

Lesson: I Chose Abortion

The rates of teen pregnancy have declined dramatically over the past decade, but the United States still has the highest rate of unintended teen pregnancy of any Western industrialized country. Almost half (49 percent) of ALL pregnancies in the United States are unintended and just over half (54 percent) of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion. Since the pregnancy rate has declined, so, too, has the rate of abortion. Overall, abortion rates declined 11 percent between 1994 and 2000, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute among adolescents there was a 27 percent decline. Factors associated with this decline are increased use of emergency contraceptive pills, decreasing numbers of abortion providers, and laws restricting access to abortion. Despite the decline, abortion remains one of the most common surgical procedures, and the current political climate threatens to further erode a woman's ability to access a safe, legal abortion. This activity will allow students to consider their opinions about abortion and consider scenarios in which women face an unintended pregnancy.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Describe their beliefs about teens and abortion
- List three scenarios in which a woman may face an unintended pregnancy

Materials:

- Copy of **“I Chose Abortion”**
- Copy of **“The Last Abortion Worksheet”**
- Pens/pencils
- Index cards

Preparation:

Write the five stem sentences on a sheet of flipchart paper and tape to the front of the room so that you can reveal one stem sentence at a time.

Stem Sentences:

- A teen girl that gets pregnant is ...
- A teen guy that gets a girl pregnant is ...
- A teen girl that chooses to have an abortion is ...
- A teen girl that chooses to parent her baby is ...
- The best thing for a guy to do if he gets a girl pregnant is ...

Procedure:

1. Remind students about class ground rules (Right to Pass, Respect Others, One Person Speaks at a Time, etc.), since today's lesson is on a sensitive topic.
2. Distribute an index card and pens or pencils, so that each student has one. Instruct students to write down their gut reaction to the following stem sentences about abortion. Tell them that their answers will be private, so they should be totally honest in their responses. Reveal and read aloud the first stem sentence, and allow students time to write a response. Continue reading one stem sentence at a time and allowing response time, until you have completed all five. Then read them through again, one at a time, asking for volunteers to share their responses. (*Facilitator Note: The purpose of this activity is to briefly assess the attitudes that your students already hold about abortion and to allow the students to hear the variety of opinions in the group. This is not a time to spark discussion or debate, but simply to listen and reflect.*)
3. Distribute the article **“I Chose Abortion”** to students and read together with your students. Guide discussion with the following questions:

- What are some reasons why teens might have sexual intercourse and not use birth control?
- What do you think about the boyfriend's role in this situation? Did he act responsibly? Could he have done anything differently in your opinion? If so, what?
- If the author was your friend and she told you she was pregnant and didn't know what to do, what advice would you give her?
- How do you feel about parental notification and/or consent laws?
- What are some ways to prevent the need for abortion? How could parents help? How could schools help?

4. Divide students into groups of four and distribute **“The Last Abortion Worksheet.”** Read the directions aloud at the top of the worksheet and ask if there are any questions about the directions. Allow groups ten minutes to complete the worksheet and try to reach consensus. (*Facilitator Note: Students may initially resist sitting in judgment of other people and their decisions. Push them to struggle with this activity, and invite them to share their feelings about the activity at the end.*)

- Prepared flipchart paper with stem sentences
- Flipchart paper
- Markers
- Tape

5. Process the activity by asking students:

- How did it feel to complete this worksheet?
- Why was it difficult for some people?
- What factors did your group consider as you made your decisions?
- What can happen when someone else makes a personal, medical decision for another person?
- What might happen if abortion became illegal in the U.S.?
- What might some possible consequences be?

6. Close the discussion by thanking students for their hard work on this difficult topic and remind them that comprehensive sexuality education can help teens prevent the need for abortions by preventing pregnancy. (*Special thanks to Laurie Lowenstein for her review of this activity.*)