STD Basics: Reducing Your Risks

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

Fostering respect and responsibility through age-appropriate sexuality education.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 6, 7, 8

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Worksheet: "STDs: What Can I Do?" – one per student
- Laptop or desktop computer with speakers and the websites, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Sbgg8icODY and http://yourstdhelp.com/free_clinic_locator.html queued up
- Article: "Taking Charge of My Sexual Health with STD Testing and Communication" – one per student
- LCD projector and screen
- White board and markers (at least 3 different colors of markers)
- Pencils in case students do not have their own

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Make sure you have speakers and internet access in your classroom and that you have had these links unblocked for your use: What are STDs? #FactCheck, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Sbgg8icODY and Your STD Help http://yourstdhelp.com/free_clinic_locator.html
- Right before class, open the video and website and make sure they are working; keep the links open and minimized so they are ready when you need them. Be sure to watch the video prior to class to make sure you are comfortable using it.
- Regarding the Your STD Help website, you can enter your state, and several of the closest places where STD testing and treatment are available will come up. Note that these will list free and low-cost clinics, which is essential for students at this age; be sure, however, to tell them they can go to their own family doctor or clinician or another clinic they may have heard about from friends.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

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

1. Describe at least two ways in which STDs, including HIV, can be transmitted. [Knowledge]
2. Name at least one step they plan to take personally to reduce or eliminate their chances of contracting an STD. [Knowledge]
3. Name at least one health center in their area to which they can go for STD testing and treatment that is affordable and confidential. [Knowledge]

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, "I'd like you to think about your day this morning, from when you woke up until just now in class. Everyone please take out a piece of paper and write down everything that's happened from 'woke up' to 'being in this class.'"

As students begin to write, watch for those who finish first. As they finish, ask for 3 volunteers to come to the front of the room and write their lists on the board as the remainder of the class finishes their lists.

While each list will look different, they may look something like this:

- Woke up
- Took a shower
- Got dressed
- Ate breakfast
- Got to school (probe: How?)
    - Took the subway
    - Took the school bus
    - Took a regular bus
    - Walked
    - Got dropped off

- Had class (probe: Which classes?)
    - Ate lunch (depending on class schedule)

Go through the lists, asking students to indicate where they had to make decisions along the way. Write the word "decision" in between the steps that required a decision with a different-color marker. For example:

"Got dressed - Decision - Decided what to wear"

Probe for more than just surface decisions, such as "had to decide what to pack for lunch" or "had to decide what to eat from the cafeteria." For example, how did they decide which classes? Did they have any input or were they decided for them? Did they decide how to get to school, or was that decision made for them?

Ask, "How do you make decisions? What factors come into play?" After a few responses, ask,

"Did any of these decisions require you to take risk?" (Probe for there being risk in getting in a car or bus; risk crossing the street; risk in how people react to what you choose to wear; risk that you eat something unhealthy and end up getting sick, etc.).

Ask, “When you were making your decisions, did you know there were risks involved? If so, know that there was risk involved, how did you make each of your decisions?” Possible responses may include, “I didn’t really think about it,” or “I’ve done it so many times I know how to do it,” or “I was (or wasn’t) worried about what would happen if I did one thing vs. something else.”

Say, “Now we’re going to take what we just talked about and apply it to one part of sex ed. There are things in our lives we make decisions about every day, some of which carry risks of different levels. Same thing goes for sexual behaviors.”

Write the phrase, “Sexually Transmitted Disease” on the board. Ask the students to remind you what an STD is. Probe for diseases that can be passed from one person to another through sexual contact. Remind students that to get an STD one person has to have one, STDs are not created spontaneously by doing something sexual with another person.
(11 minutes)

STEP 2: Say, “Generally, STDs are infections that people want to avoid – just as no one wants to get the flu or any other kind of infection. However, lots of people will get STDs at some point in their lives. STDs are actually really common, especially among young people. So it’s important to know a few key things about them:

While some STDs can be cured, others can stay in your body for life and be treated. Others can be fought off by your body’s immune system and go away on their own. Some can affect whether you can get pregnant or get someone else pregnant, and others can affect sexual functioning – or even, if left untreated, cause death. And if a pregnant person has an STD, it’s possible they may pass it to the baby during birth. So if you’re going to be in a sexual relationship in the future, you want to be sure you do so in ways that keep you healthy and reduce your chances of getting an STD.”

