

The Sex Educator

15

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A MAGAZINE FOR EDUCATORS

WHO CONDUCT SEX EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

WITH HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

Produced by the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
du Québec, Université du Québec à Montréal and Tel-Jeunes.

FIRST TIMES LOVE & SEXUALITY

BY MARIA DEL CARMEN RUMOROSO

THE SEXEDUCATOR IS NOW MUCH MORE THAN A MAGAZINE: IT'S ALSO A COMMUNITY!
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Québec 



I've had a boyfriend for the past two months and he wants us to make love. He says he's ready, but I don't know if I am. I'm a bit scared. Will it hurt? Will I bleed a lot? Is someone ready at my age? What should I do? Have other girls my age already done it? (Bianca, 13 years old)

Every day, on the bus, I see a girl who isn't from my school. I like her. She seems to be looking at me too. For the past few months we've just been looking at each other without saying anything. I told my friends about it... They say I should take the risk... but I just can't do it. It's as if my brain stops working whenever she's around. I just need advice on what I should say to her, and how. I don't want her to think I'm an idiot. (Baptiste, 13 years old)¹

The SexEducator

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Do you remember your "first times"? Your first love or first kiss? The first time you told someone you loved them and the first time you made love? The feelings of anxiety and excitement you felt at the time? You undoubtedly had apprehensions similar to Bianca's and Baptiste's.

Around the ages of 13 or 14, adolescents experience a series of "firsts" that are characteristic of emotional and sexual awakening. These experiences trigger many emotions in teens: joy, excitement, agitation, fear, insecurity and concern. These feelings, which are inevitably linked to first times, cannot be avoided, regardless of a person's age. However, as educators and professionals, you can help young people prepare for these new emotional and sexual experiences, and attenuate the excessive fears that are sometimes related. This issue of *The Sex Educator* looks at first love and what it involves: first kiss, first sexual contact, first discussions on condom use and contraception, first meeting with a boyfriend's or girlfriend's parents.

1. Bianca's and Baptiste's cases illustrate some of the many questions young people ask Tel-Jeunes's Web site about "first times".





FIRST TEENAGE LOVE

Young people are quite concerned about love: they are either already in love, have been in love or dream of being in love. A telephone survey conducted in 2000 of 520 young Montrealers aged 12 to 17 revealed that 59% of 12- to 14-year-olds and 84% of 15- to 17-year-olds had already had a romantic relationship (Lefort and Elliot, 2001). In surveys conducted in Italy, 60% of children, preadolescents and adolescents who were questioned said they were in love (Alberoni, 1999). However, the proportion of young people whose love is reciprocated or who have been in couples varies. Among children, love is mostly imaginary, full of expectations, glances and sighs. At adolescence, love is often a pseudo-passion, an infatuation, a passing craze (Alberoni, 1999).

But what is love? This feeling is not easy to explain. It could be defined as a “very intense feeling, an attachment that involves tenderness and physical attraction between two people” [Translation] (Mimoun, 2007, p. 42). For their part, young people describe love as a “tornado of emotions”, as “something magical” (Rondeau et al. 2008). For them, being in love means wanting to go to school because they’ll see the object of their affection; it’s thinking that everything the other person does is extraordinary; it’s never having met anyone before who is so interesting, amusing or charming. Such emotions can be felt for someone of the opposite sex or of the same sex. The second case may cause an adolescent to question his or her sexual orientation.

Many young people believe that there is someone out there who is made for them (the love of their life) and hope to meet this soul mate. Although girls and boys have similar definitions of love, certain sex-based trends have been identified (Montgomery and Sorrell, 1998). Reciprocity of feelings appears to be the main expectations of girls and boys. However, the nature of these feelings and perception of romantic relationships differ. Boys are more likely to associate romantic relationships with sexual experimentation, whereas most girls consider that sexuality, love and commitment go hand in hand. Boys stress the sexual aspect of the relationship, whereas girls put a lot of importance on respect. In addition, boys fall in love faster and more often than girls (Robitaille and Lavoie, 1992). Youth of both sexes seem to assign equal importance to communication, but boys confide in their friends more easily than in their partner. For their part, girls are more romantic, with the idea of an ideal couple more like those found in Harlequin romances, and their investment in the relationship is usually more intense.

WHAT DOES FIRST LOVE TRIGGER IN AN ADOLESCENT?

When dealing with a first love, an adolescent's head is full of thoughts about the other person (Cyrulnik et al., 2007, p. 155), thoughts which take over his or her entire being. Alberoni refers to "enamourment", which he defines as a unique and incomparable experience, a radical upheaval of feelings, mind and heart, a merging of two different beings (1997, p. 11). "Enamourment" is often preceded by a phase of agitation composed of dissatisfactions and quests during which an adolescent desires something new; he or she is looking around, as if searching for someone. At the same time, the teen feels jealous of those who live intensely and who love each other, since they all seem to be happier than he or she (Alberoni, 1999). Then, one day, magic: the teen feels attracted to someone in particular, which gives rise to many questions: "How can I show I'm interested?" "Does she like me?" "How can I get him to like me?" "What would be the best time to tell her how I feel?" "Will he make fun of me?" "Will she reject me?". Generally the prospect of making a move is a source of insecurity and causes a fear of rejection or of being ridiculed.

