

DECISION MAKING

Lesson 1

GRADE

7

LEARNER OUTCOME¹ W-7.13:

Examine the influences on personal decision making for responsible sexual behaviour.



MATERIALS:

1. **HANDOUT: My Personal Life Line**
2. **HANDOUT: Family Values**



INTRODUCTION:

Making decisions about sexual behaviour is a values based exercise. In order to be able to make their own decisions, students need to examine various aspects of sexuality. The exercises in this lesson encourage students to explore their own ideas and values about becoming sexually active.



APPROACHES/STRATEGIES:

A. GROUND RULES (5-10 min)

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.

B. PRESSURES BRAINSTORM (20-40 min)

Students examine reasons why teens may become sexually active by exploring different sources of pressure.

1. Write this question on the board: What pressures are there for teens to become sexually active?
2. Give students time to write down a response to the question. Emphasize that the question refers to all teens, and that answers do not need to be personal.

3. Give students the option to remain anonymous by not writing their name on the page.
4. Collect responses.
5. Without revealing the “author” to the class, use the students’ responses to lead a discussion. Use the following framework:
 - Write the pressure on the board. (This step may require you to summarize student responses. For example, both “Peers make you feel like a loser if you don’t,” and, “Some people’s friends might already be having sex,” could both be placed under a heading such as Peer Pressure.)
 - For each pressure identified by the students, discuss the following questions:
 - Why might this cause a teen to feel pressure to have sex?
 - If a teen is feeling this kind of pressure, what can he or she do to reduce or eliminate the pressure?

PRESSURE: POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Peer Pressure:

- Like any situation, doing something because of peer pressure versus making your own decision is not recommended.
- Sex may be encountered outside of a traditional romantic relationship, as in the case of sex for fun or sex for favours. It is important to emphasize that students need to do what is good and risk free for themselves. Consider the values and beliefs of your family and community. Is sex outside of a traditional romantic relationship something they would see positively?

Alcohol and Drug Use

- Using alcohol or drugs reduces one’s ability to make informed decisions. This reduced ability can lead to actions that are not reflective of one’s values or convictions.
- When in a crowd, it is important to watch your drink to ensure that it isn’t altered by anyone else.

Relationship–Partner Pressure/Partner Agreement

- Decisions about sexual relationships should be made equally by partners. These decisions should reflect the values and wishes of both partners.
- It is important to respect your partner’s decision to not become sexually active, and important to understand that you deserve to be treated with respect if you decide against becoming sexually active.
- If both partners want to proceed with becoming sexually active, this decision comes with responsibilities and possible consequences. It is essential to ensure that sexual activity is as safe as possible.

Media (TV, movies, music, Internet, social media, etc.)

- The media often provides an unrealistic portrayal of sexuality. Sexual activity is often portrayed as having no negative consequences. Also, media tends to portray sexual activity as being more prevalent than it actually is.

Pornography

- If students identify this as a source of influence, teachers may want to ask students to clarify the message. Being exposed to pornography could be an indication of abuse by an adult.
- Some students who are exposed to pornography say that they will try to emulate it. Ensure that students understand that pornography may portray an unrealistic or unhealthy version of sexuality.

Clothing/ Appearance

- While clothing can send messages, it is important to emphasize that interpreting these messages as consent for sexual activity is wrong. Consent is not given by clothing or appearance. Consent can only be given verbally in a spirit of cooperation. The absence of “yes” means no.
- Clothing can represent culture and belief. It is important to respect other’s values and beliefs around clothing.

Hormones/ Attraction

- Natural and normal responses to hormones and attraction do not necessarily equal natural and normal actions. For example, it is normal to be attracted to someone, but not normal to harass that person.
- Having sexual feelings can be normal, however a person is not required to act on these feelings if one is not ready, if it is not appropriate, or not consented to.

Curiosity

- Becoming sexually active needs to happen when someone is ready. Not when someone is curious. If you have questions about sexuality, you can ask a parent or supportive adult in your life for an honest, open answer.

Prior Sexual Activity

- Abstinence is a choice. Having been sexually active once, or even many times, does not mean that a person cannot choose abstinence.

Seeking Acceptance/ Love/ Comfort

- Often, troubling situations and low self-esteem can lead a person to seek acceptance, love and comfort in ways they would otherwise not be comfortable. Becoming sexually active is not a healthy way to solve problems or to gain acceptance and can decrease self-esteem.
6. Debrief this activity using the following questions²:
- How is not making a decision about becoming sexually active, a decision?
 - Why is equality between romantic partners so important?
 - What skills does a person need when they are part of a couple making decisions about a sexual relationship?

