

why we do it (or don't): forced choice exercise about sexual decisionmaking

OVERVIEW: Students are required to choose whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements about why people choose to have — or not to have — sex.

OBJECTIVES: To enable students to reflect critically about their own and others' decisionmaking related to sex; to strengthen personal reflection and writing skills.

DURATION:

35–40 minutes

MATERIALS:

Board+chalk; list of "'Forced choice' Statements."

TO PREPARE:

Delete any of the forced choice statements that are inappropriate and add any that would be meaningful. On one side of the board, write "Agree," and on the other side write "Disagree."

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Introduce the activity:

- Today we will discuss some of the reasons people decide to have sex or not to have sex. Many different circumstances and feelings influence people's decisions about whether to have sex. Sometimes people can have mixed feelings.
- To explore this topic, I will read a few statements. These are values statements, and there is no right or wrong response to any of them. For each statement, if you agree, go stand by the side that says "Agree." If you disagree, go to the side that says "Disagree." "Force" yourself to choose one side or the other, even if your view is somewhere in between the two sides. Then, a few people can share their views. *[Make sure everyone understands the rules.]*

2 Read each statement. After each statement, allow time for students to move to their "side." Allow two comments from each side. Then go on to the next statement even if the conversation has not come to an end. Read as many statements as time allows.

3 Reserve five to ten minutes to sum up, asking:

- Why is it important for a young person to think clearly about the reasons for his or her choice to have or not have sex? *[Probe for: sense of comfort, safety, voluntariness, and pleasure, as well as protecting one's health.]*
- Young people have many different reasons when they choose to have or not to have sex. What kinds of misunderstandings or problems can result from these differences in reasons?
- We see that people often are not aware of all their motivations and feelings, or have not analyzed their circumstances. What are some ways that we can become more aware of what is going on, how we feel, and what we want and do not want? *[Probe for: writing in a journal, talking to someone trusted, thinking honestly.]*

Homework: Write two or three paragraphs about any topic (not necessarily about sex) that you have mixed feelings about, or that you are having trouble making a decision about.

“forced choice” statements

- 1 I feel bad for boys because they have to act as if they want sex all the time, even when they don't want it.
- 2 If a girl loves her boyfriend, she should show it by having sex with him.
- 3 I think most adolescents have conflicting feelings about sex; they want and do not want to have sex at the same time.
- 4 I think it's okay to give someone money or a gift for sex.
- 5 I think it's okay to accept money for having sex, if you need the money.
- 6 I think that a real man takes risks and is sexually aggressive.
- 7 Images on television and in magazines make young people feel that they should be having sex.
- 8 Pressuring someone to have sex against his or her will, even if you don't use physical force, is more or less the same as rape.
- 9 Some girls act as if they are just seeking sexual pleasure without emotional involvement, but down deep this is not what they want; they really want an emotional connection.
- 10 A lot of girls I know have sex because they feel obligated to do so.
- 11 People who are attracted to others of the same sex should wait longer (until an older age) to start having sexual experiences than their heterosexual peers do.
- 12 Lots of young people just do not want to have sex. Their feeling has nothing to do with AIDS or pregnancy or with what adults tell them. They just do not want to be having sex, even if they have a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- 13 Sexual intercourse is always an extremely intimate and personal experience for the two people involved.
- 14 A lot of people who decide to have sex regret it later.
- 15 A lot of people who decide **not** to have sex regret it later.
- 16 Before they have sex, most adolescents talk thoroughly with their partner about whether they both feel comfortable and want to have sex, as well as about how to protect against infection and pregnancy.