

WORKSHOP SCENARIO FOR STUDENTS OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Proof of love

Workshop's goal: The aim of the workshop is to increase its participants' knowledge about engaging into hazardous sexual relations. The participants will learn about mechanisms that make young people engage into hazardous sexual relations, and about possible negative consequences of ill-considered decisions regarding sex. The participants will also learn how to make responsible choices and where to seek help in difficult situations.

Duration: 45 minutes

Target group: The workshop is intended for youth between 13 and 18 years old. It can be conducted at school – in such situation the group size is defined by class population. The workshop can also be carried out outside of school, for a group of people who don't know each other. In such situations, it is recommended that the age-wise homogeneous groups count no more than 20-25 participants.

Place: school class, day room, training room.

Materials needed: provided DVD (option)

Equipment required: laptop, projector, projection screen or TV set (if using the DVD).

Facilitator: the facilitators best suited for the proposed workshop are people who work with youth on a daily basis, who can run a facilitated discussion, and have at least basic knowledge of the phenomenon of engaging into close relationships during puberty and its specificity. We encourage you to run the workshop with two facilitators. This should ease up the discussions that will follow each exercise, and ensure comfort during the workshop.

Workshop type and kinds of work involved: lecture, brainstorm, presentation, discussion

The workshop combines elements of a lecture on hazardous sexual behaviours and a discussion with teenagers regarding reasons and consequences of engaging into ill-considered sexual contacts. The content of the workshop and types of work involved can be difficult or poignant for the participants.

We have prepared two ways of presenting the story of a person who made an ill-considered decision regarding sex. You can either read the story out loud or show the provided educational DVD.

Workshop completion/evaluation form: We kindly ask you to fill in an evaluation form for the conducted prevention workshop. Your opinion will greatly help us create further educational materials. Once you have filled in the form, you will have the possibility to obtain a workshop certificate. The form is available at www.edukacja.fdn.pl.

1. Introduction

The facilitator informs the participants that the workshop will deal with a form of hazardous sexual behaviours, i.e. making ill-considered decisions regarding sex.

The facilitator should propose to set and write down a few rules to which all participants shall comply throughout the workshop, e.g.:

- I listen when others speak.
- I don't judge other participants.
- In discussions and exercises, I refer to the story presented during the workshop.
- I treat with respect and discretion information and opinions disclosed by other participants.
- I maximally engage in the workshop.

2. Exercise: "Reasons"

Type of work: Brainstorm

Duration: 10 minutes

The facilitator invites everybody to a brainstorming exercise on reasons for which young people, without much consideration, decide to engage into sexual contacts. The facilitator puts down on the board all the ideas the participants come up with.

In the introduction to the exercise, it is worth drawing the participants' attention to factors such as:

- Peer pressure – young people are often convinced that all their friends have already had their "first time" (e.g. they don't want to be left behind, they want to try it, etc.)
- Persuasions and pressure from partner – young people may think or be told that if they do not agree to having sex, their partner will break up with them
- Time pressure – if there's little time to make a decision (the "now or never" dilemma) we tend not to think about its consequences
- "Proof of love" – some young people may make ill-considered decisions regarding their sex life because they want to give their partner a "proof of love"
- Infatuation, partner's attractiveness – if we find a person attractive or impressive, or we're infatuated by them we easily agree to what they expect of us
- Call of summer adventure – being away from home, we less eagerly consider the consequences of our actions while concentrating on our desire to have an exciting adventure
- Alcohol and drug influence – stimulants change our perception of the world, they make us prone to indulge ourselves (and others).

- Need to relieve sexual tension – sexual tension that appears in puberty may cause young people to engage into sexual relations in order to relieve it, without considering who their sexual partner is.
- Curiosity or desire to gain experience – a naturally appearing in puberty interest in sexuality may come with a desire to satisfy this curiosity or gain experience (especially in a situation of social taboo and adults’ silence on the subject).
- Desire to break the rules or prove one’s maturity – engaging into sexual relations may be considered by young people a way of breaking “arbitrary” rules that come from the adults’ authority and/or proving their own maturity.

3. Presentation: Carrie's story/Ben’s story

Materials needed: if the story is presented in the form of a video: the DVD enclosed to the scenario, laptop, projector, projection screen or TV set

Type of work: Presentation

Duration: 5 minutes

The facilitator encourages everybody to listen to Carrie’s/Ben’s story and explains that the situation it describes will serve as material for further discussion. Next he/she reads out loud the story or plays the video.

