

## LEVEL II

## Lesson 23

INTRODUCTION TO  
SEXUALITY: SEXUAL  
MYTHS OR FACTS?**Before You Begin**

You may need to go over some terms in the quiz with participants before doing this activity (pelvic exam, genital herpes, vasectomy, circumcision, etc.). These terms are discussed in the facilitator resources “Anatomy and Physiology of Reproduction,” which is part of the lesson “Reproduction Review” in Level I, and “Adolescent Health and Hygiene,” which is part of the lesson “Health and Hygiene” in Level II.

The information presented in this lesson is developmentally appropriate, since we know that many young teenagers at this age may have had sexual intercourse at least once (although many wait a long time before having it again). In addition, teens are curious about all aspects of sexuality and often have few resources to turn to for accurate information.

If you plan to use all the statements on the Facilitator Resource “Sexual Facts or Myths,” you may need to conduct this lesson over two class periods. To conduct this lesson in one class period you will need to select specific statements from the Facilitator Resource and conduct the games for as long as time permits, leaving enough time to tally points and recognize “winners.”

**Knowing Yourself**

How easy or difficult will it be for you to conduct this activity, so that it is entertaining—in a game format—yet informative?

How comfortable are you with facilitating a group discussion with your participants around some of the sexually sophisticated information presented in this lesson?

Have you considered the guidelines and rules of your school and community in presenting some of the material in this lesson?

**How This Fits In**

Consider, then coordinate with other teachers of your TOP participants, how this lesson fits into: Science, English, Health, TOP Class, and Physical Education.

**Start**

Tell participants that they are going to begin looking at sexuality and the changes that take place in sexuality and sexual behavior during adolescence. This is a particularly important area of adolescent development since sexual and reproductive maturity is reached during the teen years.

Ask participants to think about what sexuality is. Tell them to recall and share with the group specific scenes they have

**Participants Will**

Define what sexuality means to them. Dispel misinformation about sexuality and sexual behavior.

**This Lesson Takes**

45-55 minutes

**What You'll Need**

- Facilitator Resources: “Sexual Myths or Facts?”
- Newsprint and markers
- Optional: prizes for both teams

seen recently on television or in the movies, or lyrics from popular music hits, that relate to sexuality.

Record participants' responses on newsprint. Ask the group to look at the list and comment on the nature of the responses—whether they reflect a somewhat narrow, genital definition of sexuality (e.g., having intercourse, making out, nudity, etc.)—or reflect a broader definition of sexuality (e.g., gender roles, intimacy, body images, parenting, etc.).

Write the word “sexuality” on the board and circle the letters that spell “s-e-x.” Emphasize that having sex is only one aspect of a person's sexuality and ask participants to list other elements that make up sexuality. Write their responses on the board and add any of the following that are omitted:

- Feelings about being a man or woman
- Body image and feelings about the body
- Showing affection and caring
- Pregnancy, birth and parenting
- Dating and love relationships
- Families
- Preventing pregnancy, STIs, and HIV/AIDS

Tell the class that they are going to compete in a challenging game called “Sexual Myths or Facts?” which will help them uncover any false information they may have learned about sexuality.

Ask participants if they can explain the difference between a fact and a myth. If necessary, clarify that facts are true and can be supported by scientific, physical evidence; myths are not true even though many people might believe them. Point out

that in this game we are dealing only with informational myths, not spiritual myths, which are believed to be true even though they cannot be supported by physical evidence.

Explain that in this game participants will work in two teams, competing against one another, to determine who knows the most about sexual myths and facts. Remind participants that it is against the ground rules to put down another participant. Point out that even though sex is everywhere in our society, much of the information is not correct and it may be difficult to find a source of accurate information.

Explain the game to the participants:

- You will be divided into two teams.
- I will read one statement at a time to each team and they will decide whether the statement is a fact or a myth.
- Each team member will be responsible for one statement, but you should consult with your team for additional information to be sure your answer is correct.
- A team will receive one point each time it gets a correct answer. In addition, if the team can explain why a statement is a fact or a myth, they will get a bonus point.

