Communicating About A Sensitive Topic

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

Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 6

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Worksheets: "Be Assertive!" – one per every two students
- Answer Key: "Be Assertive!" – one copy for the teacher
- Homework Assignment: "Be Assertive!" – one copy per student
- Pencils in case students do not have their own
- Newsprint - three sheets
- Markers
- Masking tape

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Prepare three sheets of newsprint, each of which should have one of the following terms and their definitions: "Passive – when a person doesn't stand up for themselves or say what they want in a situation," "Aggressive – when someone says what they want in a way that doesn't respect or even threatens the other person," "Assertive – when one person communicates about their wants and needs respectfully, considering the other person's wants and needs."

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Define three types of communication: passive, assertive and aggressive. [Knowledge]
2. Demonstrate an understanding of assertive communication as the most effective way of telling someone they do not want to do something sexual with them. [Knowledge, Skill]
3. Demonstrate an understanding of how to communicate assertively about one's own decision to wait to engage in any shared sexual behaviors. [Knowledge, Skill]

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: Ask the students, "Have you ever had a misunderstanding with a friend or family member about something you or the other person said?" If they respond yes, ask for some examples. Point out, as appropriate, when the examples given are examples where communication was the issue, not what was said. If there aren't any examples that reinforce that point, say, "You've given some good examples.

One thing we're going to talk about today is how it's not always what we say to people, but how we say it that makes a difference in a situation." *(3 minutes)*

STEP 2: Reveal the first newsprint sheet with the word "passive" and the definition. Ask one of the students to read it aloud to the class. Say, "Let's have an example. Say someone asked you to go to a movie you really don't want to see. If you were passive, how might you respond?" Let a few students try, listening for passive responses. If they do not quite get it, provide the following examples:

> ***"Well, I kind of don't want to see that movie, but if you want to we can."***
>
> ***"Um, maybe? I've kind of seen it, but I guess I could see it again."***

Point out the passive aspects of the responses. Emphasize that, in the end, what the passive person wants is not being equally considered along with the other person.

Reveal the second newsprint sheet with the word "aggressive" and the definition. Ask a different student to read it aloud. Say, "Let's use the same example – someone asks you to go to a movie you really don't want to see. How do you tell them you don't want to see it in an aggressive manner?" After students have given a few responses, feel free to supplement with these examples:

> ***"Um, NO – we're not going to see that movie, we're going to see THIS one."***
>
> ***"You really want to see THAT movie? What are you, like 5 years old?"***

Point out the aggressive aspects of the responses. Emphasize that, while an aggressive response may get that person what they want, they've hurt the other person unnecessarily. Explain that when someone responds aggressively to us, it can make us feel bad about ourselves – or, depending on how aggressive the person is being, even a bit scared. That's not a very respectful way to treat other people.

Reveal the third newsprint sheet with the word "assertive" and the definition. Ask a different student to read it aloud. Say, "Let's use the same example – someone asks you to go to a move you really don't want to see. How do you tell them you don't want to see it in an assertive manner?" After students have given a few responses, feel free to supplement with these examples:

> "***I'm not really interested in that movie – are there any others you've been wanting to see? What about this one?"***
>
> ***"I'm not up for a movie – what else do you feel like doing?"***

Point out the assertive aspects of the responses. Emphasize that it's okay to disagree with someone or to propose something different from what they want – but how you do it is important.

Break students into pairs and Distribute the Be Assertive! Worksheet. Ask students to only look at the front half of the worksheet, which is labeled, Part 1.

Explain that they will be working with their partner to read the scenario in which they are

being pressured to do something and decide if the response that was given was

passive, aggressive or assertive. They should circle which type of response they think it is. If it was NOT assertive, they should rewrite the response so that it was assertive.

After 10 minutes, review each question on Part 1 and ask pairs to share a few of the responses they came up with. *(10 minutes)*

STEP 3:

Explain that being assertive is an effective way to communicate in all types of relationships, including with family members and with friends. Now, we're going to spend some time talking about communicating assertively with a person that you might be dating.

