**Healthy Reality - lesson 1**

**The Scoop…**

Accepting yourself for who you are - and why it is such an important basis for positive decision-making.

**Getting Real**

Self-image is how we see or picture ourselves, *not just on the outside, but on the inside.* Self-image can be either positive or negative, and both can have a significant impact on self esteem and behavior choices. Even positive or negative words can affect a person’s overall self-image. Self-image can positively or negatively influence the decisions we make in regard to school, relationships, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, etc.

**Lesson Goals**

* Discussion of the following points:
  + Respecting yourself
  + How to love yourself
  + Look at the positives, don’t stress on the negatives
  + Embrace your individuality
  + Self-harm
  + Don’t compare yourself to others
  + Substance use
  + Body image
  + Sexting

**The Lesson**

* (Note: Items bulleted with the dot are instructions and generalized points we want you to bring up, and can be put into your own words. Items indicated with the arrow are specific questions or comments we need you to make.)
* Make sure to emphasize the points in red.
* Tell the students you are here to talk to them about some of the increased pressures they may be feeling now in junior high, and getting ready to be in high school. Tell them you hope to be able to help them cope with some of the things they are feeling and experiencing, because this is an important time for them.
* Say that you aren’t here to lecture to them; just to bring up some important issues and hoping to get these issues out in the open and discussed as a group. Tell them you want them to feel comfortable talking about these things. We want this to be an interactive session.

Open the lesson by asking some open-ended questions about how the students feel about the transition to high school, such as:

* What are you the most excited about when you think of being in high school?
* Do you think there are going to be more negative pressures in high school? Why or why not? What kind of pressures? (Be sure to come prepared with some examples of pressures in case the students are slow to open up to you or miss some key ones, such as drinking or doing drugs, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, fitting in, getting good grades, pressures from parents, being an athlete, popularity, comparing yourself with others over social media.)
* Do you think you and your peers are already dealing with some of those pressures now? What sort of pressures are you facing?

*Note: Don’t spend a great deal of time with these questions-maybe a total of 3 or 4 minutes, at most. These are just to “break the ice” and get them talking.*

* Tell them that probably the most important topic to talk about is self-image. Start by sharing a personal story of your experiences with self-image in middle school/junior high.
* List some of the issues junior high students (male and female) deal with: body image, weight, makeup, looking “buff”, looking different from others, being an athlete or non-athlete, having a boyfriend or girlfriend, bullying, etc.
* Is it normal to struggle with self-image? Of course. Everyone does. Even adults.
* Why do you think self-image, positive or negative, is important? (As with all of these questions, including the ones below, be ready to have some of your own reasons in case the students don’t come up with their own.) How does this affect decisions you make related to your behaviors?
* Have each of the students take out a piece of paper and write down two insecurities they have about themselves. Tell them to be honest, and not to look at anyone else’s paper. When they are finished, have them turn the paper face-down on their desk.
* Say, “Now take a few seconds and briefly look around the room. Every person you see has self-image issues from time to time. It’s normal. It’s part of growing up.”
* “At this stage of every young person’s life, your brain responds more to emotion and acceptance from your peers than it does to rational decision-making. You can’t help it. It’s perfectly normal. It’s part of developing your identity. But it’s important to keep it in perspective. It’s temporary.”
* What does respecting yourself mean or look like? What are some ways you can respect yourself?
* What are some things you can do that show disrespect for yourself?
* Do you think the following behaviors show respect or disrespect for yourself, and why? (Feel free to add other items, especially if they were brought up in the previous question.)
  + Using alcohol
  + Using marijuana or other drugs
  + Self-harm
  + Eating disorders
  + How about sexting?
* What self-respect comes down to is realizing that everyone is different for a reason, and you are the person you are supposed to be. Tell yourself you are worth it. Everyone is equal in every way that really matters. You are as deserving of self-respect as anyone else. And remember that your behaviors go a long way toward building or decreasing self-respect.
* The concept of loving yourself involves regular practices and thoughts that build your self-respect. Caroline Kirk says, “Self-love requires you to be honest about your current choices and thought patterns and undertake new practices that reflect self-worth.”
* What are some specific behaviors or thought patterns people our age can adopt to build or maintain self-respect? (Have the students come up with at least five ways.)
* Sometimes others can say or do something that brings you down, right? What is the best way to react to that?
* Your value doesn’t decrease based on someone’s inability to see your worth.
* It is important to remember that many times, when someone says something bad about you, it is often done to cover up their own insecurities. So don’t take it seriously.
* When you’re in certain situations, do you seem to look more at the positives or negatives?
* Don’t ruin a good today by dwelling on a bad yesterday. Keep things in perspective and know that struggles are temporary. Every day is different and gives you an opportunity to look at the positive or the negative. It’s your choice.
* “Embrace your individuality.” What does this statement mean to you? What are some ways you can be yourself and embrace your individuality?
* Body image feels important when you are in junior high, but it’s hard when people mature at different rates. The person you are now is not going to be the same person you are in a year or two, let alone as an adult. Be patient!
* Self-image is very important, and when you compare yourself to others, it can greatly affect your self-image. Low self-image can lead to many things, such as self-harm, eating disorders and substance abuse. What are some ways we can work together to keep each other from going through these things? (Have the students come up with a short list of things they can do to support each other.)
* One of the key things to keep in mind is that everyone’s mind is different and everyone’s body is different. Accept that and respect that. No one is perfect. Just be the best and healthiest version of “you” that you can be. That’s all anyone can ask of you.
* Low self-image and body image can lead to us wanting to get positive feedback from others, and that can lead to making decisions that could greatly affect your future. What could happen in the future if you decide to participate in sexting or other activities?

Don’t let your emotions make your decisions.

* Theodore Roosevelt said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” What does this mean to you? (After they respond), Are we being fair to ourselves to constantly compare ourselves to others?
* Thank the students for their time today. Tell them you will be back for a couple more lessons. Have the students take that sheet of paper they had written their insecurities on, look at it briefly, and take a few seconds to think of ways to overcome them. Have them rip the paper into shreds, get up and throw them into the trash.