Divide the participants into two teams and tell them they can name their teams if they want to. Create a score sheet by dividing a sheet of newsprint into two columns. Write the team names on the score sheet, accordingly.

Read the first statement to the first player on one team. Encourage him or her to consult with the team for information to help decide if the statement is fact or myth. If his/her answer is correct, record one point on the score sheet. Then ask the team to explain their response. Allow a few minutes for discussion of the statement and provide



additional information, if appropriate, from the Facilitator Resource. If the answer is incorrect, go to the next team.

Repeat the process, reading the next statement to the first player on the other team. Alternate until all statements have been discussed or each player has had one turn.

**Option:**

This activity can also be conducted as a Cooperative Game, “Share the Knowledge.” In this game participants raise their hands if they think they know the answer to the statement. Two participants are selected and must talk it over and decide how they want to respond. If only one participant raises his or her hand they can select a classmate to confer with and “Share the Knowledge.”

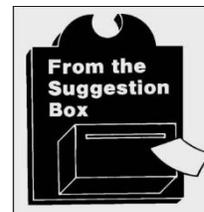
**Bringing It Full Circle**

Help participants process this lesson using the following guiding questions in a full group discussion:

- Which of these statements surprised you the most because it was untrue?
- Which of these statements surprised you the most because it was true?
- How important is it to have correct information about sexuality? Why?
- What is one new fact that you want to share with a friend or family member?
- Is there a fact that you still are unsure about? Where can you go to get additional information?

Remind the participants of their portfolios and the anonymous Question/Suggestion Box at the end of this lesson.

Sample - Do Not Distribute



FACILITATOR

# RESOURCE

## SEXUAL MYTHS OR FACTS?

**1. If a girl isn't menstruating by the time she's 13, there's probably something wrong with her.**

**Myth:** It is not abnormal for a girl to begin her period as early as age eight or as late as age 16— every girl's body has its own individual "clock." If a girl is feeling anxious about not starting her period by 15, she can see a health practitioner to make sure everything is okay.

**2. All boys have wet dreams once they've reached puberty.**

**Myth:** Many boys don't have wet dreams at all, and that is normal for them.

**3. It is unhealthy for a girl to bathe or swim during her period.**

**Myth:** There is no physical reason why a woman should need to restrict any activity during her menstrual period. Bathing is especially important during one's period for good hygiene. However, some women will avoid certain activities during menstruation because of religious beliefs or cultural customs.

**4. A male can't make a female pregnant unless he has had a wet dream.**

**Myth:** A male can cause a pregnancy the first time he is able to ejaculate, whether he is having wet dreams or not.

**5. Men and women may continue to masturbate after they begin having sex.**

**Fact:** Masturbation, or touching and stimulating the genitals, is a normal sexual behavior that occurs in males and females of all ages. In childhood, adolescence, and even adulthood, masturbation is a common means of achieving sexual pleasure and release. Masturbation is not physically harmful and it is a safe way for a person to express his or her sexuality without risking pregnancy or disease. However, people whose religion or culture has taught them that masturbation is wrong may feel guilty if they masturbate.

**6. Women should have pelvic exams before they become pregnant.**

**Fact:** Young women should have regular pelvic examinations (where the health provider examines her vulva, vagina, uterus and ovaries) once a year or so. During the examination, the provider may do a Pap test (to detect cervical cancer or abnormalities that can lead to cancer), and a test for gonorrhea or chlamydia or other STIs. Adolescents who have been sexually active should be tested for STIs, and yearly Pap tests should begin within three years of becoming sexually active (or at age 21, whichever comes first). Other reasons for an examination — even if a female has never had sex — include vaginal discharge, itching, odor, bumps or sores, or problems with periods.

**7. Frequent touching will cause the penis to grow larger.**

**Myth:** At birth a person's genes contain genetic material from both parents that will determine his or her size, eye color, body type, overall adult height, etc. No amount of touching will permanently affect the size of a man's penis or of a woman's breasts.

**8. Cancer of the testicle is more common among young men than among men over 35.**

**Fact:** Cancer of the testicle is a rare form of cancer, but it usually occurs in men aged 20-35. The first sign is a hard lump on the testicle that can easily be detected through testicular self-examination.

