

Discussion Guide

Sex Myths

Overview

After a brief class discussion about the importance of getting accurate information about sex, students read and discuss the pamphlet *Sex Myths* in small groups. They personalize the information and analyze the content of the pamphlet in their groups. Then they view the related video, *Sex Myths*, which reinforces the pamphlet's health messages, and discuss how the characters could make better decisions about sex.

Time: 45–60 minutes

Before you teach this activity:

- **Review both the pamphlet and the video** to be sure they are appropriate for your students. Obtain parent/guardian consent if required by your school.
- **Set groundrules about self-disclosure**, if these are not already in place. For example, you might ask students not to discuss their personal experiences concerning sexual behaviors, and to treat any disclosures shared by others in the class as confidential.
- **If you are working with young people in a setting other than a school**, see the *Adapting the Activity* section at the end of this guide.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify common myths about sex.
2. Describe ways sex myths can create pressures, increase risks and cause other problems for people who believe them.
3. Identify resources for accurate information about sex.
4. Describe important elements in making healthy personal decisions about sexual behavior.
5. Identify steps teens can take to challenge sex myths and promote sex truths.

Materials & Preparation

Prepare

- **Determine** how students will view the video, based on your classroom resources.
 - Option A: Students watch the video online during class, either as a full group using a single monitor, multiple linked monitors or a digital projector, or in small groups using multiple computer stations.
 - Option B: Students watch the video as a homework assignment, either on a home computer or in the school's computer lab.
- **Have** butcher paper and markers, a whiteboard, or another way to record students' ideas.

Copy:

- Activity Sheet **1A: Sex Myths: Personal Reflections**, 1 for each student.
- Activity Sheet **1B: Sex Myths: Group Discussion**, 1 for each small group.

If students will watch the video in class:

- Activity Sheet **2A: Video: Sex Myths**, 1 for each small group.

If students will watch the video as homework:

- Activity Sheet **2B: Homework Video: Sex Myths**, 1 for each student.

Links to Other Learning

This lesson on myths about sexuality could be related to lessons on:

- Reproductive health and sexuality
- STD/HIV prevention
- Pregnancy prevention
- Relationships
- Setting limits and refusal skills
- Decision making and goal setting
- Gender roles
- Identifying reliable resources

Teaching Steps for Pamphlet

Explain activity

It's natural to have questions and be curious about sex. People of all ages have questions, but sometimes they don't get the right answers. Today you're going to look at some common myths about sex, and talk about why it's important to know the facts instead.

You'll also learn how to find reliable resources for more information, and identify steps you and your friends can take to challenge sex myths. When we're finished, you should know more about where you can get accurate information about sex that can support healthy choices.

Discuss the risks of believing sex myths

Ask students:

- Why is it important for teens, and everyone else, to get accurate information about sex?
- Do you think most teens know the facts about sex?
- What are some of the problems that can happen if people believe things that aren't true about sex?

Allow students to respond to the questions and discuss their ideas. Write the main points of the discussion on butcher paper or a whiteboard. Prompt students if necessary. For example, ask what would happen if someone decided to have sex and didn't understand how to prevent pregnancy or STD, or how people might feel if they had sex and then learned that this had put them at risk for STD or pregnancy?

Define terms

Let's define some of the terms we'll use today.

- *Sex myths* are popular beliefs about sex that aren't true. Often people don't know these ideas are false. Some people may take sexual risks or feel pressure about sex because they believe sex myths.
- *Questions about sex* come from the natural curiosity humans have about their sexuality. Questions are different from myths because the people asking them know that they don't have all of the information, and want to find the right answers.
- *Sex truths* are the real facts about sex. When you get accurate answers to your questions about sex, you know sex truths.

Now you'll look at some common myths about sex, and talk about how teens can make sure they know sex truths, not sex myths.

Small groups read and discuss pamphlet

Break students into small groups. Distribute a pamphlet and the **Sex Myths: Personal Reflections** activity sheet to each student. Distribute the **Sex Myths: Group Discussion** activity sheet to each group. (Note: Groups can be up to 5 students each.)

Take turns reading the pamphlet aloud in your group. As you read each myth, discuss whether it's a myth you've heard before and what might happen if someone believed this myth.



