



# Respectful Futures

Shaping Healthy Relationships

## **Module 1**

### **Characteristics of Healthy Relationships**

# Abstract

One goal of this module is to help students understand what constitutes a healthy relationship. This module is foundational to all that will follow. It begins by inviting students into a conversation about relationships from their perspective. This includes:

- Developing a definition of “relationship” that talks about connection, friendship, respect, responsibility, and safety
- Exploring a simple model called Me+You+Us, which will give students a framework and a way to talk about healthy relationships
- Examining the many ingredients that support a healthy relationship, such as trust, honesty, respect, personal responsibility, safety, etc.

A second goal is to help students recognize that healthy relationships require skills that can be learned and practised. The module introduces three particular skills:

- Paying attention to our self and knowing how we are feeling and what we are thinking
- Paying attention to the other person, getting curious about them and how they feel and think
- Paying attention to the relationship and deciding collaboratively what will support the relationship without compromising the individuals involved

# Big Idea

Personal happiness is determined to a great extent by our ability to form supportive, mutually respectful, and honest relationships with others.

# Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Define and recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships (Brainstorming; Ingredients of a Healthy Relationship)
- Understand the challenges and barriers to establishing healthy relationships, and recognize when relationship myths are getting in the way of building healthy relationships (Relationship Talking Points)
- Understand the Me+You+Us Model, its implications for relationship success, and the differences between paying attention to me, paying attention to the other

person, and paying attention to the relationship (Skill Development; Power Struggle Dynamic)

## Learning Activities and Resources

1. Understanding Relationships
  - a. Brainstorm – Relationships
  - b. Stop-Go Graphic and Me+You+Us Model
  - c. Some Ingredients of a Healthy Relationship
2. Relationship Talking Points
3. Me+You+Us Skill Development
4. Boundaries
5. Basic Rights in Healthy Relationships

## For Facilitators

A healthy relationship is:

- One in which both people are responsible for their own happiness. They are able to set and maintain healthy, flexible boundaries; and are comfortable in being able to represent (stand up for) themselves.
- Grounded in respect, safety, and equality. It is a relationship between fully functioning, autonomous individuals who are attracted to each other and who mutually choose to be together.
- One in which caring about or loving someone means that you are supporting them in becoming the best they can be, knowing that this means there will be change. It is a relationship that doesn't try to make anyone stay the same, but encourages all individuals to grow and develop their gifts and potential.
- One in which there is room for people to be different from each other and have their own likes and dislikes, opinions, beliefs, and interests. It accommodates differences and encourages each individual to be their own best self.
- One where disagreements are worked through respectfully. Negotiation and compromise are essential and looking for a "win-win" solution is valued more than simply "getting my own way."

Relationship myths are mistaken beliefs that are widely held in our society about what a relationship is, how it works, and what we can expect out of it. These myths have many sources: our families, friends, and intimate partners; school; religious, spiritual, ethnic, and political associations; and common culture (TV, movies, music, books, magazines, and social media). Relationship myths can get in the way of

healthy relationships because they set us up to have unspoken, unrealistic, and unhealthy expectations and perceptions.

Myths can keep us stuck in unhelpful patterns of behaviour and in co-dependent relationships.

In a co-dependent relationship, each partner takes responsibility for the other person's happiness and for healing their hurt and wounded parts, BUT NOT FOR THEIR OWN. The myths we build and believe in when we act in a co-dependent way pave the way for blame and unhappiness: "Well, if you're responsible for my happiness and I'm not happy, then it must be your fault."

We may not be aware of the mistaken beliefs we hold until we run into challenges in our primary relationships. We can become aware of myths that influence our thoughts, feelings, or behaviour, and we can clear up our ideas and develop more realistic expectations about what a healthy relationship looks like.

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### **Let's get started**

*The following facilitation notes provide context and strategies that instructors can rely on during their delivery of the resources. PowerPoints have been developed and a small number of short videos have been selected to correspond with the module's materials. Those are located on the Respectful Futures site.*

## **Facilitation Notes**

### **Understanding Relationships**

- a. Brainstorm – Relationships
  1. The Brainstorm – Relationships activity was designed as a whole-group brainstorm in which all ideas are accepted and added to a growing list in each area. Teachers may wish to hand out the instructions or simply provide them orally.
  2. After the students have brainstormed, ask them to work in small groups to answer the questions on the handout.
  3. Debrief with the full group. For each of the questions, here are some ideas to look for in the answers.
    - For similarities in relationships, look for ideas such as "someone I know or communicate with."

