

# Grade 7

## Choosing Abstinence



### Learner Outcomes

**W-7.14** *Examine abstinence and decisions to postpone sexual activity as healthy choices*

### How To Use

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This lesson plan contains several activities to achieve the learner outcome above. You may choose to do some or all of the activities, based on the needs of your students and the time available. Some of the activities build on the ones that come before them, but all can be used individually.

For a quick lesson, combine activities A, B and E.

### Classroom Activities & Timing

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- A. Ground Rules (5-10 minutes)
- B. Abstinence and Sexual Activity (20-30 minutes)
- C. Promoting Abstinence Group Project (60-90 minutes)
- D. Ask an Adult Interview
- E. Question Box (5-10 minutes)

### Required Materials

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HANDOUT: Promoting Abstinence

HANDOUT: Ask an Adult

## Background Information for Teachers

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When talking about sexual activity, it is important to recognize that sexual activity consists of a variety of behaviours on a continuum ranging from any physical contact with another person to sexual intercourse. Different people place different activities in different places on this continuum. For example, while one person might consider touching another's breasts sexual activity, another may not. Similarly, some people may not count anal or oral sex as sexual activity if they only consider vaginal sex as sex.

When talking about consent to sexual activity, the full range of sexual activities, from sexual touching, hugging and kissing to intercourse, count as sexual activity.

Although people make decisions to participate in or abstain from different activities, in this lesson, sexual activity means direct touching of a partner's genitals, vaginal sex, oral sex or anal sex.

The only sure way to avoid pregnancy is to abstain from any activity where a penis or semen are near the vaginal area (including anal and vaginal sex or penis/vaginal touching). The only sure way to avoid STBBIs (sexually transmitted and blood borne infections) is to abstain from any activity that involves sexual contact between one person's body and another person's genital area, semen, vaginal fluid or blood.

For students who engage in sexual activity, these strategies can reduce the risk of pregnancy:

- Choosing sexual activities that cannot lead to pregnancy (e.g., mutual masturbation, oral sex)
- Correctly and consistently using dual protection. Condom plus another method of birth control increases birth control effectiveness and also reduces the risk for STBBIs.
- Clear communication with partners about intentions, limits and safer sex

For students who engage in sexual activity, these strategies can reduce the risk of STBBIs:

- Limiting sexual partners
- Correctly and consistently using barriers (internal and external condoms, dental dams) to reduce transmission
- Getting vaccinated against hepatitis B & human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Getting regular testing and subsequent treatment if needed

- Clear communication between partners about sexual history, testing and treatment
- Using PrEP if at high risk for HIV

Educational programs that result in the most positive sexual health outcomes (e.g. delayed first intercourse, safer sex strategies, healthy relationships) and that are the best at reducing negative sexual health outcomes (e.g. unintended pregnancy, STBBIs) are programs that are comprehensive and include information about contraception, relationships, sexual decision making & STBI prevention.

Abstinence is one possible choice regarding sexual activity for youth. It is often a healthy choice, as risks associated with sex can be avoided. However, it is important that the teacher not over-emphasize abstinence as the right choice because of their unconscious or conscious bias.

### **Inclusive Language**

Language is complex, evolving and powerful. In these lessons, [inclusive language](#) is used to be inclusive of all students, including those with diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. This includes the use of ‘they’ as a singular gender-neutral pronoun.

A person’s sex can be assigned at birth as male or female. Some people are intersex (the reproductive, sexual or genetic biology of a person is unclear, not exclusively male or female or otherwise does not fit within traditional definitions of male or female). Assigned sex is independent of gender.

Gender identity is a person’s internal sense of identity as girl/woman, boy/man, fluid among genders or no gender (regardless of what sex they were assigned at birth).

For many people, their gender is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth (cisgender). For others, their gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. They may use terms like transgender, trans, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, agender or others, to describe their gender identity. The umbrella term ‘trans’ is primarily used here, to describe people whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth differ. While this umbrella term does not fit everyone, the intention is to be inclusive as possible.

### **Being Prepared for Disclosures and Distress**

To maintain both student safety and engagement, it can be helpful for the teacher to be familiar with [trauma informed](#)

For more information on reporting and responding to disclosure see the video and related materials at [A School's Role in Keeping Our Kids Safe](#)

**practice**, use inclusive language and to acknowledge feelings and stories. It is also important to strongly emphasize respect for confidentiality among all class members.

