens suicide, call 911.

National organizations for suicide prevention include the following:

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, www.afsp.org
- Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education, www.save.org
- Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network (SPAN), www.spanusa.org
- It Gets Better Project, www.itgetsbetter.org
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
1-800-273-TALK



KNOWLEDGE CHECK

1. What may cause a teenager to have suicidal thoughts?
2. List three warning signs that a person may be considering suicide.



Sustainability—The Human Factor

According to the Webster’s dictionary, sustainability has to do with “...harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.” It is fairly easy to recognize how sustainability applies to natural resources, such as soil and water. But developing a sustainable lifestyle can also apply to human resources. Just as it is important to “give back” to the environment, relationships must be nurtured as well. If you constantly take more from others than you give, eventually you will deplete the relationship.

Unit 2 — Understanding Self

Career Spotlight

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR

High school is a time when teenagers begin to make plans for their future, to transition away from their parents, and to explore their independence. School counselors help students develop career goals, achieve academically, and gain the social skills necessary to help them become successful in college, their future careers, and in life. A typical high school counselor holds a masters degree and state certification in school counseling. They must also maintain their certifications and attend on-going professional development activities to keep their credentials current.

High school counselors help others besides students. They assist parents with college scholarship and financial aid searches; teachers by identifying at-risk students, acting as guest speakers in the classroom, and offering academic support; administrators with behavioral management plans and school-wide assessments; and the community with crisis intervention and referrals.

Source: American School Counselor Association, www.schoolcounselor.org

Unit Summary

People have characteristics that make them unique. Some of these characteristics, such as eye color, are imprinted in our genes, while others, such as our self-concept, have been shaped by our environment through our relationships with family and friends. A positive self-concept is important because it affects a person's ability to function in society, as well as overall wellness.

Being able to develop and nurture friendships is an important part of social and emotional development. Friends are people we can confide in and trust. Dating is a way to foster deep friendships that could potentially last a lifetime. However, while it is primarily a fun social activity, dating often creates unique pressures—especially for teenagers.

Once in a while, things in life may not go as planned. For example, even though a person may try very hard to perform a task to the best of their ability, they may be unsuccessful and experience failure. Doing poorly on an important exam, a breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or losing a close friend or relative can sometimes lead to such feelings as loneliness, a sense of inadequacy, or even severe depression. Unfortunately, the solution to problems may be difficult to find, and some people may think they have to resort to desperate measures. However, by taking control of a situation and learning to cope, most people can overcome any situation and continue to live a happy life.

Surviving and Thriving

REVIEW

1. Why has the nature vs. nurture argument never really been settled?
2. Name at least five characteristics of a positive self-concept.
3. List at least five important abilities needed in order to establish your identity.
4. Explain how the ability to make friends affects personal growth.
5. Write a paragraph that describes qualities and/or actions of a good friend.
6. List at least three purposes of dating.
7. Name at least two considerations one should take into account before asking someone on a date.
8. Why is it important for teenagers to be aware of possible dating concerns?
9. What is the danger of failing to recognize sources and symptoms of becoming overly stressed?
10. List five positive strategies for managing stress.
11. In what ways may the symptoms of depression differ in teens as opposed to adults?
12. Why are teenagers especially susceptible to thoughts of suicide?
13. What are some indications that a person may have a suicide plan?
14. What should you do if you suspect that a friend may be considering suicide?

Key Terms

chromosome

clique

depression

dominant gene

empathy

environment

gene

heredity

manners

potential

recessive gene

self-concept

self-esteem

self-image

stress

Unit 2 — Understanding Self