

CHOOSING ABSTINENCE

Lesson 1

GRADE

7

LEARNER OUTCOME¹ W-7.14:

Examine abstinence and decisions to postpone sexual activity as healthy choices.



MATERIALS:

1. **HANDOUT: Promoting Abstinence**
2. **SLIDE: Refusal Skills**
3. **CARDS: Abstinence Role-Play Scenarios**
4. **HANDOUT: Parent Interview**



INTRODUCTION:

Abstaining from sexual activity that involves exchange of bodily fluids and/or genital to genital or skin to genital contact is the only 100% way of avoiding the risk of an unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection (STI). Postponement of initial sexual activity, adherence to one sexual partner and protected sexual intercourse are sequentially offered as the next best alternatives². The programs that are most effective in helping young people to abstain discuss abstinence, contraception and disease prevention³.



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. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (20 - 40 min)

These discussion questions will help students begin to examine abstinence and postponing sexual activity. Encourage students to take notes during the discussion to help them complete assignments that come later in this lesson.

1. What is abstinence?

- Abstinence can mean different things to different people. For some, it means having no physical contact with other people. For others, it could mean having limited contact, allowing some activities, but not sexual intercourse.
- Abstinence is often referred to as being 100% safe; meaning that it completely eliminates the risk of STI or unintended pregnancy. This is only true if the definition includes eliminating any intimate sexual behaviour involving skin to genital, genital to genital or exchange of bodily fluids. Pregnancy can occur without intercourse if sperm is ejaculated near the entrance of the vagina or on an area that comes into contact with the vagina. STIs such as herpes and genital warts can be passed through skin-to-skin genital contact.
- The majority of teens in Canada have never had intercourse. According to Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) across Canada among grade 9 students, 23% of males and 19% of females reported having had sexual intercourse⁴.

2. What is virginity?

- Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary (2009) defines virginity as "not having experienced sexual intercourse"⁵. Keep in mind that virginity relates to personal and cultural values and opinions and may vary from individual to individual.

3. Do you have to be a virgin to be abstinent?

- No. A person who is abstinent is not necessarily a virgin. A virgin has never had sexual intercourse. Someone who is abstinent may have had sexual intercourse in the past, but is not currently sexually active. The choice to be abstinent can be made at any time, regardless of past experience. Just because a person has had sex before does not mean that that person must feel pressured to have sex again.
- Postponing sexual activity: waiting to have sexual intercourse.



You may choose to use a lesson about personal boundaries for students with differing abilities. <http://teachers.teachingssexualhealth.ca/lessons-on-plans/differing-abilities/>

People with differing abilities may be at risk to sexual pressure & may need more practice with role-play and refusal skills. Teach students how to report to, how to call the police, and what local resources are available for students.

4. What are some reasons young people choose to be abstinent or to postpone sexual activity⁶?

Personal:

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

Medical:

- Fear of pregnancy
- Fear of HIV & AIDS or other STI
- 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. A couple may spend more time talking, building mutual interests, and sharing good times with friends.

5. What are some activities that young people can do together without becoming sexually active?

- Hold hands
- Kiss
- Write love letters
- Spend time doing other recreational activities (playing tennis, etc.)

6. What are some qualities that will help maintain abstinence or postpone sexual activity?

- Ability to resist pressure
- Respect for other person's feelings
- High degree of self-control

7. What are some reasons that a commitment to be abstinent or postpone sexual activity might fail?

- Fear of saying no
- Pressure from your partner
- Peer pressure – “everyone is doing it”
- Wanting to be loved
- Use of alcohol or drugs

C. GROUP WORK: PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL (50-60 min)

Students work together to create promotional materials outlining the importance of abstinence/postponement, exploring alternatives to sexual activity, and identifying ways to say no to sexual activity.

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. Display any/all assignments that promote abstinence.
7. 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?
8. If you choose abstinence, how can you ensure it will work for you consistently?
9. How often should you review your decision about abstinence and your reasons for choosing it? Why?
10. If you choose abstinence, when and under what circumstances might you cease to use this method?
11. If you decide abstinence is no longer right for you, how will you choose another method to protect yourself from an unintended pregnancy or STI?

D. ROLE PLAY (45-50 min)

The following role-play activities will help students develop skills that promote abstinence and help to postpone sexual activity.

1. Explain that the following role-play activity will allow students to practice skills required for abstinence or postponing sexual activity. The goal of all of the role-plays is for the characters to remain abstinent or postpone sexual activity.
2. Display and discuss the **Refusal Skills SLIDE**.
3. Form student groups of 2-3 students.
4. Give each group a **Role Play Scenario CARD**.
5. Explain that groups must plan and present a role-play as outlined on the card they received. The role-play must include pressure lines, and give examples of appropriate refusal skills. Role plays should range from 1-3 minutes in length. No inappropriate language is allowed.
6. Give groups 5-10 minutes to plan and practice their role-play.
7. Instruct the audience to listen carefully to each presentation, and inform them that there will be a discussion after each presentation.
8. Have each group begin by reading the scenario and introducing the actors and their roles. Groups then act out the role-play.

9. After each presentation, use the following questions to lead a discussion:
 - What were the pressures identified in the role-play?
 - What refusal skills were used?
 - What alternative actions were suggested?
 - What are your feelings as you watched this role-play?

E. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION⁷ (10-15 min)

These discussion questions help students make personal decisions about abstinence or postponing sexual activity.

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 from an unintended pregnancy or STI?

F. PARENT INTERVIEW (5 min today, 30 min homework, 5 min next class)

Students begin a dialogue with a parent or supportive adult about relationships and sexuality.