- Respect confidentiality in the classroom.
- Anticipate where discussions will lead to protect students from revealing inappropriate personal information.
- Before starting these lessons, talk to your school counsellors so they know there may be abuse disclosures.
- Reinforce confidentiality and sensitivity when discussing this topic.
- Ensure your students understand that disclosures of abuse cannot be kept confidential. Disclosures will result in the immediate aid to the student who is or has been abused.
- Share with students what they can expect if they disclose abuse, e.g., acknowledgement, honouring their disclosure, redirection to discuss further outside of class and assurance of connecting them with support.
- The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act requires you to report the abuse of a young person to Child and Family Services or Delegated First Nation Agencies. You can locate your local office by visiting <https://www.alberta.ca/childrens-services-offices.aspx>

For more information review [Responding to Child Abuse: A Handbook](#), published by the Government of Alberta or visit [How to Help and Report Child Abuse, Neglect and Sexual Exploitation](#)

Refer to your school division's guidelines about disclosures and reporting.

## A. Ground Rules

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Ensure **ground rules** are established before beginning this lesson. For classes that have already established ground rules, quickly reviewing them can help ensure a successful lesson.

## B. Abstinence and Sexual Activity

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*These discussion questions will help students clarify the meaning of several terms, and begin to examine abstinence and postponing sexual activity.*

### 1. What is sexual activity/sexual intercourse/sex?

- Each of these terms can mean different things to different people. Some people might think sexual activity means any sexual contact like kissing, touching over or under clothing, above or below the waist. Others think sexual activity refers only to sexual intercourse, or certain types of genital to genital contact.
- Explain how you will be using the term in class. For example, "In this class, when we are talking about sex, we are talking about any contact between one person's genitals and another person's body."
- Anal sex, oral sex and vaginal sex are all types of sex.

### 2. What is abstinence?

- Abstinence means choosing not to do something. In these lessons, abstinence means choosing not to have sex. This includes not engaging in:
  - direct touching of a partner's genitals
  - vaginal sex (penis to vagina)
  - anal sex (penis to anus)
  - oral sex (mouth to penis, anus or vulva/vagina)
- Abstinence is often referred to as being 100% safe; meaning that there is no risk of pregnancy and no or low risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is only true if all of the activities in the definition above are avoided.
- Most teens choose abstinence. According to [\*The Health Behaviours in School-aged Children Study\*](#) (2020), 13% of grade 9 students and 26% of grade 10 students reported having had sex.

### 3. What is virginity?

- Virginity means different things to different people. Virginity is a cultural idea, not a biological fact, so the meaning can change from person to person and over time.
- Many people define it as not having chosen to be sexually active with another person yet. Others might say it means not having had vaginal sex.

**4. If you have already had sex, can you still be abstinent?**

- Yes. A person who has had sex in the past, who chooses not to be sexually active, is abstinent. The choice to be abstinent can be made at any time, regardless of past experience.
- Sometimes people use someone's sexual history to pressure them to have sex again. This is not fair and could be considered coercion or bullying.

5. Divide the class into small groups of 3-5 students. Ask students to brainstorm as many answers as they can to the following questions, and to write a list as a group.

**What activities can young people do together without becoming sexually active?**

- Hold hands
- Kiss
- Do recreational activities together (playing sports, etc.)
- Spend time with friends together
- Watch movies/TV/play video games
- Pursue mutual interests (arts, music, computers, etc.)

**What are some reasons young people choose to be abstinent or to delay sexual activity?****Personal**

- Personal values or religious/moral beliefs
- Not ready yet
- To avoid fear or disappointment

**Medical**

- Avoid pregnancy
- Avoid STIs
- 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 pregnancy.

**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. Partners may spend more time talking, building mutual interests, and sharing good times with friends.

**What are some reasons that a person who wants to be abstinent or postpone sexual activity might engage in sexual activity?**

- Fear of saying no
  - Pressure from your partner
  - Peer pressure – ‘everyone is doing it’
  - Wanting to feel loved
  - Use of alcohol or drugs
  - Making the decision that abstinence is no longer right for you
  - Forced into sexual activity without consent
6. Come back together as a whole class and ask each group to share some of the answers they identified for each question.