Carrie

I was spending my holidays by the sea. I was 16 and – for first time – on holidays without my parents . Just my friends and me. It was supposed to be a great excursion. The nearby log cabin was occupied by students. One of them – Mark – came to say hello when we were unpacking. He was funny and polite and... apparently interested in me – he invited me to romantic walks down the beach in the setting sun. He was older than me and his behaviour left me very impressed. He treated me like a real woman – with respect, unlike boys from my class or school. He openly claimed he finds me attractive, he insisted on having sex. Nobody has ever treated me like an adult before... the feeling sent shivers all over my body.

On the eve of his departure, he told me I was special and that he never suspected he would fall in love with me so deeply. He promised to get a transfer to a university in my city. He said the thought of our soon parting made him feel sad and empty. That night was special. Mark insisted on giving each other a proof of love, he said it would seal our relationship. I was stunned - no other guy before has ever told me I was special. I was ready to give my whole self to him... I loved him so much. It was a sea-perfumed summer night. I decided: you only live once.

And sadly, the magic was gone. Mark wasn't kind nor delicate, he didn't care that it was my first time. After it was over, he left me and went for a beer with his buddies.

I cried all night. Mark didn't even come to say goodbye, he never replied to any of my texts, answered no calls from me. Since then, I am “allergic” to guys, I don't even want to talk to any of them.

Ben

I met Veronica in a park while skating. She was really fun to talk to and we had similar interests; I think we sort of fell for each other. About a week later I asked her to go out with me and she agreed. It was amazing. We were inseparable, did everything together as if we had known each other for ages; we often finished each other's sentences. I really cared for this girl. After a month or so, she jokingly proposed we had sex and totally surprised me with it. I started wondering if it wasn't too early. On the other hand, I didn't want to disappoint her. I tried avoiding the subject but she kept coming back to it with a growing frequency. She said this would be a way for us to prove each other our feelings. I loved her and wanted her to know it. I began worrying that if I don't decide she will think I don't care about her and eventually I'll lose her. I asked Arthur, my best mate, what I should do. He said he didn't see a problem – Veronica is a super chick and I should be happy that she took initiative. A few days later, Veronica told me her parents were going away for the weekend and that she'll organize everything. She was so excited!

The night was a complete disaster. Not at all what I imagined my first sex with a girl would be. We were both stressed and uncomfortable. I was utterly ashamed, I started thinking something was wrong with me. Veronica burst into tears, she kept apologizing for letting me down.

We're not together anymore. I wanted to talk about it all with Veronica but I don't want to hurt her even more. I don't know what to say anyway. We don't even say hello to each other. I wish we had talked honestly before.

4. Lecture: The Mechanisms

Type of work: lecture

Duration: 15 minutes

Referring to the "Reasons" exercise and Carrie's/Ben's story, the facilitator explains to the participants the mechanisms that made them agree to having sex.

a) The reciprocity rule

Young people often treat their relationships very seriously, they think those relationships are special and unique. They declare their feelings and are willing to do a lot for their girlfriend/boyfriend, in order not to lose them. They feel special and feel they should reciprocate. When asked to show or prove their feelings through sex, they might decide to concede, even if they don't feel ready for it. They often fear they will lose their girlfriend/boyfriend if they decline.

Using Carrie's story, adhere to this example: Carrie's relationship with Mark was very precious to her. Mark behaved like a grown-up, unlike Ola's own peers. He enchanted her, made plans for the future. She felt special. She wanted to reciprocate – do something special for him.

Using Ben's story, adhere to this example: When Ben was asked by Veronica to prove his feelings, he wasn't sure he was ready for sex, but, in order not to let her down and show her how much he cared, he decided to go for it. He wanted her to know how much she meant to him.

b) The scarcity effect (time pressure)

Given limited time to make a decision, we tend not to consider the consequences of our choices and to see things in a more positive light than we would if we had time to think it over in peace.

Using Carrie's story, adhere to this example: Carrie's decision was highly influenced by the time pressure – the "lovers" had only one last night to spend together. Carrie probably gave in to the "now or never" illusion when, in fact, Mark was planning for future meetings. Had she not made the decision to have sex on that last night before his departure, she would have found out if he really cared for her.

Using Ben's story, adhere to this example: Ben could have been feeling pressured by the girl's actions – she planned out a romantic evening while her parents were away. He didn't get enough time to calmly think the situation through, he was under the "opportunity" pressure.

c) The halo effect

If we find someone attractive, we are more willing to trust such a person or assume their intentions are good. However, a person, whom we find attractive (physically or otherwise), does not necessarily want our good. It is important to remember that we agree to different things more easily if they come from people who impress us.

