

Healthy Roots: Learning Discernment in Relationships

Youth Leader Guide & Prep

Purpose

This activity helps teens reflect on how the people around them influence their emotional, spiritual, and personal growth. Participants will practice discernment: the ability to recognize which relationships help them become stronger, healthier, and more grounded, and which relationships may require boundaries, caution, or deeper reflection.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this activity, students should be able to:

- Recognize how relationships influence their thoughts, emotions, and choices.
- Distinguish between healthy influence and unhealthy patterns.
- Reflect on the importance of boundaries and emotional safety.
- Identify relationships where they can safely continue to grow and invest.

Before the Session

- Print all three worksheets.
- Provide pens or pencils.
- Arrange seating to allow for privacy and personal reflection.
- Plan for approximately **35-50 minutes**.

Very Important Leader Notes

This activity is private.
private.***

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Students should never be asked to:

- Share the names they write down.
- Explain why they selected someone.
- Defend their answers.
- Identify whether the person is a friend, parent, romantic partner, teammate, or family member.

Your role is not to let or help students judge each other.

Your role is to help students notice patterns and become wiser about the influences around them.

Leader Introduction (Read Aloud)

Today we're going to do an activity about relationships and influence.

Every person in our lives leaves something behind. Some relationships help us become more confident, peaceful, courageous, and grounded. Other relationships can leave us feeling anxious, confused, pressured, or emotionally drained.

This activity is not about deciding whether someone is a "good person" or a "bad person." It's also not about gossip or criticizing others.

Instead, this activity is about practicing **discernment**, which means paying attention to what grows inside of us when we're around certain people.

As followers of Christ, we're called to love everyone. But loving someone and allowing them to influence our growth are not always the same thing.

Everything you write today is private. You will not be asked to share names or personal details unless you choose to.

Part 1: Choosing Relationships to Reflect On

Leader Instructions (Read the following slowly)

Not every root grows healthy fruit.

Staying rooted also means paying attention to the environments and relationships that shape us. Discernment is not judgment. Discernment is wisdom that protects our growth.

For this activity, think of **four people whose influence in your life feels complicated.**

Don't choose the safest person in your life.

Don't choose the easiest person either.

Instead, think of people who matter to you, but whose influence sometimes leaves you wondering.

Maybe:

- you admire them, but sometimes leave feeling smaller,
- they care about you, but their actions don't always match their words,
- you feel close to them, but also confused by them,
- or you simply aren't sure whether the relationship helps you grow.

Write only their first name, initials, relationship title, or a symbol if that feels safer.

Remember:

This activity isn't about attacking anyone. It's about paying attention to what grows in you when you're around them.

Part 1: Fruit Over Flash Test

Leader Transition

As students complete Part 1, remind them:

“Focus less on what someone says about themselves and more on what consistently grows in you because of the relationship.”

[Ask students to work quietly through the first worksheet.]



Person #1:

Person #2:

Person #3:

Person #4:

When this person is in my life, more of this grows:

☐ confidence

☐ peace

☐ clarity

☐ courage

☐ honesty

☐ fear

☐ pressure

☐ confusion

☐ insecurity

☐ anxiety

☐ confidence

☐ peace

☐ clarity

☐ courage

☐ honesty

☐ fear

☐ pressure

☐ confusion

☐ insecurity

☐ anxiety

☐ confidence

☐ peace

☐ clarity

☐ courage

☐ honesty

☐ fear

☐ pressure

☐ confusion

☐ insecurity

☐ anxiety

☐ confidence

☐ peace

☐ clarity

☐ courage

☐ honesty

☐ fear

☐ pressure

☐ confusion

☐ insecurity

☐ anxiety

Their actions match their words over time:

☐ almost always

☐ sometimes

☐ rarely

☐ almost always

☐ sometimes

☐ rarely

☐ almost always

☐ sometimes

☐ rarely

☐ almost always

☐ sometimes

☐ rarely

When things are inconvenient, they still show up:

☐ yes

☐ sometimes

☐ no

☐ yes

☐ sometimes

☐ no

☐ yes

☐ sometimes

☐ no

☐ yes

☐ sometimes

☐ no

After time with them, I usually feel:

☐ steadier

☐ the same

☐ drained

☐ steadier

☐ the same

☐ drained

☐ steadier

☐ the same

☐ drained

☐ steadier

☐ the same

☐ drained

Part 2: Root Language Translation

Leader Introduction (Read Aloud)

Healthy relationships aren't only revealed by what people say when life is easy. Often, we learn the most about relationships when there is disagreement, disappointment, conflict, or hurt feelings.

In this section, you're not trying to diagnose anyone or assign labels.

Instead, ask yourself:

"When I hear these words from this person, what do I honestly experience?"

Trust your observations. Pay attention to patterns, not isolated moments.

Students then complete Part 2 privately

Students then complete Part 2 privately

Now think about the phrases this person uses when conflict or tension shows up.



If they ever said something like:

• “If you really cared, you would...”

