

Youth Relationship Education Research and Practice Priorities

Highlights from the Marriage Strengthening Research and
Dissemination Center

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- June 9, 2021

Webinar Agenda

1. Introduce the Marriage Strengthening Research & Dissemination Center (MAST Center)
2. Describe adolescent and young adult relationship attitudes, expectations, and experiences
3. Learn about the role of positive youth development (PYD) in the design and implementation of youth relationship education programs
4. Identify priorities for future research and practice related to youth relationship education

What is the MAST Center?

- Established in 2018 by a five-year federal grant
- Conducts research on marriage and romantic relationships in the U.S. and healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) programs designed to strengthen these relationship

The views expressed in this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Mast Center Objectives



Advance a
Research
Agenda



Build Capacity
for Research/
Evaluation



Strategic
Dissemination



MAST Center: Research Aims



Relationship Patterns and Trends



Program Implementation and Evaluation

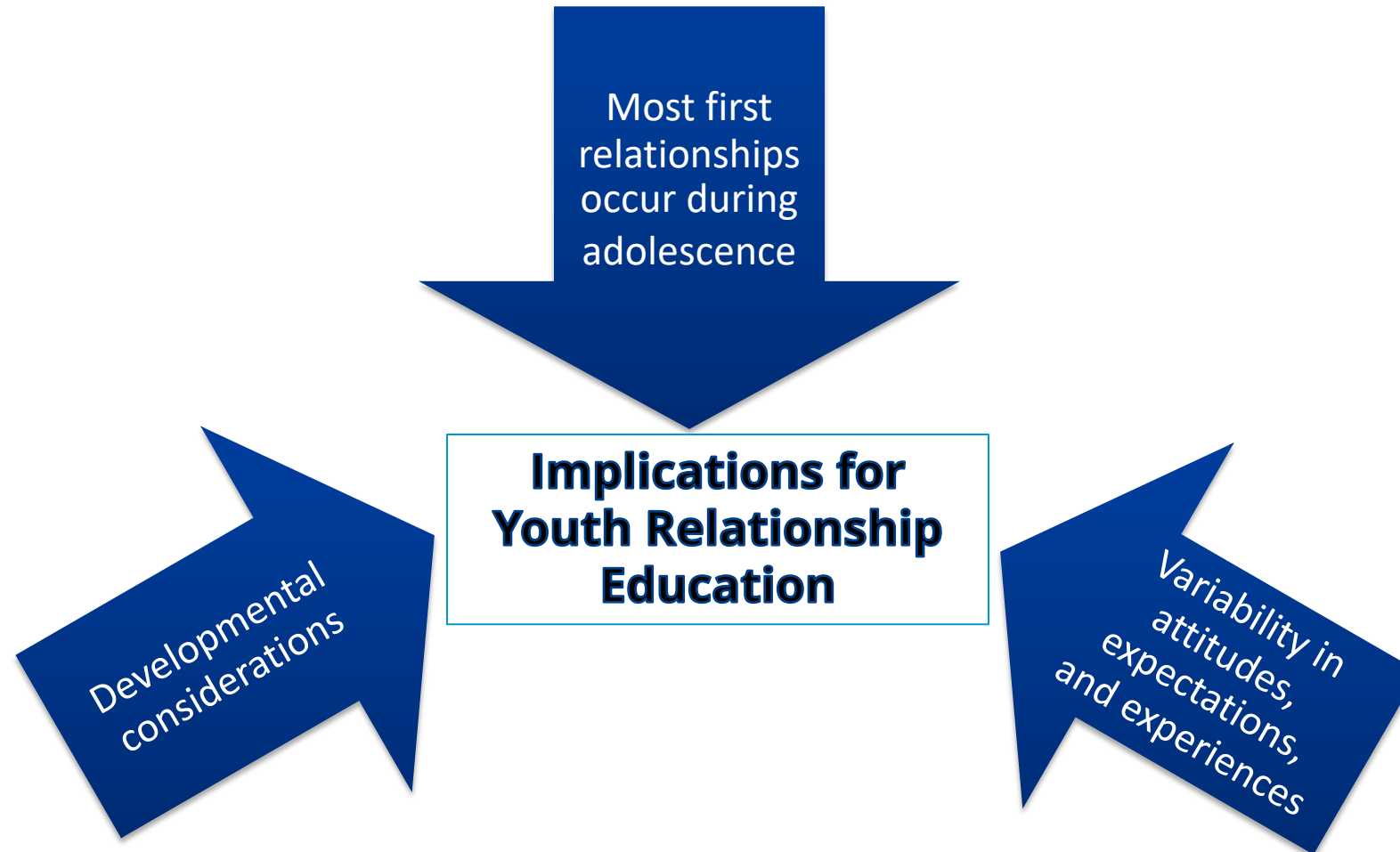
Poll

- What types of research would be most useful for informing and improving future relationship education for youth?
 - Analysis of trends in youth relationship formation
 - Analysis of youth attitudes, expectations, and experiences
 - New data on youth attitudes, expectations, and experiences
 - Research on HMRE program design and implementation
 - Research on HMRE program effectiveness (evaluation)



MAST Center Research: Relationship Patterns and Trends

Relationship Patterns and Trends: A Focus on Youth



Youth Relationship Attitudes and Experiences

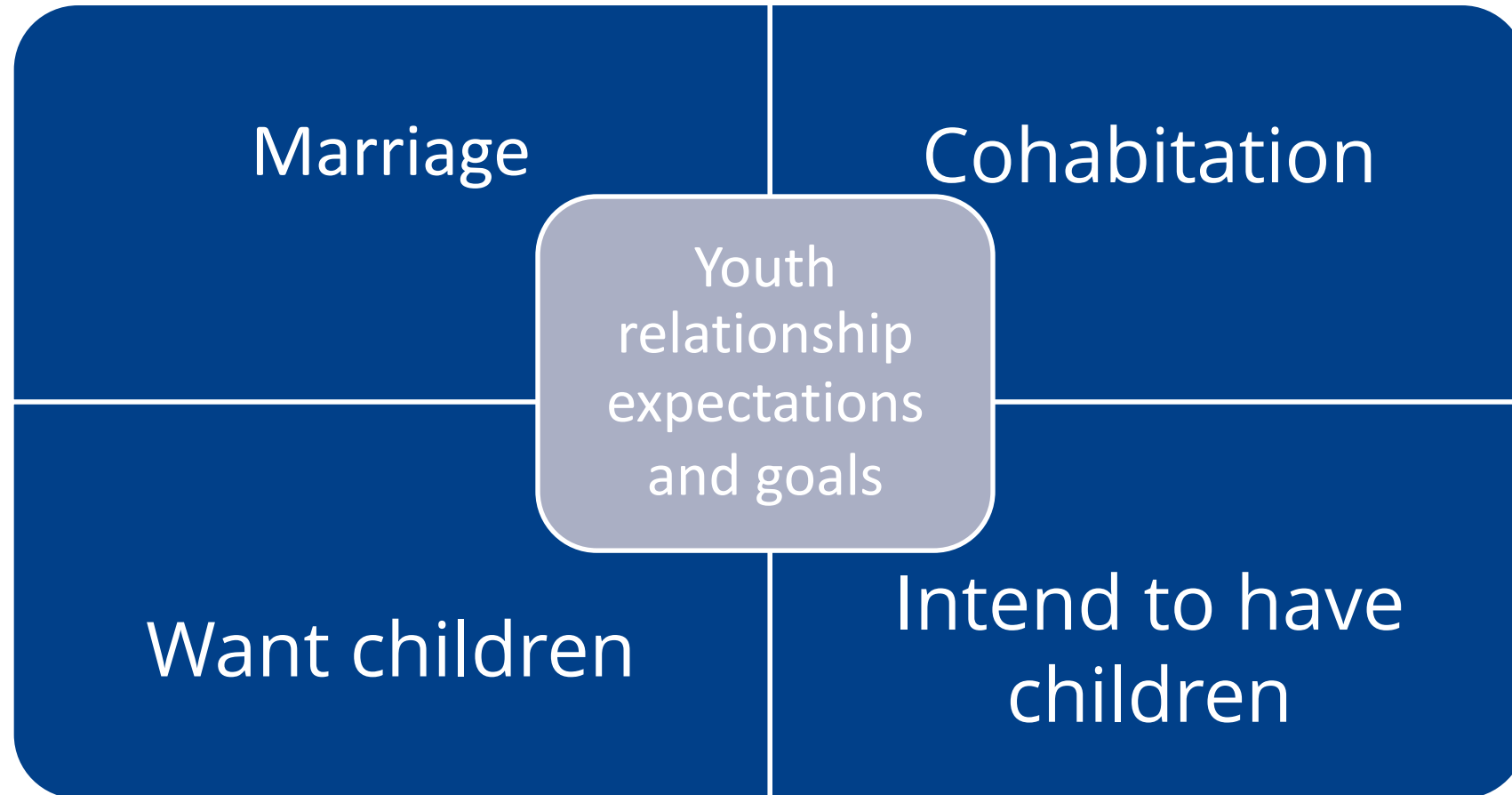
For adolescence:
Emphasize exploratory
dating, less long-term
commitment or
stability