**9. For most women, menstrual cramps are very real.**

**Fact:** Menstrual cramps are real. Most doctors believe they are caused by hormones called prostaglandins, which cause the uterus to contract. Some women have very strong contractions during their periods, and therefore, painful cramps.

**10. In males, one testicle usually hangs slightly lower than the other one.**

**Fact:** Having one testicle hang lower than the other is completely normal.

**11. In some cultures, girls are circumcised to keep them from having sex before marriage.**

**Fact:** In some cultures, girls are circumcised by having their clitoris and/or their labia removed at birth or at puberty. This procedure is meant to prevent young girls from being sexually stimulated and having intercourse or becoming pregnant outside of marriage. Unfortunately, because of infections and scarring, the practice mutilates the girl's genitals and may prevent her from ever being able to enjoy sex as a married woman. The World Health Organization and other agencies are working to educate people and to reduce this practice.

**12. In order to produce sperm the temperature of the testicles must be slightly lower than body temperature.**

**Fact:** Sperm cells are produced only when the testicles are about two degrees cooler than normal body temperature (98.6 degrees). The scrotum of the male acts like a temperature gauge and allows the testicles to be drawn up close to the body in cold weather or cold water, keeping the testicles from cooling off too much. It also allows the testicles to hang just below the body (where it is cooler than 98.6 degrees) most of the time.

**13. Girls who are virgins can't use tampons.**

**Myth:** Each girl must make her own decision about feminine protection during menstruation. However, even when a girl has never had intercourse, her vagina is large enough for a tampon to fit in. Most girls are born with a thin membrane called a hymen that partially covers the vaginal opening. The hymen always has one or more openings to allow the menstrual blood to flow out.

**14. Usually both breasts are the same shape and size.**

**Myth:** No, most women's breasts are slightly different in size and shape, just as are her feet and hands.

**15. The sperm cell from the father determines the gender (sex) of a baby.**

**Fact:** The father provides the X or Y chromosome, which carries a genetic message determining whether a baby will be female or male.

**16. Most teenagers have had sexual intercourse by their 15th birthday.**

**Myth:** In 2006-2008, 11% of never-married females ages 15-19 and 14% of never-married males that age had had sex before age 15 compared with 19% and 25% respectively in 1995.

**17. Abstinence is the only method of contraception that is 100 percent effective.**

**Fact:** Sexual abstinence, or the avoidance of sexual intercourse, is the only way a couple can be absolutely sure of avoiding the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection, including HIV infection. (However, HIV can be transmitted in other ways, such as sharing needles.)

**18. A girl can become pregnant before she has her first period.**

**Fact:** Before a girl's first period, her ovaries release the first ovum, or egg, during ovulation. She can become pregnant if she has intercourse around the time of her first ovulation, before she ever has her first period.

**19. A woman cannot get pregnant if she has sexual intercourse during her period.**

**Myth:** When a woman has vaginal bleeding, it may not be her regular menstrual period. So bleeding is not a guarantee that a female cannot get pregnant. (If she indeed is having her regular menstrual period, then it is unlikely, but not impossible — that she would get pregnant.)

**20. Teenage males need to have more sexual outlets than teen females to be healthy.**

**Myth:** Many men and women have heard this and believe it to be true, but it is a myth. It is normal for both men and women to have sexual feelings and a desire to express them. However, neither men nor women need to have sexual intercourse to be healthy.

**21. Once a man has a full erection, he must ejaculate either through intercourse or masturbation.**

**Myth:** There is no harm that occurs if a man does not ejaculate after he gets an erection. A man might feel some discomfort and heaviness in his testicles if he is sexually excited for a long period of time without ejaculating. However, the feelings will disappear once he is able to relax.

**22. A woman can get pregnant even if a man doesn't ejaculate or "come" inside her vagina.**

**Fact:** If a man ejaculates near a woman's vagina or touches her vulva while he has semen on his fingers, it is possible for sperm to find their way inside and fertilize an ovum. Women have become pregnant without ever actually having intercourse.

**23. A person can be cured of gonorrhea and still get it again.**

**Fact:** A person can get gonorrhea and many other STIs as many times as they have oral, vaginal or anal intercourse with an infected person and do not use protection such as condoms. It is important that anyone who is treated for gonorrhea and other STIs be sure his or her sexual partners are treated as well.