Let's look at Baptiste's case again. While he hopes that the situation gets somewhere, he's also afraid and insecure. In this sense, he's like many adolescents of his age. However, insecurity and fear tend to dissipate when the boy or girl thinks that the other person may also be attracted. This prospect alone can cause someone to have a more positive perception of the other person (Curtis and Miller, 1986). For some, this waiting period is exciting, probably because it is a time when they idealize the other person while experiencing very intense feelings (Robitaille and Lavoie, 1992). Moreover, like Baptiste, young people would like to know how to approach the person who makes their heart pound; it's a concern for young people who are beginning to want to seduce.

"A word, a gesture or, more often, a detail makes the other person pleasing and attractive. Eyes have very special powers. They can end a conversation or heighten an attraction. Eye contact can express attraction or the will to attract. A smile seems to confirm what a look reveals [...]."

THE ART OF REVEALING YOUR FEELINGS

In this context, seduction is defined as expressing a desire to please the other person so as to get him or her to feel an attachment and thus win the person over (Tremblay, 1994). There are all sorts of ways to seduce and be seduced.

A word, a gesture or, more often, a detail makes the other person pleasing and attractive. Eyes have very special powers. They can end a conversation or heighten an attraction. Eye contact can express attraction or the will to attract. A smile seems to confirm what a look reveals (Germain and Langis, 2003, p. 243).

Conversations about all or nothing, a sense of humour, spending leisure time together can all contribute to seduction (Robert, 2002). Being close to each other frequently plays an important part in the attraction since familiarity is a source of affection and love (Ayala, 2005). The time a boy or girl chooses to declare love is delicate; it is important to do it at the right place and at the right time, that is, in a quiet, intimate place, when the other person is open to it. It is also a good idea not to rush things: fear of rejection can be attenuated by taking the time to get to know the other person better, to let the other person notice you are interested in him or her, and to detect signs the other person feels the same. But there is no magic recipe that can be given to adolescents. Each person must discover his or her own way of charming another person and of expressing feelings.



After revealing an attraction, an adolescent expects a response: Does the other person have similar feelings? If the answer is no, the teen will undoubtedly feel sad and could even think his or her world is crumbling. Educators and professionals should make adolescents aware of the possibility that the object of their attraction may refuse, and talk about resources that could help them get through heartbreak. Young people who get rejected by the person they love need to feel listened to and respected (Trottier and Bélanger, 2001). In other words, they should be able to count on someone around them who will support them and with whom they can share the experience. This person is usually a friend, but it can also be a family member, a professional or even a parent. Teens should also entertain themselves and avoid isolation by participating in various activities (e.g. sports, going out with friends). This will help them temporarily forget their sorrows. However, they should also take the time to feel the sadness and emotions that go along with their disarray. Unreciprocated love and heartbreak are opportunities to learn about yourself and your relationships with others¹. While it's true that you can't help feelings of love from surfacing, it's also true that you can't be sure the other person will feel the same.

If love is reciprocated, then the experience can be momentous and remain engraved in the youth's memory since, for the first time, he or she not only feels loved by someone outside family and friends, but also desired (German and Langis, 2003).

THE BEGINNINGS OF A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

As a rule, at the beginning of a relationship the two people hardly know each other or don't know each other at all. The feeling of love rests, first and foremost, on the other person's apparent charms; after that, discovering the other person's less obvious attractive qualities can deepen the love (Pouilloux, 2004). By sharing secrets and disclosing their needs, expectations and emotions, young lovers can get to know each other. These discussions can sometimes be difficult since each person may feel shy about opening up to his or her partner, especially since the two are inexperienced.

Communication is essential in a romantic relationship. It is a process that involves not only sharing ideas and opinions, but also feelings. Therefore, it is important to learn to detect feelings that accompany these ideas and opinions and to express the desired feelings. Between lovers, communication is not only verbal; kisses and caresses (i.e. being physically close, embracing) pass on messages that often go well beyond words.

1. To find out more about heartbreak and youth, see Claudine RATELLE, "La peine d'amour à l'adolescence : la fin d'un conte de fées", *Le petit Magazine de la formation personnelle et sociale*, Fall 1998, [On line], [[www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/its/Documentation/pour les professionnels de l'éducation/Le Magazine Ça sexprime](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/its/Documentation/pour_les_professionnels_de_l%27education/Le_Magazine_Ca_sexprime)], and Joëlle MORIN, *Breaking Up During Adolescence: Helping Young People Cope Better*, *The SexEducator*, Winter 2009, [On line], [www.casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en/magazine].



