

Puberty/Adolescence

Day 3: "Am I normal?"

Grades 9 and 10, Lesson #6

Time Needed

One class period

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Distinguish between definitions of "acquaintance" and "friend" and explain that there are degrees of friendship.
2. Give an example of a personal fact too private to share with an acquaintance or casual friend.
3. Use self-affirmations to strengthen his/her self-esteem.
4. Avoid using the term "normal" as an emotional weapon against him/herself or others.
5. Express confidence that his/ her own adolescent development is within a range that is normal.

Agenda

1. Explain the purpose and relevance of the lesson.
2. Examine the terms "acquaintance", "friend" and "privacy".
3. Introduce the concept of "self-affirmation".
4. Use nametags and The Me Map for group-building and to highlight the "normalcy" of uniqueness.
5. Discuss the use and abuse of the term "normal",
6. Summarize key concepts and celebrate each person's uniqueness.

Materials Needed

NAMETAGS (the stick-on kind, one per student)

Photocopies

One per student of *The Me Map*

Activities

1. Begin with a transition from lesson 5:

*You have had a chance to get to know yourself a little better. Today, we'll take some time to get to know **one another** a little better without invading anyone's privacy. We'll also look at what it means to be "normal" ... which is something most of us worry about from time to time.*

2. Next, examine the issue of **privacy**. First, draw this continuum on the blackboard:

ACQUAINTANCE	CASUAL FRIEND	CLOSE FRIEND	INTIMATE FRIEND
"classmate"	"friend"	"good friend"	"partner"
"neighbor"		"cousin" *	"boyfriend"
"friend-of-a-friend"		"best friend"	"girlfriend"
		"boyfriend"	"best friend"
		"girlfriend"	"spouse"
			"very close friend"

* The term "cousin" is used in some cultures to refer, not to a specific blood relationship, but to a close friend, especially a close family friend.

You may want to add synonyms and examples, as we have above, for clarification. Get the class' help trying to define each category. Ask people to identify, silently, who **in their lives** might fall into each of the categories in the continuum.

Have them look at the *Who Am I? Where Am I Going? Worksheet* (from lesson 5) with this continuum in mind.

Which personal facts would you feel comfortable sharing with an acquaintance? a casual friend? a close friend? an intimate friend? Are there some facts you might not share with anyone?

In other words, what are your personal limits, your privacy boundaries?

Emphasize that people have an absolute right to maintain privacy boundaries and that the specific things one person is comfortable sharing with an acquaintance, for instance, will differ from someone else's specific limits.

Make clear that, at the same time, a person can feel terribly lonely and isolated if those boundaries are extremely tight. Sharing a little about yourself is a way of helping relationships **move** from one category to the next.

3. One reason people are sometimes reluctant to share personal information is that they fear being perceived as self-centered. They fear others will see any positive sharing as "bragging". Get the class' help defining "bragging" and distinguishing it from healthy "self-affirmation." Self-affirmation means a person feels proud (e.g., strong, smart, agile, valuable). He or she can express feeling good and confident without having to make others

feel bad or compare accomplishments. Ask the class for some examples of healthy self-affirmations.

Point out that strong self-esteem depends on the ability to self-affirm (to boast about yourself to people who care about you **as well as** to congratulate yourself silently for being wonderful). In turn, healthy relationships (between friends, family members, partners) depend on the strength of the self-esteem of the individuals.

Write the two basic concepts you've addressed so far on the blackboard:

PRIVACY/SHARING

SELF-AFFIRMATION

Ask the class to keep both principles in mind as they do the next exercise.

- Hand out the nametags and **Me Maps**. Ask that people write the name they prefer to be called on the nametag and put it on. Ask them to fill out the Me Map by copying one complete sentence **they don't mind sharing with the class** (mostly acquaintances) from each section of the *Who Am I? Where Am I Going? Worksheet* (from lesson 5).

Remind everyone of the ground rules, especially **the right to pass** (not share personal information aloud) and **no "put downs"**. You may want to refresh people's memories about the purpose of ground rules:

Remember the case study we discussed at the beginning of the unit -- the class a couple of kids dropped because a classmate was being insensitive? We talked about how people don't always know about the insides of other people's lives ... and how they often will unintentionally hurt or offend someone. That's why we've settled on these ground rules. Let's all remind one another, OK?

NOTE: You may want to have chairs set up in advance in a horseshoe, with plenty of space in the middle of the room for moving around, for this next activity.

NOTE ALSO: The exercise will be more effective if you participate along with the class.

Have half the class (those on one side of the room) fold their **Me Maps** in quarters and toss them into a pile in the middle of the floor. You shuffle the papers so that nobody knows which is which.

