

Lesson: When Falling Is a Good Thing: The Decline in Teen Pregnancy

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

- Describe the current trend in the U.S. teen-pregnancy rate
- List at least two barriers to teens accessing emergency contraception

Materials:

- Copies of “**When Falling Is a Good Thing: The Decline in Teen Pregnancy**”
- Copies of the worksheet *Who’s Responsible for Emergency Contraception?*
- Index cards or scraps of paper
- Piece of newsprint or chalkboard
- Markers or chalk
- Pens or pencils
- Tape

Preparation:

Write the following stem sentences on newsprint paper or chalkboard before the lesson begins.

- Teens who have sex are . . .
- Teens who don’t have sex are . . .
- Teens get pregnant because . . .
- Teens could prevent pregnancy by . . .
- Adults could help teens prevent pregnancy by . . .

Procedure:

1. Introduce the topic by explaining that U.S. teen-pregnancy rates, while on the decline, are still the highest of any Western industrialized country. The U.S. teen-pregnancy rate is four times higher than in France and nine times higher than in the Netherlands. (*Facilitator’s Note: For more information about these international comparisons, go to www.advocatesforyouth.org.*)

This lesson will examine the declining U.S. teen-pregnancy rate and what factors might further reduce the number of teens who become pregnant each year.

2. Distribute an index card/scrap of paper and a pen/pencil to each student. Tell students that you will read five sentence stems and they are to write the first thing that comes to mind on their paper. There are no right or wrong answers, just opinions about these issues.

3. Read each sentence stem twice and allow participants a few seconds to write their responses. When you are done reading all five sentence stems, tell participants you will now read them again and ask volunteers to share what they wrote with the whole group. Tell group that this activity is designed to allow the group to hear a variety of opinions and beliefs, but not give time to engage in a debate or discussion. Begin by reading the first stem sentence and ask for volunteers.

(*Facilitator’s Note: It can help to repeat what participants have said if there is concern the whole group may not have heard the statement.*) Continue this process with all five stem sentences.

4. Distribute copies of the article “**When Falling Is a Good Thing: The Decline in Teen Pregnancy**” and read together with your students. **DO NOT READ** the article “**Teen Pregnancy and the Choices We Made**”. Ask students the following discussion questions:

- Do you think teen pregnancy is an important issue in your community? If so, why? If not, why not?

- What reasons might a teen have in deciding to have sex? Deciding not to have sex?
- If a teen is having sex, why might he/she NOT use birth control?
- What stereotypes exist about teens who get pregnant? Teens who have an abortion? Teens who place the baby for adoption? Teen parents?
- In your opinion, what could help teens prevent pregnancy?

5. Explain to students that once a teen gets pregnant, there is no easy choice about what to do next. Getting pregnant, no matter the outcome, can dramatically change your life. This next exercise will focus on PREVENTING pregnancy.

6. Explain that emergency contraception (EC) is pills that prevent pregnancy and can be taken up to 120 hours after unprotected sexual intercourse. The sooner EC pills are taken, the more effective they are. In 2000, EC use was responsible for preventing 51,000 abortions in the U.S. Although currently in most states you have to get a prescription to get EC, the FDA might make it available over-the-counter very soon. This exercise will examine a scenario in which teens try to prevent a pregnancy by using EC.

7. Distribute copies of *Who's Responsible for Emergency Contraception?* to each student. Instruct students to read the worksheet individually and rank the characters at the bottom based on who behaved most honorably and responsibly.

(Facilitator's Note: Alternatively, you can read the scenario aloud or ask for volunteers to read it to the group.) Give participants five minutes to complete this task.

8. Next, divide participants into groups of four and have them arrange their seats together. Instruct groups that their task is to talk about the scenario, their rankings, and try to come to a consensus about the rankings for each character. Allow groups 10-15 minutes to complete this task.

(Facilitator's Note: During this time, it is helpful to circulate among groups to clarify any questions and facilitate differences of opinions among group members.)

9. Gather groups' attention and ask the following questions:

- How many groups were able to reach consensus?
- How did it feel to try and reach consensus on their character rankings?
- What rankings did groups give to Jayson's brother?
- What rankings did groups give to Tina?
- What rankings did groups give to Lily?
- What rankings did groups give to Jayson?
- What did you learn (about others or yourself) versus Lily's health teacher?

(Facilitator's Note: Ask probing questions to clarify people's opinions and remind group that there is no "right" answer.)

End discussion by pointing out that parents typically want schools to teach kids about sexuality and schools want parents to teach their kids about sexuality. The problem arises when each side waits for the other to teach the kids and often the result is that kids don't end up getting taught anything.

As closure, ask four volunteers to each read one of the sections from the **"Teen Pregnancy and the Choices We Made"** article. After listening to these four teens, remind students that when it comes to teen pregnancy, the best solution is PREVENTION.

(Special thanks to Teri Tomatich, M.Ed., for her review of this discussion guide.)

Lily and Jayson are in high school and have been dating seriously for almost a year. They are both in love and have a very caring and trusting relationship. A couple of months ago, they had intercourse, the first time for both of them. Lily used to be on the Pill but had recently stopped taking it because she didn't like how moody she was feeling. Now they only use condoms and have been very good about using them correctly every time they have sex. On Friday night, however, the condom broke after Jayson had already "cum" (ejaculated). They were both really upset.

On Saturday, Lily talked to her best friend, Tina, about what to do. Tina said that she had read something about the "morning-after" pill in a magazine, but thought you had to get your parents' permission to take it. Jayson also talked to his older brother but all he said was, "Sorry man—you're screwed. That really sucks." Jayson started freaking out and told Lily that he thought she should get an abortion, because he couldn't deal with having a kid right now. Lily tried surfing the Web on Sunday to see if she could find any information. Unfortunately, since her parents have filtering software, the Web sites with information about emergency contraception, birth control, and pregnancy testing were all blocked. She found the yellow pages and called a couple of clinics in her area, but since it was Sunday, they were closed. In the car on the way to the orthodontist on Monday, her mom asked how things with Jayson were going. She told her mom that everything was fine. Her mom asked if she was having sex and Lily lied. Lily felt like she would just die if her mom found out she was not a virgin. Her mom said, "Well, that's good, because I can't even think about what would happen if you ever got pregnant."

At school Tuesday, Lily listened eagerly while her health teacher covered methods of birth control. Lily's health teacher was misinformed about emergency contraception and thought it was the same thing as RU-486 (a medical abortion). Since Lily's school is conservative, the health teacher decided to skip teaching about emergency contraception, because he's not allowed to cover abortion in health class.

When Lily got home from school on Wednesday, she called the clinic again before her parents got home from work. The nurse told her it was too late to take emergency contraception since she wouldn't be able to get an appointment until Thursday, which was six days after the condom had broken. The nurse told Lily to take a pregnancy test the following weekend. Lily bought a pregnancy test from the drugstore the following Sunday and just took the test. Rank the six characters below. Number 1 would be the person who behaved most honorably and responsibly and Number 6 would be the person who behaved least honorably and responsibly.

- ___ Lily ___ Jayson
- ___ Lily's health teacher ___ Lily's mom
- ___ Tina ___ Jayson's brother

*(*Idea adapted by Nora Gelperin, M.Ed., from Teaching Safer Sex, Peggy Brick and Colleagues, Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey, www.ppgnnj.org)*