

CHOOSING ABSTINENCE

Lesson 1

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LEARNER OUTCOME¹ W-7.14:

Examine abstinence and decisions to postpone sexual activity as healthy choices.



MATERIALS:

1. HANDOUT: Promoting Abstinence
2. OVERHEAD: Refusal Skills
3. CARDS: Abstinence Role-Play Scenarios
4. HANDOUT: Parent Interview



INTRODUCTION:

Abstaining from sexual activity that involves exchange of bodily fluids and/or genital to genital or skin to genital contact is the only 100% way of avoiding the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STI). Postponement of initial sexual activity, adherence to one sexual partner and protected sexual intercourse are sequentially offered as the next best alternatives.² The programs that are most effective in helping young people to abstain discuss abstinence, contraception and disease prevention.³



This lesson will likely require TWO classes to complete.



APPROACHES/STRATEGIES:

NOTES:

A. Ground Rules

Ensure ground rules are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can promote a successful lesson.

(5-15 min)

B. Discussion Questions

These discussion questions will help students begin to examine abstinence and postponing sexual activity. Encourage students to take notes during the discussion to help them complete assignments that come later in this lesson.

(20-40 min)

1. What is abstinence?

- Abstinence can mean different things to different people. For some, it means having no physical contact with other people. For others, it could mean having limited contact, allowing some activities, but not sexual intercourse.
- Abstinence is often referred to as being 100% safe; meaning that it completely eliminates the risk of STI or unplanned pregnancy. This is only true if the definition includes eliminating any intimate sexual behaviour involving skin to genital, genital to genital or body fluid to genital contact. Pregnancy can occur without intercourse if sperm is ejaculated near the entrance of the vagina or on an area that comes into contact with the vagina. STIs such as herpes and genital warts can be passed through skin-to-skin genital contact.
- The majority of teens in Canada have never had intercourse. According to Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) across Canada 77% of males and 81% of females in grade 9 have never had intercourse.⁴

2. What is virginity?

- Virginity: Virginity has different meanings to different people and various cultures. Generally speaking, it is defined as never having had sexual intercourse.⁵

3. Do you have to be a virgin to be abstinent?

- No. A person who is abstinent is not necessarily a virgin. A virgin has never had sexual intercourse. Someone who is abstinent may have had sexual intercourse in the past, but is not currently sexually active. The choice to be abstinent can be made at any time, regardless of past experience. Just because a person has had sex before does not mean that that person must feel pressured to have sex again.

4. What does postponing sexual activity mean?

- Postponing sexual activity: waiting to have sexual intercourse.

5. What are some reasons young people choose to be abstinent or to postpone sexual activity?

PERSONAL:

- Personal values or religious/moral beliefs
- Not ready yet
- To avoid guilt, fear or disappointment

MEDICAL:

- Fear of pregnancy
- Fear of HIV & AIDS or other STI



Students living with developmental disabilities may need a whole lesson dedicated to personal boundaries due to a potential misinterpretation of verbal cues. People living with disabilities tend to be the target of sexual pressure and may need more practice with role-play and refusal skills. You may choose to play gross motor games using role-play that necessitate assertive, STOP and walk away behaviors. Have each student take several turns both saying STOP and responding appropriately to another person's STOP. Outline steps for reporting violations or sexual pressure. For example, teach students who to report to, how to call the police, and what local resources are available for students.

- Health and protection against disease. For example, risk factors for cervical cancer include: early age of first intercourse, higher number of sexual partners, and younger age at first pregnancy.⁶

RELATIONAL:

- Haven't met the right person
 - To strengthen a relationship. Abstaining or postponing sexual activity may allow time to develop a deeper friendship and establish intimacy that is not sexual. A couple may spend more time talking, building mutual interests, and sharing good times with friends.
6. What are some activities that young people can do together without becoming sexually active?
 - Hold hands
 - Kiss
 - Write love letters
 - Spend time doing other recreational activities (playing tennis, etc.)
 7. What are some qualities that will help maintain abstinence or postpone sexual activity?
 - Ability to resist pressure
 - Respect for other person's feelings
 - High degree of self-control
 8. What are some reasons that a commitment to be abstinent or postpone sexual activity might fail?
 - Fear of saying no
 - Pressure from your partner
 - Peer pressure – "everyone is doing it"
 - Wanting to be loved
 - Use of alcohol or drugs

C. Group Work: Promotional Material

(40 minutes)

Students work together to create promotional materials outlining the importance of abstinence/postponement, exploring alternatives to sexual activity, and identifying ways to say no to sexual activity.

1. Form groups of 3-5 students.
2. Give each group the HANDOUT: Promoting Abstinence.
3. Explain that groups must plan and present promotional material as outlined on the handout.

4. Allow groups time to plan and create their promotional material as outlined on the handout.
5. Have groups present their promotional material to the class.
6. Display any/all assignments that promote abstinence.
7. Debrief using the following discussion questions:
 - What are some of the most convincing reasons to remain abstinent or postpone sexual activity?
 - How realistic were the ideas presented by each group? Are there any other suggestions?

