

Relationships 101

Student Workbook

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*This workshop and its materials were adapted from
Cal Poly Counseling Services' Anxiety Toolbox and Getting Unstuck programs.*

Welcome!

Welcome to **Wellness U**! Wellness U is a collection of workshops with the ultimate goal of providing you with knowledge and skills to increase your overall well-being and meet your goals. The Wellness U Workshop Series has several parts:

- **Stress and Anxiety 101** helps participants understand the effects of stress and anxiety by learning about the fight, flight, or freeze response and the differences between motivational and unhelpful stress/anxiety. Participants will also learn a basic skill for anxiety management: grounding techniques.
- **Changing Unhelpful Thoughts** introduces participants to a cognitive behavioral strategy for challenging unhelpful thoughts. Participants will be able to identify unhelpful thinking styles, learn alternative responses to unhelpful thinking, and become more aware of their ability to challenge and change thinking patterns.
- **Intro to Wellness** introduces participants to concepts of dimensional wellness and how to increase their overall wellness.
- **Intro to Mindfulness** is all about mindfulness, its benefits, and how to practice mindfulness in day-to-day life.
- **The ABZzzzs of Sleep** helps participants improve the quantity and quality of their sleep by learning about sleep hygiene.
- **Relationships 101** introduces participants to healthy versus unhealthy relationships, ways to manage conflict, and how to set boundaries.
- **Test Anxiety** helps participants understand the components of test anxiety and introduces them to a skill to minimize the symptoms of anxiety.
- **Intro to Tai Chi** presents participants with the opportunity to learn about a traditional Chinese form of exercise which emphasizes breath and body movement and can be useful in reducing stress and anxiety as well as improving joint flexibility, stability, and muscular strength.

By the end of this series, you will have received a lot of information and, at times, it may feel overwhelming. Remember that like any skill (e.g., learning to ride a bike), the skills you will learn in **Wellness U** take time and practice to master. At times, you may encounter obstacles and/or find it difficult to integrate these skills into your daily life. That is okay, it is a normal part of the change process. As with all change, it is important to practice as much as you can, even after encountering setbacks.

Think of your practice of these skills as a form of “mental health hygiene.” At the outset, it may seem tedious and you may question why you need to practice these skills so often. Similar to brushing your teeth, daily practice prevents a buildup of stress over time. The more you practice and use these skills as part of your daily routine, the less tedious they may seem because they simply become a regular part of daily life.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Why have I been referred to Wellness U?

Our clinicians recommend participation in Wellness U after meeting with you because they think you can benefit from it. We strongly believe that if you fully engage in Wellness U and practice these skills, you will see the benefit of attending. And we have the research to back this up – since 2016, students have consistently rated these workshops as helpful. Wellness U also helps support your innate resilience by recognizing your autonomy; in other words, we know that students have the ability to address many of their concerns independently in a supportive environment. In fact, some students may get what they need from Wellness U alone. Others may benefit from Wellness U as well as other services, such as Let’s Talk (informal consultation), a support group, group therapy, or individual therapy.

What if I don’t feel comfortable in groups?

Many people feel anxious about participating in a group. Wellness U is structured and curriculum-driven, like an academic class. You are not required to speak to the entire group if you do not feel comfortable doing so. The facilitators respect each participant’s right to share only what they are comfortable sharing and never require you to share sensitive information about yourself.

What if I have an urgent need to see a clinician during Wellness U?

Simply let the facilitator or Student Counseling Services’ front desk staff know and they will facilitate you getting the help you need.

Why do you recommend practice outside of the workshop?

The focus of these workshops is on building skills; in order to achieve that goal, regular practice is essential. The more you practice, the more you may find you get out of these workshops. The assignments are for you and only you, in the service of your own personal growth. You will not be required to provide your responses at any time during this workshop; however, there will be opportunities to ask questions or share if you do feel comfortable.

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

Everyone deserves to have healthy relationships with their friends, family, and the people they are dating. Relationships aren't always easy, but there is never an excuse for abuse of any type within a relationship. Healthy relationships are built on a foundation of respect. Knowing the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships can help you build new relationships in college.

Healthy relationships are based on the following to create a nurturing and loving environment:

Mutual Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening non-judgmentally • Valuing each other's opinions 	Separate Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having friends outside the relationship • Exploring your individual identities
Trust and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respecting each other's personal space and time • Overcoming issues of jealousy and resentment 	Good Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being honest with your feelings to yourself and your partner • Communicating openly and truthfully
Honesty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting responsibility for yourself 	Forgiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiving past mistakes • Admitting your own mistakes and apologizing
Fairness and Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being willing to compromise • Seeking goals that satisfy both partners 	Fighting Fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to each other • Not assuming things • Not criticizing each other

Unhealthy or abusive relationships often use the following to gain power and control:

Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controlling where you go and who you see • Making you believe they are the only one who cares about you • Limiting activities outside the relationship 	Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making threats to hurt you, family, friends, belongings, or pets • Threatening to leave or commit suicide
Intimidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making you afraid to use certain looks, actions or gestures • Destroying property, abusing pets, displaying weapons 	Forcible Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulating or making threats in order to get sex • Getting you drunk or drugging you to get sex
Physical, Emotional, Financial and/or Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hitting, pushing, slapping or kicking • Putting you down • Playing mind games • Making you feel guilty • Using monetary means to control your decisions or actions 	Minimizing and Denying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being unwilling to take responsibility for the abuse • Making light of the abuse • Blaming the abuse on you

Tables adapted from *Teen Relationship Equality Wheel* and *Teen Power and Control Wheel* from the Centralized Training Institute, Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network, 2009. *Source: Schwartz, Jonathan P., Linda D. Griffin, Melani M. Russell, and Sarannette Frontaura-Duck. (2006). Prevention of Dating Violence on College Campuses: An Innovative Program. *Journal of College Counseling* (pp. 90-96)

Quiz: Do You Fight Fair?

Do you remember the last fight you had with the person?

- A. Yes, and you'll probably use it as ammo next time you butt heads.
- B. Does bickering over who loves each other more count?
- C. Not really. You get over things pretty quickly.
- D. Yes, but you wouldn't hold it against her/him...too much.

The person you choose starts making cracks about your family or friends in front of others. You:

- A. Shoot back an insult about one of their loud/cheap/annoying relatives or friends.
- B. Silently stew. Why bother responding when it won't change anything?
- C. Calmly ask her/him to drop it...you'll talk about it later in private.
- D. Make a snide comment about the person quietly under your breath.

You're cleaning up the garage/den/backyard, and you've asked for help. Your request was ignored. What's your next move?

- A. Launch into a tirade about how for the past six months, you've been the only one doing the hard work.
- B. Suck it up and do it yourself.
- C. Remind her/him that you need help.
- D. Find a way to slip out and avoid the other person for the rest of the day.

The person you choose is driving you to class (your car is getting fixed). How does it all go down when you get lost?

- A. The bickering rivals ESPN Radio's *Mike & Mike in the Morning*.
- B. You both vent silently. Grrr.
- C. One of you gets frustrated, the other one feels defensive, and then you make up.
- D. You jokingly suggest she/he become a professional NASCAR driver.

You're both trying to set up the new computer/hang blinds, but the manual is confusing, and tensions run high. What happens?

- A. You both curse out the other person.
- B. Leave the mess -- not dealing!
- C. Cool off for 10 minutes, and then come back to tackle it together.
- D. Tell them to take the lead because she/he is *clearly* better at it than you are.

Friedman, A. (2019). Quiz: Do You Fight Fair? Retrieved from <https://www.thenest.com/content/do-you-fight-fair>

If you answered mostly As

You duke it out. The point of having a dispute is to find a settlement that appeases both of you. That's not easy to do when you drag in past arguments and let the expletives fly. So outlaw the name-calling. Explain things in terms of "I feel," like, "It hurts my feelings when you tease me in front of friends," and back that up with reasons why. Resist finger-pointing, such as, "You never take my side!" Speak more rationally, and it will be easier to reach a resolution.

If you answered mostly Bs

You simmer in silence. Some people are simply afraid to fight. It might be that you grew up in a house full of yelling, or that you've found it easier if you don't rock the boat. Arguing is healthy for the relationship, and it doesn't mean the relationship is going to end. Don't hold back the next time you're ticked off. Explain what is bothering you without being too critical and suggest an alternative or two to the situation.

If you answered mostly Cs

You fight fair. You can diffuse a spat when the subject of a duel isn't worth your time, and you battle it out with poise when you reach a boiling point. The key to fighting fair is focusing on the matter. Fights really feel bad when you're in the thick of them, but your honest and upfront style helps you to come out feeling better about your relationship in the end.

If you answered mostly Ds

You're passive-aggressive. You're on the cusp of letting your real feelings show: a nasty comment, a backhanded compliment, and a heavy sigh from the constant martyr. If you would just come clean and have a legit argument, a lot of things could be solved. So say it, plain and simple. If the passive-aggressiveness creeps out, just fess up so you can get back to enjoying each other.

Friedman, A. (2019). Quiz: Do You Fight Fair? Retrieved from <https://www.thenest.com/content/do-you-fight-fair>

Fair Fighting Rules

Before you begin, ask yourself why you feel upset.

Are you truly angry because your partner left the mustard on the counter? Or are you upset because you feel like you're doing an uneven share of the housework, and this is just one more piece of evidence? Take time to think about your own feelings before starting an argument.

Discuss one issue at a time.

"You shouldn't be spending so much money without talking to me" can quickly turn into "You don't care about our family". Now you need to resolve two problems instead of one. Plus, when an argument starts to get off topic, it can easily become about everything a person has ever done wrong. We've all done a lot wrong, so this can be especially cumbersome.

