Choose Your Words Carefully

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

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 7

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Large strips of newsprint statements, prepared as indicated
- Masking tape
- "Choose Your Words" activity statements, prepared as indicated
- Envelopes for "Choose Your Words" activity statements, prepared as indicated (there should be one envelope per every two students)
- Homework: "iRelationship" – one per student
- Teacher's Guide for Homework – one copy
- White board and markers

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- On a sheet of newsprint, write the following statements in large letters:

  Hey, can I talk with you about something?

  Sure, what's up?

  I can't go to your game, I'm sorry.

  I'm not going to your game.

  Let's talk later.

  Cut the newsprint so that each statement is an individual strip, at least three inches high each.

- Print out enough copies of the "Choose Your Words" activity statements for half the number of students in your class. Cut each copy into individual strips and place the strips into an envelope so that each envelope has an entire set of strips in it. You should have envelopes for half the class. Label half of the envelopes "Partner A" and half "Partner B."

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Identify at least two characteristics of healthy communication in a relationship. [Knowledge]
2. Apply their understanding of healthy communication to a scenario between two people who are discussing technology use within a relationship. [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, "Has anyone ever had to talk with someone about something really important – but you weren't sure how to do it?"

Acknowledge the raised hands and ask, “What specifically can make it challenging to talk with someone about something important to you?” Probe for:

- You don’t want to hurt their feelings
- You’re not sure whether you should talk with them about it
- You’re embarrassed about it
- You don’t want to make them mad
- You just don’t want to deal and hope that ignoring it will make it go away
- You like them as more than a friend and you’re worried if you talk about something serious they won’t want to hang out with you anymore

Say, “Whether it’s a friendship or a relationship, it’s important to be able to talk about things that come up. If a friend always teases you and you really hate when he does that – but you never tell him that you hate it – it’s not his fault if he keeps doing it and makes you mad, it’s yours because you didn’t say anything about it!

The big question, of course, is how do you talk with someone about something that’s important to you?” *(6 minutes)*

STEP 2: On the board write, “Partner A” at head level, followed by “Partner B” about five feet to the right of it. As you’re writing, say, “Let me give you an example. Let’s say I was Partner A, and the scenario was that my significant other wanted me to stay after school and watch their basketball game.” Between the two headers, write “Basketball Game.” Now, I want to be supportive, but I already told my best friend I’d hang out with them. So how do I bring this up?”

Post the newsprint strip that reads, “Hey, can I talk with you about something?” Say, “This is always a good place to start. Giving the other person a heads up that you need to talk will get their attention and let them know that it’s important they listen.” Under the Partner B sign, post the flipchart strip that reads, “Sure, what’s up?.”

Say, “If you’re Partner B, you want to respond to let the other person know that not only is it okay for them to talk, but that you’re also going to pay attention to them – not anyone else, not your phone, not a video game – but them. Make sense?”

Under Partner A, post “I can’t go to your game, I’m so sorry.” Ask the students what they think of this as a way of breaking the news to the other person. Ask, “What might be some ways Partner B might respond?”

Once you’ve gotten some reactions, take down, “I can’t go to your game, sorry” and ask, “How do you think Partner B would respond if you said this instead?” and post the large flipchart strip that reads, “I’m not going to your game. Let’s talk later.” Have a few students respond. Ask, “What’s different between the two?” Probe for the fact that the last statement doesn’t explain why and sounds like Partner A is mad or like something’s wrong.

Say, “Clearly, I have some choices as to how I can bring this up – but regardless of what I choose, it’s going to have an impact on how the other person responds. I won’t necessarily know what that impact is until my significant other responds – but I can think before I speak and choose my words carefully. Which is what you are about to do.” *(12 minutes)*

STEP 3: Divide the class into pairs. Then put two pairs together to form a group of four. Say, "In each group of four are two pairs. Each pair will represent one person in a relationship, partner A or partner B. This couple needs to talk about an important part of any relationship: how they're going to deal with technology in their communication with each other and with others about their relationship."

Hold up an envelope and say, "One pair will receive an envelope that reads 'Partner A' and the other, 'Partner B.' Inside are strips of paper with individual statements. You are going to create a conversation between the partners using these statements. Here are the rules:

a. You can only use each slip once.
b. You are both interested in staying together – you want the relationship to work!

You will have five minutes for each pair to look through their statements to get a sense of what's there. Then when I say, 'Go,' Partner A will start the dialogue with one of their statements. Partner B will then have a minute in which to put down their response. Partner A shouldn't move forward until I say so." Answer any questions and distribute the envelopes to the pairs and ask each pair to look at them together and start planning how they will use them. *(6 minutes)*

STEP 4: After a minute or two, say, "Okay – Partner A, let's get the conversation started. Put down your conversation starter. Partner B, don't respond yet." After a minute, check to make sure all the Partner As have gone, then say, "Okay, Partner B, put down your response. Partner A, read what Partner B put down on the desk. You have a minute to come up with your response. Partner B, please wait to respond until I tell you to."

