

El Camino:

The Road to Healthy Relationships

Child Trends partnered with the District of Columbia Office of Human Rights and the District of Columbia Department of Health to develop *El Camino: The Road to Healthy Relationships*, a curriculum designed with direct input and collaboration from students and educators to prevent bullying and other forms of interpersonal conflict, both in-person and online. Specifically, the program helps middle school-aged youth—grades 6 through 8—develop knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that support their ability to make decisions based on their personal values and foster healthy relationships with peers, parents and family members, and partners.

El Camino: The Road to Healthy Relationships is intended for implementation in youth-serving agencies, including schools and out-of-school-time (OST) programs. The curriculum is built upon three core components that are essential to the success of the program.

1. **The curriculum is youth-driven;** teachers do not tell the youth what to think, believe, or do.
2. **Teachers use a positive, strengths-based orientation and a focus on skills;** teachers focus on what youth *should* do, not what they *should not* do.
3. **Youth identify their personal values and consider how these values influence their decisions.**



Scope and Sequence

El Camino: The Road to Healthy Relationships consists of two units for use in grades 6 through 8, with lessons aligned to [Washington, DC's curricular health standards](#). Each unit contains five lessons. The curriculum may be used for any grade level within the grade band but is not designed to be delivered in consecutive years. The curriculum contains ten 60-minute lessons, which may also be delivered across twenty 30-minute sessions. The lessons build upon one another by reinforcing previously introduced topics.

In **Unit 1: Values, Identity, and Decision-Making**, students identify their personal values and consider how these values shape their personal identity and influence how they interact with others. Students also learn a decision-making framework called STAR (Stop. Think. Act on your values. Reflect.) to help them identify and cope with strong emotions and navigate interpersonal conflict or relationship challenges.

In **Unit 2: Practicing Healthy Relationships Skills**, students learn about and practice using healthy relationship skills (e.g., empathy, assertive communication, and boundary setting) to act on their values while navigating interpersonal conflict or relationship challenges.

Curriculum Activities

El Camino: The Road to Healthy Relationships incorporates a variety of interactive, youth-driven activities to engage participants. These activities are designed to empower youth to think for themselves about important issues like relationships, personal values, and decision making. These activities include:


- **Reading and discussing** a novella/story that features teen characters, as a means for youth to talk about relationship challenges that they may face
- **“Voting with your feet,”** which encourages youth to move around the room to show agreement or disagreement with a statement or idea that corresponds to a physical area of the room
- **Role playing** with other youth using scenarios that teens may experience in real life
- **Participating** in group discussions, small group activities, and individual reflection
- **Practicing new social and emotional skills** as they are learned, with peers in the classroom (for example, identifying and managing emotions, making decisions, setting personal boundaries, and communicating assertively)

Curriculum Development and Pilots

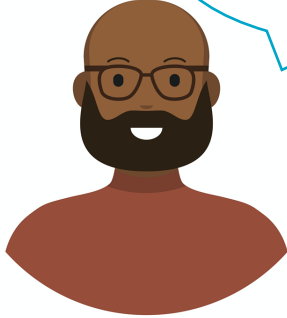
From 2017 to 2020, Child Trends developed *El Camino: The Road to Healthy Relationships* through a series of focus groups conducted with Washington, DC educators and parents, as well as high school students who reflected on their own middle school experiences. Child Trends then piloted the curriculum in five DC classrooms with students in grades 6 through 8. The final curriculum incorporated feedback from DC teachers and administrative leadership, student focus groups and surveys, classroom observations, and facilitator debriefs.

Reach	Demographics ¹
3 schools 5 classrooms 82 youth	Age: ages 11-15; average age 12 years old Gender: 57% female, 43% male Race/ethnicity: 54% Black or African American, 36% Hispanic or Latino, 5% multiracial, 4% another race


Participant Testimonials




My favorite part of the lessons was practicing how to give feedback in real life.



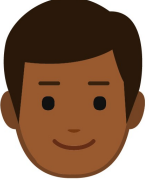
I was looking forward to coaching my students up on how to be effective communicators.



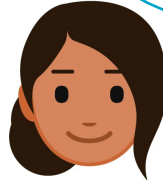
My favorite part of the lessons was talking about teenagers' emotions.



I loved the connections to social media!



My favorite part of the lessons was talking about things that are important to me.



My favorite part of the lessons was talking about boundaries.

El Camino: The Road to Healthy Relationships is available online on the Child Trends website. Materials are available here: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/building-healthy-relationships-among-dc-youth-a-universal-bullying-prevention-program>

This project is funded wholly or in part by the DC Department of Health (DC Health).

¹ Based on survey data from 74 students.