THE FIRST KISS

Teens expect, imagine, dream about and are apprehensive of the first kiss. A study of students in Quebec and Switzerland showed that at the time of their first kiss, young people were usually anxious, imagined a variety of scenarios and were particularly concerned about the technical aspects: how to breathe, how to move, and especially how to do it well (Medico and Lévy, 2005). They also were afraid of feeling disgusted or being rejected.

The first kiss is often either playful or romantic (Medico and Lévy, 2008). A playful kiss is given at an average age of 11 years and can be associated with sexuality or love. It is often given during evenings out with friends, in the context of a game where the goal is to give the longest possible French kisses to the greatest number of partners. These games are training in the technique of kissing or are used to stake out a hierarchical place in the group. Young people participate voluntarily in this game or are pressured by friends.

A first romantic kiss is given at an average age of 14 years, in the context of a romantic relationship. It is generally associated with pleasant and erotic feelings of love, especially for girls. However, it can also have negative associations: the first kiss might be experienced as an unpleasant event and thought about with fear and disgust (Medico and Lévy, 2005).



When the time for a first kiss draws nearer, teens might feel anxiety and fear (Regan et al., 2007). These feelings are more marked among boys, perhaps because although the first kiss is a new experience for teens of both sexes, traditionally boys are perceived as initiators of sexual interactions whereas girls are attributed a more passive role (Sprecher and Regan, 2000, in Regan et al., 2007). Emotions change during the first kiss. For boys, anxiety and fear are often replaced with elation, happiness, sexual arousal and enjoyment. For girls, feelings range from disgust and boredom to pleasure, tenderness and excitement. Once the first kiss ends, most boys continue to experience positive feelings like happiness and satisfaction; some feel shy. Most girls have positive responses, often mixed with disappointment and regret. These response models can be explained by sociocultural factors associated with the meaning of sexuality, since the first kiss is a first step along the path to maturity and adulthood (Regan et al., 2007).

Researchers tend to distinguish a “romantic” kiss from other experiences linked to the first kiss. Thus, a romantic kiss has nothing to do with technique; it is not measured according to length of time when lips touch or with tongue movement. It is a kiss during which a person is guided by instinct and feelings, and through which the love and tenderness felt for the other person is communicated. A romantic kiss involves not only the mouth but the entire being. We feel a warmth that expresses the mix of bodily pleasure and love (Stagnara, 2002). The first kiss is a memorable experience in the course of a relationship. It brings two people closer together and confirms a desire to be part of the other person’s life, to know everything that is important to him or her: passions, friends and family.



FIRST SEXUAL ENCOUNTERS

Adolescence is a period of first sexual encounters. Although it is not always the case, such encounters occur in the context of a romantic relationship. There is a need to feel the other person's body, to be with the other person, kiss, touch and caress him or her, and discover this body that has long been imagined. Exploring the other person's body also increases awareness of one's erotic potential (Germain and Langis, 2003). It is a discovery of the world of caresses, those that procure gentleness and comfort, and those that arouse desire (Vaisman, 2000). Lovers need to be attentive to each other, to detect if their caresses produce pleasant or unpleasant sensations. Touching also provides an opportunity to assert yourself, to tell each other what you like, what gives you pleasure, what you don't like and what makes you uncomfortable (Germain and Langis, 2003; Stagnara, 2002; Vaisman, 2000).

But what is the limit? Each person has to determine his or her pace and manner, all the while knowing that it is possible to stop at any time. You can feel love for someone without necessarily wanting to do more than embrace, kiss and gently caress (Fenwick and Walker, 1995). The most important thing is that teens be able to perceive how they feel in the situation and be not too shy to talk about it. It is a question of listening to the signals the body sends. If these signals are negative (e.g. tension, discomfort, wanting to be elsewhere or doing something else), the adolescent must be able to tell his or her partner, verbally or non-verbally, without giving in to pressure or to a fear of looking ridiculous, or of being perceived as babyish or not cool. No one is obliged to continue sexual exploration "to the end", that is, to have a "complete" sexual relation. Feeling good with the other person, listening and respecting oneself—this is what is important.

FIRST SEXUAL RELATIONS

Most young people have their first sexual relations with a lover, someone with whom they have already had sexual encounters. First sexual relations are a continuation of these encounters, a bit like a choreography composed of a sequence of sexual behaviours. In this choreography, the intimacy that develops between two partners is staged, as they learn about one another and discover sexuality. The choreography can take a bit of time to take form since the partners progress toward an intimacy that integrates an increasing number of sexual behaviours. The sequence of their sexual behaviours varies, but often follows a classic pattern: first, caressing on top of and then under the sweater, touching while wearing only underwear, caressing the genitals, sexual stimulation of the genitals, oral-genital relations, and so on. Sexual exploration involving two people contributes to the learning process about sexuality that young people experience, whether by feeding their desire for the other person or by learning to reveal themselves gradually to their partner. The choreography may eventually integrate or lead to sex with vaginal penetration. But the pace at which this is attained varies among young people. Some will do this choreography with one partner only, at a pace that can vary from a few hours to a few months or even years. Others explore various sequences of the choreography with different partners, in a succession of romantic relationships.