Tell the class you are going to show a short animated video from AMAZE.org called, “What are STDs? #FactCheck,” and that they will have a worksheet to complete. Tell them that the sheets are asking them to write down how people can get STDs – and to write down how the students plan to avoid getting them and if you’ve already experienced an STD, what your plan would be for not getting one in the future. Tell the students that they will be asked to share their completed sheets with at least one other person in the class, so they should keep that in mind as they write down their answers. Distribute the sheets and play the video. (8 minutes)

STEP 3: After about 8 minutes, ask students to stop where they are. Divide the group into pairs, and ask students to share their plans with each other. Tell them that if they hear something from the other student about how you can get an STD that doesn’t sound quite right to mark it on their partner’s paper with a star so they can come back to it later or ask you about it. Ask the students to tell each other what they think of each person’s plan, and to provide any suggestions they think might help. Tell students they’ll have about 5 minutes in which to do this. (9 minutes)

Note to the Teacher: *If you know that students have personal experience with STDs – for example, a family member with HIV – you may wish to intentionally pair certain students together to be sensitive. Otherwise, random pairing is fine.*

STEP 4: Ask the students to stay in their pairs and ask how they think they did on their own plans. Ask what they thought of their partner’s plan, and whether they got any helpful feedback on theirs.

Ask the students to share what they've heard about how STDs can be transmitted. Write these on the board, asking students not to repeat something they've heard already. If anyone says something that is incorrect, be sure to correct it and write the correct information on the board. *(14 minutes)*

STEP 5: Say, "It's great to think this through and to create a plan for yourselves. But what about the other person with whom you may end up having sex? How would you know whether they had an STD so that you can both protect yourselves? What can you do to find out?"

Probe for:

- Ask the person (remind students that many STDs have no symptoms so they might not know they have one)
- Ask other people who know the person (which could also make that person mad)
- Go together to a doctor's office or clinic to get tested for STDs.

Say, "A really important thing to keep in mind is that there is no one test that covers all STDs. So if someone says to you, 'I've been tested already,' ask that person what they've been tested for. Sometimes, they've been tested for HIV – but there are different tests for the other STDs. A doctor or clinician will ask you some questions to determine which STDs you may or may not be at risk for and then conduct the tests based on that. So it's really important to give honest information and answers to that doctor or clinician."

Project the website, http://yourstdhelp.com/free_clinic_locator.html, so that the class can see it on the screen or white board. Using the dropdown menu on the top left side of the landing page, put in your state and hit "go." Scroll down for the city or town closest to you to show what is in your area. Have student write down the website address for future use and remind them that they can always come back to you in the future to be reminded of the URL.

Answer any questions, then ask students to hand in their individual plans. Then distribute the article, "Taking Charge of My Sexual Health with STD Testing and Communication" and ask them to read it for homework and answer the journal questions that appear at the end of the article. *(8 minutes)*

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The individual worksheet, paired discussion and large group process will be directed at achieving the first two learning objectives. In addition, by collecting and going through the individual plans, the teacher will be able to catch any remaining myths/misinformation by correcting them on the sheets and returning each student's plan to them.

Posting the website and showing students the link, as well as the search results that come up for local STD testing and treatment centers, will achieve the third learning objective.

HOMEWORK:

Article: Have students read the article, "Taking Charge of My Sexual Health with STD Testing and Communication," and then respond to the assigned questions in their journals or on a piece of paper.

STDs: What Can I Do?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Please answer the following questions. You will be sharing this with at least one other student in class, so be sure what you write here is something you're comfortable with another person knowing!

1. How can STDs be spread from one person to another? See if you can list up to THREE ways:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

2. Explain why the following three strategies can be the most effective way to protect yourself or someone else from getting an STD.