Continue to facilitate this process, giving a minute for each "partner" to go, until each has put down five statements. Walk around the room and check their work, giving guidance as needed. As you walk around, tear off a long strip of masking tape and leave it for each group. *(14 minutes)*

STEP 5: After the last turn, ask students to stop and reflect on their dialogue. As they are reading through, ask them to take the pieces of tape and tape the dialogue to the desk or table top. Then ask groups of four to carefully walk around the room and read the dialogues of the other groups before returning to their original ones. Ask them to sit together as a group of four for the remainder of class.

Process the activity by asking the following questions:

- What was it like to do that? What was [easy, hard, fun] about it?
- What did you think of the conversation you created overall? Did it work out well or did it seem like they still had things to talk about?
- Thinking about your conversation or any of the ones you observed – what did you notice worked WELL in the "couples" discussions? What did you notice did NOT work well?
- What does this tell you about what's most important when you're trying to have a conversation about something important?

As students respond, write the phrase, "Take-home messages" on the board and record their answers beneath it. If it's not included by the students, be sure to share the following:

- However you communicate – whether verbally or via text – it's important to communicate. Otherwise it's all a guessing game!
- Technology is a big part of all relationships today. Talking up front about what you do and don't want, and what you do and don't expect around privacy and the other things we discussed in class is really important.

Distribute and go over the homework assignment. *(12 minutes)*

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The in-class activity is designed to achieve both learning objectives, while the homework assignment will reinforce the learning to ensure the objectives are met.

HOMEWORK:

"iRelationship" video clip and worksheet – students are to watch this brief, online video, respond to questions in the worksheet provided and bring their sheets to the next class session.

Note: This lesson was inspired by "Setting Sexual Limits" from Filling the Gaps – http://www.siecus.org/_data/global/images/filling_the_gaps.pdf.

I really like you.

I really like being with you.

I'm so glad that we're a couple.

I really like it when you post photos of us.

I don't want you to post photos of us unless I've seen them and said ok.

Snapchat's ok, but no Instagram posts.

Why don't you ever post pictures of us?

Can I talk to you about something?

I don't like posting photos – they're just for us.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Okay.

I want you to send me a sexy picture of you.

I’m not comfortable doing that.

No.

No.

No.

Sure.

I don’t feel like talking right now.

Why are you pushing me?

Me, too.

I really like that people know we’re together.

I feel really close to you.

You can trust me.

Everyone does this.

I’m really serious.

I don’t want you to check my phone without my saying it’s okay.

We should trust each other.

I don’t care if you check my phone.

I have nothing to hide, but you need to trust me.

What are you hiding?

I don’t like it when you keep texting me and asking where I am.

I don’t like it when I text you and you don’t respond.

When you only text one word to me you sound mad.

I don’t like texting.

We’ll only post photos on…

Instagram.

Snapchat.

Other social media if we both agree.

If one of us posts a photo and the other doesn’t like it, we’ll take it down.

Homework: iRelationship

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Watch the video, “iRelationship”, which you can find online at **https://vimeo.com/22365117** and then answer the following questions about it.

1. Things seemed to be off to a good start between James and Jessica. What changed and why?

2. What was the main thing James was confused about?

3. What was the main thing Jessica was confused about?

4. What was different about Jessica and Ryan’s encounter on the bus?

5. What could make James and Jessica’s situation better?

Teacher's Guide
Homework: iRelationship

The following offers some possible responses to the open-ended questions connected to the homework video. Student responses that recognize something close to these points, or that bring up other valid points in the teacher's opinion, should be considered correct.

1. Things seemed to be off to a good start between James and Jessica. What changed and why?

   James didn't respond to Jessica's final text that first night they were texting, which sent Jessica the message that he wasn't interested in hanging out with her.

2. What was the main thing James was confused about?

   Whether Jessica wanted to hang out as friends or whether going out meant they were on a date.

3. What was the main thing Jessica was confused about?

   Why James didn't respond after she suggested getting together during their first text chat; also, why James eventually seemed interested, and then took off when they were out together in the park.

4. What was different about Jessica and Ryan's encounter on the bus?

   Ryan spoke directly to Jessica. He was clear that he wanted to hang out. Jessica also asked him directly whether it would be a date and he said, again clearly, that it would be.

5. What could make James and Jessica's situation better?

   If they avoided guessing what the other wanted or was interested in and just asked – or said so clearly. James and Jessica both talked with other friends about what the friends thought might be going on, but James and Jessica never spoke with each other.