Using Carrie's story, adhere to this example: Mark showed her his best sides – he was handsome, chivalrous, he wooed her and treated her like a real woman. She thought she knew him and could trust him but this was not true. His positive features "lent" some of their shine to his other characteristics. Thus, Carrie, who considered Mark attractive, was willing to believe he also had good intentions.

Using Ben's story, adhere to this example: Both Ben and Veronica had similar interests, they spent a lot of time together. She was very important to Ben, and he didn't want to let her down. Seeing Veronica as interesting and attractive might have caused Ben to assume her idea to prove each other's feelings cannot be a bad one.

d) Consequence and engagement

The longer we are engaged in a given activity, the harder it becomes for us to pull out from it. We want to stay consistent and that's only natural. The longer we are in a given situation, the harder it is to say no, to set firm boundaries. Young people often fear they will let their girlfriend/boyfriend down, so even if they don't feel comfortable with the proposition they get, they are more willing to concede. They think that since they are together they should show each other affection and agree to e.g. sex. They may consider intercourse a next step in their relationship.

Using Carrie's story, adhere to this example: Carrie spent nearly all her excursion with Mark; he gained her trust, planned for their future. They were a couple and, to Carrie, her consent to having sex seemed a natural completion. After all, she wanted to give Mark the proof of her love to him.

Using Ben's story, adhere to this example: Ben was deeply engaged into his relationship, he didn't want to let his girlfriend down. They spent a lot of time together, they were inseparable, did everything together. He wanted for Veronica to be happy with their relationship, he was ready to prove to her how much she meant to him.

Summing up, the facilitator explains that often, when we want to achieve a goal that is very attractive to us, or we feel the need to return a favour, and additionally we feel the pressure of time, we act hastily, not always responsibly, and not always in our best interest.

The facilitator should inform the participants that Ola's/Ben's story is not an isolated case. The 116 111 Helpline's stats show that thousands of teenagers engage into ill-considered sex and expose themselves to various negative consequences.

5. Discussion: Consequences

Type of work: discussion

Duration: 10 minutes

The facilitator invites the participants to a discussion on possible negative effects of making ill-considered decision on engaging into sexual relations.

A question for discussion: What negative effect on one's emotions and social life may have an ill-considered decision on engaging into sexual relations?

Examples:

- Depression, anxiety, fears;
- Feeling of guilt;
- Isolation from others (due to experienced emotions);
- Lower self-esteem;
- Trouble in trusting other people;
- Problems in engaging into relationships in the future, etc.
-

A question for discussion: What negative physical effects may have an ill-considered decision on engaging into sexual relations?

Examples:

- Unwanted and unplanned pregnancy;
- Getting infected with a sexually transmitted disease, e.g. HIV;
- Exposure to violence, etc.
-

If the above mentioned examples do not resurface spontaneously during the discussion the facilitator proposes to the participants that they analyse Carrie's/Ben's story. It is worth starting the conversation by listing the consequences suffered by them and then encouraging the participants to come up with other possible negative effects of making an ill-considered decision on engaging into sexual relations.

Summing up, it is good to show young people that the consequences of their decisions on engaging into sexual relations involve every aspect of their lives. They may alter our wellbeing, bring trouble in trusting other people, lower our self-esteem. It is important to remember about the physical

consequences of such decisions as well, e.g. an unwanted and unplanned pregnancy or the danger of contracting an STD.

6. Conclusion

Duration: 5 minutes

Summing up, the facilitator should emphasize that we give in to various types of social influence every day. The workshop presented those that make young people engage into ill-considered and hazardous sexual contacts. The facilitator should underscore the importance of thoroughly considering the choices we make and ensuring our own safety – even when we really want something or when we're under peer pressure.

The facilitator reminds the participants that they have discussed also the potential negative consequences of ill-considered engaging into sexual relations. It is important not to struggle with them alone. Although discussing difficult situations that happen to us is never easy, it is worth engaging in such discussions – with parents, teachers, friends. It is sometimes difficult to talk openly with people close to us – we need anonymous help and support. At times like this you can turn to many places – among them to the Helpline for Children and Youth, operating under the toll-free 116 111 number. Sometimes writing might be easier than talking. Via the www.116111.pl website you can send an anonymous message and receive help.