

PARENT INVOLVEMENT GUIDE



My Future-My Choice™
A sexual health curriculum for teens

MY FUTURE-MY CHOICE™

A sexual health curriculum for teens

YOUTH SERVICES PROGRAMS

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INTRODUCTION TO MY FUTURE-MY CHOICE

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child will soon receive the My Future-My Choice program in the classroom. My Future-My Choice is a comprehensive sexual health curriculum aimed at sixth- and seventh-graders. This program helps students understand the advantages of postponing sexual involvement and teaches them information and skills to be safe and healthy. This booklet is designed to help you understand what your child is learning during My Future-My Choice and provides opportunities for discussion within the context of your own family's values.

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES OF EARLY ADOLESCENCE

Early adolescence starts when children begin to go through puberty and ends when most of the physical changes of puberty are complete. Your child is most likely in this early adolescent stage of development. During this time, you may notice significant physical, emotional and social changes as your child begins the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Boys and girls go through puberty at different rates and experience a wide variety of developmental changes. Friends and peers take on increasing importance. Many young people at this stage experience and express a wide range of emotions that can change often.

Your child's thinking patterns and abilities are also changing. Early adolescents are growing in their ability to take on higher-level thinking. Yet most adolescents your child's age are still very concrete thinkers. This means they tend to see things as "all or nothing" and either "right or wrong." Early adolescents are still directly influenced by parents, mentors and older teens.

Importantly, early adolescence is also a time when many students often experience real or perceived pressure from friends and peers to experiment in social situations and try drugs, tobacco and alcohol. Many parents may hear "everyone is doing it" as an excuse. For many young people, fitting in with their peers is important. This is also the time when young people become more aware of sexual feelings and desires.

Adolescence is an important time for young people to hear clear messages about being safe and healthy, postponing sexual involvement and choosing wisely. Specific examples, concrete situations and skills education by parents, teachers, mentors and older teens can be effective. My Future-My Choice has specific content and approaches that fit the learning patterns of your child's age group. The My Future-My Choice message of making healthy choices and postponing sexual involvement is designed to reach children before most of them are sexually active. My Future-My Choice is delivered by adults and older teens, who are powerful role models for early adolescents. All of this allows My Future-My Choice to be developmentally appropriate, realistic and effective in teaching students about the benefits of making healthy choices and valuing their sexual health.

YOUR ROLE IN MY FUTURE-MY CHOICE

The My Future-My Choice curriculum is designed to teach your child specific skills and knowledge around postponing sexual involvement and making good choices about sexual health. My Future-My Choice reinforces the importance of sexual health and personal values. As parents or guardians, you are the most important resource for your child as they learn the values related to their life decisions. What you do at home can help your child know how important you feel it is to wait until they are ready, both physically and mentally. What you say at home helps your child understand the importance of protecting oneself from sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancies. How you talk with your child about the curriculum can build on the My Future-My Choice message and help them make healthy choices.

When My Future-My Choice is presented in the classroom, it is a critical time for you to discuss your personal, family and/or religious beliefs around sexual involvement. Whether the concern is about waiting until they are in committed relationships or avoiding an unplanned pregnancy or STD transmission, it is important that parents and significant adults talk with their children about making healthy choices.

SUPPORTING EACH MY FUTURE-MY CHOICE LESSON

Following each lesson is a summary and suggestions for parents, guardians and other adults to support and reinforce the My Future-My Choice message. We hope these suggestions help guide the discussions between you and your child. Many of the suggestions involve parents and specific adults sharing personal opinions and experiences in a positive and open manner. This style of discussion is the most effective way to communicate with your child. Your involvement makes a difference in the effectiveness of the My Future-My Choice program.

LESSON 1: LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The main purpose of this lesson

In this lesson, participants work on setting goals for the future. Without goals, the child lacks determination or plans for the future. It is easy to drift through life letting things “just happen” to us. Setting goals is an important part of taking control of our future. In this lesson we will identify why having short-, mid- and long-term goals is important.

The main topics of this lesson

- Determining the difference between short-, mid- and long-term goals.
- Setting a personal physical, mental and/or social short-term goal.

Learning the reality

- The choices we make, even when we’re young, affect what we do as adults.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Make sure your child understands the importance of setting goals and sticking to them.
- Take turns discussing your personal short-, mid- and long-term goals with your child.
- Reinforce ways your family acknowledges growing up. Since many young people associate sex with being an adult, it is important to let them know there are other ways to show you’re grown up rather than having sex.

LESSON 2: THE ADVANTAGES OF POSTPONING SEXUAL INVOLVEMENT

The main purpose of this lesson

This lesson explores why young people become sexually active and the advantages of postponing sexual involvement.

Middle school students are more concerned about how their lives are today than how they will be in the future. Therefore, it is important to explore the immediate advantages for postponing sex. Students also need to know that the negative consequences of having sex at this age outweigh the positive ones.