• ☐ Are they expressing a need
• ☐ or using guilt to control me

☐ Are they expressing a need
☐ or using guilt to control me

☐ Are they expressing a need
☐ or using guilt to control me

☐ Are they expressing a need
☐ or using guilt to control me

• “That’s not what happened.”

• ☐ Are they clarifying the situation
• ☐ or rewriting history to avoid responsibility

☐ Are they clarifying the situation
☐ or rewriting history to avoid responsibility

☐ Are they clarifying the situation
☐ or rewriting history to avoid responsibility

☐ Are they clarifying the situation
☐ or rewriting history to avoid responsibility

• “You’re overreacting.”

• ☐ Are they trying to calm things down
• ☐ or minimizing how I feel

☐ Are they trying to calm things down
☐ or minimizing how I feel

☐ Are they trying to calm things down
☐ or minimizing how I feel

☐ Are they trying to calm things down
☐ or minimizing how I feel

• “Everyone else agrees with me.”

• ☐ Are they seeking resolution
• ☐ or trying to isolate me

☐ Are they seeking resolution
☐ or trying to isolate me

☐ Are they seeking resolution
☐ or trying to isolate me

☐ Are they seeking resolution
☐ or trying to isolate me

• “I guess I’m just the bad guy then.”

• ☐ Are they taking ownership
• ☐ or flipping the blame back onto me

☐ Are they taking ownership
☐ or flipping the blame back onto me

☐ Are they taking ownership
☐ or flipping the blame back onto me

☐ Are they taking ownership
☐ or flipping the blame back onto me

For this person, when words and tone don’t match, I usually feel:

☐ heard

☐ heard

☐ heard

☐ heard

☐ unsure

☐ unsure

☐ unsure

☐ unsure

☐ dismissed

☐ dismissed

☐ dismissed

☐ dismissed

☐ blamed

☐ blamed

☐ blamed

☐ blamed

When I express a boundary, they:

☐ respect it

☐ respect it

☐ respect it

☐ respect it

☐ push it

☐ push it

☐ push it

☐ push it

☐ ignore it

☐ ignore it

☐ ignore it

☐ ignore it

☐ make me feel guilty

☐ make me feel guilty

☐ make me feel guilty

☐ make me feel guilty

Part 3: Healthy Roots Reflection

Leader Introduction (Read Aloud)

Now step back and look at everything you noticed.

Remember:

- No relationship is perfect.
- Most people will have both strengths and weaknesses.
- The goal isn't to decide whether someone deserves your love.
- The goal is to understand where your deepest roots can grow safely and healthily.

As you complete this final reflection, ask yourself:

- Which relationships help me become more of who God created me to be?
- Which relationships leave me confused, anxious, or unstable?
- Is there a boundary, conversation, or change I may need to make?

*****Students then complete Part 3 privately*****

*****Students then complete Part 3 privately*****



Person #1 Reflection

Looking at everything I checked in Part 1 & 2:

This relationship mostly grows:

- ☐ strong roots
- ☐ mixed signals
- ☐ unstable soil



Person #3 Reflection

Looking at everything I checked in Part 1 & 2:

This relationship mostly grows:

- ☐ strong roots
- ☐ mixed signals
- ☐ unstable soil

Person #2 Reflection

Looking at everything I checked in Part 1 & 2:

This relationship mostly grows:

- ☐ strong roots
- ☐ mixed signals
- ☐ unstable soil

Person #4 Reflection

Looking at everything I checked in Part 1 & 2:

This relationship mostly grows:

- ☐ strong roots
- ☐ mixed signals
- ☐ unstable soil



One boundary or adjustment I can now see that I need to make is:



The one relationship I feel safest growing deeper roots with is:

Optional Debrief Discussion

No names may be shared

No names may be shared

Initial questions to begin leading a group discussion:

- What surprised you about this activity?
- Was it easier or harder than you expected to identify patterns?
- Why do you think God calls us to practice discernment?
- What is the difference between judging people and recognizing unhealthy influence?
- How can boundaries actually strengthen relationships?

Additional Discussion Questions

- Did this activity change the way you think about what makes a relationship "healthy"? Why or why not?
- Why do you think it can be difficult to notice unhealthy patterns when we care deeply about someone?
- What kinds of qualities help you feel emotionally, spiritually, and physically safe around another person?
- How can someone love another person while also deciding to create stronger boundaries?
- If relationships are like soil for our roots, what kinds of "soil conditions" help people grow into who God created them to be?

And a few bonus questions you might keep in reserve if the discussion goes especially well:

- Can a relationship be both meaningful and unhealthy at the same time? What makes that complicated?
- What role do trust and consistency play in healthy relationships?
- Have you ever realized later that someone influenced you more than you recognized at the time?
- How do you know when a relationship needs a conversation, a boundary, or simply more time and understanding?
- What do you think Jesus' relationships teach us about wisdom, love, and boundaries?

Closing Thought (Read Aloud)

Discernment isn't about deciding who deserves love.

It's about recognizing where your roots can grow strong.

God never asks us to ignore wisdom, deny our experiences, or stay planted in unhealthy soil.

Healthy roots don't happen by accident.

They happen when we learn to recognize the places, people, and relationships that help us become who God created us to be.

