

To Have Sex, or To Wait

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Adolescent choice is the focus of my research and curriculum unit. It is my intent to teach this unit in three sections. The first is parenting skills, to prepare my young students for the rigors and joys of being a parent at the ap-proprate time, including prenatal care, the responsibility of each parent, statistics re-garding the divorce rate of teen marriages, and so on. The second is the importnace of protected sex, for when teenagers feel that they are ready for this type of activity, including birth control methods and sexually transmitted diseases. The third addresses the appropriate age for beginning sexual activity, including reasons why adolescents may decide to become active at this age and underlying reasons for these decisions. It is my hope and intent to give the adolescents whom I teach and nurture daily the information they need, and the connec-tion they require to assimilate the information they need, to enable them to make positive choices regarding sex and parenting in their lives. This connection will be made through readings about young people like themselves and visitors who will give them additional information and insight into why their lives can change based on the decisions they make now.

I currently teach at is Truman Middle School in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The school is situated in the Westgate area and 78.8% of students are either low-income or at the poverty level. Another characteristic of this community is the lack of diversity which is usually so prominent in Albuquerque. The most recent figures available from Albuquerque Public School Computer Services is that 79.8% of our students are Hispanic, as compared to 49.1% in other Albuquerque Middle Schools. Sadly, teenage childbirth appears to be higher in our community than in other areas of Albuquerque. I believe we must begin with the adolescents, making changes in their education, their critical thinking skills, and how they take this information and utilize it to their benefit.

This curriculum unit is designed for a special education, self-contained classroom in which the students are in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. This unit will be taught during the Life Skills class, which is approximately 45 minutes per day. Because most of my students have significant oral and written language deficits and are between se-cond and fourth grade in their reading level, a great deal of my lessons will be oral discussions and stories read by the

teacher.

Deciding when the time is right to begin a sexual relationship with another individual is very difficult. Don Nardo describes this very well in *Teen Sexuality*. He states:

Such decisions about sex include falling in love, becoming sexually active because of peer pressure, the possibility of catching and/or spreading Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's), the confusions and fears that often accompany having homosexual feelings, and dealing with an unwanted pregnancy.

One of the many reasons which adolescents begin sexual activity before it is advisable for them to do so is the amount of time that these young people spend alone and unsupervised. "Teenagers who have spent huge blocks of their time either alone or with friends or taking care of siblings after school while parents are at work," re-marks writer Patricia Hersch, "have come to believe that they can handle anything. Anything," Hersch states, "includes being sexually active." Without the necessary guidance these young people require, they are going to attempt to grow up in ways that will not benefit them now, or in the long run, as they become parents. Although it is obviously not within my power to change their family lives, I plan to show them other possible life styles. I am going to ask my students what it is about their own lives at home that they don't like or approve of, and then show them how they can choose to make safe choices. We will discuss each level of sexual behavior in my curriculum unit through varied readings and discussions.

Other aspects also have to be considered in addressing sexual behavior including the quality of teen's education about sex and how to prevent pregnancy. I truly believe that I will be able to encourage some of my students to be abstinent until a time when their minds and bodies have leveled out and allow them to make mature decisions about beginning their sexual lives. However, I know that many will or have already begun this aspect of their young lives. For this reason, I will educate them as to sources that they can use to research birth control methods, after which we can discuss the different types in class openly. I will have a speaker come in from Planned Parenthood to answer questions which the students might have. Although some argue that there is possibility that educating students about methods of birth control may increase the chance that a child will begin sexual relationships with the idea that he/she is "prepared," I believe that to

withhold this information would initiate more pregnancies in the community. It is almost a "Catch 22" situation.

Informing my students of what the highly possible repercussions of unprotected sex are, I will be able to instill in them some new ideas regarding beginning their families when they are truly ready. Of course, the teacher using this program should be sure to coordinate some of the more biological aspects of the program with the health educator at your school. One example of possible repercussions comes from *Kids Still Having Kids*, by Janet Bode: "If you become pregnant, and are infected with HIV or AIDS, you have tough choices to make. Consider these questions: Will continuing the pregnancy make me sicker or shorten my life? Have I been taking any medication that could damage the fetus? If I get sick or if I die, who will care for my baby? If the baby gets sick or dies, can I cope?" Studies show that 13 to 30 percent of babies born to HIV-positive mothers end up with the virus, too. Sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy are only two types of repercussions which a young teen may have to deal. Another type comes with abortion, which can include the trauma and guilt sometimes associated with it. Additional difficulties with this choice can include finding a location in your immediate area, and post-abortion complications such as infection or severe bleeding. Still other repercussions come with giving up your child into the foster care system because you are not able to care for them appropriately, giving up your child into the adoption system which is a more permanent loss, trying to be a single teenage mother or father while maintaining a secure and nurturing home life for your child, and the stress you may feel at not being able to do it all if you decide to keep your child.