Pamphlet

When you finish reading the pamphlet in your group, take a few minutes to complete Activity Sheet 1A: **Sex Myths: Personal Reflections** on your own.

This activity sheet is private. You won't share your answers with your group.

Then complete Activity Sheet 1B: **Sex Myths: Group Discussion** as a group.

Allow students to read and discuss the pamphlet and complete the individual and group activity sheets.

Activity Sheet 1A

Sex Myths: Personal Reflections

Directions: After you read the pamphlet in your group, answer these questions on your own. Your answers are private. You will not be asked to share them.

1. Name a myth about sex that could create problems for you if you believed it. It might be one of the myths in the pamphlet, or something else you've heard.

What are some problems that could occur in your life if you believed this myth?

2. Name something you've heard that you're not sure about—you don't know if it's a sex myth or if it's true.

3. What are the best places for you to get answers to your questions about sex?

Classes in school Counselor
 Parents Health care provider
 Bookstore/library Boyfriend or girlfriend
 Internet Older brother or sister
 Friends Other _____

Why are these the best choices for you?

4. Name a friend, an adult, and a professional (such as a teacher, doctor or counselor) whom you could talk to if you had questions or concerns about sex.

Friend: _____
 Adult: _____
 Professional: _____

5. Name a website where you could get reliable answers to questions about sex.

Relationship Check Activity Sheets 1

Activity Sheet 1A

Review and summarize

Ask students:

- What did you think of the pamphlet? Were there any myths in this pamphlet you hadn't heard before?
- What are some of the consequences that could happen if a teen believed each of these myths? (answers to question 2)
- What were some of the consequences for the different people and couples you imagined? (answers to questions 3, 4 and 5)

Activity Sheet 1B

Names: _____

Sex Myths: Group Discussion

Directions: After you've read the pamphlet, answer the questions as a group.

1. Why is it important for people to know sex truths, not sex myths?

2. Choose one myth from the pamphlet and come up with 3 things that might happen to a teen who believed it was true.

3. Imagine that someone your age has decided to be abstinent—to not have sex. What are 2 myths that might create pressure on this person to have sex? They can be myths in the pamphlet, or other myths you've heard.

4. Imagine a teen couple has been together for a while, and has decided they're ready to have sex. What are 2 myths that would increase their risk of negative consequences? (It's OK to repeat myths from earlier answers.)

5. Imagine a couple in a long-term relationship has been having sex for a while. How could sex myths create problems for them? (It's OK to repeat myths from earlier answers.)

6. What are 3 reliable sources for information about sex? How do you know these resources can be trusted?

7. What are 3 things teens can do to challenge sex myths and promote sex truths?

Relationship Check Activity Sheets 2

Activity Sheet 1B

- What are some reliable sources for information about sex? How do you know these resources can be trusted?
- What are some things teens can do to challenge sex myths and promote sex truths?

Allow students to respond to the questions and discuss their ideas. Go back to ideas from the opening discussion. Prompt students on specific issues if necessary, such as STD, HIV, condoms and contraception, pregnancy, sexual orientation or setting limits.

Teens can challenge sex myths by:

- Identifying reliable sources of information
- Staying informed and becoming a resource for friends who have questions
- Speaking up when they hear or see myths (write, blog, post, talk)
- Talking with romantic partners about sex truths
- Organizing campaigns to inform peers
- Taking classes like this one

Note: If you are showing the video in class at this time, follow the Teaching Steps in section A below. The video can be found at www.etr.org/pub/sexmyths. If your students will be viewing the video outside of class using the URL link on the pamphlet, follow the Teaching Steps in section B below.

A. Teaching Steps for In-Class Video

Explain activity

Now we're going to watch a video that dramatizes some of the things described in the pamphlet.

Here are some things I want you watch for and think about as you view the video:

- What are these characters thinking and feeling during these events?
- What are they paying attention to?
- Do you see any gender issues going on? Do the characters have different ideas about what males or females are supposed to do?

Now let's watch the video.

