

# Communicating about a Sensitive Topic

A Lesson Plan from *Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum*

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

## **NSES ALIGNMENT:**

By the end of 8th grade, students will be able to:

**PR.8.IC.1** – Demonstrate the use of effective communication skills to support one's decision to abstain from sexual behaviors.

**TARGET GRADE:** Grade 6  
Lesson 4

**TIME:** 50 Minutes

## **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- Worksheets: "Be Assertive!" – one per every two students
- Answer Key: "Be Assertive!" – one copy for the teacher
- Homework Assignment: "Be Assertive!" – one copy per student
- Pencils in case students do not have their own
- Newsprint - three sheets
- Markers
- Masking tape

## **ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:**

- Prepare three sheets of newsprint, each of which should have one of the following terms and their definitions: "Passive -- when a person doesn't stand up for themselves or say what they want in a situation," "Aggressive -- when someone says what they want in a way that doesn't respect or even threatens the other person," "Assertive -- when one person communicates about their wants and needs respectfully, considering the other person's wants and needs."

## **A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:**

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

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

1. Define three types of communication: passive, assertive and aggressive. [Knowledge]
2. Demonstrate an understanding of assertive communication as the most effective way of telling someone they do not want to do something sexual with them. [Knowledge, Skill]
3. Demonstrate an understanding of how to communicate assertively about one's own decision to wait to engage in any shared sexual behaviors. [Knowledge, Skill]

## **PROCEDURE:**

**STEP 1:** Ask the students, "Have you ever had a misunderstanding with a friend or family member about something you or the other person said?" If they respond yes, ask for some examples. Point out, as appropriate, when the examples given are examples where communication was the issue, not what was said. If there aren't any examples that reinforce that point, say, "You've given some good

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examples. One thing we're going to talk about today is how it's not always what we say to people, but how we say it that makes a difference in a situation." (3 minutes)

**STEP 2:** Reveal the first newsprint sheet with the word "passive" and the definition. Ask one of the students to read it aloud to the class. Say, "Let's have an example. Say someone asked you to go to a movie you really don't want to see. If you were passive, how might you respond?" Let a few students try, listening for passive responses. If they do not quite get it, provide the following examples:

"Well, I kind of don't want to see that movie, but if you want to we can."

"Um, maybe? I've kind of seen it, but I guess I could see it again."

Point out the passive aspects of the responses. Emphasize that, in the end, what the passive person wants is not being equally considered along with the other person.

Reveal the second newsprint sheet with the word "aggressive" and the definition. Ask a different student to read it aloud. Say, "Let's use the same example – someone asks you to go to a movie you really don't want to see. How do you tell them you don't want to see it in an aggressive manner?" After students have given a few responses, feel free to supplement with these examples:

"Um, NO – we're not going to see that movie, we're going to see THIS one."

"You really want to see THAT movie? What are you, like 5 years old?"

Point out the aggressive aspects of the responses. Emphasize that, while an aggressive response may get that person what they want, they've hurt the other person unnecessarily. Explain that when someone responds aggressively to us, it can make us feel bad about ourselves – or, depending on how aggressive the person is being, even a bit scared. That's not a very respectful way to treat other people.

Reveal the third newsprint sheet with the word "assertive" and the definition. Ask a different student to read it aloud. Say, "Let's use the same example – someone asks you to go to a movie you really don't want to see. How do you tell them you don't want to see it in an assertive manner?" After students have given a few responses, feel free to supplement with these examples:

"I'm not really interested in that movie – are there any others you've been wanting to see? What about this one?"

"I'm not up for a movie – what else do you feel like doing?"

Point out the assertive aspects of the responses. Emphasize that it's okay to disagree with someone or to propose something different from what they want – but how you do it is important. (7 minutes)

**STEP 3:** Ask the students whether they have ever heard the word "abstinence" before. Ask them what they have heard, or what they understand it to mean. Tell them that "abstinence" refers to deciding not to do something for a period of time. Explain that people can choose to abstain from all sorts of things throughout their lives. For example, when people go on a

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diet, they may abstain from eating sugar for a period of time. Then, they might start eating it again in small amounts. That lets them enjoy dessert without experiencing the negative consequences that can come from eating too much of them.

Tell the students that for this next activity you are going to focus on abstinence from sexual behaviors. That means waiting to have vaginal, oral or anal sex.

Say, “In my other example, I talked about choosing to abstain from sugar to minimize the negative ways it can affect the body. Can anyone think of reasons why someone might choose to abstain from the sexual behaviors I just mentioned?” Probe for:

- They don’t want to get pregnant or get someone pregnant
- They don’t want to get an STD or HIV
- They don’t feel like they’re old enough/ready

**Note to the Teacher:** *Some students may say “because it’s wrong” or “because it’s a sin.” Although these are valid reasons for some students, it is important to avoid shaming those who do have sex. Simply adding the word “some” – “some people have been taught that it’s a sin, although not everyone is religious or belongs to the same religion” – can ensure that that student is heard while minimizing the judgment placed on those who may end up having a different experience.*

After you have heard the reasons given, say, “These are all good reasons. Remember the example I gave about sugar? Some people who choose to abstain from eating sugar do it so that when they do start eating it again they are being careful about their health overall. That’s because foods with sugar taste really good – and as long as we eat them in moderation and balance them with other healthy foods, eating sweet food, for some people, is a part of enjoying their lives.