- For differences, look for ideas around family, friend, acquaintance, nearby, far away, personal, professional, virtual, actual, etc.
  - Try to elicit reasons why students see the relationships as important. If there are differences in the types of relationships students identify as important, probe into those differences (if appropriate) or simply highlight that differences occur. Some students may identify a pastor or grandparent, while others might identify a teacher or best friend.
4. Facilitate a group brainstorm to generate a working definition of “relationship.” When the students are satisfied with their definition, inform them that the group will return to that definition at the end of the module to decide whether they want to revise it in any way.

b. Stop-Go Graphic and Me+You+Us Model

The poster and handout are to be used together in this exercise.

1. Display the poster showing the Stop/Go symbols. Ask students: *Why is the concept called Me+You+Us and not Me+You=Us?*
2. Using students’ ideas and the Stop/Go symbols, introduce the concepts included in the handout. Ask students to discuss the points on the handout in small groups and then debrief in a large group. Ideas to cover:
  - The model allows us to think about relationships in a good way.
  - Two or more individuals choose to be in a relationship.
  - Just because we choose to do this, it does not mean we give up being individuals.
  - We therefore have three entities: me, you, and us. (As an individual, I may decide to eat at noon, but if I am with a friend, I may make a different decision that takes into account their needs as well as mine.)

The concept of Me+You+Us is a powerful one that can and will be revisited as students move into other modules. Distribute the next Me+You+Us handout. It may be useful to post this handout in the classroom as a visual reminder of the concept.

c. Some Ingredients of a Healthy Relationship

1. Begin this exercise with a brainstorm on the following question: *What are the characteristics/ingredients of a healthy relationship?* This activity can be a whole-group or small-group activity. If done in small groups, it will require that a whole-group discussion or debrief be conducted so that a common list can be generated.
2. After the list has been generated, ask students: *Why did you include these characteristics? How do you think they work to make a positive relationship?* These questions can be discussed first in small groups and then debriefed with the whole group.

## Relationship Talking Points

1. Ask students to form small groups.
2. Select statements from the list (Part 1) based on age- and maturity-appropriateness. Choose the ones that you think may be most useful in light of the needs and circumstances of the students. Assign one statement to each small group to discuss, using the following questions as discussion starters:
  - a. Would following the advice of the statement be helpful or hurtful to a healthy relationship?
  - b. Is the statement supportive of the Me+You+Us Model?
3. After debriefing, ask students to rewrite the statement in a way that honours the Me+You+Us Model. Gather their ideas and ask for improvements from others.
4. Distribute the Part 2 statements (which you may wish to edit beforehand for age appropriateness).
5. Engage students in a discussion of any statements that they or you feel are important. A suggested question for discussion: *How do these notions help to build strong and healthy relationships?*

## Me+You+Us Skills Development

1. Begin by asking students to determine, without speaking or gesturing, how many people in the class are hungry. They should not be able to tell just by looking. Then ask students to raise their hands if they are hungry.
2. During the debrief:
  - a. Raise the following issues:
    - (1) How did you know that you were or were not hungry? What clues did you use?
    - (2) Why could you not know if another person in the room was hungry? What makes it hard to know this about another person?
    - (3) What could you do to find out about whether someone else might be hungry?
  - b. Note:
    - (1) These questions should elicit responses that highlight the importance of communication and awareness of and concern for the other person's well-being.
    - (2) They should also elicit the idea of mindfulness in ourselves.
    - (3) This discussion should also lead to further discussion of feelings or thoughts that we can know about ourselves but not about others unless we take the time to check in with the other person.

3. At this point, it would be valuable to provide students with some information on the skills they should develop. (This information may be better “told” than elicited.) Distribute the handout on Me+You+Us Skills Development.
4. Engage students in a discussion about the concept and its advantages and disadvantages, if any.

