

Guarding Your Heart

Quarter 4 | Lesson 9 | Life Skills

1. **Connecting:** Play a game to introduce the idea of “guarding your heart.”
2. **Teaching:** Learn about healthy and unhealthy emotional attraction (1 Corinthians 13:4–5; Philippians 2:3; Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 4:23; 18:1).
3. **Responding:** Decide if emotional responses are healthy or unhealthy.

Unit Introduction: This unit is about relationships with the opposite gender and about sexual purity. While these lesson topics may feel awkward at times, it is important to help your teens know God’s love and guidance on this subject. It is best to be clear and direct in your teaching. If possible, split up your group and have a woman teach the girls and a man teach the boys. Make yourself available for students’ questions. Your willingness to discuss this sensitive topic will help to equip your teens for a life of purity before God.

SUPPLIES

- Bible
- 1 rag or strip of cloth for each student

Optional Supplies:

- Memory Verse poster
- Pencils
- Student Pages

Teacher Devotion

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Proverbs 4:23

We do many things to protect ourselves physically. We may seek medical attention when we are ill, and we try to avoid dangerous situations. So why do we not show the same care for our emotions and thoughts? Why do we follow our emotions without thinking about where they are leading us? Why do we allow thoughts to lead us toward things that are hurtful to us or others? Have you been hurt in a way that changed your relationships permanently? How did you respond to the pain?

The Bible tells us to guard our hearts. The heart is the centre of who we are—our thoughts and emotions. Guarding our hearts means that we watch over the directions our thoughts and emotions will take us. Will it be toward others in a healthy way and toward God? Or will it take us into unhealthy relationships and things that are sinful and evil? God cautions us to watch over our emotions and thoughts as we would care for something that is precious. Spend a few minutes asking God to show you some areas where you have not been guarding your heart. Ask Him to help you be more diligent.

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Lesson Time

1. Connecting: Play a game to introduce the idea of “guarding your heart.”

As your teens arrive, give each person a rag or a strip of cloth. Each teen should drape the cloth over 1 shoulder.

Invite your teens to move to a large open area. Set boundaries that the teens must stay within for the following game.

We will play a game called Guard Your Heart. The cloth I gave you represents your heart. You must guard it and keep it from being stolen by others. When I say, “Go!” you should try to collect other students’ hearts. You cannot grab them from others’ hands, pull them away from others, or push others out of the way. You can only take hearts from others by gently removing the cloths from their shoulders.

Teacher Tip: Do not say that the person who collects the most hearts wins, even though the teens will likely assume that.

Have teens spread out and begin the game. After about 5 minutes of play, stop the game and ask your teens to sit down.

- **Who do you think won?**

Teens may compare to see who has the most stolen hearts. Check to see if whoever has collected the highest number of hearts still has his own heart. Reveal that the winners are those who did not lose their hearts.

Teacher Tip: You set the tone for how your teens will approach this unit. If you are relaxed as you discuss these important issues, they will relax also. If you are tense, they may think this topic is embarrassing or uncomfortable. God is with you as you teach the teens. Focus on His heart for them, and God will give you confidence and wisdom.

Today we will talk about attraction to those of the opposite sex. Emotional attraction often begins with infatuation. This is a strong feeling of attachment to or admiration for another person. This feeling can sometimes be mistaken for love because it is intense. But unlike the real, biblical love we have talked about, infatuation does not last. Because of this, it is important to learn how to guard your heart so that you are not hurt emotionally, spiritually, or physically. In doing this, you can also protect the other person from being hurt.

2. Teaching: Learn about healthy and unhealthy emotional attraction (Proverbs 18:1; 1 Corinthians 13:4–5; Philippians 2:3; Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 4:23).

Attraction to others is normal, and everyone feels it at some point in life. Many times when you are attracted to someone, it is for good reasons. Maybe you like the way that person smiles or treats others. Perhaps you think the person is smart or funny or nice. Maybe you like the way you feel when you are near that person. All of these are normal responses.

Remember that emotions are not good or bad, right or wrong. It is what we do with them that determines whether they are healthy or unhealthy. We cannot control the emotions we feel, but we are responsible for how we respond to them.

When you are attracted to someone, you may experience several different stages of attraction. At first, all you can think about is that person. You may want to be around that person all the time. You may only see the good things about that person and none of his or her faults.