The main topics of this lesson

- Advantages of postponing sexual involvement.
- Reasons most young people wait to become sexually involved: unplanned pregnancy, not wanting STDs, family influence, waiting until marriage, religious values.

Learning the reality

- Most young people are **not** having sex.

Factual information

- Pregnancy **can** occur the first time someone has sex.
- Only abstinence is 100 percent effective.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss your family values for waiting to become sexually involved.
- Remind your child that the majority of middle school students are **not** having sex.
- Discuss ways your family acknowledges growing up, since many young people associate sex with becoming an adult.

LESSON 3: SOCIAL PRESSURE

The main purpose of this lesson

This lesson's goal is to help young people acknowledge that the images or messages about sexual behavior in the media are not always accurate or the healthiest models for youth. Media messages usually do not show the consequences of early sexual involvement. Experiencing sexual feelings and pressures are normal. It is important to know how to handle these feelings and pressures.

The main topics of this lesson

- Identifying the pressures young people feel from today's society.
- Discussing how the media (songs, magazines, advertisements, television, Internet) pressure young people to become sexually involved.
- Learning how their internal sexual feelings can make them feel pressured.
- Learning the importance of positive pressures: conscience, morals, family/religious values.

During this lesson, students are:

- Reminded of advantages of postponing early sexual involvement.
- Learning that the media often don't show consequences of early sexual involvement.
- Reassured that sexual feelings are normal and can be acted on in positive, healthy ways.
- Instructed that it is important to think for themselves.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Listen with your child to some of his or her favorite music. Discuss what each of you hears in the song's words.
- Discuss how you dealt with different pressures when you were your child's age.
- Discuss how your family deals with pressures from society.

LESSON 3: SOCIAL PRESSURE—continued

- Talk about situations where you had to think for yourself.
- Ask what pressures your child thinks his or her peers are experiencing in school (e.g., needing to wear the same clothes, be “cool” to fit in).
- Discuss the rewards of living up to your own values.
- Discuss other ways the media present a “fantasy world” that doesn’t always accurately reflect real life situations and consequences.

LESSON 4: UNDERSTANDING PEER PRESSURE

The goals of this lesson

This lesson explores the kinds of relationships people have in life and how peer pressure may occur in those relationships. Even in committed relationships, sex does not have to be involved. Although friends can be critical, it is important they learn that having sex is not necessary to be popular or have friends. In addition, young people learn to set personal “stopping points.”

The main topics of this lesson

- Discussing negative peer pressure, often the most difficult pressure to handle.
- Learning how to identify peer pressure.
- Learning that most middle school youth are not sexually active.
- Saying no to sexual involvement allows them to take advantage of other opportunities.
- Understanding that they always have the right to say no.
- Understanding different types of relationships including acquaintances, friends and best friends, dating relationships and committed relationships.

During this lesson, students are:

- Reminded that relationships are defined by depth of feeling, not level of physical affection.
- Given the opportunity to set their own personal limits for physical affection.
- Discussing how alcohol and drugs can influence their personal limit.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss how you deal with peer pressure.
- Remind your child how alcohol and drugs can affect sexual involvement.

LESSON 4: UNDERSTANDING PEER PRESSURE—continued

- Give personal examples of different types of relationships in your life and how you define them.
- Talk about the pressures your child feels in school and explore strategies for addressing them.
- Help your child set personal limits for physical affection.
- Share your experiences regarding the personal limit you've agreed on.
- Talk about what it was like when you were in middle school.
- Make a plan together of what to do if your child is being pushed past his or her limit; for instance, discuss what your child can say and do and identify people to talk with or places to go.
- Reinforce the fact that it is never OK for others to pressure your child for sex or to touch him or her in ways that feel uncomfortable.

LESSON 5: LEARNING ASSERTIVE TECHNIQUES

The goals of this lesson

This lesson helps young people learn to say no in ways that effectively send the message they wish to send. Recognizing the ability to be assertive is a useful skill in many aspects of life. Learning to say no assertively lets young people express feelings in an honest way without hurting friends and helps them stand up for their beliefs.

The main topics of this lesson

- Learning to identify situations that could create pressure for sexual involvement.
- Understanding the difference between assertive and aggressive behavior.
 - **Assertive:** Stating your thoughts and feelings in a confident, firm manner that allows you to stand up for what you believe without being angry or rude.
 - **Aggressive:** Stating your thoughts and feelings in an angry manner. You may be rude or hurtful, make threats or even act violently.
- Understanding that being assertive includes direct eye contact and a clear, firm voice.
- Learning the Three-Step Assertive Skill.

THREE-STEP ASSERTIVE SKILL:

Step 1:

- ◆ Say **NO**.
- ◆ Repeat **NO**.
- ◆ Stand firm: No excuses, no reasons, no explanations necessary.

Step 2:

- ◆ Reverse the pressure.
- ◆ State how the pressure makes you feel.
- ◆ Ask the person: "Why do you keep pressuring me when I say **NO**?"