1. Distribute the **Parent Interview HANDOUT** for students to complete as a homework assignment.
2. Explain that students can complete this handout with a parent or supportive adult. Use the **Parent Interview HANDOUT** to guide the discussion.
3. Dedicate time to debrief this activity during the next lesson. Debrief questions include:
4. How does talking about relationships and sexuality with a parent or supportive adult help you to form your own values?
5. What was the best experience during the interview?



When using role-play activities that highlight relationship issues, it is important to be cognizant of students in your class who may be involved in a same sex relationship or questioning their sexuality. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-identified students often experience pressure in relationships and may at some point want to raise this issue with an adult.



Although teens often challenge their parents' ideas, they want to hear their parents' opinions and values. A survey conducted with Canadian teens found teens saw their parents as role models when it came to sexual health, not celebrities from movies, television, music or sport. Many personal values are learned and reinforced at home. Invite students to encourage open dialogue at home⁸.



QUESTION BOX (10 min)

Have students fill out questions and address them next class.



TAKE IT HOME

Students will complete the **Parent Interview HANDOUT**.



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:

- Define abstinence and postponing sexual activity?
- Outline the importance 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?

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Group Names: _____

PROMOTING ABSTINENCE

Together with your group, produce material for an adolescent audience that promotes abstinence and postponing sexual activity. Follow the steps outlined below.

1. Choose **one** of the following types of promotional material for your group to create:
 - Poster:** a one-sided poster complete with colour and graphics
 - Pamphlet:** a fold-out pamphlet complete with colour and graphics
 - Commercial:** a commercial complete with written script and a live or video 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 Say No to Sex
3. Brainstorm your ideas. Your group must have at least **25** points directly related to the topic.

REFUSAL SKILLS

USE VERBAL SKILLS:

- Say “No”
- Tell your partner you want to stay abstinent or postpone sexual activity

USE BODY LANGUAGE:

- Use serious facial expressions
- Create distance between you and your partner
- Cross your arms

USE DELAY TACTICS:

- Stop kissing or touching
- Tell your partner you have to call home

SUGGEST ALTERNATIVES:

- Call up friends to go out together
- Go to the mall or to a movie
- Suggest playing a sport or another activity

BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP:

- Explain your feelings
- Ensure your partner knows that you made a decision to stay abstinent before this moment

ABSTINENCE ROLE PLAY SCENARIOS

Role-Play Scenario One

Chris and Jamie have been going out for a long time. They have never had sex, but lately there have been several occasions during which they have felt pressure to “go further” sexually. Each time, one or the other has been able to suggest that maybe they’d better slow things down. This weekend, Jamie’s parents are away and Chris has come over to help baby-sit Jamie’s little brother. Once Jamie’s little brother has gone to bed, things begin to get out of hand. Use the following script to help you begin your role-play.

Refusal: Um, wait...I think we should stop.

Pressure line: Oh, come on. Just a little bit more won’t hurt...

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Agreement:

Conclusion:

Conclusion:

Role-Play Scenario Two

Taylor and Mandeep have been flirting with one another for a long time. They are at a party at a friend's house. No parents are around, and there has been a lot of drinking. Both of them have had a few, and now they find themselves alone in one of the bedrooms. They are fooling around, and things begin to go further than one of them would like.

Refusal: Hey, I think we should stop.

Pressure line: Why? We're just having fun. I really like you...

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Agreement:

Conclusion:

Conclusion:

Role-Play Scenario Three

Avery and Kelly have just started seeing one another after Kelly broke up with a long time partner. Kelly has had sex before, but isn't comfortable having another partner so soon. Kelly wants to remain abstinent in this new relationship. Avery doesn't understand. The two of them just went out for a really nice dinner after the school dance, and Avery expected it would lead to more than just a goodnight kiss.

Refusal: Can we slow down a bit, please?

Pressure line: What's the big deal? You've been here before. Just not with someone as great as me...

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Agreement:

Conclusion:

Conclusion:

Role-Play Scenario Four

Greg and Connie have been friends since they were babies. Their families are close friends, and they have been going to the same camp ground together every summer since they can remember. Recently, they have talked a lot about sex and what it would be like. They are both curious, and decide that when they are both ready, they want to try it together to see what it is like. One day, they try fooling around, and before they know it things are getting really serious.

Refusal: Hang on. I can't do this.

Pressure line: But we talked about it. You were fine just an hour ago...

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Agreement:

Conclusion:

Conclusion:

Role-Play Scenario Five

Jessie and Robin have been dating for three months and have been sexually active for two months. They have been using condoms, but one broke recently, and it has made Jessie think twice about the consequences. Jessie has decided to resume abstinence and stop having sex with Robin. They've talked about it, and Robin agreed it was OK. One day after school, they are working on homework in Jessie's room, and one thing leads to another. They are becoming seriously close to having sex when Jessie decides to stop.

Refusal: Robin, stop. We talked about this before. It's too risky.

Pressure line: That was just one time. We can be careful. Come on...

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Pressure line:

Refusal:

Agreement:

Conclusion:

Conclusion:

Student Name: _____

Parent/Adult Support: _____

PARENT INTERVIEW

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 or a supportive adult in your life can help you to review your decisions about abstinence.

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 adult this handout so that they can think about the answers before the interview.

Step 3

Interview the adult using the questions provided.

Step 4

Both you and the adult 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. When you were my age, what did you know about sexuality?
2. What do you think are the most important reasons for a young person to remain abstinent or to postpone sexual activity?
3. What values do you want to share with me regarding sexuality?
4. How can we handle talking about this if I ever have questions or concerns?

(Tear off and hand in this slip only)

We completed the “Parent Interview.”

Student

Adult