Same thing here with sex. People who choose to abstain from sex usually end up having sex at some point in their lives. That’s because sex between two people, when both people are ready physically and emotionally, have said they wanted to do it and are ready to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and/or disease, can feel good and bring a couple closer. But just like with other things in our lives that help us feel good, we need to think about how and when to do them.

For the purposes of this next activity, I’m going to ask you to imagine that you are in a future relationship with someone who wants to have some kind of sex with you. You know you are not ready to have sex, but you really like this person and would like them to be your girlfriend or boyfriend. We’re going to practice how you can tell them you want to wait without hurting their feelings or feeling bad about your decision.” (10 minutes)

**STEP 4:** Break the students into pairs. Ask them to pretend someone is asking them to have some kind of sex, and they don’t want to. On the sheet are some sample ways of saying “no” to someone who wants to have sex when you don’t. Tell them to read through each and talk about whether that response is passive, aggressive or assertive. Once they’ve decided, they should circle the answer on the sheet.

Then, if the statement is NOT assertive, they should work together to re-write the response to make it assertive. Tell them they will have about 10 minutes in which to do this.

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Distribute the worksheets. As students work, walk around and listen to their discussions to be sure they understand the activity. (13 minutes)

**STEP 5:** After about 10 minutes, ask students to stop. Go through each of the answers, asking different students to share their responses. Use the Teacher’s Guide: Be Assertive! as a reference to provide assertive responses if students are stuck. (15 minutes)

**STEP 6:** When there are 5 minutes left in the class, stop and tell them about the homework assignment. Explain that they are to go home and “teach” a parent/caregiver the difference between passive, assertive and aggressive communication. Then their parent/caregiver will answer a few questions on the homework sheet, which the students should bring back to their next class session. Distribute the homework sheets and collect the completed “Be Assertive!” worksheets. (2 minutes)

### **RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:**

The worksheet activity will ascertain whether students understand what passive, assertive and aggressive communication are and what the differences between them are which achieves the first two learning objectives. The homework will further reinforce and provide assessment of understanding based on how well they communicate the lessons to their parent/caregiver.

### **HOMEWORK:**

Students are to go home and “teach” a parent/caregiver what they learned. The parent/caregiver is to complete the “Be Assertive!” homework sheet provided, which the student is to bring with them to the next class

## BE ASSERTIVE!

### Worksheet

**Instructions: Pretend that someone is pushing you to have sex with them, and you want to wait. The following statements are possible responses to that pressure.**

Circle whether each statement is PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE. If it's not assertive, write a response that is.

1. I don't want to have sex with you, grow up!

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Listen, having sex means taking risks – and I'm not willing to risk my health and my future like this.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

3. If all you can think about is sex, there's something wrong with you.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

4. I'm not ready to have sex right now. But I really like it when we kiss a lot.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

5. I guess we could hang out at your place – I mean, I'm really uncomfortable about your parent(s) not being there, but if you really want to, I'll come with you.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

*Adapted from an activity in Goldfarb, E. and Schroeder, E. (2004), Making SMART Choices about Sex: A Curriculum for Young People. Rochester, NY: Metrix Marketing*

## BE ASSERTIVE!

### Answer Key

Pretend that someone is pushing you to have sex with them, and you want to wait. The following statements are possible responses to that pressure.

Circle whether each statement is PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, or ASSERTIVE. If it's not assertive, write a response that is.

1. I don't want to have sex with you, grow up!

PASSIVE, **AGGRESSIVE**, or ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: I don't want to have sex, but I really like you. Let's talk about what else we can do together that doesn't include sex.

2. Listen, having sex means taking risks – and I'm not willing to risk my health and my future like this.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, **ASSERTIVE?**

3. If all you can think about is sex, there's something wrong with you.

PASSIVE, **AGGRESSIVE**, ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: I'm curious about sex, too – but I feel like you talk about it a LOT and it makes me feel like there's something wrong with me.

4. I'm not ready to have sex right now. But I really like it when we kiss a lot.

PASSIVE, AGGRESSIVE, **ASSERTIVE?**

5. I guess we could hang out at your place – I mean, I'm really uncomfortable about your parent(s) not being there, but if you really want to, I'll come with you.

**PASSIVE**, AGGRESSIVE, ASSERTIVE?

ASSERTIVE: I love hanging out with you, but I'm not comfortable doing that when no one else is home. Want to come to my place instead?

*Adapted from an activity in Goldfarb, E. and Schroeder, E. (2004), Making SMART Choices about Sex: A Curriculum for Young People. Rochester, NY: Metrix Marketing*

## BE ASSERTIVE!

### Homework

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dear Parent/Caregiver:** Today, your child learned the differences between passive, assertive and aggressive communication. Your child is going to teach this to you. Once you have learned this, please answer the following questions:

1. According to your child, what is the difference between passive, assertive and aggressive communication?

2. Of the three, which is the one that shows the most respect for both people involved?

PASSIVE

AGGRESSIVE

ASSERTIVE

3. Of the three, which one often ends up hurting the other person or making them feel bad?

PASSIVE

AGGRESSIVE

ASSERTIVE

4. Of the three, which one doesn't help you communicate what you want or need clearly?

PASSIVE

AGGRESSIVE

ASSERTIVE

Thank you for your time!

Parent/Caregiver signature: \_\_\_\_\_