It is essential that I break through the wall by which adolescents seem to think they are protected. Because so many in my community have lost family members through violence of one sort or another, I think that perhaps convincing them that pregnancy can happen to them just as easily as to anyone else will not be as difficult as it might be with other communities. I believe that they see this as a way of life, not recognizing the fact that there are other choices that can be made. Getting past that barrier will hopefully open a whole new world for my students. A world which they choose, rather than having it chosen for them.

Many young people decide for the wrong reasons to have sex. As mentioned previously, peer pressure at this age can have an incredible amount of influence over what an adolescent will do, even when he/she knows in their heart that it really isn't the right thing for them. To reiterate, Cynthia Akagi, in *Dear Larissa* says:

The only time sex isn't healthy is when a person uses sex to hurt, abuse, or dominate another person, and when you have intercourse before you're emotionally able to handle the intimacy or use birth control and STDs protection to protect yourself against unplanned pregnancies.

We want our young people to know that it is not that we are against sex, per se. That would sincerely make us look like a bunch of hypocrites. We want them to know that when it's right, it's great, but it absolutely has to be the right time!

"Between 1990 and 2000, the number of females ages 15 to 19 will increase by a million. Unless significant reductions are achieved in the teen birth rate, this trend can be expected to increase substantially the number of births to teen mothers," acknowledges Susan M. Fisher in *Adolescent Parenthood*. I will work to reduce unwanted pregnancies in my little corner of the school system, and I hope that my efforts will be long lasting.

Before our adolescents have already reached the level where a pregnancy has occurred, it is absolutely necessary to educate them about their future infants. Prenatal care must be the first concern, with elimination of drugs and alcohol as the next important. These adolescents must be taught how to nurture a child, how to deal with the stress of parenting, how to best handle the financial burden with which they will be faced, and especially, how not to fall into a pattern of abuse and neglect. We can only hope that in the event these adolescents become parents, that the education which I have given them will help them in making good decisions regarding their families. My young charges will know before this unit is over that I am someone whom they can reach out to in a time of need to support and guide them.

Implementation

Essential Question I: What does it mean to be a good parent?

Goal

Students will integrate new information, which they will attain through readings, map-ping, writing, speakers, and discussions to make socially acceptable decisions regard-ing prenatal care and parenting skills needed to raise happy and healthy children.

Weekly Materials:

Dear Larissa

Kids Still Having Kids

chalkboard and chalk

overhead with markers

pencils and writing paper

construction paper and glue

Procedure

Day One

- 1). Write Essential Question on board or overhead as an anticipatory set.
 - 2). Have students brainstorm, while teacher writes responses on board as to possible answers to Essential Question.
 - 3). Review any words from reading, which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 4). Read Letter 21, pages 181 - 190, in *Dear Larissa*, and then discuss material generally, summarizing the information
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Day Two

- 1). Have a short discussion about what was read the previous day.
 - 2). Review any words from reading which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 3). Read "Pregnant? I'm only eleven!," "You ain't killing my kid!," and "Study of Kids Exposed to Drugs" from *Kids Still Having Kids*.
 - 4). Brainstorm with students how some of these young people were good or inadequate parents, and what they feel like they could do in these situations to make better decisions.
 - 5). Inform students that there will be some visitors the next day who have had to experience some of the difficulties about which they have been reading about. Have the students prepare a list of questions for our visitors. Preferred individuals for this activity will be an expectant couple, a single teen mother and/or father, or a teen parent who has lost his/her child through addiction, abuse, neglect, or adoption. It is preferable for these guests to be from the immediate community, in order for the students to relate to them and their situations. Have students, in groups of two or three, organize questions for our visitors.
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Day Three

- 1). Review questions that students have compiled for guests and add any, which seem relevant.
 - 2). Welcome guest to classroom, and introduce them to students explaining what each guest is there to share.
 - 3). Allow ten to 15 minutes for each speaker depending on how many speakers teacher was able to acquire for this class. Be sure to allow 15 minutes at the end of class for students to ask questions. Remind students to write down any new questions they may think of during the presentations rather than interrupt the speakers. This will help keep side talking to a minimum.
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Day Four