## **Boundaries**

1. Begin the activity by having students read the handout. Facilitate a discussion of the three examples of boundaries, and the corresponding examples of crossing boundaries and enforcing boundaries.
2. Conduct a debrief to elicit ideas on how to increase comfort levels with respectful assertiveness, personal power, and influence. Highlight the fact that by doing this, we allow people to know us better; by understanding my own boundaries and personal power, I am able to recognize and empathize with another person’s sense of boundaries and personal power.
3. Facilitate a discussion on how setting our own boundaries can help us to respect other people’s boundaries.
4. Distribute the Basic Rights in Healthy Relationships information sheets and ask students to read the materials.
5. Continue the discussion on the concepts of respectful assertiveness, personal power, and influence; this time, however, the discussion should be informed by the added knowledge about the basic rights in healthy relationships. Ask students to think about boundaries that might be in place for each of these rights. For example: the right to express my opinion is bounded in law through legislation regarding hate speech, slander, and libel, human rights legislation, and the Constitution. It is also bounded by moral and social expectations. The notion that “rights” are absolute can be harmful. With rights comes responsibility, both individual and societal.

## **Basic Rights in a Healthy Relationship**

1. Have students complete the handout individually. Inform them beforehand that their answers will not be made public unless they are comfortable doing so.
2. When students have completed the handout, ask students to share an incident (if they are comfortable doing so). Collect a number of examples.
3. Ask students to consider how they would do things differently from what was done in the example to ensure a more respectful interaction. Consider how the revised interaction relates better to the Me+You+Us Model.

## Bringing It Together

As a culminating activity, revisit the definition of “healthy relationship” that the group developed throughout the module. Revise it as they suggest.

## Replay/Assessment

Here are a few ideas for wrapping up this session. These activities can be used to assess learning. Feel free to choose from among them, depending upon the flow of the class and/or students’ preferences.

- Have students work individually or in small groups to design and make a poster that pulls all of the concepts in this module together.
- Ask students to write on the following:
  - What are two or three things you learned today? Why is this learning important to you?
  - What are you prepared to use in your relationships and why?
  - What do you need more information about? Do some research to provide further information that answers your questions.
  - How does the notion of basic rights in a relationship “fit” with the definition of “relationship” that you developed earlier?
  - How does the concept of boundaries support the Me+You+Us Model?
  - What changes would you make to the definition we developed earlier so that it would be more accurate about what a healthy relationship is?

## In Conclusion

This module has focused on relationships – the meaning and characteristics of a healthy relationship, the Me+You+Us Model of relationships, healthy boundaries, and individual rights in relationships.

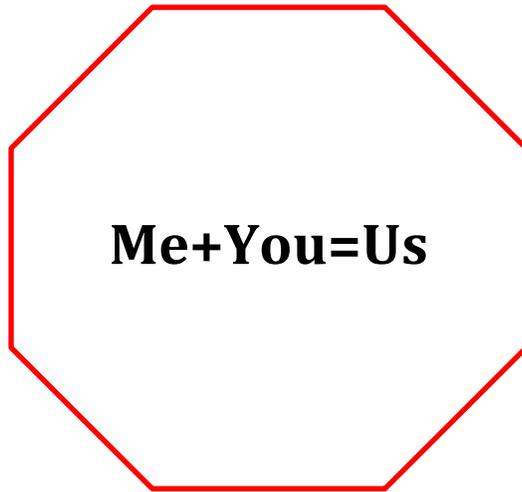
The next module will focus on how our thinking and feelings result in behaviour and how we can learn to control these in order to build healthy and respectful relationships.

**The following pages are the handouts and resources to be provided to learners.**

## **Brainstorm – Relationships**

1. Name some of the many relationships you have in your life.
2. How are these relationships the same (someone you know, communicate with, relate to, etc.)? How are they different (short/long time, familial/close/distant, friends/ acquaintances, personal/professional, virtual/actual, etc.)?
3. Which relationships are the most important in your life?
4. Given the ideas discussed, how would you define “relationship?” (Build a class definition that may change over the course of the six modules.)

