

My Life, My Decisions

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

Students will be able to:

PD.12.CC.1 – Analyze how brain development has an impact on cognitive, social and emotional changes of adolescence and early adulthood.

PR.12.INF.1 – Analyze influences that may have an impact on deciding whether or when to engage in sexual behaviors.

TARGET GRADE:

High School – Lesson 11

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Projector and screen
- Computer with PowerPoint
- PowerPoint: "What Would You Do If...?"
- White board and markers
- "Considering Others' Opinions" worksheet (one per student)
- Homework: "Values and Beliefs Interview" (one per student)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Name at least three messages they receive about sexuality from different people in their lives. [Knowledge]
2. Describe the extent to which these people have an impact on students' decision-making. [Knowledge]
3. Identify at least two other factors that have an impact on sexual decision-making. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar—using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him," using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Introduce the lesson by asking the students, "Have you ever said or done something to someone that afterwards you just asked yourself, 'Holy smokes, why on earth did I just say or do that?'" It could be something really minor like walking in the room and calling a friend a nickname you never have before, and once it's out, it sounds really dumb. Or it could be something more significant like someone asking you to keep something just between the two of you, and it being too good to keep to yourself, so you just tell one person and immediately regret it."

After a few students have responded, ask, "What does it feel like in that moment right after we've realized that what we did was the wrong thing to do?" Answers will vary, but more often than not students will either physically put their hands on their stomach or refer to that area—that it does not feel good and can make you almost feel sick to your stomach.

Say, "We all go through this—and not just once, it's something we all experience throughout our lives. We sometimes make decisions without thinking, and sometimes—even when we think them through really well at first—we still sometimes make a decision we wish we had not made."

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Ask, “Can anyone think of a time when you made a decision that really paid off for you, or that you knew was the right thing to do?” Ask for a few examples.

Say, “Clearly, there are just as many opportunities to make positive decisions as there are to make bad ones. Today, we’re going to talk about sexual decision-making and what and who can have an impact on the decisions we make.” (4 minutes)

STEP 2: Say, “In a moment, I’m going to hand you each a worksheet that lists a number of things people need to think about when they’re in sexual relationships. Across the top, you’ll see categories of people we might have in our lives.” Show the students the worksheet and read the categories of people aloud. Tell them that having the support of family and loved ones can be very important and communicating with other adults can be beneficial when they are trying to make important decisions in their lives.

Say, “What I’d like you to do is read each statement and think about what these different people in your life might say in response. For example, say you were interested in someone and wanted to ask them out—or you knew they were going to ask you out. Who would you talk with about that? What would you expect them to say? Write those things in the boxes provided. Because some categories can apply to more than one person—like a close friend—feel free to decide on who that person will be for the purposes of this activity and write their name in that box. Even if you wouldn’t discuss one of the topics with a particular person, please write what you imagine they’d say, as our perceptions are sometimes just as important as what we actually hear from people!”

Tell them that they will be discussing their responses with at least one other student in the class, but how much of what they share will be up to them. Distribute the worksheets and ask students to complete them individually. Tell them they will have 8 minutes in which to complete the worksheet. (12 minutes)

***Note to the Teacher:** As students are working, write the discussion questions listed in Step 3 on the white board.*

STEP 3: After about 8 minutes, ask everyone to stop what they are doing and pair up with another student. Say, “I’m going to ask you to talk in pairs about what that experience was like for you. Please use the following questions to discuss what you just did:

- How did you know what these people in your lives would say?
- What did you think of these messages? Were they mostly positive, negative or a mix?
- In what ways do you think the people listed on your sheet affect or would affect the decisions you make about sexuality? Why?”

After a few minutes, ask students to stop their paired discussions and share responses in the larger group by reviewing their answers to the three discussion questions. After going through the three discussion questions, say, “People in our lives have influence over us, no matter who they are. Some have more than others. Let’s look a little deeper at this.”