TABLE 1 **YOUNG PEOPLE AND SEXUAL RELATIONS:
SOME NUMBERS**

- Just under 75% of CEGEP students have had oral sexual relations at least once, at an average age of 16.
- Slightly over half of young Quebecers between the ages of 15 and 19 have had at least one sexual relation with vaginal penetration.
- The average age at first sexual relation with vaginal penetration is about 16, for both girls and boys.

Sources: SOM Surveys, Opinion Polls and Marketing, 2009; Rotermann, 2008; Lambert et al., 2007; Rotermann, 2005; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2003.





FIRST SEXUAL RELATION WITH VAGINAL PENETRATION

Many young people are concerned about having sexual relations with vaginal penetration. This issue is brought up in films and magazines, on the Internet and with friends. Some youth fear or dread it; others dream of it and are looking forward to the moment with impatience. Concerns related to first sexual relation involve mostly each person's expectations, performance and reasons to go "all the way."

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPECTATIONS

The first sexual relation with vaginal penetration rarely occurs as young people had imagined (Robert, 1999). They often make up idealized scenarios based on what is presented in films, novels or the media, which project images of perfection and performance.

In the media world, young couples love each other, have perfect bodies, are skilful lovers, climax together. On this dream planet inhabited by extraterrestrials, there's no acne, no condylomas, no 'saddlebag hips', no clumsiness, no unintended pregnancies, and no condoms to put on [Translation] (Robert, 2002, p. 50).

We haven't even included all the magazines that target adolescent girls that contain an enormous quantity of advice on what to do during their first sexual relation and how to do it (Richard-Bessette, 2008). As for boys, they can be influenced by pornography, which they consider as a resource for learning about male and female behaviours, which they may try to imitate (Poulin, 2008).

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According to Robert (1999), one out of two girls and one out of four boys are disappointed by their first sexual experience, and this is mostly due to the gap between expectations and reality (Richard-Bessette, 2008). Therefore, it is important to demystify the first sexual relation with vaginal penetration to protect young people from bitter disappointment (Germain and Langis, 2003).

THE ANGUISH OF INEXPERIENCE

The first sexual relation with vaginal penetration also brings up issues linked to inexperience. It awakens two feelings: excitement about discovery and fear of the unknown. Girls worry most about possible pain caused by penetration. The vaginal opening is rather small and is partly covered by the hymen, which makes it more difficult for the penis to enter the first time. Girls are afraid of feeling pain and of bleeding (Stagnara, 2002). Normally, if the relation is gentle, the vagina is well lubricated and the girl sufficiently aroused, penetration should not be painful: "An adolescent girl will feel a kind of pinch or slight pain that passes quickly, and will sometimes bleed a bit." [Translation] (Robert, 2002, p. 52). Boys are afraid of not performing well or not meeting expectations, of ejaculating too fast or having difficulty maintaining an erection, and of not giving pleasure to their partner (Vaisman, 2000). During the first sexual relations with vaginal penetration, shyness, emotion and lack of experience can cause temporary erectile problems for boys; girls might feel less pleasure than they had imagined. It is then important to make the most out of the satisfaction of being together, in each others' arms. That's already a lot. The best is yet to come, and will come, if they give themselves the opportunity to do it again (Robert, 2002). Although making love is natural, it's also something you learn by trial and error, and especially over time (Bureau de consultation jeunesse, 1998).

Given the concerns and insecurities that result from lack of self-confidence, shyness and inexperience, intense pleasure and orgasm are not always attainable (Germain and Langis, 2003; Robert, 1999). To deal with their apprehensions, partners should learn about each other, respect each others' values and religious beliefs¹, and take the time to go through each step of a sexual relation. Sharing concerns, joys and expectations, becoming closer and having a sense of humour help develop trust between the two people. As a result, it is possible for the first sexual relation with penetration to be a positive experience, with no performance anxiety (Stagnara, 2002). A pleasant sexual relation leads to very intimate and unique communication that goes beyond words; the shared pleasure creates very strong connections that change both partners (Dolto et al., 2007).

Some teens will be tempted to drink alcohol or take drugs to loosen up and get a bit of courage. These substances can help reduce inhibitions, but they can also alter a person's judgement (Coleman and Cater, 2005). Under the influence of alcohol or drugs, youth often go further than they had thought they would or do not protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unplanned pregnancy. These risky situations leave behind many unpleasant memories and regrets.

REASONS TO HAVE COMPLETE SEXUAL RELATIONS

A number of reasons can motivate a young person's decision to have sexual relations with penetration. Without question, the most common reason is love (especially for girls), followed by curiosity and wanting to experiment (especially for boys), and being under the influence of alcohol or drugs (CME, 2003). Whether planned or not, the first penetration will be considered to be more positive if the person feels ready to have this experience.