D. Role-Play

The following role-play activities will help students develop skills that promote abstinence and help to postpone sexual activity.

1. Explain that the following role-play activity will allow students to practice skills required for abstinence or postponing sexual activity. The goal of all of the role-plays is for the characters to remain abstinent or postpone sexual activity.
2. Display and discuss the overhead Refusal Skills.
3. Form student groups of 2-3 students.
4. Give each group a Role-Play Scenario card.
5. Explain that groups must plan and present a role-play as outlined on the card they received. The role-play must include pressure lines, and give examples of appropriate refusal skills. Role-plays should range from 1-3 minutes in length. No inappropriate language is allowed.
6. Give groups 5-10 minutes to plan and practice their role-play.
7. Instruct the audience to listen carefully to each presentation, and inform them that there will be a discussion after each presentation.
8. Have each group begin by reading the scenario and introducing the actors and their roles. Groups then act out the role-play.
9. After each presentation, use the following questions to lead a discussion:
 - What were the pressures identified in the role-play?
 - What refusal skills were used?

(40 min)



When using role-play activities that highlight relationship issues, it is important to be cognizant of students in your class who may be involved in or questioning their sexuality. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gendered students often experience pressure in relationships and may at some point want to raise this issue with an adult.

- What alternative actions were suggested?
- your feelings as you watched this role-play?

E. Concluding Discussion⁷

These discussion questions help students make personal decisions about abstinence or postponing sexual activity.

1. If you choose abstinence, how can you ensure it will work for you consistently?
2. How often should you review your decision about abstinence and your reasons for choosing it? Why?
3. If you choose abstinence, when and under what circumstances might you cease to use this method?
4. If you decide abstinence is no longer right for you, how will you choose another method to protect yourself?

F. Parent Interview

Students begin a dialogue with a parent or guardian about relationships and sexuality.

1. Distribute the handout Parent Interview for students to complete as a homework assignment.
2. Explain that students can complete this handout with a parent or guardian. Use the handout Parent Interview to guide the discussion.
3. Dedicate time to debrief this activity during the next lesson. Debrief questions include:
 - How does talking about relationships and sexuality with your parent or guardian help you to form your own values?
 - What was the best experience during the interview?

(10-15 min)

(5 min today, 30 min homework, 5 min next class.)



In the Calgary region (2003) Parent Health Survey, 96% of parents with children aged 10-17 have talked to their children about relationships and sexuality.⁸ Although young adolescents challenge their parents' ideas, they want to hear their parents' opinions and values. Many personal values are learned and reinforced at home. Invite students to discuss this topic with their family and encourage open dialogue.

(10 min)



QUESTION BOX:

If time permits, address student questions.



TAKE IT HOME:

Students will complete the handout Parent Interview.



Keep in mind that all students do not live in a “traditional” family nor do they have equal opportunities for open discussion within their “family.” Although it is best for students to complete this assignment with a supportive parent or guardian, it may not be possible. Be sensitive to the needs of your students.



SELF REFLECTION:

- During the lesson, were:
- Ground rules being followed?
 - Good practices established regarding discussion?
 - Role-play activities handled appropriately by the students?

What will you change for future classes with this group?

What will you change for future use of this lesson?



STUDENT ASSESSMENT:

During the lesson, did students:

- Knowledge:**
- Define abstinence and postponing sexual activity?
 - Outline the importance of abstinence/postponement?
 - Explore alternatives to sexual activity?
 - Identify ways to say no to sexual activity?
- Skills:**
- Exemplify appropriate listening and speaking skills during class discussion?
 - Demonstrate an understanding of refusal skills?
- Attitudes:**
- Decide what personal actions are going to be followed?



You may want to use the Promoting Abstinence materials and presentations for formal evaluation.

¹ Alberta Learning. (2002). Health and Life Skills, Kindergarten to Grade 9, p.12

² SIECUS, Community Action Kit, Responding to Arguments Against Sexuality Education. Retrieved July 2007 from http://www.communityactionkit.org/pdfs/Learning_The_Basics/what_the_research_tells.html

³ SIECCAN. (2004). Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in Canada: A Report Card in 2004. The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, Vol. 13 (2). Retrieved July 2007 from <http://www.sieccan.org/pdf/mckay.pdf>

⁴ SIECCAN. (2004). Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in Canada: A report card in 2004. The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality, Vol. 13 (2). Retrieved July 2007 <http://www.sieccan.org/pdf/mckay.pdf>.

⁵ Wikipedia Encyclopedia. (2007). Retrieved July 2007 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin>.

⁶ Alberta Cervical Cancer Screening Program. (2003). Retrieve July 2006 from <http://www.cancerboard.ab.ca/accsp/women14.html>

⁷ Advocates for Youth. (2007). Teaching Abstinence as a Part of Comprehensive Sex Education: What Is Abstinence? Retrieved July 2007 from: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/lessonplans/abstinence.htm>

⁸ The Calgary Health Region. (2003). Parent Health Survey. Retrieved July 2007 from http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hocr/2003_Parent_Survey/Teen/sexual_behavior.htm