LESSON 5: LEARNING ASSERTIVE TECHNIQUES—continued

Step 3:

If more is needed after using steps 1 and 2, then:

- ◆ Refuse to discuss the matter any more.
- ◆ Suggest something else safe to do.
- ◆ Then walk away.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss how to identify and avoid situations that may put pressure on your child to be sexually involved.
- Have your child practice their refusal skills. Offer praise and encouragement.
- Discuss how being assertive and using refusal skills is useful in many situations.
- Encourage your child to trust his or her own decisions about sex and to express them assertively.

LESSON 6: CHANGES

The main purpose of this lesson

In this lesson, young people learn about some of the changes their bodies go through during puberty and how these changes can sometimes affect how they feel about themselves and others. One of the biggest changes caused by puberty is that your child is now able to become pregnant or cause a pregnancy. For some young people, having sexual intercourse is not clearly connected to getting pregnant or causing a pregnancy.

The main topics of this lesson

- Become acquainted with the vocabulary used in this curriculum.
- Describe physical, social and emotional changes that occur during puberty.
- Explain the relationship between conception and pregnancy.
- Discuss the reproductive cycle and systems.

During this lesson students are:

- Told what to expect during puberty.
- Reminded that a girl can get pregnant the first time or any time she has sex, and a boy can cause a pregnancy the first time or anytime he has sex.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss that bodily changes are normal and happen to everyone at some point in their lives.
- Discuss family values and morals with your child.

LESSON 7: RECOGNIZING THE RISKS

The main purpose of this lesson

In this lesson, young people discuss the advantages of not becoming sexually involved. They talk about what it means to be sexually active and how some negative consequences include sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs/STIs) — what causes them, how they are spread, ways to prevent them and the risk of pregnancy.

The main topics of this lesson

- Discuss facts around STDs/STIs.
- Discuss risky behaviors.
- Protection;
- Abstinence as the most effective method.
- Discuss how risky behaviors may affect personal goals.

To help young people identify methods of protection including abstinence, disease reduction measures and contraception. Young people will learn about appropriate school, home and community resources to meet specific needs around sexual health.

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- Recognize abstinence as the safest, most effective protection against STDs and pregnancy.
- Identify possible short- and long-term outcomes of sexual activity.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss advantages of not becoming sexually involved and, if possible, share personal experiences.
- Discuss risky behaviors and, if possible, share experiences.
- Discuss facts around sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs/STIs).

LESSON 8: COMMUNICATION AND REFUSAL SKILLS

The main purpose of this lesson

This lesson's goal is to help young people understand the importance of effective communication. Students will also review the skills taught earlier to refuse sexual pressures and maintain healthy relationships.

The main topics of this lesson

- Learning to identify situations that could create pressure for early sexual involvement;
- Understanding the difference between assertive, passive and aggressive behavior:
 - **Assertive:** Stating your thoughts and feelings in a confident, firm manner that allows you to stand up for what you believe without being angry or rude.
 - **Passive:** Not participating readily or actively in standing up for what you believe.
 - **Aggressive:** Stating your thoughts and feelings in an angry manner. You may be rude or hurtful, make threats and even act violently.
- Reviewing and practicing the Three-Step Assertive Skill.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss the importance of communicating effectively in all relationships.
- Discuss how to identify and avoid situations that may put pressure on your child to become sexually involved.
- Practice the Three-Step Assertive Skill with your child.
- Discuss how being assertive and using refusal skills is useful in many situations.
- Discuss times when you have had to use refusal skills.
- Encourage your child to trust his or her own decisions about sex and to express them assertively.

LESSON 9: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

The main purpose of this lesson

This lesson discusses different types of relationships including acquaintances, friends and best friends, dating and committed relationships*; it also identifies healthy and unhealthy relationships.

* Remember, a relationship is defined by depths of feeling, not level of physical affection.

The main topics of this lesson

- Identify different types of relationships.
- Identify healthy and unhealthy traits and activities within relationships.

During this lesson, students will:

- Create a cover story advocating healthy relationships.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Discuss the importance of making smart, responsible choices in our relationships.

LESSON 10: REINFORCING SKILLS

The main purpose of this lesson

In this lesson, students review all concepts and skills learned in their prior lessons. Students participate in a game to reinforce their learning.

The main topics of this lesson

- Reviewing the information and materials from lessons one through nine.

What parents and adults can do to reinforce the message

- Summarize the My Future-My Choice message.
- Discuss the importance of postponing sexual involvement.

Have continuing discussions with your child about your values regarding early sexual involvement.

This document can be provided upon request in alternative formats for individuals with disabilities. Other formats may include (but are not limited to) large print, Braille, audio recordings, Web-based communications and other electronic formats. E-mail sandra.j.harms@state.or.us, or call 503-945-6098 (voice) or 503-945-5896 (TTY) to arrange for the alternative format that will work best for you.