But what does "being ready" mean? Generally speaking, we feel ready when we feel good with the other person, when we trust him or her and feel respected. It also means that body, heart and mind are all manifesting the desire for a sexual relation. The decision to have a first sexual relation has to come from the person himself or herself, and not as a result of pressures exerted by the partner or by peers.

TABLE 2 **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE HAVING A SEXUAL RELATION**

- Do I want to have a sexual relation?
- Do I feel like being intimate?
- Do I trust my boyfriend/girlfriend?
- Do I feel obliged to or pressured into having a sexual relation?
- Are the conditions right for the sexual relation to be gentle and serene?
- Do I want to have a sexual relation because my boyfriend/girlfriend or friends have done it?
- What do I expect from a sexual relationship?
- Have I thought about using something to protect against STIs and pregnancy?

Sources: Robert, 1999, 2002.

These questions will help you encourage young people to think about the reasons why they have sexual relations. It is advisable to clarify that having a boyfriend or girlfriend does not mean there is an obligation to have sexual relations. People should never force themselves to do it if they don't feel ready or don't want to have this experience right away. It is important to go at one's own pace. It is absolutely normal to only want to embrace, kiss and feel good without going all the way. It is by experimenting together slowly and without rushing, reassuring each other and looking for quality rather than performance that two people get to know and love each other (Tremblay, 1994). These moments can be extremely pleasurable, both physically and emotionally. Moreover, a decision to be sexually active involves responsibilities, since there are also associated risks. Young partners must talk together about protection against STIs and contraception.

1. For more on this topic, see Sylvain RAMSAY, "Embracing other cultures: Sex education for a multicultural clientele", *The SexEducator* No. 3, Winter 2005, [On line], [www.casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en].



FIRST DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CONDOMS AND CONTRACEPTION

Sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy are the risks associated with having sexual relations, even the first time. A suggestion to use protection does not mean there is a lack of trust; rather, it indicates that the person wishes to relax and enjoy the sexual relations with his or her partner. Wanting to protect oneself and making sure the partner does the same is a sign of a responsible person. However, fear of rejection, shyness or lack of confidence mean that adolescents often prefer to avoid issues of protective methods and contraception (Loignon, 1996).

There are several ways for partners to raise the subject: for example, “What would you say if we were to go buy condoms? ”; “Let’s deal with the issue of condoms right away. Then we can have fun.” “Have you thought about what it would be like to have a baby right now? ”; “I don’t want to have kids as long as I’m not totally ready. What can we do about that? ”; “This may seem awkward but we have to talk about condoms”¹. These are just examples. What is essential is to find one’s “own” way of bringing up the subject with partners, even before having sex for the first time. However, it is better to have this conversation before passion takes over rather than having regrets once the relation is over².

If someone thinks he or she is not quite comfortable talking about protection against STIs and contraception with a partner, it is probably a sign of not being ready to have sexual relations yet. This indicates not only that it is difficult to communicate with the partner but also that there is a lack of accountability and respect towards oneself and the other person.

1. Loosely based on the site [www.sexualityandu.ca/teens/sti-3.aspx].

2. To find out more about the importance of using condoms and how to respond to arguments against its use, see Christine LACROIX and Richard CLOUTIER, “Sexual Health: Protect It!”, Updated and expanded edition, The SexEducator , No. 4b, spring 2010, [On line], [www.casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en/magazine].

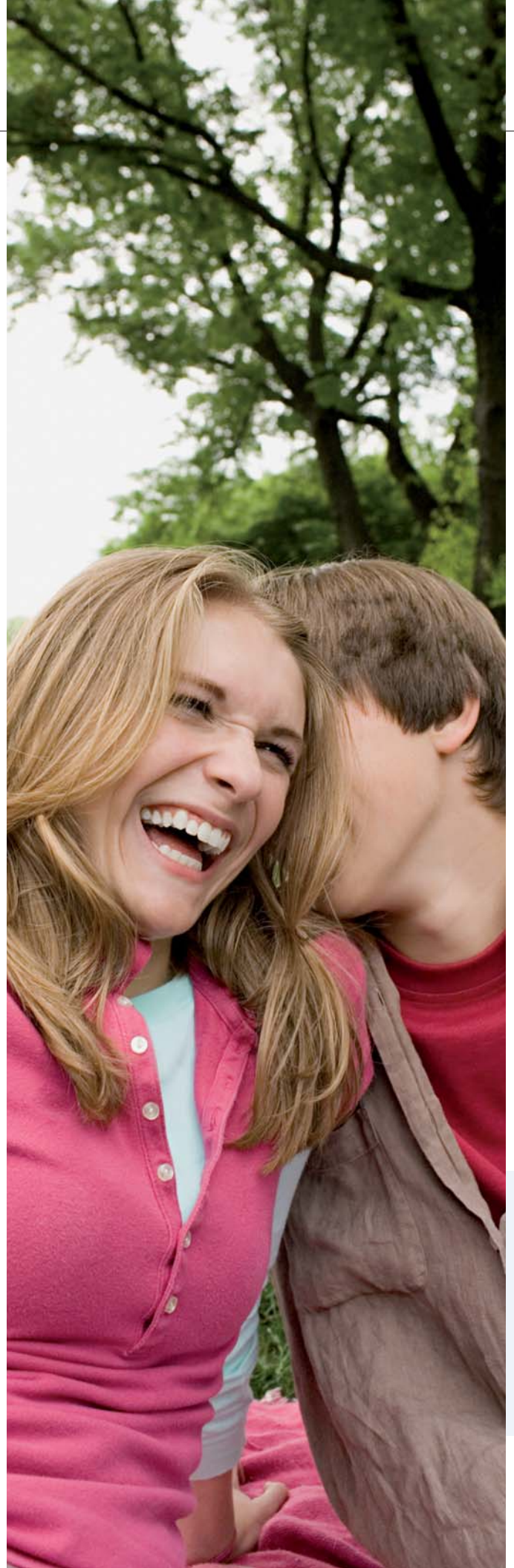
FIRST INTRODUCTION OF YOUR PARTNER TO YOUR PARENTS

