

EXAMINING ABSTINENCE

Lesson 1

LEARNER OUTCOME P12:¹

- Describe sexually healthy actions and choices for one's body, including abstinence
- Analyze strategies for choosing responsible and respectful sexual expression
- Describe the ways in which personal values influence choices
- Assess the consequences of being sexually active



MATERIALS:

1. SLIDE: [Famous Quotes About Love](#)
2. SLIDE: [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#)
3. SLIDE: [Intimate Relationships](#)
4. HANDOUT: ["How Do I Love Thee?"](#)



INTRODUCTION:

Comprehensive Sexual Health Education stresses abstinence as the preferred sexual behavior amongst teens. Abstaining from sexual activity that involves an exchange of bodily fluids and/or genital to genital or skin to genital contact is the only sure way of avoiding the risk of pregnancy and/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. The programs that are most effective in helping young people to abstain discuss abstinence, contraception and sexual health decision-making². This lesson focuses on exploring how teens can make healthy and responsible decisions about future sexual activity.



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

Students review abstinence and postponement of sexual activity.

(15-20 min)

Encourage students to take notes during the discussion to help those complete assignments that come later in this lesson.

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 unintended 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. It is possible for pregnancy to occur without intercourse if sperm is ejaculated near the entrance of the vagina or on an area that comes into contact with the vagina. Some STI such as herpes and HPV can be passed through skin-to-skin genital contact.

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.

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, it does not mean a 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 / family values or religious/moral beliefs
 - Not ready yet
 - To avoid guilt, fear or disappointment



The information students collect about abstinence may help them when completing activities included in the **Contraception** lesson plans.



Some people have sexual intercourse in their teen years. Many do not. Cultures and religions support various values that influence our individual decisions. It is important to realize that these values may be reflected in the attitudes of students in the class and they may be struggling with sexual decision-making.



Remember that different cultures and families have different beliefs about the use of contraception. In many societies, there are cultural taboos against sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

- **MEDICAL:**
 - Fear of pregnancy
 - Fear of HIV & AIDS or other STI
 - Lack of information on contraception
 - 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 pregnancy³.

- **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 makes abstinence work?

- Being able to talk to each other
- Commitment
- Partner cooperation
- Assertiveness
- A positive vision for the future
- Self esteem
- Self-control
- Information
- Knowledge of consequences
- Awareness of your personal values
- Ability to identify sexual situations

7. What factors can cause abstinence to fail?

- Alcohol / drugs
- Peer pressure
- Threat or force
- "Alone for the weekend"

C. How Do I Love Thee...Let Me Count the Ways

Students think about how they can express their love and affection without taking part in sexual activity.

1. Put up the slides: Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Famous Quotes About Love

2. If time permits, give the students one of these short assignments:
 - Gather a collection of cartoons about love
 - Complete the following statement: "Love is..."
 - Ask someone else to complete the above statement



Teachers need to be sensitive to those students who are sexually active. It is important for students not to feel guilty or feel like it is a bad choice.

(20-25 min)


- Complete the following statement: “A truly intimate relationship has these qualities...”
- Gather a collection of quotes about love from poems, music and/or movies

3. Handout How Do I Love Thee and have students complete.

D. How Do You Know?

Students explore the process of making decisions about being ready for a new activity in relation to obtaining a driver’s license.

1. Introduce this activity by explaining to the group that they will all be legally able to try for a driver’s license when they turn 16. Some people in the group may rush out on the first day they are eligible and get their license right away. Others may wait a year, several years and some people may never get their license
2. Ask the group: How many of you want to drive some day? How many of you want to get your driver’s license as soon as you turn 16?
3. *In small groups, have the students do the following:*
 - Make a list on newsprint of all the reasons you can think of why a teen might choose to get their driver’s license.
 - Make a list of all the reasons you can think of why a teen hold off on learning to drive.
 - Imagine your group has the authority to give or refuse a driver’s license to a 16 year old that you test. What are the 3 most important factors that would influence your decision to grant a person a license?
4. Say to the students: “There is no license or official age when making decisions as to whether or not to be sexually active. Some people are very clear on when they will have sex –e.g. they will not have sex until they are in a long term committed relationship. For many others, it can be confusing.
5. Ask the group: How many of you think you may want to have sex some time in your life? How many are very clear about when the right time would be to have sex?
6. Put the students in small groups. The groups make a list on newsprint of all the reasons a teen might want to have sex
 - To show love for partner
 - Desire, curiosity
 - Feels good
 - Wanting to feel loved



You may choose to take in this completed handout for assessment.