Next you may think about talking to the person and getting to know the person better. You may want to spend more time with that person, which may cause your feelings of attraction to grow. You may try to find ways to spend more time with that person.

Soon, you may think about telling the person how you feel. This could make you nervous and excited because you hope the person is attracted to you as well. Or you may feel anxious and irritable because you wonder if the person will reject you.

Often the third stage is deciding to tell the person how you feel. If the person has the same feelings, this may develop into a deeper relationship. However, if the person does not feel the same way you do, you may feel hurt or embarrassed. Sometimes you may choose not to share your feelings because of this possibility.

The final stage is when the infatuation ends. It may end because you are no longer attracted to the person or the person is not attracted to you. When the attraction is mutual, it also may develop into a deeper relationship. You may feel sadness or anger if things do not work out as you hoped. Or your emotions may grow beyond infatuation to love based on mutual feelings.

Even though most emotional attractions do not turn into lifelong relationships, we can still learn from them.

- **What do you think you might learn from an emotional attraction?**

Allow a few students to respond before sharing the information below.

Emotional attractions can help prepare you for future relationships. They can help you practice the right way to treat a person of the opposite gender. They can help you deepen your friendships. Emotional attractions can also help you to develop your communication skills.

Emotional attractions can be harmful. When we let our emotions control our behaviour, we may make poor choices that cause emotional or physical harm to us or to others.

The best way to have healthy relationships is to guard your heart. You can do that by showing respect for yourself and others. Here are some ways to do that.

1. Include others. When you are emotionally attracted to someone, it may be tempting to only spend time with or think of that person. Listen to what the Bible says about isolating yourself.

*Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment.*

Proverbs 18:1, ESV

- **How does isolating yourself when dealing with an attraction go against sound judgment?**

Students may answer that not seeking out others may be because you do not want to hear what they will say. You may not want them to keep you from making poor choices. Others may see things about that person that you are ignoring due to the attraction.

Not including others is a sign that your emotional attraction is not healthy. When you are willing to sacrifice relationships that are important, or when you are afraid to tell others about your attraction, it is a warning sign that your attraction is not healthy.

- **Why might you try to keep your emotional attraction secret?**

Students may answer that not wanting to share could indicate shame, embarrassment, or inappropriateness in the relationship.

If you feel that you cannot tell others you trust about your feelings, it may be that your infatuation is with someone inappropriate. Your attraction may be unhealthy if you are infatuated with someone much older, or who is already married, or who your family would not approve of. If you are married and have romantic feelings about someone other than your spouse, it is also unhealthy.

- **Can you think of any other signs that an infatuation is unhealthy?**

Students may share that, in some cultures, it is unhealthy to be infatuated with someone from a rival group or social class. It is also unhealthy to be infatuated with someone who seems dangerous or mysterious or someone you do not know well. While those people may appear exciting, these infatuations may not lead to safe, healthy relationships. Teens should also resist infatuation with someone who is eager for a sexual relationship.

2. Be patient. When you are emotionally attracted to someone, the healthiest way for the relationship to grow is to take time to get to know the person better. But often an infatuation makes you feel like you must act on your feelings immediately.

Have a student read 1 Corinthians 13:4–5 aloud from the Bible.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no record of wrongs.*
1 Corinthians 13:4–5

- **Why would patience and kindness be signs of love?**

Emotional attractions are usually impatient—because they are centred on what you want to make you feel good. But in healthy, loving relationships, people try to be patient with one another. They are willing to wait for the relationship to develop over time.

Rushing a relationship is a sign that this attraction is not healthy. When an infatuation becomes the centre of your life and dominates your thoughts and activities, it is unhealthy.

3. Be unselfish. The verses we just read can tell us about being unselfish as well. Let's read them again.

Ask a student to read 1 Corinthians 13:4–5 again.

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,
it keeps no record of wrongs.*
1 Corinthians 13:4–5

- Why would love not be proud, envious or boastful?
- Why do you think love is not self-seeking or dishonouring of others?

In a loving relationship, both people care about the needs of the other person. In infatuations, most often you are focused on meeting your own needs, not caring for the other person. It is a very selfish way of approaching a relationship. This is why infatuations are often impatient—you want your own desires to be met right now.

