

## 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.*)

# The Last Abortion\*

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Imagine that you are a Supreme Court Justice. Congress has just passed an amendment making it illegal to have an abortion for any reason. The legislation was deemed unconstitutional and you have just finished hearing arguments from both sides. You assume your fellow Justices will vote in favor of this legislation even though two are abstaining. As a Supreme Court you have been given a special privilege. The Justices are able to grant one woman the last safe, legal abortion before the legislation becomes law. Below is the only information you have been given about each woman who is seeking this last abortion. Your task is to discuss each case with your fellow justices and try to come to a consensus about which woman you believe should receive the last abortion and why.

1. A 14 year-old teenager who was sexually abused by a friend of the family. That abuse resulted in her pregnancy.
2. A 39 year-old single mother of five children who is dependent on governmental programs to help provide for her family. She is only able to work outside of the home part-time.
3. A 36 year-old woman who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer and requires immediate chemotherapy in order to have a good chance of surviving the cancer.
4. A 23 year-old woman who was brutally raped by her ex-boyfriend. She had a restraining order issued against him.
5. A 30 year-old woman whose pre-natal tests show gross fetal anomalies, meaning severe birth defects.
6. A 34 year-old mother of three, whose marriage is on the brink of divorce due to her husband's severe depression, became pregnant as a result of sex she and her husband had on one of his very infrequent "good days". Her husband has told her that having another child would almost certainly result in divorce given his mental health status.
7. A 22 year-old woman who was recently diagnosed with HIV. There is a chance that the baby will be born HIV+ unless she can get AZT (the medicine that will help prevent the spread of HIV to her baby).
8. An 18 year-old who is planning to go to college on full academic scholarship. The condom broke that she and her boyfriend were using. She will lose her scholarship if she misses a semester at school.
9. A 46 year-old woman who thought she was going through menopause when she did not get her period. Her children are all grown and she is about to become a grandmother.
10. A 25 year-old woman with moderate developmental disabilities who lives in a group home. Her long-term boyfriend lives there as well although the group home cannot provide housing for infants.