

Abstinence, Attitude & Activism

Grade 11 and 12, Lesson #18

Time Needed

One class period

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Define “sexual abstinence” and discuss its potential benefits, List and describe at least 3 negative consequences and 3 positive consequences of sexual intercourse, recognizing that the latter is a controversial issue.
2. Explain the kinds of subtle and overt sexual messages in our society and recognize that these messages can be less influential if one notices and questions them.
3. Describe one way to influence a mass medium and one way to influence a friend or acquaintance, with whom one disagrees.

Agenda

1. Explain the lesson’s relevance and purpose.
2. Use the Abstinence Transparencies to define “abstinence”. In pairs, have students consider potential benefits of abstaining from sexual intercourse, negative and positive consequences of sexual activity, their values regarding “a person’s readiness” and “a relationship’s readiness” for sexual intercourse.
3. Use the Attitude Transparencies to define “attitude”. Use the Worksheet and Learning Stations to address the concept that sexual messages surround us and to help students consider the nature of those messages.
4. Use the Activism Transparencies to define ‘activism’, Use the Reference Sheets and discussion to introduce the concept that each of us can question and influence the media and our friends and acquaintances ... that we do not need to be the passive recipients of others’ influence regarding sexuality.

Materials Needed

One per student of ...

Sexual Influences Worksheet

One class set of ...

Activism Reference Sheet 1: Responding to the Media

Activism Reference Sheet 2: Responding to Jokes and Slurs

Transparencies ...

*Abstinence Transparencies 1 and 2 **

*Attitude Transparencies 1 and 2 **

*Activism Transparencies 1 and 2 **

Six sheets of easel paper

Six learning station items

These can be album covers, magazine ads, jokes overheard in your high school, photos of graffiti from your rest rooms, etc. Tape each to a sheet of easel paper with a numeral at the top (1-6) and post around the walls of the classroom. See Activity 3 for guidance in choosing items to include.

* Alternately, beginning in late 2006, all FLASH transparencies will be available as PowerPoint files on the FLASH web site: www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan/flash

Activities

1. Explain the lesson's relevance and purpose:

Most of you will be leaving home soon...

- *A few of you may already be married and some will be right after you graduate from high school.*
- *Some of you may already be living by yourselves or with roommates and others will be once you graduate.*
- *Some of you will be living in a college dorm or an army barracks.*

You will be facing the same old pressures and new ones, too ... with more responsibility and less outside guidance. You've grown up in a sex-saturated society. You've spent the last 16 or 18 years surrounded by subtle and not-so-subtle sexual messages ... on billboards, radio, television; in magazines, graffiti, and jokes; in conversations with friends and family; in the newspaper, video games, movies, pamphlets in your doctor's office, books, and sometimes from the pulpit.

Sometimes the messages about sexuality conflict with one another. Often the make-believe world portrayed is nothing like reality. Today, you will have an opportunity to consider:

- *your criteria for what is best with respect to sexual behavior,*
- *what kinds of sexual messages and pressures surround you,*
- *how your attitude about those messages can make them more influential or less influential,*
- *how you can become an activist ... actively influencing others (and even the media), instead of being the passive recipient of others' influence.*

2. Use **Abstinence Transparencies 1 and 2** to explain the term and to make clear that different people define "sexual abstinence" differently.

Put three headings on the blackboard:

"Possible Negative Consequences of Sexual Activity" and

"Possible Positive Consequences of Sexual Activity" and

"Benefits of Abstinence"

Have people turn to a partner and take turns listing negative consequences. Explain that they should include any potential negative consequences for any kind of sexual behavior. Explain that each person must take at least two turns before "passing". That way STDs and Pregnancy, the easy answers, will not be their only answers. After about a minute and a half, stop them and have volunteers report their answers aloud, as you jot down the key words. The list should include, at least, these seven factors:

- **unintended pregnancy**
- **sexually transmitted disease**
- **future sexual dysfunctions** (problems with sexual response)
- **intensified loneliness and/or depression**
- **emotional hurt and/or disappointment** (your own or that of people you love)
- **jail or other legal consequences**
- **guilt and regret**

You may want to elaborate upon these seven factors, or invite students to elaborate:

What's so hard about unintended pregnancy?