**STOP**



**GO**



## **Me+You+Us**

Me+You+Us may be a new way of looking at relationships.

$$\begin{array}{c} \mathbf{Me} \text{ (one individual)} \\ + \\ \mathbf{You} \text{ (one or more individuals)} \\ + \\ \mathbf{Us} \text{ (the relationship)} \end{array}$$

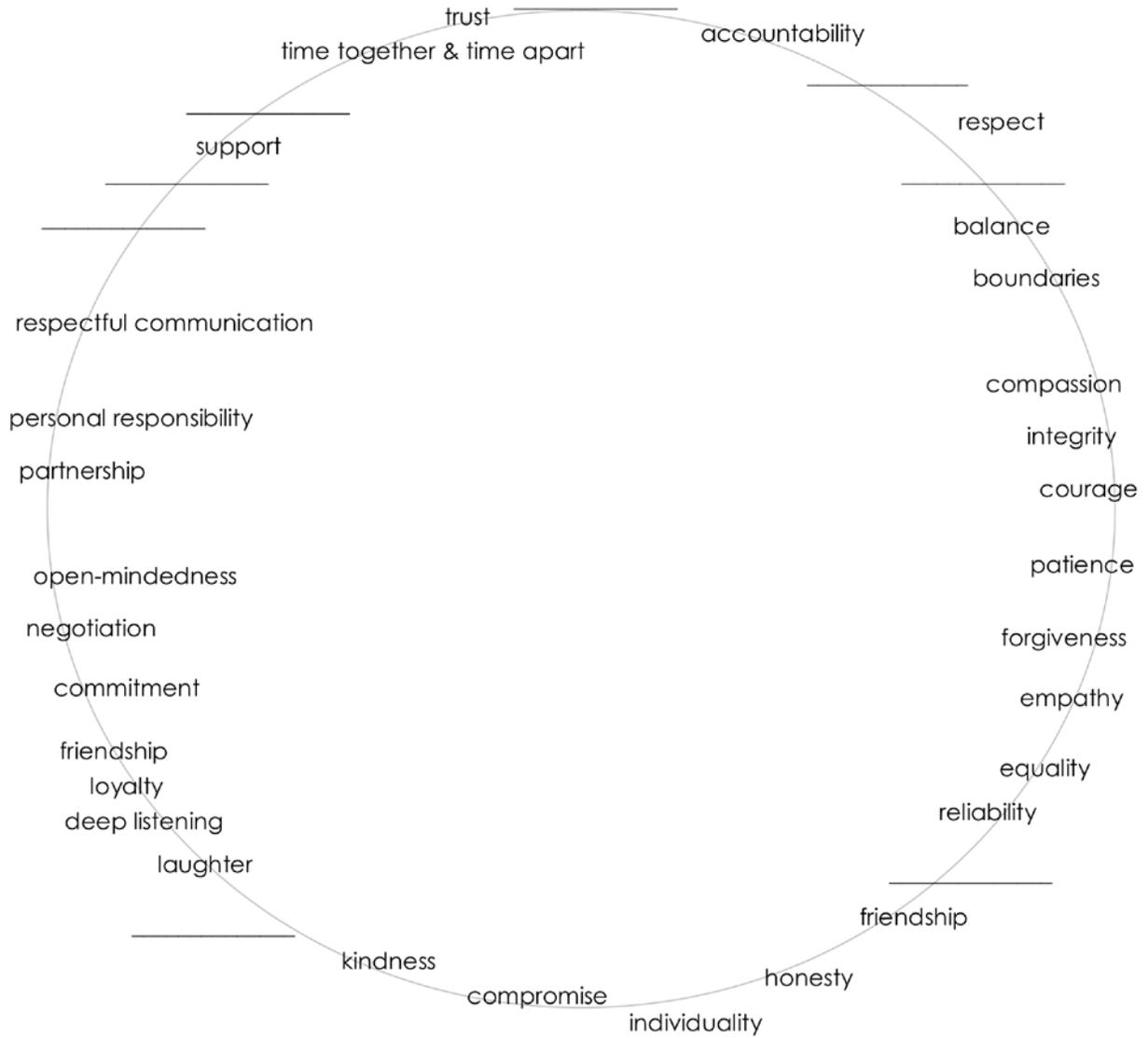
When you decide to be in a relationship, you do not cease to be an individual. The model is not just “us.” This model of a healthy relationship has three components, three separate entities that we will continue to revisit:

1. Myself: Who I am
2. Yourself: Who you are
3. Us: The relationship we have; who we are together

And will include an appreciation of:

4. Me+You+Us awareness
5. Boundaries
6. Basic rights in a healthy relationship

# Some Ingredients of a Healthy Relationship



## Relationship Talking Points: Part 1 Statements

- I can't live without you.
- You're my better half.
- The two shall become one.
- You complete me.
- I can only be complete when you are in my life.
- If you really liked/loved me, you would know what I was thinking and feeling.
- If you really liked/loved me, you would know what I want and need.
- If you really loved me, you would sleep with me.
- Love means I never have to say I'm sorry.
- Love means I don't have to be kind.
- Love means I don't have to work at the relationship.
- Love means I will be happy all the time.
- You will be the solution to my problems.
- You will make me feel good about myself.
- You will make me feel loved.
- My jealousy means I truly love and care about you.
- Relationships must be 50/50.
- Emotional intimacy is not that important.
- Romantic love, passion, and sex will always be the same.
- Girls are too emotional ... boys aren't emotional enough.
- Sometimes people say "No" but they mean "Yes."

## Relationship Talking Points: Part 2 Statements

- As much as I love you and would like to be with you, I can live without you.
- You are not my better half. I am whole and complete with or without you.
- Two do not become one; individuals remain individuals and add the aspect of relationship.
- I am already complete.
- It is your work to feel complete in your own life.
- I can really love you and
  - not know what you are thinking and feeling without you telling me.
  - not know what you want and need without you telling me.
  - not be ready for sex or not want sex right now.
  - not be a mind reader. I rely on you to tell me your truth.
- Love means:
  - I need to apologize when I make a mistake.
  - I do need to be kind and respectful.
  - I do need to work to care for, build, and maintain the relationship.
  - Sometimes I will be happy, contented, frustrated, stressed, sad, etc., and we can strive to work through the fullness of all that we experience.
- I am not the solution to all your problems, and I will do what I can to help support you.
- It is my job to fill me up, and it is your job to fill you up. We are each responsible for our own self-esteem.
- Each of us needs to feel worthy of love no matter whom we are in relationship with.
- Jealousy is not a measure of love; it is a measure of insecurity.
- Relationship is not 50/50 (that can lead to score-keeping). It is for each person to bring as much as they can to the table.
- Emotional intimacy is one of the foundations of a healthy relationship.
- Romantic love, passion, and sex will change over time, as everything changes over time.
- We are all emotive beings. It is part of the human condition.
- Whenever someone says “No,” it is always our job to hear “No” no matter what!

## Me+You+Us Skills Development

### **Power Struggle**

**Focus on me only or you only**  
**Only one of two things**  
**is possible:**  
**Win/Lose, Right/Wrong**

### **“Us” Awareness**

**Focus on us**  
**Many things are possible**  
**Win/Win**  
**What you want/need**  
**is as important as**  
**what I need/want**

## **Me+You+Us Skills Development**

### ***“Me” Awareness: Paying Attention to Me***

We all need to develop the capacity to know ourselves: not only what is true in the moment (I’m hungry, angry, warm, cold, tired), but also what is true over time (core beliefs and values). It is important to notice that some things which are true right now will not be true in an hour. For example, I notice I’m hungry. If I make myself a sandwich and eat it, I will then feel full and more energetic.

Hunger and thirst are usually easy to determine, but other feelings may be more complex. Taking time to focus on what you are feeling can be a very important skill in making good decisions about how you relate to others.

An equally important aspect of self-awareness is the ability to be honest with yourself about your feelings. When we can do this, we have a much better chance of reacting to others appropriately.

### ***“You” Awareness: Paying Attention to the Other Person***

“You” awareness is different and separate from “Me” awareness. It is the skill/capacity/ability to pay attention to what is happening for another human being. “You” awareness is not about you, or explaining yourself, or convincing the other person, or trying to prove anything. It is simply the ability to pay attention to the other person.

The goal is to understand. You don’t need to agree or disagree. In this moment, it’s not about you; it’s about trying to discover, as much as is possible, what the other person is experiencing and saying.

Being able to do this well is an important skill in bringing people together.