No degrading language.

Discuss the issue, not the person. No put-downs, swearing, or name-calling. Degrading language is an attempt to express negative feelings while making sure your partner feels just as bad. This will just lead to more character attacks while the original issue is forgotten.

Express your feelings with words and take responsibility for them.

"I feel angry." "I feel hurt when you ignore my phone calls." "I feel scared when you yell." These are good ways to express how you feel. Starting with "I" is a good technique to help you take responsibility for your feelings (no, you can't say whatever you want as long as it starts with "I").

Take turns talking.

This can be tough but be careful not to interrupt. If this rule is difficult to follow, try setting a timer allowing 1 minute for each person to speak without interruption. Don't spend your partner's minute thinking about what you want to say. Listen!

No stonewalling.

Sometimes, the easiest way to respond to an argument is to retreat into your shell and refuse to speak. This refusal to communicate is called stonewalling. You might feel better temporarily, but the original issue will remain unresolved and your partner will feel more upset. If you absolutely cannot go on, tell your partner you need to take a time-out. Agree to resume the discussion later.

No yelling.

Sometimes arguments are "won" by being the loudest, but the problem only gets worse.

Take a time-out if things get too heated.

In a perfect world we would all follow these rules 100% of the time, but it just doesn't work like that. If an argument starts to become personal or heated, take a time-out. Agree on a time to come back and discuss the problem after everyone has cooled down.

Attempt to come to a compromise or an understanding.

There isn't always a perfect answer to an argument. Life is just too messy for that. Do your best to come to a compromise (this will mean some give and take from both sides). If you can't come to a compromise, merely understanding can help soothe negative feelings.

Setting Boundaries

Personal boundaries are the limits and rules we set for ourselves within relationships. A person with healthy boundaries can say “no” to others when they want to, but they are also comfortable opening themselves up to intimacy and close relationships.

Know Your Boundaries

Boundaries should be based on your values, or the things that are important to you. For example, if you value spending time with family, set firm boundaries about working late.

Your boundaries are yours, and yours alone. Many of your boundaries might align with those who are close to you, but others will be unique.

Know your boundaries before entering a situation. This will make it less likely you’ll do something you’re not comfortable with.

What to Say

You always have the right to say “no”. When doing so, express yourself clearly and without ambiguity so there is no doubt about what you want.

“I’m not comfortable with this”

“Please don’t do that”

“Not at this time”

“I can’t do that for you”

“This doesn’t work for me”

“I’ve decided not to”

“This is not acceptable”

“I’m drawing the line at ____”

“I don’t want to do that”

What to Do

Use Confident Body Language

Face the other person, make eye contact, and use a steady tone of voice at an appropriate volume (not too quiet, and not too loud).

Be Respectful

Avoid yelling, using put-downs, or giving the silent treatment. It’s okay to be firm, but your message will be better received if you are respectful.

Plan Ahead

Think about what you want to say, and how you will say it, before entering a difficult discussion. This can help you feel more confident about your position.

Compromise

When appropriate, listen and consider the needs of the other person. You never have to compromise, but give-and-take is part of any healthy relationship.

Setting Boundaries

Instructions: Respond to the following practice questions as if you were really in each situation. Think about the language you would use to firmly state your boundary.

Examples

Situation: You notice your roommate has been eating your food in the fridge. You never discussed plans to share food, and don't want them eating what you bought.

Response: "I'd like to keep our food separate. If there's something of mine that you want, please ask me before taking it."

Situation: Your friend calls you at 11 pm to discuss issues she is having with her boyfriend. You need to wake up at 6 am.

Response: "I can tell you're upset. I want to talk to you, but I need to go to bed. Maybe we can talk tomorrow afternoon."

Practice

Situation: You invited a friend over for the evening, but now it's getting late. You would like to get ready for bed, but your friend seems unaware of how late it is.

Response:

Situation: A good friend asks you out on a date. You are not interested in being more than friends. You would like to let them down clearly, but gently.

Response:

Situation: You missed several days of work due to a medical condition. When you get back, a coworker asks what happened. You feel this information is personal, and do not want to share.

Response:

Situation: Your brother asks if you can watch his two young children on Saturday morning. You already have plans.

Response:

Situation: Your coworker is upset about their recent performance review. They start yelling and slamming their fist on their desk. This is making you very uncomfortable.

Response:

Situation: A salesperson comes to your door during dinner. You try to politely show disinterest, but they keep giving their sales pitch. You want to get back to dinner.

Response:

Safeline

If you have experienced sexual assault or other sexual misconduct and want help, please call the MSU Safeline at 662-325-3333.

Safeline is staffed by trained counselors and is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The call is confidential, and the counselor can assist you in getting help and in navigating your options.

Student Counseling Services provides confidential sexual assault advocacy. To learn more or to make an appointment during office hours, you can call us at 662-325-2091.

For emergencies, please call 911.