ONE ANSWER: Having to face...

1. becoming a parent when one isn't ready, and having to support a child emotionally and/or financially for at least 18 years,
2. having an abortion [or one's partner having one], or
3. making an adoption plan for one's baby
4. other people's judgments of you ... none of which is easy or painless.

Point out that unplanned pregnancies are sometimes so upsetting, a woman considers suicide.

But aren't some sexually transmitted diseases just nuisances?

ONE ANSWER: Yes, some are. One "nuisance infection" is pubic lice [curable without any permanent damage.] But at the other extreme, are life-threatening, incurable infections, such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus [the one that usually, if not always, leads to AIDS.]

What kind of sexual experience could lead to future sexual dysfunctions (problems with sexual response)?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

1. Any experience that you feel bad about (especially if you feel scared, degraded, or guilty at the time) or
2. Any experience with someone you don't like (especially an impersonal, dehumanizing one, like one with a stranger).

When might sex only intensify a person's loneliness and/or depression?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS: When they do it...

1. out of obligation or pity or
2. to prove something or
3. to escape boredom
4. to make someone like them or to "catch" or hold on to the person

Why do people sometimes feel emotional hurt and/or disappointment following sex?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

1. It is a mediocre (or boring or lonely) experience that doesn't live up to their expectations.

2. They feel that they've been "conned" or "used" because the other person lied to them, or just had different expectations (that weren't really communicated).
3. Even if it is a positive experience, it can lead to emotional pain when the couple subsequently breaks up. (Not that a break-up wouldn't have been painful anyway, but having had intercourse can make it even more so.)

What people you love could get hurt or disappointed by something sexual you do?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

1. your parents or other family members
2. your spouse/partner or any person to whom you have made a sexual commitment
3. the person with whom you share the sexual experience (and perhaps their family)
4. a child you might be creating

When might a person face jail or other legal consequences for having sex?¹

ANSWER: In Washington State, the following behaviors are illegal unless you are married to the person:

1. intercourse or other sexual contact with someone less than 12 years old ... if you are 24 months older than them
2. intercourse or other sexual contact with someone at least 12 but under 14 ... if you are 36 months older than them
3. intercourse or other sexual contact with someone at least 14 but under 16 ... if you are 48 months older than them
4. intercourse or other sexual contact with someone at least 16 but under 18 ... if you are 60 months older and you are in a supervisory position, such as teacher or doctor
5. incest (intercourse with a child or teen under age 18 if you are a known relative such as a parent or step-parent, grandparent, brother or sister) ²
6. intercourse or other sexual contact through threat or use of force, even if you are married to the person
7. intercourse or other sexual contact when the victim – of any age -- is physically helpless or doesn't understand (which could be interpreted to include a partner who has been drinking),
8. threatening or forcing a minor to engage in sexual contact, knowing that it will be photographed or part of a live performance.

NOTE: In Washington, oral and anal sex are legal, except in the circumstances described above. This is not true in every state.

¹ For the actual wording of rape laws in Washington State, go to: <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=9A.44>. Elsewhere in the U.S., start your legal research here: <http://www.rainn.org/counseling-centers/state-sexual-assault-coalitions.html>

² "Intercourse" is defined under Washington State law to include vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, by a penis or an object, as well as oral-genital contact.

What kinds of sexual experiences can lead to guilt and regret?

ONE ANSWER: Any that do happen to lead to adverse consequences ... as well as any kind that conflict with your values, your moral code. ***For some people, that might include one or more of the following...***

1. forcing or pushing another person into sex
2. having sex when they aren't married
3. having sex with someone they don't care about
4. risking their own and/or someone else's health
5. anything involving deceit
6. a kind of touch they believe is wrong (oral or anal intercourse, vaginal intercourse, same-sex touch, masturbation, touching breasts, etc.)
7. sex with someone who isn't old enough to really understand and consent, or who can't because they've been drinking (or using other drugs) or are developmentally disabled
8. sex that breaks a commitment to be monogamous
9. using birth control
10. not using birth control
11. a kind of touch their family or religion would consider wrong

Discuss which consequences apply to any kind of sexual behavior and which ones only apply to certain behaviors. (Pregnancy, for example, is a possible consequence of only vaginal intercourse, not masturbation, kissing, or oral intercourse. STDs such as HIV could result from any form of intercourse, but not from mutual masturbation [unless there were sores or cuts on one's hands]. Emotional hurt could result even from a kiss, under the wrong circumstances, such as with someone other than one's spouse.)