(20-25 min)

- Social pressure (from partner, perception that “everyone is doing it”)
7. Groups then make a list on newsprint of all the reasons a teen might postpone having sex.
 - Worried about pregnancy, STI
 - Religious or cultural values
 - Not ready, not the right person,
 - Family expectations
 - Waiting until lifetime commitment
 - You or your partner are drunk or under the influence of substances (youth who know that consequences of alcohol and other substances may include poor decision making may decide to hold back until they are better able to make such decisions)

 8. Next, have groups consider the following: If society were to issue a sex license, that would allow someone to have sex, how would people qualify for one? What would people need to know? What skills need to be developed?
 - STI prevention
 - Contraception, pregnancy prevention
 - Communication skills
 - Negotiation skills

 9. Finally, have the groups use following discussion questions to help the group decide whether they are ready for sex⁴.
 - Am I feeling pressured to have sex by my partner, my friends or television and movies?
 - Will having sex fit with my religious or moral beliefs?
 - Will I feel guilty if I have sex?
 - Do I want to have sex to get love, affection or attention?
 - Do I want to have sex to prove that I am sexually attractive?
 - Am I afraid that my reputation will be hurt if I have sex?
 - Do I think sex will bring my partner and me closer together, both emotionally as well as physically.
 - Do my partner and I both want the same things from sex?
 - Can I talk to my partner about birth control and can we share the responsibility for birth control?



A survey of Canadian youth and mothers (2008) reports that sexual health education at school was an opportunity for 74% of mothers to discuss sexuality and sexual health with their teenager.⁵ Although adolescents challenge their parents' ideas; they want to hear their parents' opinions and values. 45% of teenagers regarded their parents as role models, far ahead of friends and celebrities. Parents play a valuable role in their adolescents' sexual health knowledge, especially the more value-based issues⁵. Invite students to discuss sexual health and sexuality with their family and encourage open dialogue.

- Can I talk to my partner about sexually transmitted diseases and how we can protect ourselves?
- If birth control fails, are we ready to deal with an unplanned pregnancy?
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10. Close the discussion by stating: “the decision whether or not to have sex is not an easy decision to make. A number of issues including STI, pregnancy prevention and skills (communication and negotiation) need to be considered. The decision whether or not to become sexually active or to stop being sexually active (if you have had sex in the past, this does not mean you have to have sex again) is one that each individual needs to consider. Only you can decide what is right for you.”



QUESTION BOX:

(10 min)

If time permits, address student questions.



SELF REFLECTION:

- During the lesson, were:
- Ground rules being followed?
 - Good practices established regarding group work and discussion?

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 postponement of sexual activity?
 - Outline the importance of learning about abstinence?
 - Explore alternatives to sexual activity?
- Skills:**
- Exemplify appropriate listening and speaking skills during class discussion?
 - Decide what personal actions are going to be followed?
- Attitude:**
- Recognize the importance being abstinent within a relationship?

¹ Alberta Education. (2002). *Career and life management guide to implementation*. Retrieved from <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/health/resources/calmguide.aspx>

² Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SEICCAN). (2010). *Sexual health education in the schools: Questions and answers* (3rd Ed.). Retrieved from http://www.sieccan.org/pdf/she_q&a_3rd.pdf

³ Canadian Cancer Society. (2010). *Causes of cervical cancer*. Retrieved from http://www.cancer.ca/Alberta-NWT/About%20cancer/Types%20of%20cancer/Causes%20of%20cervical%20cancer.aspx?sc_lang=en&r=1

⁴ Government of Alberta. (2011). *Am I ready for sex?* Retrieved from: <http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/sex-am-i-ready.html>

⁵ Frappier, J.Y., Kaufman, M., Blatzer, F., Ellito, A, Lane, M., Pinzon, J., McDuff, P. (2008). *A survey of Canadian youth and mothers*. *Paediatr Child Health* 2008, 13 (1): 25-30. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528827/pdf/pch13025.pdf>