Ask the students whether they have ever heard the word "abstinence" before. Ask them what they have heard, or what they understand it to mean. Tell them that "abstinence" refers to deciding not to do something for a period of time. Explain that people can choose to abstain from all sorts of things throughout their lives. For example, if a person wanted to really focus on studying for the SAT or another college entrance exam, they might abstain from watching TV and playing video games until the exam was over.

Tell the students that for this next activity you are going to focus on abstinence from sexual behaviors. That means waiting to have vaginal, oral or anal sex. Anal, oral, and vaginal sex transmit STDs and is often how a person gets pregnant.

Say, "In my other example, I talked about choosing to abstain from TV and video games to minimize the negative effects it can have on study time and concentration. Can anyone think of reasons why someone might choose to abstain from the sexual behaviors I just mentioned?" Probe for:

They don't want to get pregnant or get someone pregnant

They don't want to get an STD or HIV

They don't feel like they're old enough/ready

Say, "The reason people may choose to be abstinent from sex is because it is the most effective way to prevent a pregnant or STD, including HIV. Not having any type of sex (oral, anal, or vaginal) means a person doesn't have to worry about pregnancy or STDs because they aren't engaging in the behaviors that put them at risk for them."

Note to the Teacher: *Some students may say "because it's wrong" or "because it's a sin." Although these are valid reasons for some students, it is important to avoid shaming those who do have sex. Simply adding the word "some" – "some people have been taught that it's a sin, although not everyone is religious or belongs to the same religion" – can ensure that that student is heard while minimizing the judgment placed on those who may end up having a different experience.*

After you have heard the reasons given, say, "These are all good reasons. People who choose to abstain from sex usually end up having sex at some point in their lives. That's because sex between two people, when both people are ready physically and

emotionally, have said they wanted to do it and are ready to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and/or disease, can feel good and bring a couple closer. But just like with other things in our lives that help us feel good, we need to think about how and when to do them.

For the purposes of this next activity, I'm going to ask you to imagine that you are in a future relationship with someone who wants to have some kind of sex with you. You know you are not ready to have sex, but you really like this person and would like them to be your girlfriend or boyfriend. We're going to practice how you can tell them you want to wait without hurting their feelings or feeling bad about your decision." *(10 minutes)*

STEP 4:. Explain that in their same pairs, they will be deciding if a response is assertive to an unwanted sexual behavior, and if it's not assertive, rewriting it to be so.

Ask them to pretend someone is asking to have sex, and they don't want to. On the sheet are some sample ways of saying "no" to someone who wants to have sex when you don't. Ask them to repeat their steps to decide why type of communication the response is, circle the answer on the sheet, and rewrite the statement if it is not assertive.

Tell them they will have about 10 minutes in which to do this with their partner.

Distribute the worksheets. As students work, walk around and listen to their discussions to be sure they understand the activity. *(13 minutes)*

STEP 5: After about 10 minutes, ask students to stop. Go through each of the answers, asking different students to share their responses. Use the "Teacher's Guide: Be Assertive!" as a reference to provide assertive responses if students are stuck.

(15 minutes)

STEP 6: When there are 5 minutes left in the class, stop and tell them about the homework assignment. Explain that they are to go home and "teach" a parent/caregiver the difference between passive, assertive and aggressive communication. Then their parent/caregiver will answer a few questions on the homework sheet, which the students should bring back to their next class session. Distribute the homework sheets and collect the completed "Be Assertive!" worksheets. *(2 minutes)*

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The worksheet activity will ascertain whether students understand what passive, assertive and aggressive communication are and what the differences between them are which achieves the first two learning objectives. The homework will further reinforce and provide assessment of understanding based on how well they communicate the lessons to their parent/caregiver.

HOMEWORK:

Students are to go home and "teach" a parent/caregiver what they learned. The parent/caregiver is to complete the "Be Assertive!" homework sheet provided, which the student is to bring with them to the next class.

