

Rvsd January 2017



The Teenage Brain and Making Responsible Decisions About Sex

Lesson Goals

- Review What We Know About the Teenage Brain
- Review the Decision Making Model
- Discuss the Role that Values play in Supporting Good Decision Making
- Understand How Emotions Can Interfere with Responsible Decision-Making
- Talk to a Parent/Guardian of Other Trusted Adult About One's Family's Values

SEL Skills

Self-awareness, Decision-making

Terms

- Amygdala
- Impulsive Decision-Making
- Moral Compass
- Values

Materials: Folders, Journals, Decision-making Model handout, Values Based Decision-making Model handout.

Family Homework Assignment: Students will interview a parent/guardian, or other trusted adult about the family's values. Values are developed and strengthened throughout your life but have their origin in one's family, community, faith communities and other organizations, and even your location in the world (e.g., region, country). Knowing what your values are and strengthening your beliefs and commitment to your values is a good strategy for making good choices and staying healthy in high school.

Activity 1: Review What We Know About the Adolescent Brain

~ The purpose of this activity is to help teens understand that they are at risk for impulsive decision-making and provides skills and strategies for good responsible decision-making in relation to sexual behavior.

Slide Presentation: Your Adolescent Brain: Why you do the things you do! Use the slide presentation to further explain to students how the immature teenage brain can affect decision-making around a lot of different risky behaviors.

- A. Gender-Female Brain/Male Brain
- B. Pleasure/Reward Pathways
- C. Decision Making

The prefrontal cortex is not fully mature until the mid-twenties. The prefrontal cortex is responsible for:

- Judgment
- Seeing into the future
- Seeing how behavior can affect the future
- Moral intelligence
- Abstract thinking
- Seeing what is not obvious
- Planning for the future
- Rational behavior and decision making
- Understanding rules of social conduct

Amygdala - emotional/social hijacking

Process Questions:

- 1) What implications does this have on teen sexual behavior? On teen decision-making?
- 2) What types of decisions will teens be faced with regarding sex and sexuality during high school?
- 3) What are the implications of what we have learned about teen brain capacity in relation to making fully mature decisions about participation in “risky behaviors?”
- 4) What strategies can teens put in place to help them make good sound decisions.

Activity 2 - Revisit the Decision Making Model

~ The purpose of this activity is to provide students with logical steps for making a responsible decision

Review the decision-making model that was introduced to you in middle school. It is important to follow a consistent process for making decisions so that you can carefully think through all the possibilities and consequences of your choices.

Draw the decision-making model on the board (or smart-board) and introduce the steps to making a good decision by using a simple situation (e.g., whether, or not you should cut school). This is designed to be a quick review.

NOTE: This model was first introduced as part of the grade 6 sexuality curriculum.

Activity 3 - Making Decisions Under the Influence of Emotions

~ The purpose of this activity is to help students understand some of the biological reasons why they are at risk for impulsive decision-making.

The amygdala is part of the limbic system of the brain and is involved in instinctive "gut" reactions, including "fight or flight" responses. Lower activity in the frontal lobe could lead to poor control over behavior and emotions, while an overactive amygdala may be associated with high levels of emotional arousal and reactionary decision-making.

<http://brainconnection.positscience.com>

Most decisions are not made in the peace and comfort of your own home. Many teenage decisions will have to be made while under the influence of your emotions. You may not always feel good about your decisions - even when you make a value-based decision that you know is right for you. You will find, that there are times when you will be left with unresolved intense feelings and emotions. This will seem confusing and frustrating. It is important to try to separate the emotions from the decision-making process. Remind yourself that, although uncomfortable, the intensity of these emotions are finite...and manageable.