C. LIFE LINE (40 min)

Students examine their personal life goals and decisions, and explore the impact that becoming sexually active might have on these plans.

1. Distribute a copy of the handout **My Personal Life Line**.
2. Have students write the current year at the bottom of the line, and the year they will turn 30 at the top.
3. Have students write their age next to the bottom of the line.
4. Next, have students make marks along the timeline indicating:
 - a) The age at which they would like to start their first “real” job. Have them write the type of occupation they would like to pursue.
 - b) The youngest age at which you would like to become involved in a long-term committed relationship. Have them write the word “relationship” or “marriage” here.
 - c) The age at which they would like to be a parent for the first time. Next to the mark, write the age and number of children you would like to have. If a student never intends to have children, have them write “no children” at the age that represents a possible answer.
 - d) The accomplishments they would like to achieve (such as graduation, travel, etc.) between now and the first mark along the line.
 - e) Any other major events along the timeline that have not been covered in the instructions.
5. Begin a class survey, polling the group to determine the average age for beginning an occupation, entering into a relationship/marriage, or having children.
6. Discuss the various plans that students have listed to occur between now and when “real life” begins, as indicated by the marks indicating occupation, relationship/ marriage, and children.
7. Ask the students to put two more marks on the timeline, one in the space between now and relationship/marriage, and the other at any point they choose. Number these marks 1 and 2.
8. Have students label the two extra marks as follows: 1 = pregnancy. 2 = STI. Some students may refuse to write these down. This is a good sign, as it indicates responsible sexual decision making.



Remember many students have different religious or cultural expectations surrounding relationships and marriage. In some cultures, it may not be appropriate for a female to be seen alone with a male even if they are friends. Other cultures or religions expect females to marry at a very young age. If teachers are open to this information, they may be a good source of support for students who are trying to understand their personal beliefs.

9. Debrief this activity using the following questions:

- How would these events fit into your planned lifeline?
- In the case of teen pregnancy, what other goals would likely have to be cancelled, altered, or postponed?
- What age points would have to move back?
- What other impacts do you imagine there would be?
- What about an STI? What implications does this have for the future?
- If you disagree with the appearance of any of these “added” life situations in your life, what does this mean for the decisions and lifestyle choices you are making now or will have to make in the near future?
- What are you doing now to accomplish the goals you’ve indicated?



Although teens may challenge their parents’ ideas, they want to hear their parents’ opinions and values. A survey conducted with Canadian teenagers found the teens saw their parents as their role models when it came to sexuality and sexual health, not celebrities from movies, television, music or sport⁴. Many personal values are learned and reinforced at home. Invite students to discuss this topic with their family and encourage open dialogue.

D. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION (10-15 min)

Students are encouraged to make personal decisions about abstinence or postponing sexual activity³.

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?

E. FAMILY VALUES

*Invite students to interview a member of their family about family values. Use the handout **Family Values** as a guide.*



QUESTION BOX (10 min)

Have students fill out questions and address them next class.



TAKE IT HOME

Students complete the handout **Family Values**.



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 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:

- Identify various sources of pressure that may influence one’s decisions about sexual behaviour.
- Clarify family values about sexuality.

Skills:

- Use a decision-making framework to learn how to set goals and make decisions?
- Make personal decisions about abstinence or postponing sexual activity?
- Set some life goals and discuss the impact that becoming sexually active might have on these plans?

Attitudes:

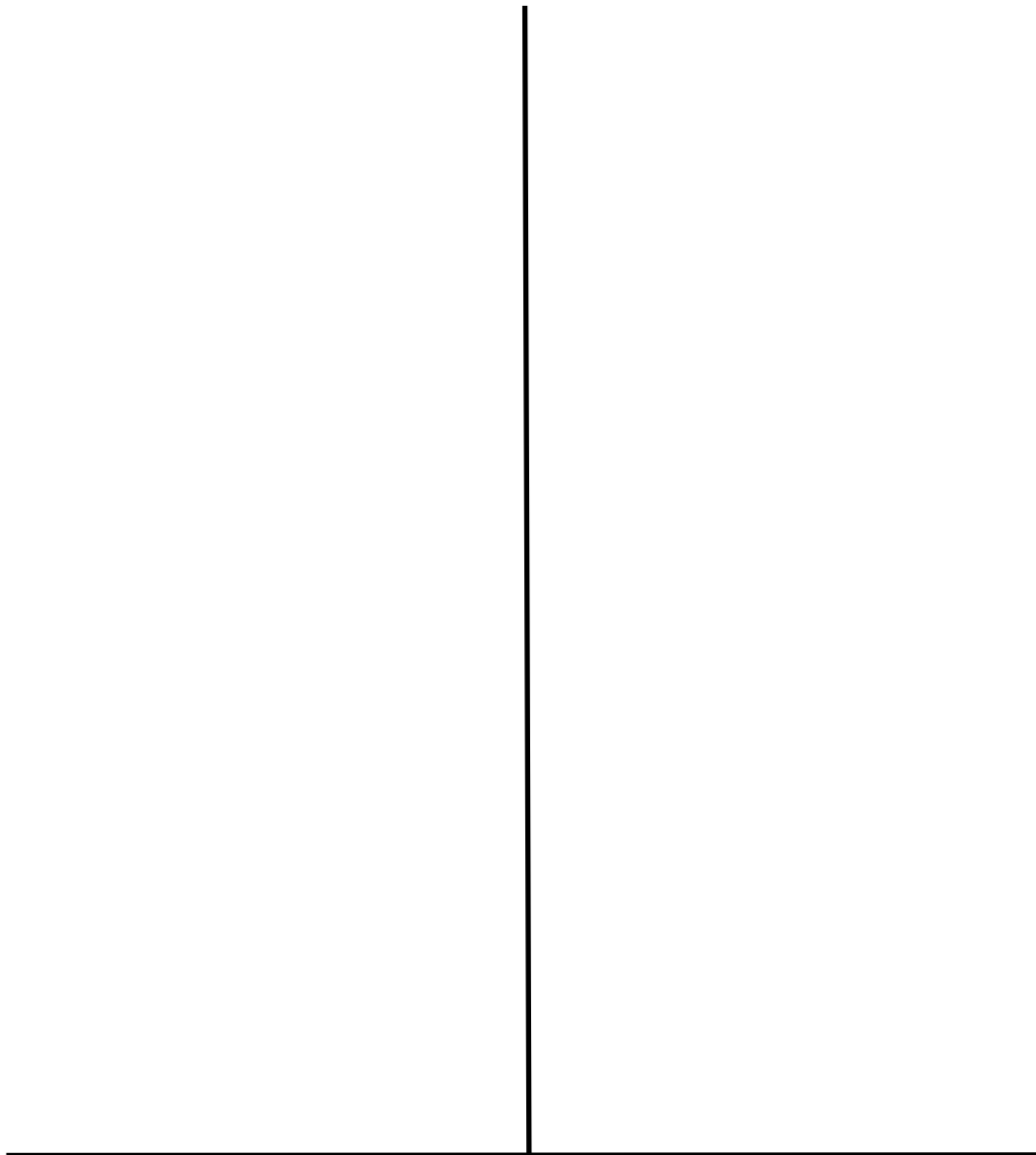
- Recognize that each person needs to make a conscious choice about becoming sexually active or not.

1. Alberta Education. (2002). *Health and life skills guide to implementation: Kindergarten to grade 9*. Retrieved from <http://education.alberta.ca/media/352993/pos.pdf>
2. Alberta Education. (2002). *Health and life skills guide to implementation: Kindergarten to grade 9*. Retrieved from <http://education.alberta.ca/media/352993/pos.pdf>
3. Advocates for Youth. (2008). *Teaching Abstinence as a Part of Comprehensive Sex Education: What Is Abstinence?* Retrieved from <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/professionals/lesson-plans-professionals/192?task=view>
4. Frappier, J.Y., Kaufman, M., Baltzer, F., Elliott, A., Lane, M., Pinzon, J., et al. (2008). Sex and sexual health: 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>

Name: _____

MY PERSONAL LIFE LINE

The line below represents your personal life line. At the bottom is this year. At the top is the year you turn 30. Your teacher will give you instructions to complete the activity.



Name: _____

FAMILY VALUES

The decisions you make about sexuality will be based, at least in part, on your family values. Talking with your family about these values can help you to make decisions about sexuality. Use this handout as a guide to interview a supportive adult in your family about the values they would like to share with you.

- Step 1** Take this handout home. Share it with a parent or a supportive adult, and ask that person if you can complete it together.
- Step 2** Schedule at least half an hour with the adult for the interview. Give the person you will interview this handout so that they can think about the answers before the interview.
- Step 3** Conduct the interview using the questions provided.
- Step 4** Both you and the person you interviewed sign the tear-off slip at the bottom of the page when the interview is complete. This tear-off slip can be handed in to show that you have completed the activity.

1. What are three personal or family values that you would like to share with me?

2. Over the next five years, how can I use these values to make good decisions about sexual behaviour?

(Tear off and hand in this slip only)

We completed the “Family Values” Interview.

_____ Student

_____ Parent/Adult Support