Have everyone in the other half of the class stand up and take one paper. Then the **whole** class mills around, and those with other people's **Me Maps** try to find the people who wrote them. They ask, for example, "Is your favorite color blue?" or "Did you used to want to be a fire fighter?"

As each person finds the person who wrote the one they are holding, he or she hands that person his or her own **Me Map** (so they each have one another's). Thus, eventually everyone will get a partner.

(You may need to ask people who aren't "found" after about 3 minutes, to raise their hands, so they can be found more easily.)

Have everyone sit down, with partners, and read his or her partner's nametag and *Me Map*. Then, beginning with yourself, perhaps, one pair at a time stands up and introduces one another to the class:

"This is Mark. Mark was born in Boston and, when he was little, he wanted to be a truck driver." Mark introduces *his* partner: "This is Sylvia. Her favorite TV show is Deal or No Deal and her first memory is her fourth birthday party." ... and so forth.

- When everyone has finished, have them return to their own seats. Point out that there is tremendous variety in the room, as well as some similarities. While people have a lot in common (as was clear in the first Puberty/Adolescence lesson when we looked at changes most teens can anticipate) uniqueness is "normal". Explain that sometimes people forget how wonderful they are as unique individuals because they worry so much about whether they are "normal". They use the term "normal" as a weapon against themselves. Or, to try to convince themselves they are "normal", they use the term as a weapon against someone who is different from them.

The term can actually be used a number of ways; it isn't always a weapon. Here are several meanings:

NORMAL = HEALTHY (Here it is a fact.) *A normal 6-month old baby can sit up, but cannot walk.*

NORMAL = AVERAGE OR USUAL OR COMMON (This can also be verified as a fact, but is sometimes used as a weapon.) *The normal adult penis is 3-5 inches long, when it is not erect. (Hey! That does not imply that a penis outside this usual range is unhealthy!)*

NORMAL = LIKE-THE-MAJORITY OR LIKE-THE-SPEAKER (This is provable, in a sense, but it is an opinion and it implies the belief that to-be-otherwise is **not OK** ... Here it begins to be a weapon.) *Normal families eat dinner together. (Who says so? Just because your family does, doesn't make it so.)*

NORMAL = RIGHT, GOOD, ETHICAL, SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE (This is clearly a belief and usually a weapon.) *I must not be normal; I've never had a boyfriend. (What a self-destructive way to think.)*

So sometimes the term is used to reassure and clarify, like when a doctor tells a parent his or her 6-month old baby is "normal".

Point out that other times, the use of the word "normal" can be hurtful: If you believe that a "normal" relationship means never having any serious arguments and you and your partner **do** argue, you will feel as if your relationship is abnormal (bad, wrong). If you believe that a "normal" guy is interested in sex all the time, and you aren't, you'll think you are abnormal. These kind of stereotypical/prejudicial "normals" are limiting and hurtful.

Ask the class whether the person who is taller or shorter than average, or is a racial or other minority is "abnormal" ... just because he or she is not "average"? Perhaps the term "different" is less likely to be used as a weapon. A person can be different from the majority,

but perfectly normal. You might suggest that, since the word “normal” can be a weapon, the class agree to be very careful about the use of the word.

Remind the class that, with respect to puberty and adolescent development, there is no universal norm. There are healthy ranges, but no absolutes. There are no “normal” ages for physical maturation; there are averages, but a person can be perfectly normal and not mature at exactly 12.47 years ... or whatever ridiculous number you’d get if you averaged the ages that everyone began puberty. Nor are there “normal” ages for crushes and attractions, nor for emotional maturation and social comfort. Everyone progresses at his or her own rate in his or her unique ways, throughout his or her entire life.

6. Discuss and summarize the key issues of the lesson, relating them to sexuality, by raising some of these questions:

How did it feel to share these personal facts? What do you think will ever make it easier for you?

Since there are levels of friendship ... would you share some personal things with one friend and not another?

Which section was it most difficult or uncomfortable to share? If it was the “My Strengths” section, why is it hard for many of us to compliment ourselves? Why is it important to do, even if it is hard?

Close with a celebration of the uniqueness of the members of your class.

*If normal means “in the majority” or “on average”, a person would have to be female in order to be “normal” ... since there are more females than males alive today. She would have to live in China, since more of the world’s population lives there than anywhere. If she **did** live in the United States, and wanted to be “normal” she would have to be 36.5 years old, which is the average age of females living in the United States as of the 2000 census.*

*To help each person celebrate his or her uniqueness, I would like to ask you each to write, at the bottom of your own **Me Map**, “I’m not average ... I’m unique,” sign it, and turn it in for credit.*

Me Map