Review the slides (how your emotions hijack your brain)

When you become aware that you may be acting on your emotions instead of being thoughtful

- 1) Recognize and name the emotions that are involved
- 2) Realize that these emotions can affect your decision-making skills
- 3) Rely on your values to guide your decision

Activity 4 - Values-Based Decision-Making Model

~ The purpose of this activity is to provide students with logical steps for making a responsible decision based on their values

After reviewing the steps to the decision-making model, introduce the Values-Based Decision-Making Model. Explain that decisions about sex should be made within a framework of values. Making a good decision means making a decision that is right for you at a given moment-in-time.

Hopefully, your decision at this time in your life would be to abstain from sexual behaviors. The strength and conviction to stay true to your decision is based on strengthening your values. Values are the basis for fulfillment in your life and define what you stand for and how you do things. Values are developed and strengthened throughout your life but have their origin in your family, your community, your faith communities and other organizations, and even your location in the world (e.g., region, country). Knowing what your values are and strengthening your beliefs and commitment to your values is a good strategy for making good choices and staying healthy in high school.

Draw the Values-Based Decision-Making Model on the board (or smart-board) and introduce the additional step of filtering decisions through a framework of values.

Example: *Josh asked Abby to come over to his house on Friday night. He told her that his parents were going to a wedding in New Hampshire and would not be coming home until sometime the next day. Abby has liked Josh for quite some time. They hang out at school and have met up at some sports events, but they have never spent any time alone together. What should Abby do?*

Note: Have students generate a second or third scenario.

A key factor in making healthy decisions is knowing yourself - by becoming more self-aware. Prompt students to think of values that Abby might rely on in helping her to make this decision. Remind students that making decisions about sexual behaviors can be confusing because of all the mixed messages we receive about sex and sexuality. Developing a moral compass can help guide your decisions.

Process Questions:

1. How did (could) Abby's values help her make a responsible decision?
2. How might this process be different if Abby had overwhelming strong romantic feelings for Josh?
3. How might this process be different if Josh pressured Abby to make the decision he wanted her to make?
4. What strategies might you put in place to make sure you are making a responsible decision when situations like these occur?

A MODEL FOR DECISION MAKING

- 1. Define the problem**
- 2. Generate at least three options**
- 3. Analyze the consequences**
- 4. Make the choice**
- 5. Reflect on our decision**

New Activity

Adapted from teachingsexualhealth.ca

Making decisions about becoming involved in sexual activity involves understanding one's personal values and learning how to respect the values of others. Setting personal boundaries and sexual limits and understanding the values helps you to maintain congruency between your actions/behaviors and your values. Ultimately this will help you to establish and maintain future goals and health. The following activities will help you think about how you might talk to a partner or future partner about sex so that you values and their values are respected.

Review the five steps to decision-making:

1. Define the problem
2. Generate at least three options
3. Analyze the consequences
4. Make the choice
5. Reflect on our decision

Divide the class into small groups. Write the following questions on the board:

1. What does the term personal boundaries mean?
2. What does it mean to set "sexual limits?"
3. Why is it important to set personal boundaries and sexual limits?

Groups brainstorm and write their comments on newsprint to display.

Ask students to explain their definitions:

What does the term personal boundaries mean?

What does the term sexual limits mean?

Why is it important to know your personal boundaries and set sexual limits for yourself?

Sexual limits refer to sexual behaviors that are acceptable and unacceptable for an individual. Personal boundaries is similar but may include both sexual and not sexual behaviors. They are both very personal and unique to the individual. They should reflect and be congruent with personal values.

Why is it important to set sexual limits?

Thinking about and deciding upon one's own personal boundaries and sexual limits requires one to explore their values around sex and sexuality. Doing this outside of a relationship allows you to be honest with yourself and think about what is right for you. Having done this makes it easier to have discussions and set limits ahead of time with a boyfriend or girlfriend and will ensure that you are not taken by surprise, that your actions fall in line with your values, and misunderstandings are avoided.

4.

Put STEPS TO DECISION-MAKING on board

1. Define the problem
2. Generate at least three options
3. Analyze the consequences
4. Make the choice
5. Reflect on our decision

Discussion

Why is a decision-making model helpful?

Which step would take the most time?