- 1). Spend a short time discussing the presentations of the previous day, and answer any additional questions, which may have arisen from it.
 - 2). Review any words from reading, which may be difficult for students in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 3). Read, "The Best Solution was Abortion", "My son and I are in Foster Care", "Adoptive Mother, and Coordinator, Services for Young Fathers" from *Kids Still Having Kids*.
 - 4). Discuss with students their feelings regarding the previous reading, and ask them to share any stories which they may have relating to the material.
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Day Five

- 1). Review any words from reading, which may be difficult for students in order for them to have better understanding.
- 2). Read to students, "What Story do you Want to be Yours?" from *Kids Still Having Kids*, and inform students that this is the last day of this particular curriculum. Tell them that there will be an assignment at the end of the reading, so to listen closely to what is read.
- 3). Discuss the reading with students, and ask what they learned in the last three days. Review the Essential Question, and ask if they would now answer it differently than they had previously.
- 4). Have students draw, from a cup, a slip of paper these will have situations similar to the readings written on them. Each student will

respond to the situation as they think they truly should respond if they themselves were to find themselves in that particular situation. Remind them that this is their test. It hopefully will enable them to focus on what they should actually do, and not the way they would have responded before this unit. The response must be at least three paragraphs long in order to explain the situation, respond to it appropriately, and discuss what the future plan will be from that point in the situation.

5). Teacher or students will read situations and responses, with input after each from class. Only positive input will be allowed.

6) Have students take home their work to be signed by parents and returned. This will hopefully ensure that the parents will read what their children are doing and encourage their children to make appropriate sexual choices as the situation arises.

Essential Question II: Are you sure you know everything you need to know to begin a sexual relationship?

Goal

Students will integrate new information, which they will attain through readings, mapping, writing, a speaker, and discussions to make socially acceptable decisions regarding safe sex and birth control.

Weekly Materials:

Dear Larissa, chapters 19 and 20, *Sexual Diseases and Birth Control*, pages 151-180

Coping With Safer Sex

chalkboard and chalk

overhead projector with markers

pencils and writing paper

construction paper

glue

Procedure

Day One

1). Teacher will read each student's work from the previous week to reinforce skills learned with a small discussion after each one.

2). Essential Question will be written on board or overhead as an anticipatory set.

3). Class will brainstorm what it is to know everything they need to

know to begin a sexual relationship while teacher records each item on board or overhead. Be sure to bring up the financial aspect of being ready. This should have a great impact on them when they realize how much, both in lifestyle and financially, they would have to give up. Reinforce this throughout the unit as appropriate.

- 4). Review any words from reading, which may be difficult for students in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 5). Teacher will read *Dear Larissa*, Letters 19 and 20, and *Sexual Diseases and Birth Control*.
 - 6). Discuss with students what new information they learned, and compare it on the board to what students thought they knew previous to the reading.
 - 7). Have students copy down what is written on board to keep for future reference and to help reinforce information.
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Day Two

- 1). Have students read back to class what new information was learned from previous class.
 - 2). Review any words from reading, which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 3). Read *Coping With Safer Sex*, Chapters One, Two, and Three, "Tough Decisions/Smart Choices," "Your Incredible Body," and "Getting Pregnant is No Accident." Be sure to stop shortly after each chapter to ask for comments or questions. This further integrates the material into each student's personal life.
 - 4). Summarize conclusions which have been drawn regarding materials read and discussions.
 - 5). Inform students of a visitor from Planned Parenthood who will be coming the next day, and have them brainstorm a list of questions which they have for him/her. This activity may be done in groups of two or three.
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Day Three

- 1). Students will finish their lists, which were assigned on the previous day, before speaker arrives.
- 2). Speaker from Planned Parenthood will be introduced. Guest will have 15 minutes to deliver lecture, after which students and guest will

have 15 minutes for a question and answer period.

Day Four

- 1). Class discusses what new information was learned from speaker and what information was already known. Be prepared to answer any questions students may have that were not answered by speaker.
- 2). Review any words from reading which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
- 3). Teacher reads *Coping With Safer Sex*, chapters Four, Five, and Six, "Your Best Bets for Birth Control", "Sexually Transmitted Diseases," and "Protecting Your Body from Sexually Transmitted Diseases."
- 4). Have students choose a birth control method to research, and write a first draft. The research paper need only be a paragraph long, but encourage students who are able to write more. Be sure to have pamphlets and easy to read books on the sub-ject available in the classroom.
- 5). Review any words from reading which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
- 6). Read Chapter 7 of *Coping With Safer Sex*, "Sex, Sex, Sex ---- Ready or Not," and have a short discussion about material.
- 7). Have students complete their final draft of their research paragraph. Include an illustration or drawing (they will attach them to construction paper, then display).