Among all the “firsts” that go along with a first love, one is particularly stressful: the moment when a teen introduces a boyfriend or girlfriend to his or her parents. The teen hopes that the person will make a good impression and that the parents will like him or her. If they want this experience to be positive, both adolescents have to adopt certain attitudes such as being polite and acting properly.

Wanting to introduce a boyfriend or girlfriend to parents can mean that the relationship is serious and that the teenager is hoping the parents will acknowledge and accept it. Bringing the other person home is a way of letting him or her get closer, sharing little secrets, and revealing the universe in which the adolescent grew up and which shaped his or her personality (Vaisman, 2000, p. 16). The parents will feel reassured knowing the person for whom their child has feelings. For them, it is also an opportunity to strengthen communication with and be closer to their child, and thus support their child as he or she experiences a first love. During this period, teens want to be independent, discover things on their own, and detach from their parents; at the same time, they need their parents’ protection, authority and tenderness. They want to be free not to tell their parents anything as well as the assurance they can tell their parents everything and be understood (Stagnara, 1998).

CONCLUSION

Adolescence is a time of many firsts, from which follow many questions, feelings and fears. How adolescents experience these firsts depends on the answers they find along the way. It is especially important to teach them that they can learn about love and sexuality at their own pace, and that each experience, whether positive or negative, helps us evolve.



Learning activities

Now that you are aware of the various issues related to first teenage experiences, you can discuss this topic during group activities. The learning activities below aim at preparing adolescents for these new experiences and easing fears they may have. They are intended for Secondary I students, who are about 12-13 years old.

The activities suggested here are designed to help adolescents learn about facets of first romantic encounters. The activities are designed not only for schools but also for use in organizations such as youth centres. The content sections to consult are indicated at the beginning of each activity. Before starting the activities, it may be helpful to read pages 39 and 40 of the document *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform* (available at www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss, section Documentation/ For education professionals). These two pages contain the section “Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education.”

You can also encourage students to consult, if needed, one of the school's resource persons (psychologist, nurse or social worker). In fact, complementary educational services were created to help young people find solutions to difficulties they are facing, through a specific program or a special intervention (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2002). These professionals are valuable allies and it is important that they be kept informed of activities that will be conducted in class.

The tables below indicate how the proposed activities can be integrated into the Québec Education Program and into complementary educational services programs. The presented activity sequence serves as a guideline. School professionals can use the proposed sequence or reorganize it to fit broader learning contexts.

Possible associations with the Québec Education Program

GOALS OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Construction of identity
- Construction of a world view
- Action-oriented empowerment

SUBJECT AREA AND SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

Ethics and religious culture

The topic of first romantic and sexual experiences can be addressed alongside ethical considerations of young people's perceptions, ideas and values. Competencies related to reflecting on ethical questions and engaging in dialogue could be explored.

BROAD AREA OF LEARNING

Health and well-being

To ensure that students develop a sense of responsibility for adopting good living habits with respect to health, safety and sexuality

Focus of development

- Awareness of the consequences that personal choices can have for one's health and well-being: Sexuality, stress and emotional management

CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCY

Exercise critical judgement

Form an opinion, express his or her judgement and qualify his or her judgement.

CONTEXT OF INTERVENTION

See the instructions at the beginning of each activity.

Possible associations with complementary educational services programs

PROMOTION AND PREVENTION SERVICES PROGRAM

Provide students with an environment conducive to the development of healthy lifestyles and of skills that are beneficial to their health and well-being.

PROGRAM OFFERING HELP SERVICES

Support students in their search for solutions to the difficulties they are facing.

ACTIVITY 1

WHAT IS FALLING IN LOVE?

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
30 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on personal perceptions of “falling in love.” Identify the differences between girls’ and boys’ perceptions of first love. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teenage first love (p. 3-6 of the magazine). The document <i>Transformations, Butterflies, Passions... and All Sorts of Questions. Parents’ guide for discussing sexuality with their teens</i> (available at www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss, section Documentation/For parents).