Next, have the dyads (pairs of students) brainstorm possible positive consequences of sex. The point is to paint an honest picture, not to imply that you (the teacher) think that sex can only ever lead to unhappiness! After a minute or so, have volunteers report back. The "possible positive consequences" list should include, at least these seven factors:

- ***a hoped-for pregnancy***
- ***physical pleasure***
- ***emotional pleasure***
- ***learning about your own feelings and your body***
- ***feeling good about yourself and your body***
- ***deepening the bond between you and another human being, your sense of closeness, of intimacy***
- ***spiritual intimacy (a deepening bond with God or a Higher Power of some sort)***

Point out that the issue of "positive consequences" is a value-laden one:

Some people believe that all the things we've listed are healthy, ethical outcomes of sex ... that, under the right circumstances, sex is supposed to be pleasurable, physically as well as emotionally. What those "right circumstances" are is, of course, also a matter of differing opinions.

Then, some people believe that, even within marriage, sex is not meant for enjoyment, at least not physical enjoyment. They believe it should be only for reproduction, or perhaps for emotional and spiritual intimacy, but not for physical pleasure.

Have pairs discuss benefits of sexual abstinence, besides, “avoiding negative consequences”. Again, have volunteers report back to you. The list should include, at least:

- It can free you to invest in other parts of your life (your music, your acting, a sport, etc.). Some people’s ambition doesn’t leave time and emotional energy for commitment.
- It can deepen the bond between you and another human being, your sense of closeness, of intimacy. Sometimes becoming prematurely sexually intimate interferes with your relationship’s ability to deepen.
- It can give you a sense of safety, security, calm.
- It can give you a sense of pride, if it’s what you believe is right.

Finally, have the dyads decide who will be Person A and who will be Person B. Person A has exactly one minute to explain his or her opinion about “when a person is ‘ready’ for sexual intercourse.” Then person B will have exactly one minute to explain his or her opinion about “when a relationship is ‘ready’ for sexual intercourse.” No reporting will be necessary; in fact, we’d discourage it, as people are expressing their own, perhaps very personal, opinions.

3. Show and discuss briefly the **Attitude Transparencies**. Notice how both definitions 1 and 2 OF “TO HAVE AN ATTITUDE” could be seen as positive. The first is the more traditional definition. It represents flexibility, open-mindedness: TO HAVE A POINT OF VIEW ON AN ISSUE. The second is a meaning commonly used in youth culture. It represents knowing your own mind and refusing to be swayed: TO BE BRAZEN, BULL-HEADED, BOLD ABOUT AN ISSUE. In either case, your attitude affects how likely you are to be influenced by new messages and pressures.

Hand out the Sexual Influences Worksheet. Point out that you have created six Learning Stations around the periphery of the room.

They will give you a chance to examine how our culture (graffiti, advertising, popular music, etc.) affects our attitudes about sexuality..., or how it can affect us, if we don’t pay attention.

Have students fill out the Worksheet as they examine the Learning Stations. There is no particular order for the Worksheet or Learning Stations. (They may begin at any Station, filling out the corresponding section of the Worksheet, and then move on to any other Station, and so forth.) Depending upon the time, you can have students respond to any 3 Learning Stations or to all 6.

In creating Learning Stations, we recommend:

- a. that you use a variety of media (magazine ads, graffiti, album covers, lines from television commercials, etc.)
- b. that you choose thought-provoking items that reflect feelings or values about a variety of sexual issues (gender roles, sexual behavior, relationships, body image, etc.)

- c. that at least one or two of the items reflect positive, affirming messages.

Create Learning Stations by photocopying and taping each one to a large sheet of white paper, with a numeral at the top (one through six).

Allow people no more than 10 minutes to complete only as many Learning Stations as they can. Discuss their reactions.