### ***“Us” Awareness: Paying Attention to the Relationship***

“Us” awareness is about the relationship. Given that “this” is true for you, and “that” is true for me, what are we going to do? What you want or need is one bookend, what I want or need is the other bookend. In between those bookends are many possibilities. In “Us” awareness, both people care about finding solutions that meet the needs of both parties. When we work together to find mutually beneficial outcomes, we build relationships that are based on respect and honesty.

Here's the contrast between "Us" awareness and a power struggle: when two people (or groups) disagree, the bookends are always "what I want" and "what you want." Those are constant. How we negotiate the solution spells the difference.

# Boundaries

My Boundary	Crossing My Boundary	Enforcing My Boundary
I don't like others using my phone without permission.	My classmate takes my phone and begins to scroll through.	I respectfully request my phone back and remind my classmate that I don't like people using my phone without my permission.
I don't like being hugged by strangers or acquaintances.	Someone comes up to me with arms wide open for a hug.	I step back and extend my hand for a handshake or a fist bump.
I don't like racial slurs or "jokes" at the expense of others.	Someone in my school makes a derogatory remark about a classmate.	I respectfully remind the person that those comments make me uncomfortable.

## Boundaries

Boundaries are the limits you set around yourself to protect and contain your “self” and others. Your boundaries are rooted in your ability to know and value yourself and others. You will build better boundaries when you are clear about where you end and others begin. We all have the right and the responsibility to set healthy, clear, yet flexible boundaries.

Boundaries are influenced by the culture we grow up in. Hugging is one example. Some cultures are very free with hugs, while others are more reserved. Some people are OK with hugging the first time you meet; for others it is reserved for closer, more established relationships. A person who is inclined to hug at first meeting will want to make sure that the person being hugged is comfortable before simply moving in. Conversely, the hugger should not feel rejected if the person being hugged does not welcome the hug.

Boundaries can be physical, emotional, social, mental, and spiritual:

- *Physical:* Our bodies and our personal space
- *Emotional:* Comfort zone (This separates the self from another. It allows us to see ourselves as unique, with our own feelings, needs, and perceptions. It enables us to decide what behaviours we will accept from others and with whom we will be close.)
- *Social:* Social network, friends, and family (This enables us to decide with whom we will be close and whom we will keep at a distance.)
- *Mental:* Beliefs, ideas, information, decision-making process (This determines what information we will take in and consider.)
- *Spiritual/cultural:* Beliefs about the world and our place in it

Healthy, flexible boundaries help us in many ways:

- Healthy boundaries build confidence. As you become more aware of your values, likes and dislikes, and strengths and weaknesses, you will become better able to know yourself. People will sense your clarity and know what to expect from you.
- Boundaries are a form of protection. They make you less vulnerable and enable you to stop being manipulated. Healthy boundaries are like a fence with a gate: they allow you to let in that which is good and keep out that which is harmful. They make you less vulnerable.
- Boundaries are about protection and containment. They help to control the impact you have on the world and they help control the impact the world has on you.
- Boundaries are an important aspect of a healthy relationship; they help build respect for yourself and for others.

- Boundaries make you an asset to your family, friends, team, and community. Others can trust you to be clear about what you can and cannot do. People will know what they can expect from you.
- Boundaries help you control your own life; they allow you to be responsible for your own happiness.
- Boundaries enable you to determine the kinds of experiences you want to have. They help you to be your authentic self. As you become clearer about what's OK and not OK for you, others become more aware of who you truly are.
- Boundaries are about taking care of yourself, not controlling others.
- Boundaries are flexible. They may change depending on:
  - Our role or job at the time
  - How we are feeling
  - The situation we are in

For example, how we behave at a family gathering may be very different from how we behave at work or at school. A friend can stand closer to us than a stranger can. If we are angry with someone or they are angry with us, we may need more space between us. Healthy boundaries are flexible. They are like a fence around a beautiful garden. The fence has a gate: we decide what we let in and what we keep out.



- The right to be called by no names that devalue me
- The right to be asked respectfully rather than ordered
- The right to choose my own friends
- The right to set and maintain my own boundaries
- The right to have and pursue my own interests
- The right to my own identity
- The right to change my mind