For young adults:
Emphasize
communicating
relationship needs and
expectations

For all youth:
Emphasize knowing
when to end a
relationship, why, and
how

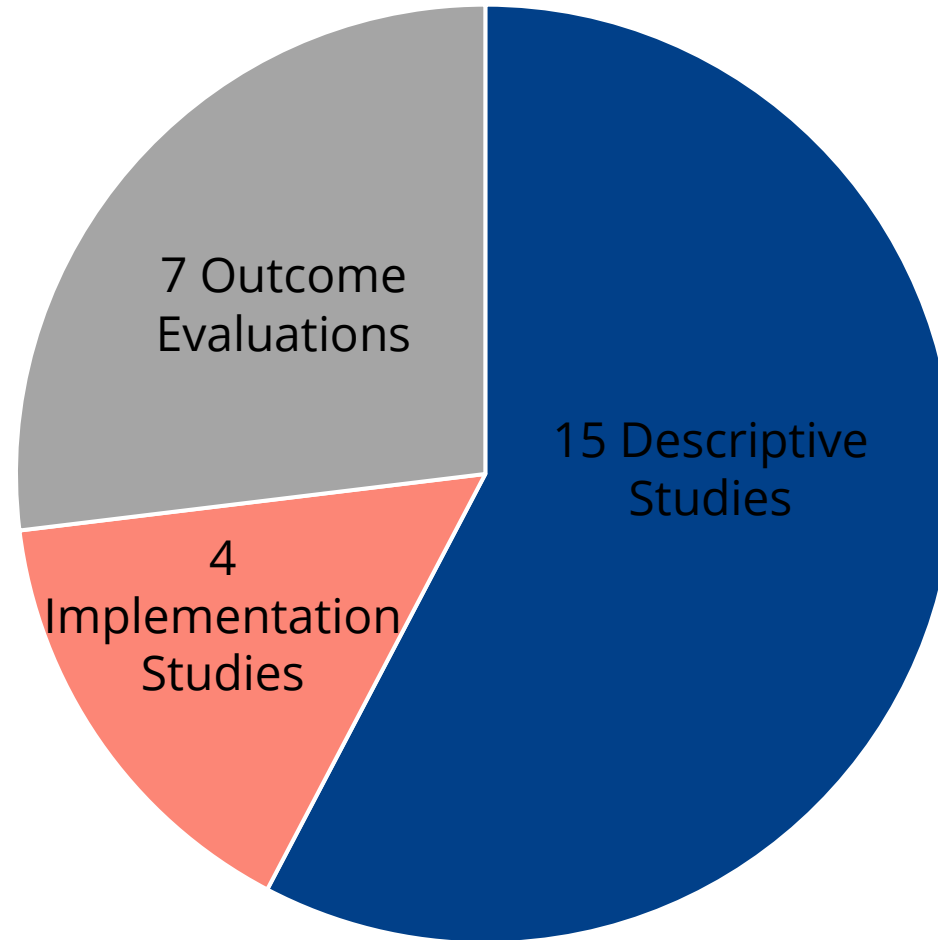
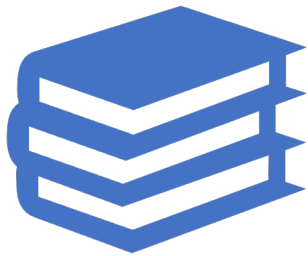
Source: [Relationship Quality and its Measurement Among Adolescents and Young Adults: A Review of the Literature](#)