Abstinence

_____

Using condoms or other barriers correctly each time you have sex

_____

Getting tested for STDs (and making sure your partner does too) before you have sex together

_____

3. If you were to find out you had an STD, what could you do to make sure you don't pass it to someone else?

_____

_____

Taking Charge of My Sexual Health With STD Testing & Communication

By Amy Robles, 19, Contributor

Though I've never had an STD scare, I've always gotten tested before having sex with a new partner. The first time I was screened I was still in high school and living at home with my religious parents who I didn't want to know I was sexually active. I knew they would disapprove and likely punish me or make my life very difficult if they knew I was having sex.

I had done my own research online about sex and sexual health, which is pretty much the only reason I was educated enough to know that it was important to get tested, that I could have a sexually transmitted disease (STD) even if I didn't show symptoms and that Planned Parenthood would provide confidential testing. My sex ed in middle school had been lacking, and the one week in my high school health class had been even worse. I got lucky because I found a lot of sex-positive education sites and blogs, like Sexetc.org, and good online resources, like Planned Parenthood's website. The information I got from these resources gave me a really strong conviction that I wanted to be in charge of my sex life and sexual health and showed me ways I could do that, like getting tested regularly and talking to my partners.

I've always made sure to have a talk about our STD statuses and what we're each comfortable with sexually before ever engaging in sexual behaviors.

STD Testing at Planned Parenthood

I'd heard about Planned Parenthood from my friends and other girls at school, so I made an appointment there. At the time, I was in my first relationship in which I could have been at risk of being exposed or exposing my partner to an STD. So before having sex with my then-partner for the first time, I wanted to be completely sure I was STD-free and could keep me and my partner safe. I knew the best way to go about that was getting tested and talking to my partner.

At Planned Parenthood I got tested confidentially and inexpensively. Plus, they were really supportive and informative when I went to them. I remember nervously making the phone call to the clinic in my car so my family wouldn't hear me. I was reassured and encouraged when making the appointment was much simpler than I imagined. All I had to do was reserve a time, and when I went in, I filled out some paperwork to qualify for free care as a minor. When it came time for my appointment, I gave a urine sample, so they could test me for chlamydia and gonorrhea. Since I didn't have any specific concerns, they just tested me for two of the most common STDs

After the test, I had a short consultation with one of the clinic doctors about my general sexual health. The doctor provided me with some condoms and lubricant, as well as a prescription for birth control pills, which didn't cost me anything. As a part of their "Take Charge" program, I got birth control for free because I was a minor.

Talking with the staff about my sexual health and getting birth control and safer sex methods to help myself and my partner prevent pregnancy and/or the transmission of STDs was extremely liberating for me. It gave me a sense that I was in control of my own sexuality. And it still makes me feel that way.

The last time I was tested was before engaging in sexual behaviors with my current partner. I was tested again for the same STDs at my doctor's office. Because I had a comfortable environment to be tested the first time, it really encouraged me not to be nervous about getting screened for STDs in the future. And now it's no big deal to have it done!

Talking With My Partner about STDs

Getting tested is only part of the story, though. With each new partner I've always made sure to have a talk about our STD statuses and what we're each comfortable with sexually before ever engaging in sexual behaviors. At a point when I know I want to take the next step with a partner and have sex, I always initiate conversations with my partners when we aren't doing anything sexual—one was while driving, another in the park. It gives me the chance to be honest with my partners about wanting to be sexual with them and broach the subject of us potentially having sex at some point. We talk about whether they would want to have sex too, what specifically they would be comfortable with as well as making sure we plan to practice safer sex and get tested for STDs.

STD Testing Was Worth the Work

I've been lucky to be with people who have already been tested since their last partner and who are completely willing to get tested if they hadn't. While I may have been nervous going into some of the conversations—because it's always bound to be a little nerve-wracking to straight up admit that you want to have sex with someone, even if you're dating—every time it has been a positive experience. It has always been a relief to hash things out like that, and each time I've done it, it has brought me closer to my partner and improved our communication as well as intimacy.

JOURNALING QUESTIONS

1. Three things I plan to talk with my boyfriend or girlfriend about STDs before we start having sex are…

A)

B)

C)

2. If I thought I had an STD, I would get tested because _____

_____

3. If I were to get tested for an STD, I'd want _____ to come with me.