Where can teens get information that can help them decide about their sexual limits?

Distribute the An Important Decision Handout. Ask students to read Frankie's Story and then list and explain the steps he used to make his decision. Conduct a large group discussion to collect feedback.

Discussion

Why should those who choose to be sexually active consider emotional and relationship consequences as well as physical consequences?

Physical Consequences of sexual activity may include pregnancy, HIV and AIDS or other STI's, and the increased risk of diseases. For example, risk factors for cervical cancer include: HPV, early age of first intercourse, and history of STI's.

Relationship Consequences may mean that the relationship changes. A couple may spend less time talking, building mutual interests, and sharing good times with friends in favor of sexual activity. Relationships with friends and family may also be affected. One partner may enjoy or want sexual activity more than the other, so the balance of power in the relationship may change. If pregnancy or STI results - the relationship may not last.

Emotional Consequences relate to the importance of highlighting that sex is not just a physical activity. The psychological impact of being sexually active must not be ignored. Someone may have decided to be abstinent until recently and may feel guilty or disappointed after the first sexual experience. They may feel that they have betrayed their values or beliefs. If pregnancy or STI's result, the emotional consequences may be far reaching.

Frankie's Story : An Important Decision

Use what you have learned about decision-making. List and explain the steps that Matt used to make his decision.

Frankie and Tory have been dating for about three months. Frankie is happy when they are together. They laugh and have fun together. Frankie can tell that Tory has mutual feelings (this can be seen by smiles and kind gestures). Things have gotten serious between Frankie and Tory during the last month. They have been alone more and kiss a lot. They touch each other and things have gotten pretty hot. Tory has told Frankie that because they love each other -- they should be together in "every-way".

Frankie would like to have sexual intercourse with Tory. Who wouldn't? There just seems to be a lot of reasons not to. Frankie is concerned about getting an infection, but is even more concerned about getting Tory pregnant. Frankie has plans for the future, and a baby just doesn't fit into those plans at this time. Tory says they can use a condom, but Frankie knows condoms are not 100 percent safe. He would be stressed out. The other thing that Frankie thinks about is how sex might change his relationship with Tory. Some of the couples he knows broke up after they had sex. Things just got too complicated.

Frankie talks to Tory and tells her he has decided to wait to have sexual intercourse. He says he hopes she understands their relationship and their futures are just too important to risk. Tory says she is willing to wait, too. Sexual intercourse is a big decision, and they should be sure. Frankie feels good about his decision for now. He and Tory are closer than ever. They seem to communicate better now that the pressure is off.

Frankie's Decision Steps:

1

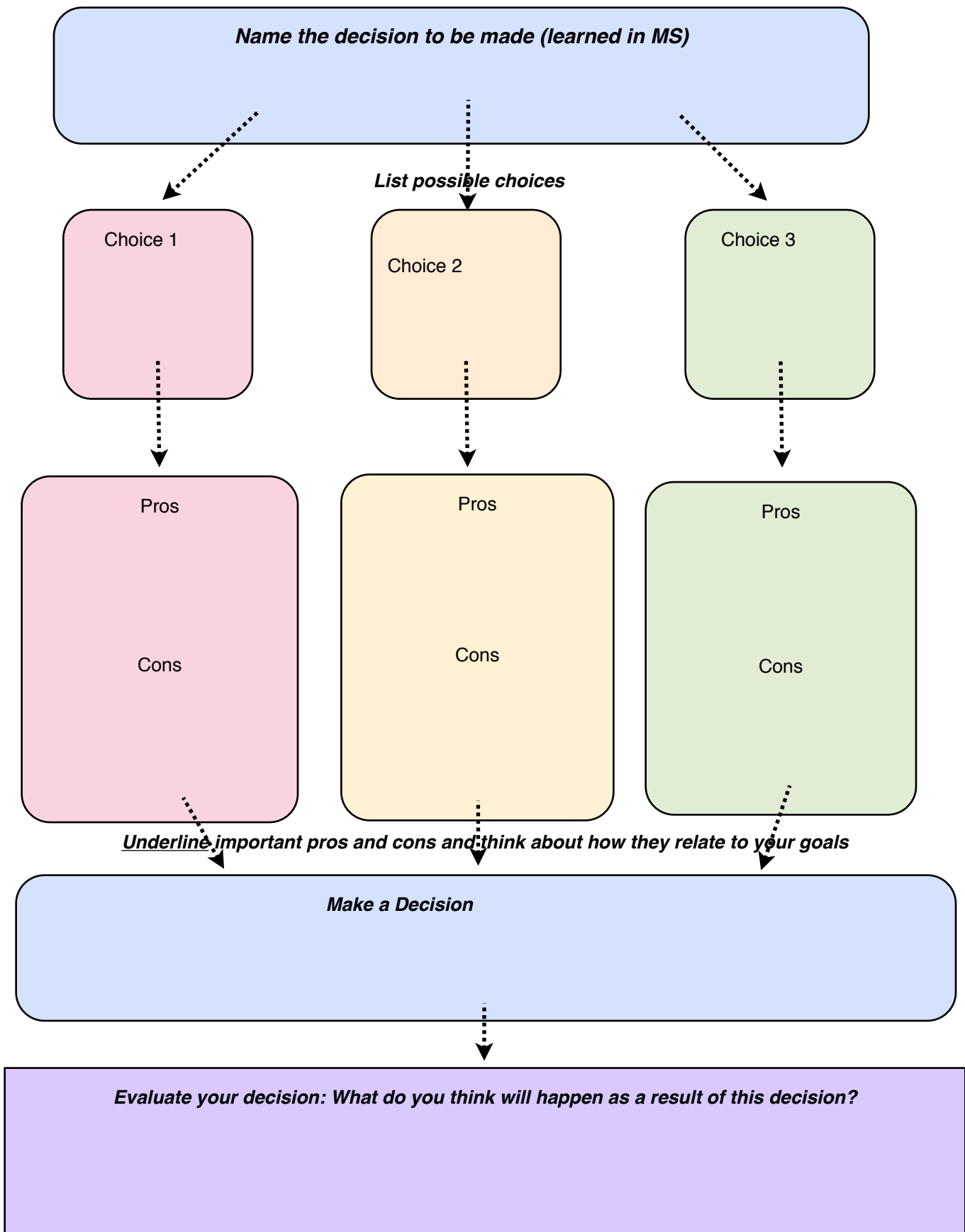
2

3

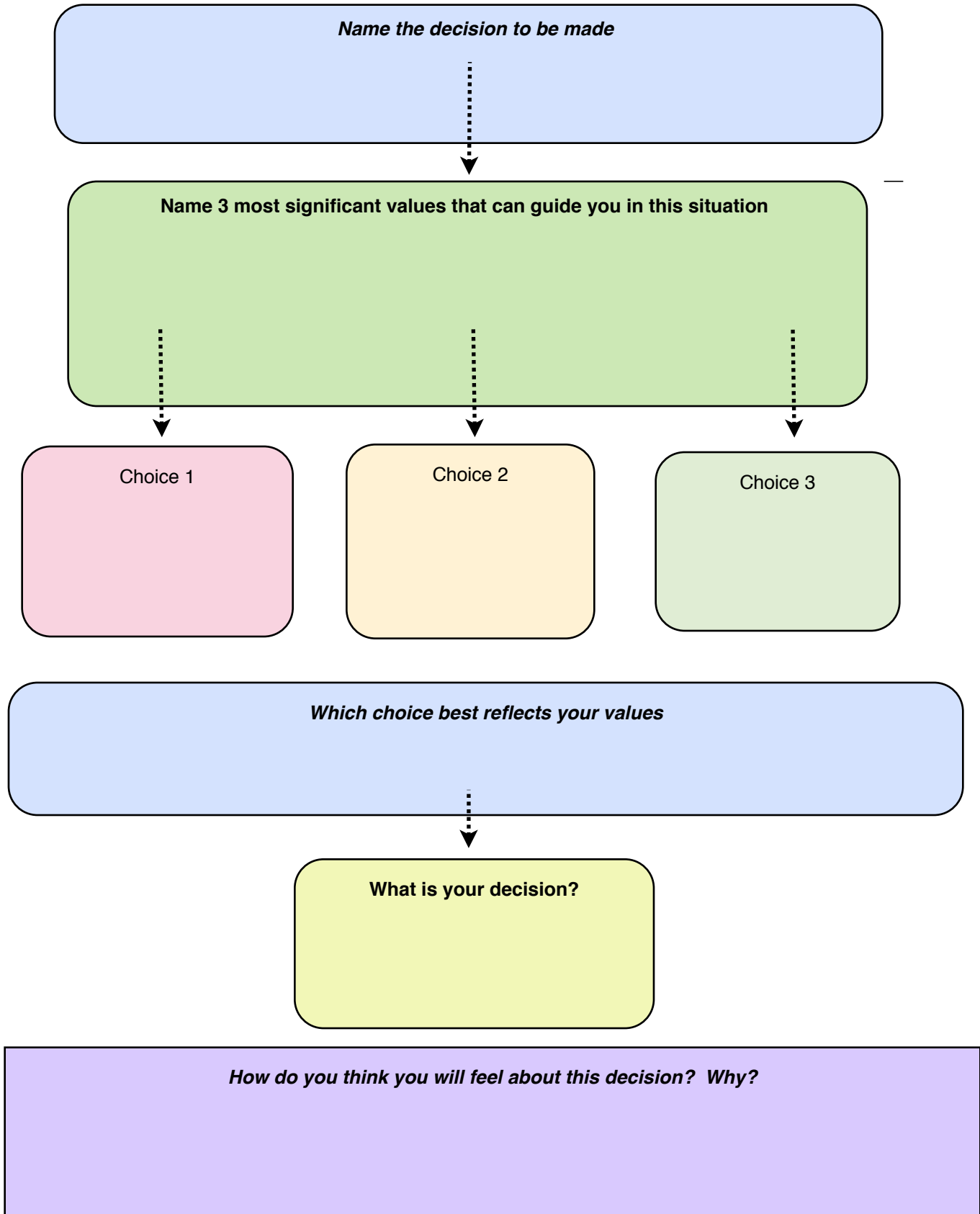
4

5

NOTES FOR NEW ACTIVITY AND TOPIC OF DECISION-MAKING



Values Based Decision Making



Family Homework Assignment: Values about Sex and Sexuality.

Choose a parent/guardian or other trusted adult to interview about values. During this interview, you are trying to understand the values that are important to your family about sex and sexuality. After this interview, you will be doing an introspective journaling assignment reflecting on your parent/guardians or other trusted adult's point of view. Be prepared to discuss the role that values play in making decisions about sex. You are welcome to add your own questions or alter a question slightly to make it more meaningful.

What do our family's values tell us about sex and sexuality?

What do our religious values tell us about sex and sexuality?

What do our cultural values tell us about sex and sexuality?

Explain a little bit about our discussion in class about the mixed messages teens receive from the media (TV, Movies, Magazines). Ask your parent/guardian or other trusted adult if s/he experienced mixed messages when s/he was a teenager? If so, what were they? How did s/he deal with them?

Given our conversation about values and about mixed messages, discuss some specific strategies for abstaining from sexual behaviors as a teen.

Reflective Journaling Activity

1. What was something interesting you learned from talking to your parent/guardian or other trusted adult about values?

2. Explain why you believe it is important for people to consider their values when making decisions about sexual behaviors?

3. What strategies did you and your parent/guardian or other trusted adult discuss for dealing with mixed messages about sex and sexuality?

Reflective Journaling Activity

TEACHER'S NOTES