Youth Relationship Expectations and Goals



Youth Relationship Education Research and Practice – Working with Diverse Youth Populations

- Annotated Bibliography
- Priority youth populations

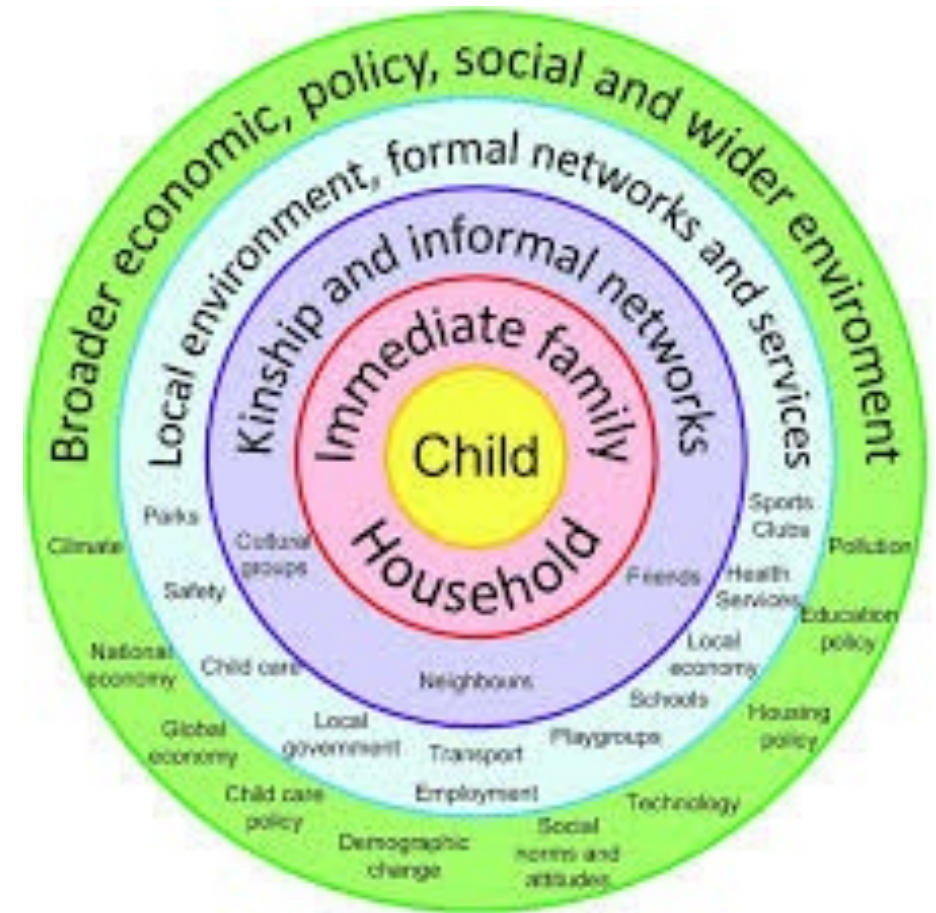




MAST Center Research: HMRE Program Implementation and Evaluation A Focus on Positive Youth Development

What is Positive Youth Development?

- An evidence-informed strengths-based developmental approach that:
 - Positively engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families
 - Provides opportunities for leadership, fosters positive relationships, and builds skills and competencies



How is PYD Different From Traditional Youth Services?

Paradigm Shift

Traditional Youth Services

- Fixing Problems
- Reactive
- Troubled Youth
- Youth as Recipients
- Programs
- Professional Work

Positive Youth Development

- Building on strengths
- Pro-active
- All youth
- Youth as Participants/Resources
- Relationships
- Everyone's Work

Adapted from Search Institute. 2001.
Old Attitudes/New Attitudes. Speaking of Developmental Assets.

Poll

- From your experience, which areas of programming might benefit the most from a PYD approach?
 - Recruitment
 - Curriculum Content
 - Curriculum Delivery
 - Youth Engagement
 - Youth Needs

How Can PYD Inform HMRE Programming?