- What problems could be caused by focusing only on meeting your own needs in a relationship?
- Students may answer that it is selfish. In the long run, selfish relationships usually do not last. Unselfish relationships better reflect the verses in 1 Corinthians.

4. Be yourself. It may be tempting to try to make yourself look better in the eyes of the person to whom you are attracted. For example, you may act or talk in ways that are not how you normally act. You may laugh at things you do not find funny, or you may act like you are interested in something you are not. Or you may do things that you would never do on your own. In a healthy relationship, you can show the other person who you truly are. It means that you share what you care about and what you believe. You stay true to who you are. Listen to this verse:

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.*
Philippians 2:3

Another way to say this verse is to not be selfish or act in ways to try to impress others.

5. Finally, be sure to put God first. When you have an infatuation, it can feel like the most important thing in your life. But the Bible tells us that when we put God first, He will provide for all of our other needs—physical and emotional. Let's see what Jesus said about this.

Ask a student to read Matthew 6:33 aloud from the Bible.

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well.*
Matthew 6:33

- What do you think it would look like to put God first when you are infatuated with someone?
- Answers may include talking to God about the person and your feelings, continuing to spend time with God, and not allowing the infatuation to take priority over your relationship with God.

God knows you better than anyone, and He will never leave you. Think of Him as the most important Friend you could have—one that you should not dismiss simply because you are infatuated with someone.

- When you do these things, you are guarding your heart. Think back to our game. Who were the winners?
- Allow teens to respond that the winners were those who kept their hearts.

Ask a student to read Proverbs 4:23 aloud from the Bible. Show the Memory Verse poster, if you are using it.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.
Proverbs 4:23

- **What do you think it means to “guard your heart”?**

Guide the teens to understand that they should not offer their hearts—their wills, inmost thoughts, feelings, desires, etc.—to someone easily. They should protect their hearts so that they are not hurt by others. They should save deep intimacy for God and for long-term relationships established in trust and respect.

Just as it is important to guard your own heart, be sure to guard the other person’s heart, too. If someone is infatuated with you, be kind and respectful toward that person, even if you do not feel the same way. Be kind and gentle so that you do not hurt that person when you tell him or her how you feel.

3. Responding: Decide if emotional responses are healthy or unhealthy.

Stand with the teens in the middle of your space. Tell teens that you will read a situation. If they think the person’s response to the situation is healthy, the teens should move to 1 side of the space. If they think the response is unhealthy, they should move to the other side. If they think it is both or they are unsure, they should stay in the middle of the space. As you explain the instructions, point to the different sides.

Optional: If you are using the Student Pages, the teens can do the following activity on their pages.

Situation 1: Akello really likes a girl in his school. He is daydreaming about her during math and misses the assignment for tonight’s homework.

Situation 2: Mary thinks the man who works in the gardens at the church is very kind. He helped her when she fell and scraped her knee. Now, every time she sees him, she blushes and gets embarrassed. She plans to tell him how she feels, even though he is much older than she is.

Situation 3: Mukasa feels very special about a girl who is new to his area. He invites her to spend time with him and a group of friends after school.

Situation 4: Ambokile has flutters in his stomach every time he sees Bupe. When his friend asks Ambokile to help him with a project, Ambokile says no because he hopes Bupe will walk by and smile at him, like she does sometimes.

Situation 5: Kerubo feels guilty. Barasa told her that he had romantic feelings for her. Kerubo likes Barasa too. He pressured her to have sexual relations, and she gave in to his pressure.

Situation 6: Kioko has lots of friends. He likes spending time with all of them, but he especially likes being with Nekesa. He thinks she is really funny and has a nice smile. He decides to pray about his feelings.

Remember that emotions like these are normal. However, it is important to choose to act wisely and not make decisions based only on your emotions.

Close with a blessing based on Philippians 4:6–7:

Blessing: May you experience the peace that passes all understanding as you consider your relationships with others. May you put Jesus Christ first and fill yourself with His love so that you will know how He wants you to guard your heart.

Family Connection: Encourage the students to ask their family members what they consider most important in a relationship. The teens can then share that God wants us to guard our hearts. If possible, provide the students' families with copies of the Resource Article, "Sexual Exploitation," from the beginning of this unit.

Lead the teens in singing this quarter's song, if possible.

"Reckless Love" by Cory Asbury: <https://youtu.be/Sc6SSHuZvQE>