



Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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Lesson: Should a Teen under 18 Need Her Parent's Permission to Have an Abortion?

Learning Objectives

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

- 1) Describe at least one reason why teen girls should and at least one reason why teen girls should not need their parent's permission to have an abortion.
- 2) Clarify their own beliefs about the rights of teens versus their parents regarding sexual health decisions.

Time Needed

60 minutes

Materials

- Copies of "Should a Teen under 18 Need Her Parent's Permission to Have an Abortion?" One per student
- One AGREE and one DISAGREE sign (UNSURE sign optional)
- Masking tape
- One copy of "Forced Choice—Teens and Their Parents: Whose Right Is It?"
- Copies of "But How Do I Tell My Parents?" Worksheets 1 & 2—one worksheet per small group of three

Preparation

Post the AGREE and DISAGREE signs in the room on opposing walls.

Procedure

1. Introduce topic by explaining that most people have strong feelings about abortion. Explain that this activity will not address the issue of whether abortion is right or wrong, rather the reality is that abortion exists and teens throughout the United States have abortions every day. Explain that this activity will examine the rights of teens versus their parents when it comes to making decisions about their sexuality. [2 minutes]
2. Distribute a copy of "Should a Teen Under 18 Need Her Parent's Permission to Have an Abortion?" to each student. Ask for two volunteers and have each read one side of the article aloud to the whole class. Ask students the following discussion questions:
 - What do you think about the opinions expressed in the article?
 - Did you feel that your opinion was represented by one of the authors? [8 minutes]

3. Next, explain that you will be conducting a forced choice activity to allow students to clarify what they believe about teens' rights versus those of their parents. Explain that not all teens have parents or live with their parents, so you'll be using the word "parent" to mean any adult that was responsible for parenting a teen, not just biological parents. Point to the posted AGREE and DISAGREE signs on opposing walls of the room. Explain that you will read a statement and students are to decide whether they agree or disagree and then move to the side of the room that represents their opinion. (**Facilitator's Note:** You may choose to add an UNSURE sign for the middle, if you feel your students would struggle with this exercise. If you choose to use the UNSURE option, explain its purpose during the directions.) Explain that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, but simply opinions and perspectives that can be shared to gain insight and build empathy. Ask if there are any questions before you begin. [2 minutes]

4. Read one of the statements from "Forced Choice—Teens and Their Parents: Whose Right Is It?" Once students have moved to stand next to either the AGREE or DISAGREE sign, instruct them to talk with others who have the same opinion and explain why they believe what they do. Allow participants a couple of minutes to talk groups. [5 minutes]

5. Gather the group's attention and ask for one person to share his or her beliefs about this statement with the large group. (**Facilitator's Note:** It can help to start with the group with fewer people, so they don't feel overpowered by the larger group.) Repeat this process until at least two people from both sides have been heard. Continue to the next statement and repeat as time permits. [10 minutes]

6. Instruct students to return to their seats. Ask students the following questions:

- What did you learn as a result of doing that exercise?
- Did you notice that your opinion or thinking shifted as a result? [5 minutes]

7. Next, explain that teens often want to talk with their parents about important sexual health topics, but struggle with how to have the conversation. Explain that over 60 percent of teen girls who become pregnant tell their parents and that most parents, while shocked and possibly disappointed, support their teen throughout the experience. Explain that in order to help teens prepare for just such a conversation, the next activity will require small groups to create dialogue between a parent and his or her teen. Explain that teens should think about how to prepare for and have this conversation, so that it might be easier for all involved. [2 minutes]

8. Divide students into groups of three. Explain that each group will get either Worksheet 1 or Worksheet 2. The task is to read the situation and fill in the worksheet with as much detail and thoughtfulness as possible. Distribute copies of the worksheets to each group, so that some groups have Worksheet 1 while others have Worksheet 2. Give students ten minutes to complete their worksheets and indicate when time is up. [12 minutes]

9. Ask groups with Worksheet 1 to report back, so that members of each group describe the preparation they would recommend, the ideal situation they created and the dialogue

between teen and parent. Once you have heard from each group with Worksheet 1, continue the same process, hearing from groups with Worksheet 2. (**Facilitator's Note:** If you feel your students would handle a role-play successfully, have two members of the group read their dialogue as a role-play while the third member plays narrator to set the scene. Conduct as many role-plays as time permits. If you want to make this assignment for credit, have each group member write his or her name on the worksheet, and collect them at the end.) [12 minutes]

10. Lastly, ask students to think of one word that would describe how they would feel if they needed to tell their parent(s) that they might be pregnant or had gotten a girl pregnant. Have each student whip around and share their feeling word aloud. [1 minute]

11. Close by explaining to students that dealing with an unintended pregnancy never has easy answers and if someone were ever to face that situation, there are community clinics, hotlines and Web sites that can help, such as those listed in the *Sex, Etc.* magazine or Web site, Sexetc.org. [1 minute]

Forced Choice – Teens and Their Parents: Whose Right Is It?

1. Teens should be required to get a parent's permission to take emergency contraception.
2. Parent(s) should be notified when their teen is tested for HIV.
3. Teens under age 18 should involve their parent(s) in a decision about an unintended pregnancy.
4. A guy should have equal rights as the girl when it comes to deciding the outcome of an unintended pregnancy.
5. Parents should be notified when a teen has been sexually assaulted.
6. Teens should be at least 16 in order to buy condoms.
7. Parents have a right to know if their child is having sexual intercourse.
8. Parents should be informed if their teen is getting birth control from a clinic.

The Discussion Guide was created by Nora Gelperin, M.Ed., director of training and education at Answer. For additional lessons, go to http://answer.rutgers.edu/page/lesson_plans. Special thanks to Teri Tomatich, M.Ed., for her review of this Discussion Guide.

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