Show video

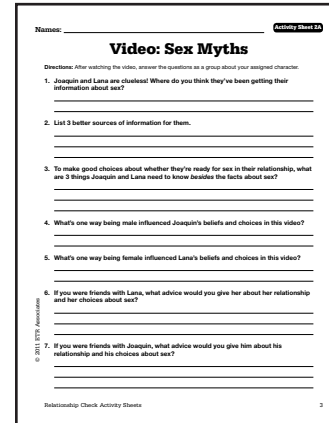
Have students watch the video.

Discuss video in general

Ask students:

- What did you think of the video?
- These are common myths among American teens. Have you ever talked to anyone who believes any of these myths?

Allow students to respond to the questions and discuss their ideas. Distribute the **Video: Sex Myths** activity sheet to each small group.



The activity sheet is titled "Video: Sex Myths" and includes a "Name:" field and a "Directions:" section. The directions ask students to answer questions as a group about a video. The questions are:

1. Joaquin and Lana are confused! Where do you think they've been getting their information about sex?
2. List 3 better sources of information for them.
3. To make good choices about whether they're ready for sex in their relationship, what are 3 things Joaquin and Lana need to know besides the facts about sex?
4. What's one way being male influenced Joaquin's beliefs and choices in this video?
5. What's one way being female influenced Lana's beliefs and choices in this video?
6. If you were friends with Lana, what advice would you give her about her relationship and her choices about sex?
7. If you were friends with Joaquin, what advice would you give him about his relationship and his choices about sex?

At the bottom, it says "© 2011 ETR Associates" and "Relationship Check Activity Sheets 3".

Activity Sheet 2A

Small groups analyze video

Allow time for small groups to work together to complete the activity sheet. Then lead a full-class discussion. As time allows, have groups report on their answers to each question:

- Where do you think Joaquin and Lana have been getting their information about sex?
- What are some better sources of information for them?
- To make good choices about whether they're ready for sex in their relationship, what are some things Joaquin and Lana need to know besides the facts about sex? What do they need to know about each other? What do they need to know about their own values?
- Were there gender issues going on in this video? How did being male influence Joaquin's beliefs and choices in this video? How did being female influence Lana's beliefs and choices in this video?
- What advice would you give Lana and Joaquin?
- Why do you think the myths talked about in this video keep going? Why do people continue to believe them?

(Go to Closure section.)

B. Teaching Steps for Video as Homework

Explain assignment

For homework, you're going to watch a 3-minute video that dramatizes some of the things described in the pamphlet.

The URL for the video is listed on the back page of the pamphlet. If you need any help finding a computer to watch the video on, let me know before you leave class today.

Distribute the activity sheets and describe the assignment.

Watch the video, and notice what the characters seem to be thinking and feeling. You may want to watch the video twice before you complete your activity sheet.

When you've finished watching the video, complete your activity sheet. Bring it back to class on **[due date]**, so we can discuss it.

Name: _____ **Activity Sheet 2B**

Homework Video: Sex Myths

Directions: Go to the video Sex Myths at www.etr.org/subwebsites and watch the video. Notice what the characters seem to be thinking and feeling. You may want to watch it twice before you complete the activity sheet. Bring your completed activity sheet back to class on _____ **[due date]**.

- Joaquin and Lana are confused! Where do you think they've been getting their information about sex?

- List 3 better sources of information for them.

- To make good choices about whether they're ready for sex in their relationship, what are 3 things Joaquin and Lana need to know besides the facts about sex? What do they need to know about each other? What do they need to know about their own values?

- What's one way being male influenced Joaquin's beliefs and choices in this video?

- What's one way being female influenced Lana's beliefs and choices in this video?

- If you were friends with Lana, what advice would you give her about her relationship and her choices about sex?

- If you were friends with Joaquin, what advice would you give him about his relationship and his choices about sex?

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Relationship Check Activity Sheets

Activity Sheet 2B

Debrief homework

After students have completed their homework, guide a discussion. Ask students:

- What are some things that stand out for you when you think about the video?
- These are common myths among American teens. Have you ever talked to anyone who believes any of these myths?

Students can refer to their activity sheet for the following discussion.

- Where do you think Joaquin and Lana have been getting their information about sex?
- What are some better sources of information for them?
- To make good choices about whether they're ready for sex in their relationship, what are some things Joaquin and Lana need to know besides the facts about sex? What do they need to know about each other? What do they need to know about their own values?