4. Use the Activism Transparencies to introduce the concept that each of us can question and influence the media and our friends and acquaintances ... that we do not need to be the passive recipients of others' influence. Hand out the Reference Sheets and allow five minutes for people to read them silently. Invite discussion.

Offer that those who wish may keep one or both Reference Sheets. We suggest that you offer extra credit for people's efforts to influence the media's sexual messages and/or to respond to friends' and acquaintances' sexual jokes and slurs. In order to earn this extra credit, a student would simply need to write a one page report about his or her effort.

Sexual Influences Worksheet

NAME _____ DATE _____ PERIOD _____

LEARNING STATION #1:

What does this imply about sex (or about men, or women, or love, or relationships, or any other aspect of sexuality)?

What is your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Are you touched by the message? offended? saddened? scared? Why?

LEARNING STATION #2:

What does this imply about sex (or about men, or women, or love, or relationships, or any other aspect of sexuality)?

What is your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Are you touched by the message? offended? saddened? scared? Why?

LEARNING STATION #3:

What does this imply about sex (or about men, or women, or love, or relationships, or any other aspect of sexuality)?

What is your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Are you touched by the message? offended? saddened? scared? Why?

LEARNING STATION #4:

What does this imply about sex (or about men, or women, or love, or relationships, or any other aspect of sexuality)?

What is your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Are you touched by the message? offended? saddened? scared? Why?

LEARNING STATION #5:

What does this imply about sex (or about men, or women, or love, or relationships, or any other aspect of sexuality)?

What is your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Are you touched by the message? offended? saddened? scared? Why?

LEARNING STATION #6:

What does this imply about sex (or about men, or women, or love, or relationships, or any other aspect of sexuality)?

What is your reaction? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Are you touched by the message? offended? saddened? scared? Why?

Activism Reference Sheet 1: Responding to Media

“Advertising which stereotypes men and women and uses abusive images contributes to the problem of sexual and physical abuse by saying it’s OK, glamorous, and sexy. Advertising affects us all. If it didn’t work, they wouldn’t use it.” -- The Rev. Marie M. Fortune

So? What can you do if you find the media offensive? You’re only one person!

FIRST: Figure out what it is that offends you.

What’s wrong with this particular show or commercial or billboard or pop song? Does it promote a stereotype? Does it degrade someone or teach people to degrade one another? Does it encourage people to manipulate (con) or exploit (use) one another? Does it imply that casual sex is best ... no strings, no caring, no consequences?

SECOND: Talk about it.

Tell people what you think about it. Tell your friend, your little brother or sister, your child. No big deal? Maybe one message is no big deal, but messages add up ... if we just let them slide. Pretty soon, we even begin to believe them. Talking helps.

THIRD: Write a letter, plan a petition or a demonstration.

Speak up. To whom? How about the t.v. network or the the local t.v. or radio station? How about the company that rents the billboard space, or the company whose product is selling hurt and prejudice? How about the newspaper or magazine editor?

What should you say? We do not recommend that you advocate censorship. Whether your opinion is liberal or conservative, censorship is not the answer, in our opinion, in a democratic society.

“One of the best ways to eliminate hatred in a society is to expose it, examine it, and discuss its effects. Hiding it ... only guarantees its perpetuation.”

-- Donna Hulsizer

Instead, we suggest you...

1. express your opinion about the message being portrayed, and
2. ask that either
 - a. they give equal time to the other (or AN-other) message or
 - b. they air a direct discussion of the message.
3. and thank them when they do portray the kind of attitudes you appreciate.