Essential Question III: Are you ready or not, and why or why not?

Goal

Students will integrate new information, which they will attain through readings, map-ping, writing, and discussions to make socially acceptable decisions regarding begin-ning sexual activities.

Weekly Materials

Dear Larissa, Letter Two and Three, "A History of Sex Since Grandma Was a Teen" and "Your Changing Body" and "Changing Feelings," pages 5 - 18.

It's Okay to Say No - Choosing Sexual Abstinence (book)
chalkboard and chalk
overhead projector with markers

pencils and writing paper
construction paper and glue

Procedure

Day one

- 1). Write "Are you ready or not, and why not?" on board as an anticipatory set.
 - 2). Brainstorm with students using a web on the board or with an overhead projector. Encourage students to think of as many reasons for each option as possible
 - 3). Teacher reads Letters Two and Three in *Dear Larissa* after which students and teacher discuss the material. Be sure to preread and discriminate before reading to class. Encourage students to tell stories regarding material which have occurred in their own lives. If teacher has appropriate stories to share, they should also be included.
 - 4). Summarize conclusions which have been drawn regarding materials read and discussions.
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Day Two

- 1). Review with students conclusions that were drawn previous day.
 - 2). Write on board or overhead the word "abstinence" and brainstorm with students as to what they believe it means
 - 3). Review any words from reading which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 4). Read Chapters One, Two, and Three, "What Abstinence Means," "Abstinence as an Option," and "Dangers of Teenage Sexual Activity" from *It's Okay to Say No: Choosing Sexual Abstinence* to students, stopping as needed to answer questions or to clarify difficult concepts.
 - 5). Write a comparison chart on board or overhead to contrast what they thought abstinence meant before or after the reading. Review unfamiliar words again to be sure students understand their meaning in context to the reading.
 - 6). Discuss with students what they thought of the reading, whether they understood what the author was trying to relate, and whether or not they agree with the author.
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Day Three

- 1). Review with students conclusions that were drawn previous day.
 - 2). Review any words from reading which may be difficult for students, in order for them to have better understanding.
 - 3). Read Chapters Four, Five, and Six, "Abstinence: The Only Foolproof Birth Control," "The Benefits of Abstinence," and "The Difficulty of Abstinence" from *It's Okay to Say No: Choosing Sexual Abstinence* to students, stopping as needed to answer questions or to clarify difficult concepts.
 - 4). Review unfamiliar words again to be sure students understand their meaning in the context of the reading.
 - 5). Discuss with students what they thought of the reading, weather they understood what the author was trying to relate, and whether or not they agree or not with the author.
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Day Four

- 1). Review with students conclusions that were drawn previous day and write them on board or overhead.
- 2). Review any words from reading, which may be difficult for students in order for them to have better understanding.
- 3). Read Chapters Seven and Eight, "Why Abstinence is Worth the Trouble," and "Making Sexual Abstinence Work for You," from *It's Okay to Say No: Choosing Sexual Abstinence* to students, stopping as needed to answer questions or to clarify difficult concepts.
- 4). Review unfamiliar words again to be sure students understand their meaning in context to the reading.
- 5). Discuss with students what they thought of the reading, weather they understood what the author was trying to relate, and whether or not they agree or not with the author.
- 6). Have students write a first draft paragraph about a middle school student and what she/he did when confronted with the decision of whether or not to abstain from sexual activity and why.
- 7). Help students with choosing a beginning for their paragraph by offering a few pos-sible openings:
 - I once knew a girl named Alyssa, whose boyfriend was trying to make her have sex...
 - Tony was feeling left out because he thought all his friends were having sex...

- Ramon thought he was a real stud until he met Brittany, who said she wasn't ready yet to have sex...
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Day Five

- 1). Have students continue to work on paragraph until it is ready to be displayed.
- 2). Have students draw a picture depicting what their paragraph is about, and then have them glue both paragraph and picture on construction paper.
- 3). As students complete their paragraphs and pictures, ask them where they would like their's displayed. Some students are not comfortable having their work displayed publicly, and therefore should be allowed to display it in a less prominent place than the others are.

Assessment

This unit will cover the following benchmarks from the "Albuquerque Public School Profile of the Graduate"

Academics

Proficiency in the English Language

Integrates and demonstrates proficiency in all areas of knowledge through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and other means of communication.

Cultural Understanding

Demonstrates an understanding of other cultures, and exhibits knowledge and skills in at least one language in addition to English.