BE ASSERTIVE!

Worksheet

PART 1 Instructions: Pretend you're feeling pressured to do something you don't want to do. The following statements are possible responses to that pressure. Circle if the statement is PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE. If it's not assertive, write a response that is.

1. A person is pressuring you to steal some money out of your grandmother's wallet. You yell, "Get out of my face about it, I'm not going to do it!"

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

2. On the way home from school another kid is pressuring you to push a third student down who always walks home alone. You just smile and nod your head 'no'.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

3. Your friend wants you to tell each other's parents you're spending the night at each other's house so you can actually go to a big party at the fraternity house nearby. You say, "No. I'm not telling my Mom that. I wouldn't want to risk her trust."

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

PART 2 Instructions: Pretend that someone is pushing you to have sex with them, and you want to wait. The following statements are possible responses to that pressure. Circle whether each statement is PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE. If it's not assertive, write a response that is.

1. I don't want to have sex with you, grow up!

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

2. Listen, having sex means taking risks – like pregnancy and STDs. I'm not willing to risk my health and my future like this.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

3. If all you can think about is sex, there's something wrong with you.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

4. I'm not ready to have sex right now; there's no way I'm ready for a baby. But I really like it when we kiss a lot.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

5. I guess we could hang out at your place – I mean, I'm really uncomfortable about your parent(s) not being there, but if you really want to, I'll come with you.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: _____

Adapted from an activity in Goldfarb, E. and Schroeder, E. (2004), Making SMART Choices about Sex: A Curriculum for Young People. Rochester, NY: Metrix Marketing

Teacher's Guide
BE ASSERTIVE!

1. A person is pressuring you to steal some money out of your grandmother's wallet. You yell, "Get out of my face about it, I'm not going to do it!"

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: No way. I'm not taking money from anyone.

2. On the way home from school another kid is pressuring you to push a third student down who always walks home alone. You just smile and nod your head 'no'.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: No, that's really not cool. I don't think pushing other people is funny.

3. Your friend wants you to tell each other's parents you're spending the night at each other's house so you can actually go to a big party at the fraternity house nearby. You say, "No. I'm not telling my Mom that. I wouldn't want to risk her trust."

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

1. I don't want to have sex with you, grow up!

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: I don't want to have sex, but I really like you. Let's talk about what else we can do together that doesn't include sex.

2. Listen, having sex means taking risks – like pregnancy and STDs. I'm not willing to risk my health and my future like this.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

3. If all you can think about is sex, there's something wrong with you.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: I'm curious about sex, too – but I feel like you talk about it a LOT and it makes me feel like there's something wrong with me.

4. I'm not ready to have sex right now; there's no way I'm ready for a baby. But I really like it when we kiss a lot.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

5. I guess we could hang out at your place – I mean, I'm really uncomfortable about your parent(s) not being there, but if you really want to, I'll come with you.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

Teacher's Guide
BE ASSERTIVE!

ASSERTIVE: I love hanging out with you, but I'm not comfortable doing that when no one else is home. Want to come to my place instead?

Adapted from an activity in Goldfarb, E. and Schroeder, E. (2004), Making SMART Choices about Sex: A Curriculum for Young People. Rochester, NY: Metrix Marketing

BE ASSERTIVE!
Homework

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Dear Parent/Caregiver: Today, your child learned the differences between passive, assertive and aggressive communication. Your child is going to teach this to you. Once you have learned this, please answer the following questions:

1. According to your child, what is the difference between passive, assertive and aggressive communication?

2. Of the three, which is the one that shows the most respect for both people involved?

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE ASSERTIVE

3. Of the three, which one often ends up hurting the other person or making them feel bad?

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE ASSERTIVE

4. Of the three, which one doesn't help you communicate what you want or need clearly?

PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE ASSERTIVE

Thank you for your time!

Parent/Caregiver signature: _____