Recruitment

- Message in ways that resonate with youth's "culture"

Curriculum Content

- Relevant to youth interests
- Responsive to their preferences

Curriculum Delivery

- Intentional skill-building approach
- Build a "safe" learning environment

Youth Engagement

- Invest in relationship with facilitator
- Connect to their lived experience

Youth Needs

- Recognize and build from strengths
- Leverage family and community assets

Specific Developmental Considerations

- Heightened curiosity and interest in new experiences
- Identity development
- Sense of autonomy and agency
- Sense of belonging with peers
- Sensitivity to stress and reward



Integrating Positive Youth Development and Youth Relationship Education – an Application

Be Calm Connections

- Federal grant funded by the Office of Family Assistance
- Reflects federal priority to help youth build relationship skills, support positive development, and promote successful transitions to young adulthood

Short-term Goals:

Build students' skills in managing emotions and stress, positive and effective communication strategies, and conflict resolution

Long-term Goals:

Improve students' mental and emotional wellbeing and their ability to engage in compassionate and affirming relationships at home, school, and with friends

Be CALM Program Background

A Mindfulness-Based Self-Regulation Program

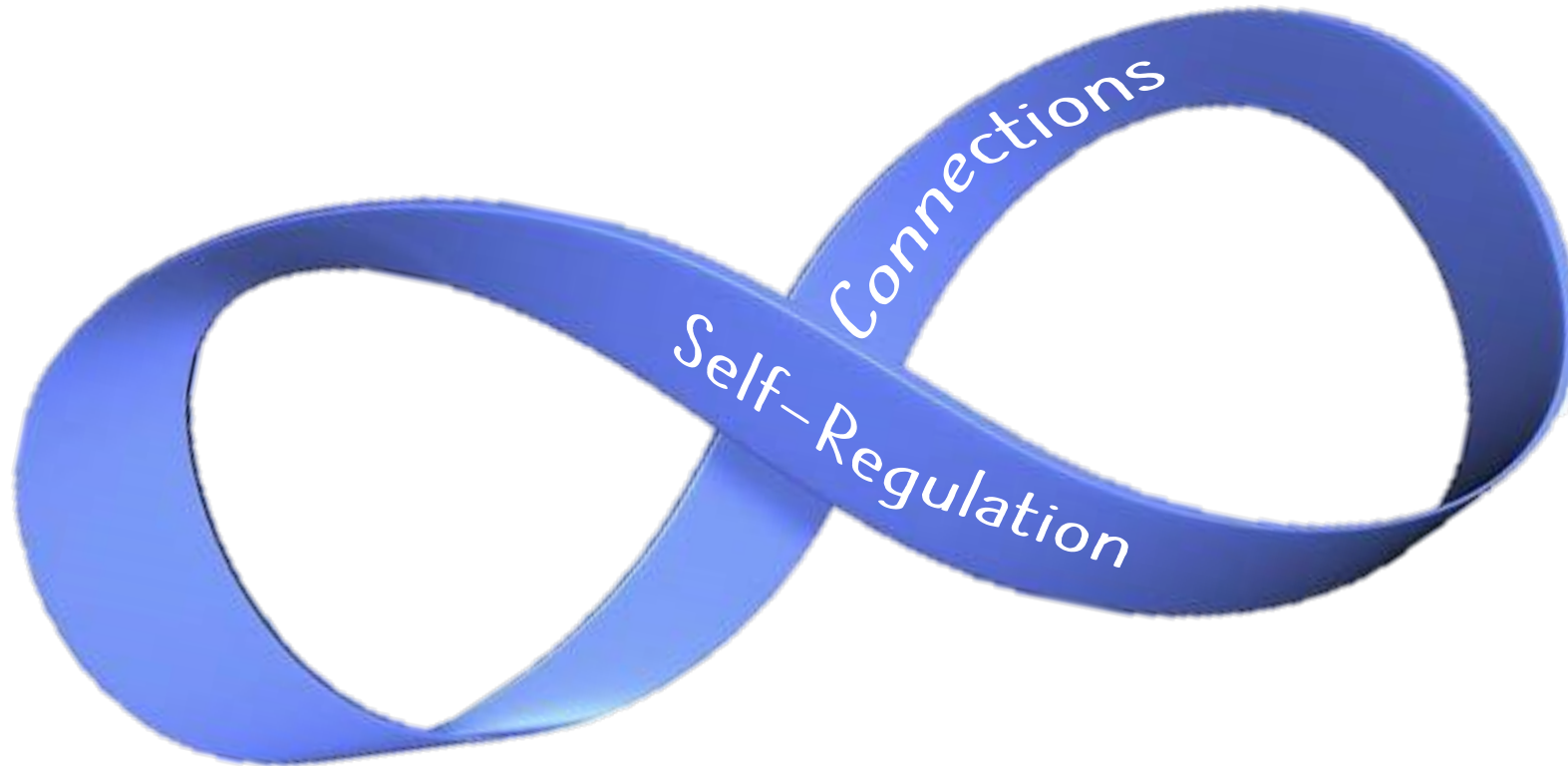
- Developed for middle schoolers 2017-2020
 - Targeted impulse control and decision-making
- Delivered to 2,000+ students across 4 districts in NC
- Small RCT showed promising effects on health/PE teachers
 - Decreased stress, increased teaching mindfulness, observed co-regulation
- Qualitative student data suggested
 - Decreased emotional reactivity, better coping/conflict resolution, and application to interpersonal interactions
- Teacher report showed
 - Greatest improvement in the area of prosocial skills