Start the PowerPoint “What Would You Do If...?” Read the first statement on Slide 1 and ask the students to respond. Then reveal the second statement on the slide and ask whether they would change their minds—based on who the second person is—or stick with their original decision. Discuss why or why not. Continue with Slides 2 and 3. (16 minutes)

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STEP 4: Say, “Aside from the people in our lives, when it comes to making decisions about sex and sexuality, what other things come into play? For example, ‘past experience’ [write that word on the board in a different color] may have an impact on whether I choose to do or not to do something. What else comes to mind?” As students respond, write their answers on the board. Each list will be different, but in general, probe for:

- Past experience (positive)
- Past experience (negative)
- Whether I know anyone who has done this behavior and how it went for them
- What my personal/religious values are about a particular behavior or having sex
- How I feel about my body
- My understanding of my sexual orientation
- What I see depicted in the media
- What I have seen on the Internet

Say, “We often hear from people, ‘I’m not influenced by other people or the media; I make up my own decisions.’ The reality is that it is impossible to make decisions about anything—let alone something as important as sex and sexuality—in a vacuum. We are definitely influenced by the people and the world around us—and sometimes we’re not even aware of what that influence is.

It feels a bit simplistic to say that, above all, what you want and think is right is the most important thing—but it’s actually true. In the end, you are the one who benefits from your positive decisions, and you’re the one who has to deal with the negative consequences if there are any. So no matter what you hear, or what you think you know about others, you have the right to think and make decisions for yourself.”

Explain to students that they do not always have to be alone when making important decisions, including decisions about sex and sexuality, and that finding trusted adults in their life that they can talk to is very important. The “*Values and Beliefs Interview*” homework assignment will help them think about which adults in their life they can talk to about sex and sexuality and a brief interview with this person will help them begin the steps to creating open and honest communication. (12 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The worksheet activity and paired discussion will achieve Learning Objectives 1 and 2, and the brainstorm and discussion relating to other influences will achieve Learning Objective 3.

HOMEWORK:

The “*Values and Beliefs Interview*” homework sheet, in which students select a trusted adult to interview about their beliefs on sex and sexuality and begin a conversation about these topics.

Considering Others' Opinions

Name _____ Date _____

When making decisions about sex and sexuality, it can be really useful to hear what other people have to say. (Then again, sometimes it's not!) Who would you talk with, and what would you expect them to say?

In the table below, write some of the messages you would expect to hear from these key people in your life. Feel free to write in their names to help you focus on one specific person if you have several people that could fit in the same column. If you don't have one of these categories of people in your life, just leave it blank, or you can change it to a category that's not here.

	PARENT/ CAREGIVER	SIBLING	PARTNER/ BF/GF	BEST FRIEND	RELIGIOUS/ FAITH LEADER	OTHER?
1. Whether you should ask out or go out with someone that you've liked for a long time						
2. Whether you're ready to have sex						
3. Which types of safer sex or birth control/contraceptive methods to use						
4. Whether it's weird that you want to wait to have sex						
5. What you or a partner should do about an unplanned pregnancy						
6. Whether you should get tested for STIs before starting a new relationship						

Values and Beliefs Interview

Homework (HS-11)

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Think about the adults in your life that you might be able to talk to about important things, like sex and sexuality. Pick someone such as a parent, caregiver, family member, teacher or mentor to interview about their thoughts and feelings about sex and relationships. This interview might start a conversation about your own thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs and might lead to more conversations in the future.

Ask your trusted adult:

1. Briefly describe the messages that your parent(s)/caregivers gave you about the following topics:
 - Sexuality
 - Women
 - Men
 - Heterosexual (Female/Male) Relationships
 - Same Sex Relationships
 - Premarital Sex
 - Birth Control
 - Teenage Pregnancy
 - STIs and HIV/AIDS
2. How do you feel about your parent(s)/caregivers(s) messages? Do you agree with these messages now? Disagree?
3. If your own values and beliefs are different from your parent(s)/caregiver(s)' values and beliefs about these topics, what do you think caused the difference in beliefs?
4. What messages would you like your own child (or me) to receive? What changes might you make?
5. If your values and beliefs are different than my own, how would you feel if I came to you for advice on one of these topics?
6. What advice could you give me, based on your own experiences and reflections, on how I can become a healthy adult and have healthy relationships?