- Were there gender issues going on in this video? How did being male influence Joaquin's beliefs and choices in this video? How did being female influence Lana's beliefs and choices in this video?
- What advice would you give Lana and Joaquin?
- Why do you think the myths talked about in this video keep going? Why do people continue to believe them?

(Go to Closure section.)

Closure

End the lesson

Ask students:

- How does what you learned from the video compare with what you learned from the pamphlet?
- If you were writing a pamphlet on sex myths, what's one myth you would have included that's not in the pamphlet you read? Why would you want to see that myth addressed?
- What are the most important things for teens to remember about sex myths?

Reinforce these points:

- *Sex myths can increase risks and lead to other problems.*
- *It's important for teens, and everyone else, to have good resources where they can get accurate answers to their questions about sex.*

Assess student work

Collect students' activity sheets and evaluate their work.

Assessment Evidence

Objective 1: Students identified common myths about sex by:

- Completing the **Sex Myths: Personal Reflections** and **Sex Myths: Group Discussion** activity sheets
- Participating in class and small-group discussions.

Objective 2: Students described ways sex myths can create pressures, increase risks, or cause other problems for people who believe them by:

- Completing Question 1 on the **Sex Myths: Personal Reflections** activity sheet.
- Completing Questions 2 through 5 on the **Sex Myths: Group Discussion** activity sheet
- Participating in class and small-group discussions.

Objective 3: Students identified resources for accurate information about sex by:

- Listing personally relevant resources in Questions 3, 4 and 5 on the **Sex Myths: Personal Reflections** activity sheet.
- Completing Question 6 on the **Sex Myths: Group Discussion** activity sheet.
- Completing Question 2 on the **Video: Sex Myths** or **Homework Video: Sex Myths** activity sheet.
- Participating in class and small-group discussions.

Objective 4: Students described important elements in making healthy personal decisions about sexual behavior by:

- Completing Question 3 on the **Video: Sex Myths** or **Homework Video: Sex Myths** activity sheet.
- Participating in class and small-group discussions.

Objective 5: Students identified steps teens can take to challenge sex myths and promote sex truths by:

- Completing Question 7 on the **Sex Myths: Group Discussion** activity sheet.
- Participating in class and small-group discussions.

Adapting the Activity

If you are presenting this activity in a community-based setting, some simple adaptations can enrich the learning and make it more relevant to the young people you serve.

Here are some ideas:

- **Take more time, if you can.** You may have more time than schools to develop discussions, and more freedom in the matters you discuss. Explore participants' ideas, experiences, perspectives, responses and solutions in greater depth.
- **Link the material to the mission or focus of your organization.** For example:

- In a religious or spiritual setting, talk about the ways being informed about sexuality and making healthy, appropriate choices about sex relate to spiritual perspectives.
 - In a young men’s or young women’s organization, spend more time addressing gender-specific issues, both in terms of risks and solutions. Do girls and boys believe different things about sex? Are some myths more common among males than females, or vice versa? Is it easier to correct myths across genders, or with same-gender friends?
 - In an organization that focuses on a particular cultural community, ask participants to describe the specific issues they observe and experience and discuss how these are similar to or different from those presented in the pamphlet and video. What are the common myths in their community? What are trusted sources of information in the community? Do these trusted sources provide accurate information?
 - In a setting that supports youth with specific risks, such as substance abuse, mental health issues or learning challenges, ask participants to describe how these risk factors affect the likelihood that individuals will believe sex myths. Is it more difficult to challenge myths? Are there different myths among this group than among youth in general?
- **Expand the learning by involving parents.** After teaching this activity, have participants develop a program for their parents/guardians using the pamphlet, video, and discussions between youth and adults. They could come up with a list of questions for parents, offer presentations about what they have learned, or practice working with parents as partners in gathering accurate information about sex.
 - **Have youth develop their own scripts.** Have participants write their own scripts that address sex myths. Offer some editorial guidelines—for example, that the characters shouldn’t be acting out any sexual activities. Youth can act out their scripts as skits, or make their own videos.