## C. Promoting Abstinence Group Project

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*Students work together to create promotional materials outlining the benefits of abstinence/postponement, exploring alternatives to sexual activity, and identifying ways to communicate readiness with partners.*

1. Form groups of 3-5 students.
2. Give each group the **Promoting Abstinence** handout.
3. Explain that groups must plan and present promotional material as outlined on the handout.
4. Allow groups time to plan and create their promotional material as outlined on the handout.
5. Have groups present their promotional material to the class.
6. Debrief using the following discussion questions:
  - What are some of the most convincing reasons to remain abstinent or postpone sexual activity?
  - How realistic were the ideas presented by each group?
  - Are there any other suggestions?
  - How often should you review your decision about abstinence and your reasons for choosing it? Why?
  - If you choose abstinence, when and under what circumstances might you change your mind?
  - If you decide abstinence is no longer right for you, how will you choose another method to decrease risks of an unintended pregnancy or STI?

Although teens often challenge their parents' ideas, they want to hear their parents' opinions and values. Research shows teens see their parents, not celebrities, as role models when it comes to sexual health. Many personal values are learned and reinforced at home. Invite students to encourage open dialogue at home.

## D. Ask an Adult Interview

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*Students begin a dialogue with a parent, guardian or supportive adult about relationships and sexuality. Keep in mind that not all students have equal opportunities for open discussion with family or other adults in their life. 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.*

*Due to the sensitive nature of human sexuality topics, it is recommended that homework is reviewed or discussed but not graded.*

1. Distribute the **Ask an Adult** handout for students to complete at home.
2. Explain that students can complete this handout with a parent, guardian or other supportive adult.
3. Explain that this is not a graded assignment and there are no right or wrong answers.
4. Dedicate time to debrief this activity during the next lesson. Debrief questions could include:
  - How does talking about relationships and sexuality with a parent or supportive adult help you to form your own values?
  - What was the best experience during the interview?

## E. Question Box

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*Answer any questions from the [question box](#) in the previous lesson. Have students submit any new questions and address them next class.*

*Addressing the questions at the next class allows you time to review the questions and prepare responses.*

## Self-Reflection

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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

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During the lesson, did students:

### Knowledge:

- define abstinence and postponing sexual activity?
- outline the value of abstinence/postponement?
- explore alternatives to sexual activity?
- identify ways to say no to sexual activity?

### Skills:

- exemplify appropriate listening and speaking skills during class discussion?
- demonstrate an understanding of refusal skills?

### Attitudes:

- decide what personal actions are going to be followed?

# Promoting Abstinence

As a group, produce material for a tween or teen audience that promotes abstinence and postponing sexual activity.

1. Choose **one** of the following types of promotional material for your group to create:
  - Poster/Infographic: a one-sided poster/infographic complete with colour and pictures/graphics
  - Commercial: a commercial complete with written script and a live or video presentation
  - Series of 3 blog posts that include pictures/graphics or 3 vlog entries
  - Podcast: an audio broadcast complete with written script and a live or recorded presentation
2. Choose one of the following topics as a focus for your group:
  - Reasons to be abstinent or postpone sexual activity
  - Things you can do without doing “it”
  - Ways to talk with your partner about what you’re feeling ready for
3. Brainstorm your ideas. Your group must have at least 10 points directly related to the topic. Write the points in the boxes on the next page.
4. Plan the layout/design/script of your promotion.
5. Work together to develop a finished product.
6. Use the following checklist to ensure you have created high quality promotional material:
  - Topic is clear
  - Design/format appeals to grade 7 audience
  - Design/format is creative
  - Design/format highlights the most important information
  - Information is easy to understand
  - Information is accurate
  - Information is appropriate
  - Information is complete (at least 15 points are included)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Information to include in the presentation**


# Ask an Adult

The decision to remain abstinent or to postpone sexual activity is a personal one. It is based on many things, including your personal values. Discussion with a parent, guardian or other supportive adult in your life can help you to review your decisions about abstinence.

1. Take this handout home. Share it with a parent, guardian, or other supportive adult, and ask that person if you can complete it together.
2. Schedule at least half an hour with the adult for the interview. Give the adult this handout so that they can think about the answers before the interview.
3. Interview the adult using the questions provided.

## Questions

What values do you want to share with me about sex?

What do you think are the most important reasons for a young person to remain abstinent or to postpone sexual activity?

How can we handle talking about this if I ever have questions or concerns?