

SEX, ETC.

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Discussion Guide *For Adults Working with Teens*

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Lesson 1: Sexual Abuse: Sequoia's Story

The incidence of sexual abuse has reached epidemic proportions, yet our society has done little to address this complex social ill. The links between sexual abuse and teenage pregnancy are well established and provide yet another compelling reason why we must tackle this issue with our students. Abusive relationships span across all types of people and relationships. They can happen in lower-income areas and among people with significant financial means. People who have little or no education can be in abusive relationships—as can people with graduate degrees. Abuse can happen between people of any ethnic or cultural background, in same-sex relationships, and/or between people of the same or different ages. It is vital that we help adolescents understand the scope of sexual abuse and learn about the resources available for them.

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

- Define sexual abuse
- Describe at least two possible side effects of sexual abuse
- Identify at least two resources for information and support

Materials:

- Copy of “**Sexual Abuse: Sequoia’s Story**” for each student
- Copy of “**Sexual Abuse Resources**” for each student
- Flipchart paper
- Markers
- Index cards
- Tape

(Facilitator Note: As the statistics clearly illustrate, there is a very good chance that some, if not many, of your students will have had some kind of experience with abuse. We suggest that you talk about this up front, before starting the lesson, letting students know that you are available after class if they need help, or that they can contact the resources you will provide if they are or have been abused. However, it is important to let students know at the beginning that while being in an abusive relationship is absolutely nothing to be ashamed of, this session is not the best time or place to talk about personal experiences. This is done to protect the safety and confidentiality of everyone in the group. Also, under no circumstances is it appropriate to disclose your own experience with sexual abuse to a student, either in front of the group or individually in private.)

Preparation:

Prepare flipchart paper with the following bulleted questions written on each separate sheet:

Sheet #1

- What are your reactions to this article?
- Who do you feel is at fault for this abuse?

Sheet #2

- Would you feel any differently if Sequoia had ever flirted with Anthony? What if she had worn really sexy clothes?
- How do you feel about Sequoia’s decisions?

Sheet #3

- How do you feel about Sara and her role in this situation?
- How do you feel about Sequoia’s mom?
- What were some effects of the sexual abuse Sequoia and her sister experienced?

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. (*Facilitator Note: Even with the ground rules and verbal reminder about self-disclosure, it is possible that a student might disclose to you. This might happen DURING, or AFTER class. If the disclosure takes place during class, try not to miss a beat. Say something like, “Right. As I mentioned before, many of us may know someone who has been involved with or knows someone who has been abused,” and return to the activity. At the end of class, take the student who disclosed aside and let her or him know about the steps you will need to take to protect her or him, based on your school’s policy and procedures. If you do not know what they are, be sure to find out from your principal before getting started on this topic. If the disclosure takes place after class, then simply take action according to the school’s policies.*)
2. Write the words “sexual abuse” on the flipchart paper and ask students to brainstorm a definition. Using their suggestions, establish a working definition for sexual abuse that includes the following elements: “Sexual abuse is when someone forces another person to do something sexual against his or her will. It can include rape (with or without intercourse), incest (sexual behaviors between blood relatives), and/or other forced sexual behaviors.”
3. Explain that often survivors of sexual abuse are exploited by an older person who is physically bigger and has power over them. People who sexually abuse often try to keep the people they abuse from telling anyone. They do this by threatening to hurt them or making them feel like the abuse was their fault. Sexual abuse is *never* the fault of the person being abused. People who are sexually abused are often confused about what is or isn’t sexual abuse. This activity will help students think about the roles of various characters in one scenario of sexual abuse.
4. Distribute the article “**Sexual Abuse: Sequoia’s Story**” and read together with students.
5. Ask students to find a partner. Tape Sheet #1 to board. Instruct them to discuss the following questions together and allow students five minutes to complete.
6. Then ask them to switch partners with another pair, so they have a new partner. Tape Sheet #2 to board. Instruct them to discuss the following questions together and allow students five minutes to complete.
7. Lastly, instruct them to join with another pair to form a group of four. Tape Sheet #3 to board. Instruct the groups to discuss the following questions and allow students ten minutes to discuss their answers.
8. Ask students to return to their seats and review some of the questions with the whole group. Ask for volunteers to share a “snapshot” of their discussions with the whole group. Instruct students that they will reflect on their three conversations and draw some conclusions about what they have learned. Distribute index cards and have students complete the following stem sentence twice, making sure to tell them that they won’t be required to share their responses.

I learned...

Then ask for volunteers to share any responses they would like with the group.

9. As closure, distribute copies of “Sexual Abuse Resources” to students and review the resources together.

(Special thanks to Elizabeth Schroeder, MSW, for her in-depth assistance with this activity.)

Sexual Abuse Resources

Key Points:

- While the vast majority of people who sexually abuse are male, abusers can be male or female.
- People who are sexually abused can be male or female.
- Abuse is NEVER the fault of the person being abused.
- It can be difficult to determine what is and is not abuse—so people should listen to their “gut response” and tell someone if something happens that makes them feel uneasy or uncomfortable.
- The majority of sexual abuse offenders has abused more than one person and CANNOT stop without professional counseling.
- Someone who is being abused should TELL AN ADULT immediately so that the abuse will stop.

Resources

Web Sites: Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network—www.rainn.org
Stop Abuse for Everyone—www.safe4all.org

Telephone Hotlines National Domestic Violence Hotline—(800) 799-SAFE (7233)/voice or (800) 787-3224/TTY
National Sexual Assault Hotline—(800) 656-HOPE (4683)