**24. Males can have sexually transmitted infections without having any symptoms.**

**Fact:** Many men (and the majority of men for many STIs) have NO symptoms.

**25. Alcohol and marijuana make it easier for people to get sexually aroused.**

**Myth:** Actually, these substances have the opposite effect. Alcohol and marijuana are depressants — they decrease the flow of blood to the genital area, making it more difficult for men to have an erection and more difficult for men and women to experience orgasm. These drugs may reduce a person's inhibitions (hang-ups) and make him/her feel freer to have sex, but they can also reduce sexual performance. More importantly, they can make people feel like it is okay to do things they would not ordinarily do, such as have sexual intercourse or have sex without protecting against pregnancy, STIs, and HIV infection.

**26. Crack cocaine is the only drug that affects an unborn baby's health after the first three or four months of pregnancy.**

**Myth:** Although newborn babies may be affected by their mother's crack cocaine habit, many newborns are also damaged by fetal alcohol syndrome because their mothers drank alcohol during their pregnancies. Women who smoke while they are pregnant directly affect the health of their unborn child, since smoking increases the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS.)

**27. There is one absolutely safe time each month when a woman cannot get pregnant.**

**Myth:** There is no completely safe time for having sexual intercourse and avoiding pregnancy. Sperm can live up to five or six days in the female body. An egg can be fertilized for only about the first 24 hours after ovulation. The hard part is accurately predicting when ovulation will occur. Because a woman's cycles can be irregular, and because she may ovulate earlier than usual for some unexpected reason, she can never be sure she is safe from pregnancy. If a female has had sex in the last five to six days when she ovulates, fertilization of the egg by the sperm may occur.

**28. A man who has had a vasectomy no longer ejaculates during intercourse.**

**Myth:** Semen, the fluid ejaculated out of the penis when a man has an orgasm, or "comes," consists of sperm cells and fluids from several glands in the male reproductive system. When a man has a vasectomy, his vas deferens is severed so that sperm cells can no longer travel from his testicles out through his penis. However, all of the glandular fluids continue to be secreted, and they make up most of the semen that is ejaculated during orgasm. A man will not notice a difference in the amount of ejaculate after a vasectomy.

**29. A woman with a heavy discharge from her vagina does not necessarily have a sexually transmitted infection.**

**Fact:** All women and girls who have reached the age of puberty have a normal vaginal discharge that is part of the vagina's natural way of cleansing itself. The amount of discharge varies from woman to woman and at different times in a woman's menstrual cycle. It is usually heaviest around the time she ovulates. If the discharge starts to itch or burn, or has a different color or odor than usual, that may be sign of a vaginal infection or of an STD. In either case, the woman should see a health practitioner.

**30. Males with large penises have and give more sexual pleasure during sexual intercourse.**

**Myth:** Penis size has nothing to do with the amount of sexual pleasure that a male or his partner experience during intercourse. Penises that are small when flaccid (not erect) tend to grow proportionately larger during stimulation than do larger ones.

**31. Although genital herpes can be very painful, the disease does not have serious consequences.**

**Myth:** Herpes is a virus that can cause painful sores on the mouth, genitals or anus. Herpes can also cause brain damage or death in infants who are infected with the virus during the birth process. Women who have herpes must not deliver a child vaginally if any active herpes lesions, or sores, are present on the genitals or in the birth canal.

**32. Anal intercourse is a safe way to avoid pregnancy and STIs.**

**Myth:** This is a particularly dangerous myth, since anal intercourse is one of the easiest ways HIV infection and some other STIs are spread. Because the anus is not as elastic as the vagina and is not lubricated, it can tear more easily, allowing viruses and bacteria to be transmitted directly to the blood.

**33. A woman is temporarily sterile while she is nursing a baby.**

**Myth:** Women who breast-feed their babies are protected from pregnancy for the first three months after the baby is born — but only if they do not feed the baby formula in addition to breast milk. Even if she is breast-feeding, a mother should discuss with her health provider how to avoid getting pregnant again too soon.