1

As an introduction, mention that adolescence is a period for discoveries, when a series of first experiences take place as a result of emotional and sexual awakening: first love, first kiss, first sexual encounters, first discussions on the use of condoms and contraception, and first introduction of a boyfriend or girlfriend to parents. These experiences trigger many emotions in teens: joy, excitement, agitation, fear, insecurity and concern.

2

Give each student a sheet of paper (different colours for boys and girls) with the following two questions:

- *What is falling in love?*
- *Why does one have a girlfriend/a boyfriend?*

3

Collect the sheets and read the answers aloud. On the board, write the boys’ answers on one side and the girls’ answers on the other side.

4

Lead a discussion using the following questions:

- *Did some of the answers surprise you?*
- *Were you expecting some of the answers?*
- *Did you notice any differences between girls’ and boys’ answers?*
- *What did you learn about girls and boys from this exercise?*

5

In conclusion, identify the differences between boys and girls in terms of their perceptions of love and their expectations in a romantic relationship. Emphasize the importance of being aware of these differences to better understand how young people of both sexes behave, to have more balanced relationships as well as realistic expectations with regard to romantic relationships.

In addition to this activity, or to present the topic of romantic awakening in teenagers, we suggest viewing the educational video *Les années papillon*, produced by Vidéo Femmes in 2005. Six teens, three girls and three boys, experience their first inner turmoils: first-love stories, girl-boy relationships, friendship, body changes. A discussion facilitation guide with several intervention proposals is included with the video.

ACTIVITY 2

THE BEGINNINGS OF A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
75 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think about the feelings that come up when you reveal your feelings to someone.• Know the various ways to reveal your feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First teenage love (p. 3-6).• What does first love trigger in a teenager? (p. 4).• The art of revealing your feelings (p. 4-5).• First introduction of your partner to your parents (p. 12).

Scenarios

BAPTISTE, 13 YEARS OLD

Every day, on the bus, I see a girl who isn't from my school. I like her. She seems to be looking at me too. For the past few months we've just been looking at each other without saying anything. I told my friends about it... They say I should take the risk... but I just can't do it. It's as if my brain stops working whenever she's around. I just need advice on what I should say to her, and how. I don't want her to think I'm an idiot.

LAURA, 12 YEARS OLD

I'm 12 years old and I haven't had a boyfriend yet. In my school, there's a guy I like and I know he likes me too. I'm just too shy and whenever he approaches me my hands become damp, I'm hot, I feel butterflies, my heart beats faster, I turn red and I don't know what to say to him. Last week, he asked me to go out with him, but I said I couldn't. I don't know why I said that. Since that day, he won't talk to me anymore. I think he's not interested in me anymore. I messed up and I don't know what to do.

CHLOÉ, 13 YEARS OLD

I started going out with my first boyfriend almost three weeks ago. I'm so happy with him! My parents would like to meet him and asked me to invite him over. My boyfriend's very shy and I don't know whether he'll want to come. What can I say to him to convince him?

ACTIVITY 2

THE BEGINNINGS OF A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP (CONTINUED)



Present the scenarios to the group.



Ask students to get into **ALL-BOY** and **ALL-GIRL** groups of four and give each team a sheet of paper with a situation scenario and questions for reflective thinking. Each scenario should be given out to at least one boys' team and one girls' team. The colour of the sheets should be different for the boys' team and for the girls' team.

QUESTIONS ON BAPTISTE'S SCENARIO

GIRLS

- 1) If you were in Baptiste's place, how would you feel?
- 2) Should he reveal his interest to the girl?
 - a) If yes, how should he do it?
 - b) If not, why shouldn't he?
- 3) In your opinion...
 - a) How would a girl like to have someone show their interest in her?
 - b) How would a girl not like to have someone show their interest in her?
 - c) How can a girl show her interest in someone she likes?

BOYS

- 1) If you were in Baptiste's place, how would you feel?
- 2) Should he reveal his interest to the girl?
 - a) If yes, how should he do it?
 - b) If not, why shouldn't he?
- 3) In your opinion...
 - a) How would a boy like someone to show their interest in him?
 - b) How would a boy not like someone to show their interest in him?
 - c) How can a boy show his interest in someone he likes?

QUESTIONS ON LAURA'S SCENARIO

GIRLS

- 1) If you were in Laura's place, how would you feel?
- 2) Should she reveal her interest to the boy?
 - a) If yes, how could she do it?
 - b) If not, why shouldn't she?
- 3) What do you think about how Laura felt and what she replied to the boy?
- 4) In your opinion...
 - a) How would a girl like to have someone show their interest in her?
 - b) How can a boy show his interest in someone he likes?