These addresses of the major t.v. networks may help:

ABC Inc., 500 S. Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521, (818) 460-7477,
www.abc.go.com

CBS, 51 West 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 975-4321, www.cbs.com

NBC, 100 Universal City Plaza, Universal City, CA 91608, www.nbc.com

Other media:

REFERENCES:

About-Face is a non-profit group that promotes positive self-esteem in girls and women of all ages, sizes, races and backgrounds through a spirited approach to media education, outreach and activism. <http://www.about-face.org>

Images in Action, from Tolerance.org addresses historical and modern day images that contain hidden messages about us, about others and about our world.
http://www.tolerance.org/images_action/index.jsp

Do Something is a community where young people learn, listen, speak, vote, volunteer, ask, and take action to make the world a better place.
<http://www.dosomething.org/index.cfm>

Youth Activism is a site where you can pick a cause, find out who you can consult with, read success stories and more. www.youthactivism.com

The Freechild Project provides resources, training, and consultation to individuals and organizations interested in youth voice, youth-led activism, meaningful youth involvement, and youth-adult partnerships. <http://www.freechild.org/index.htm>

Youth Empowerment Initiatives at Advocates for Youth works in the U.S. and developing countries to empower youth to participate meaningfully in developing programs and policies that will affect their health and well-being.
<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/about/youthempowerment.htm>

Activism Reference Sheet 2: Responding To Jokes & Slurs

HEY, J—
DID YOU HEAR
THE ONE ABOUT
THE SLUT?



YOU MEAN THE GIRL
WHO PEOPLE SAY HAS
HAD SEX WITH MORE
THAN ONE GUY?



... YOU WANNA
HEAR MY
JOKE?



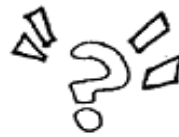
WAIT, PAMMY,
I HAVE ONE FOR YOU!
HOW DO YOU TREAT A
GIRL WHO'S HAD SEX?



I DON'T
KNOW.
HOW?



THE SAME WAY
YOU TREAT A GUY
WHO'S HAD SEX.
LIKE A PERSON.



J... THAT'S
NOT FUNNY.



YOU'RE RIGHT.
I DIDN'T MEAN
FOR IT TO BE.



OH, I GET IT.
SORRY.
YOU'RE RIGHT.

OK.
HOW DO YOU
TREAT A PERSON
OF COLOR?



HEY,
IT'S OK.



LIKE A PERSON.
HOW DO YOU TREAT
A SMALL CHILD?

LIKE A PERSON.
HOW DO YOU TREAT
SOMEONE WITH AIDS?

LIKE A PERSON.
I LOVE YOU, JASON.

LIKE A PERSON.
HOW DO YOU TREAT
SOMEONE IN A WHEELCHAIR?

Abstinence Transparency 1

AB - STAIN (ăb-stān) *v.*

**To voluntarily keep from
doing something:**

**abstain from drinking
abstain from voting**

- **ab sti-nent** *adj.*
- **ab sti-nence** *n.*

American Heritage Desk Dictionary

Abstinence Transparency 2

SEXUAL ABSTINENCE

Definition #1: choosing not to have any sexual touch at all (not alone or with another person ... no slow dancing, no masturbation, etc)

Definition #2: choosing not to share any sexual touch with another person that could lead to intercourse (perhaps holding hands, kissing; but not heavy kissing, touching breasts or genitals, etc.)

Definition #3: choosing not to have sexual intercourse (perhaps sharing sexual touch, even to orgasm; but no vaginal, oral or anal intercourse)

Definition #4: choosing not to have vaginal or anal intercourse (perhaps having oral sex, but not vaginal or anal intercourse)

Attitude Transparency 1

AT-TI-TUDE (ăt-ĭt-tood) *n.*

A way of thinking or behaving

Oxford American Dictionary
Avon Publishers, 1980

Attitude Transparency 2

TO HAVE AN ATTITUDE

Definition #1: to have a point of view on an issue

“My attitude about your People changed when I met you.” ... the entire combination of my feelings, beliefs, and level of knowledge / misconceptions

Definition #2: to be brazen, bull-headed, bold about an issue

“You have an attitude.” ... a “Don’t mess with me; I’ve got strong feelings or opinions about this and I’m not open to your influence!” point of view

Activism Transparency 1

AC-TIV-ISM (ăk-tiv-izəm) *n.*

A ... practice based on militant action

MIL-I-TANT (mīl-ə-tənt) *adj.*

Fighting ... in the service of some cause

The American Heritage Dictionary
Houghton Mifflin, 1981

Activism Transparency 2

ACTIVISM

Definition #1: fighting for what you believe

Definition #2: acting (writing letters, speaking up, etc.) in order to influence others attitudes