Be CALM Connections Adaptations

- Adaptations for 9th grade
- Explicit focus on interpersonal interactions
- Embed within AVID elective to enhance fidelity
- Greater focus on building a sense of agency and belonging
- Promoting cultural relevance of the curriculum
- Integrating expertise from local mental health specialists



Self-Regulation is Foundational for Positive Youth Development



Be CALM Connections Program Goals

C is for
COOL

Managing thoughts and strong emotions in healthy ways when dealing with stress and conflict.

A is for
ATTENTIVE

Being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, especially when communicating.

L is for
LOGICAL

Considering and making sense of my own and other's perspectives and experiences.

M is for
MATURE

Working out problems with others to support healthy connections.

Mindfulness is...



Pressing the Pause, on purpose and



Tuning In to the present moment,



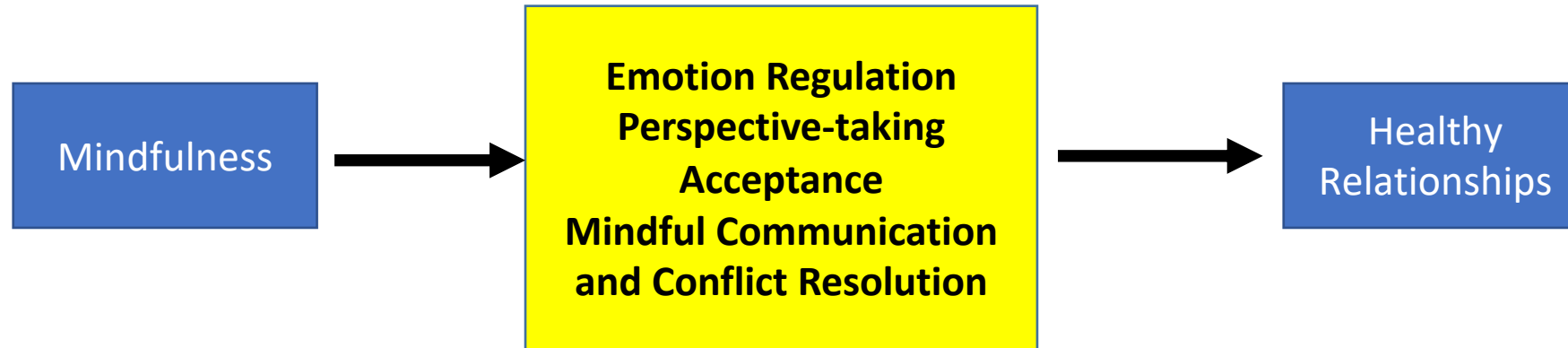
with a **Curious**



Kind attitude.

The practice of mindfulness cultivates a kind and curious awareness that we can bring to interactions with others.

How Mindfulness Can Enhance Relationships





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Q&A