BOYS

- 1) If you were in Laura's place, how would you feel?
- 2) Should she reveal her interest to the boy?
 - a) If yes, how could she do it?
 - b) If not, why shouldn't she?
- 3) What do you think about how Laura felt and what she replied to the boy?
- 4) In your opinion...
 - a) How would a boy like someone to show their interest in him?
 - b) How can a girl show her interest in someone she likes?

QUESTIONS ON CHLOE'S SCENARIO

GIRLS

- 1) Is it important for you to let your parents know that you are in love?
- 2) Is it important for you to have your parents meet your boyfriend or girlfriend? Why?
- 3) What are the possible fears associated with introducing a boyfriend or girlfriend to your parents?
- 4) Would this situation be stressful for you? Why?
- 5) Is it important for you to have your parents accept your boyfriend or girlfriend and that his or her parents accept you? Why?

BOYS

- 1) Is it important for you to let your parents know that you are in love?
- 2) Is it important for you to have your parents meet a girlfriend or boyfriend? Why?
- 3) What are the possible fears associated with introducing a girlfriend or boyfriend to your parents?
- 4) Would this situation be stressful for you? Why?
- 5) Is it important for you to have your parents accept your boyfriend or girlfriend and that his or her parents accept you? Why?

3

Ask the teams to discuss their assigned scenario among themselves and to answer the reflective questions, making sure that all the team members share the same point of view.

4

Read the first scenario and ask a representative of each team to give their answers for each reflective question. Repeat the procedure for the two other scenarios.

6

End the activity by reminding the adolescents that showing an interest in someone can be difficult, for teens and adults alike, especially if there is no sure sign of mutual attraction. There are several ways to reveal emotions, and everyone can find the one with which they are most comfortable. Some factors can help, like choosing the right moment and not rushing things because this helps us to get to know each other, give the other person time to realize that we are interested, and detect any possible signs of mutual feelings.

5

Continue the discussion by encouraging students to share their views on the following questions:

- *Is there a magical recipe for seduction?*
- *Are there differences between boys and girls in their ways of showing their interest in someone?*
- *What questions do we need to ask ourselves when we feel attracted to someone and we want to show them our interest?*
- *How can we reduce our fear of being rejected while making our first move?*
- *Why do we want to introduce our girlfriend or boyfriend to our parents?*
- *Why is it important, or not important, that our parents accept our girlfriend or boyfriend?*
- *How should your girlfriend or boyfriend behave to leave a good first impression on your parents?*

ACTIVITÉ 3

FIRST SEXUAL RELATIONS

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
<p>75 min.</p> <p>(over two course periods)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know the fears that arise most frequently from the first sexual relation and how to reduce them. Think about the reasons that lead you to have your first sexual relation, and in particular, to feel “ready.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First sexual encounters (p. 7-8). First sexual relation with vaginal penetration (p. 9-10). First discussions about condoms and contraception (p. 11).

1

In the introduction, mention that adolescence is a period of first sexual encounters: first kiss, first touch, first sexual relations. Everyone must, however, respect their own pace and respect their partner's pace, without feeling forced to move on to the sexual act itself.

3

Ask the students to complete the sentences anonymously, in writing. Girls should identify themselves on the sheet with a “G” and boys with a “B.”

2

Give students a sheet of paper with the following sentences:

- For me, a sexual relation is...
- I think that a person is ready for his or her first sexual relation when...
- I would like to know if during their first sexual relation, boys...
- I would like to know if during their first sexual relation, girls...
- I think that for it to be pleasant, a sexual relation should...
- I consider a sexual relation to be unpleasant if ...

4

Collect the sheets and sort them according to sex. The next part of the activity takes place at the following session. A resource professional (psychologist, sexologist, or school nurse) can be invited to the next session.

5

Read the sentences aloud; ask a student to write all the girls' answers, and another student to write all the boys' answers on the board.



6

During the plenary, conduct a discussion by using the students' answers as well as the questions below.

- a) What are some reasons that lead a boy to engage in sexual acts (touching and kissing someone's body)? And a girl?*
- b) What are some reasons that lead a boy to have his first sexual relation with penetration? And a girl?*
- c) What questions do we need to ask ourselves before deciding to have a sexual relation?*
- d) Can we be disappointed with our first sexual relation? Why?*
- e) What are the similarities and differences between boys' and girls' expectations with regard to their first sexual relation?*
- f) What "little incidents" are foreseeable for "first times"?*
- g) What is the best time to talk about condom use and contraception?*
- h) How can we talk about condom use and contraception with our boyfriends or girlfriends?*
- j) What are the criteria that help us determine whether a sexual relation is pleasant or not?*

7

In concluding the activity, insist on the importance of doing things at each individual's own pace. To have fulfilling sexual relationships, it is better not to rush, but rather to take the time to get to know each other and fully experience all the stages that lead to the actual sexual relation. Sharing your expectations and fears can help you build trust in your partner and get over clumsy moments with humour. Sexuality is a process that needs to be discovered and learned. There is no "right" age for having sexual relations; instead, the moment is right when you feel that this is what you really want, in your mind, in your body, and in your heart.

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