Knowledge in Core Content Areas

Exhibits knowledge and skills in language arts, health education, mathematics, physical and life sciences, physical education, social studies, employability, and fine arts; meets high standards.

Application of Knowledge and Skills

Identifies, accesses, evaluates, and utilizes information in a variety of ways including the use of technology and other media; applies the principles of financial, time, and personal management.

Employability

Communication

Conveys ideas, information, and questions clearly, accurately, and in an organized fashion in speaking and writing; contributes to group processes and goals; applies listening skills and uses appropriate language in all interactions.

Work Ethics

Practices productive work habits; works independently as well as part of a cooperative team; maintains a sense of responsibility and accountability; strives to improve abilities and learn new skills; remains flexible and adaptable in changing work situations.

Application of Knowledge and Skills

Transfers acquired academic and technical knowledge and skills to various work situations; creates and carries out projects from design to finished product; uses organizations, planning, and problem solving skills.

Human Relations

Interpersonal skills

Uses interpersonal techniques that foster collaboration with individuals and groups; participates/facilitates working cooperatively in diverse groups; applies problem solving techniques by identifying and selecting appropriate alternatives to resolve issues; exercises individual freedoms while demonstrating respect for property

and for rights of others.

Social Responsibility

Exercises individual freedoms while exhibiting social responsibility to family, community, and society; demonstrates citizenship by contributing to the community; exercises rights and responsibilities guaranteed by the Constitution and law; acknowledges, and respects individual and group differences.

Personal Effectiveness

Knowledge of Self

Exhibits a positive self-concept; identifies and builds upon personal strengths and qualities; practices self-discipline; maintains a positive attitude.

Health-Enhancing Behaviors

Exhibits the ability to cope effectively with personal challenges, frustration, and stressors; makes choices to promote good health.

Self-Motivation

Displays perseverance; sets high standards; accepts new or changed responsibilities.

Character Development

Develops a personal values system; accepts responsibility for own actions; chooses ethical courses of action.

Thinking Skills

Conceptual Thinking

Uses techniques to see connections between situations that are not obviously related; identifies key issues in complex situations; applies creative, logical, or critical thinking strategies to develop original concepts, systems,

or solutions.

Analytical Thinking

Breaks and organizes complex problems, processes, systems, or projects into parts for problem solving, informed decision making, and management.

Information Gathering and Application

Gathers information from technological research, other reference materials, personal interview or surveys, and by asking appropriate questions; analyzes, evaluates, and selects information relevant to academic, workplace, and life problems or opportunities.

Independent Thinking

Applies techniques to a given situation; exhibits flexibility.

Bibliography

Akagi, Cynthia G. *Dear Larissa: Sexuality Education for Girls Ages 11-17*. Littleton, CO: Gulantic Publishing Company, 1994.

Sexual instruction for girls including historical information, the sexual body (both male and female,) dating, pregnancy, and so on.

Ayer, Eleanor *It's Okay to Say No: Choosing Sexual Abstinence*. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1997

This book discusses what abstinence means, the dangers of teenage sexual activity, the difficulty of choosing abstinence, and the advantages of abstaining from sex.

Bode, Janet. *Kids Still Having Kids: People Talk About Teen Pregnancy*. New York, Chicago, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Franklin Watts, 1992.

Maynard, Rebecca A., ed. *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, D.C.,

1997

Presentations of interviews with teenage mothers, information about adoption, parenting, abortion, and foster care are discussed.

Mahoney, Ellen Voeickers. *Coping With Safer Sex*. New York, NY: Rosen Publishing Group, 1990.

Included in this book are discussions regarding the physical and ethical aspects of teenage sexuality including such topics as the reproductive system and methods of protection against disease and pregnancy.

Nardo, Don. *Teen Sexuality*. San Diego, CA: Lucent Books Inc., 1997

Additional Recommended Readings

Savage Inequalities by Jonathan Kozol

The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish.

Everything You Need to Know About Sexual Abstinence by Barbara Moe

Adolescent Parenthood by Max Sugar M.D. (reference book)

Speaking Out: Teenagers Take on Race, Sex, and Identity, by Susan Kuklin

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention: School -Community Cooperation by Constance Hoenk Shapiro

Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood: An Annotated Guide by Ann Creighton-Zollar

Too Scared to Cry: Psychic Trauma in Childhood, by Lenore Terr

A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence, by Patricia Hersch

Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Gang Member, by Sanyika Shakur

Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods to Rebuild America, by Lisbeth B. Schorr