

# The SexEducator

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A MAGAZINE FOR INTERVENERS AND EDUCATORS  
WHO ARE OFFERING SEX-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL AGE

A production of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec  
in collaboration with the Université du Québec à Montréal and Tel-jeunes

## HAS MODESTY BECOME UNFASHIONABLE?

BY MIREILLE FAUCHER

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Québec 



### FEAR OF KISSING POORLY

Well, I'm asking for advice because I'd like to go out with a guy. I like him very much and he likes me, but I'm going to have to kiss him and I've never kissed before. Also, I have braces, so I'm scared that I'll mess it all up and that he'll tell me that I'm bad at French kissing and he'll leave me because of that. Help me! (13 years old)

### MY FIRST TIME

I've had a boyfriend for some time and we've got to make love but, I don't know why, I'm scared of not being any good and disappointing him, and if I'm not ready? What should I do? (15 years old)

### FEAR OF REJECTION

I have a problem... there's a guy I'm interested in. He's already asked me if I like him. I told him that I didn't know... but deep down, I really like him a lot. I find him really nice. But I'm scared of telling him how I feel. He's so cool... and me... I don't know that I'd be right for him. I'm scared of being rejected... I'm scared of taking the first steps... I don't know what to do... He's really good-looking... What should I do? (14 years old)

### PENIS SIZE

Well, I'm 15 years old and I've still got a small penis. And, well, I wonder if that's normal, because all my friends have big ones. (I see them at the swimming pool, you see the shape under their swim suits.) So, because I've got a small penis, I don't want to have a girlfriend because she's going to laugh at me and I don't want to go swimming with my friends because they'll notice.

(Extracts from the Tel-jeunes Support Forum)

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How can we answer these questions and, at the same time, try to reassure these adolescents? Various forums for young people, such as the Support Forum on the Tel-jeunes website ([www.teljeunes.com](http://www.teljeunes.com)), allow us to see the extent to which adolescents are preoccupied with their bodies (and whether they are normal), falling in love for the first time, and their first sexual experiences. They have a lot of questions about how to enter into relationships with others, how to communicate, how to seduce, and about sexual relations in general. They are looking for instructions on how to kiss, how to perform fellatio, what their first time will be like, and how to live up to expectations. Fear of ridicule is evident in what they say. They are also trying to find out if they are 'normal', both in their emotional responses and physiologically. 'Worry,' 'fear,' and 'embarrassment' are words they use to describe how they feel about their sexuality and their loving relationships. These worries and fears stem from a very specific phenomenon: modesty. But what is modesty? At a time when certain media present more and more explicit sexual content and others seem to advocate sexual performance, what place does modesty have in adolescent sexuality?

### WHY TALK ABOUT MODESTY?

Since young people are bombarded with information and images encouraging performance-oriented sexuality and its explicit representation (e.g. Internet sex), it is important to help them understand the role of modesty in sexuality. Modesty is in some way the interior sense by means of which adolescents discover their limits, fears, and worries. It allows adolescents to respect their physical and mental integrity in the context of intimacy with another (De Rausas, 1997). Modesty can, notably, indicate to young people that they are not at ease with others or that they are not ready for sexual acts. It allows them to perceive the limits of their comfort zones. But will adolescents pay attention to such signals? Educators or facilitators will, at least, be able to help adolescents with this issue.

First, why not teach what modesty is by beginning with the notion of respect? If adolescents can determine what they are afraid of, they will be able to think about the importance of respecting their limits, which requires, as a precondition, the capacity for self-assertion. Quite a few adolescents have difficulty sharing their fears and emotions, hence the relevance of discussing with them the issues of modesty and respect for one's limits. As educators or facilitators you spend time with young people in an environment that is key to their socialization; you have a privileged role. There is a chance that they will confide in you, and you may have the opportunity to have an influence on what they say and do. The various pedagogic activities presented here will help you provide them with tools.

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## WHAT IS MODESTY?

Modesty takes many forms, has many meanings, and is close to concepts such as shame, immodesty, and prudishness.

## MODESTY

According to Inès Péliissié De Rausas, the author of *La pudeur, le désir et l'amour* (1997), the French word for modesty, *pudeur*, has its root in the Latin word *pudorem*, which means shame. Thus modesty is often defined as feeling shame about one's body or about an action. De Rausas also suggests that the concept of modesty is linked to that of respect for oneself and for others. In his *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, published in the 19th century, Littré defined modesty as "honest shame caused by a fear of that which could hurt" decency or respectability. He also links the concept to a kind of "reserve [...] that stops one from saying, listening to, or doing certain things" [translations] that are likely to cause embarrassment. His second definition clearly departs from the context of bodily shame, and attaches the notion of respect for others and for the values of society to the concept of modesty.

## MODESTY LINKED TO SEXUALITY

To define modesty linked to sexuality, Jocelyne Robert (2005: 39) reiterates this idea of reserve in her work *Le sexe en mal d'amour*: What is sexual modesty if not a kind of dam, barrier, reservation or restraint? Modesty serves to suppress for a while, to put aside and preserve the flow of libido. [translation]

Modesty is also defined as the expression of embarrassment and shame one can feel when watching, engaging in, or contemplating acts of a sexual nature (Bologne, 1986). This embarrassment may lead to a desire to hide your body and keep your feelings to yourself (Débarède and Santiveri, 1996). These authors add the aspect of human dignity, which requires respect for a person's physical and emotional integrity. They also stress that modesty has been present, in various forms, throughout human history and in all cultures.

## SHAME

Shame is linked to not liking your body and thus not wanting to show it. Shame often seems to be linked to modesty (Delaroche, 2000; Dolto, 1989), if not actually considered to be a synonym for modesty. However, a person can easily be modest without feeling any shame (Delaroche, 2000; De Rausas, 1997; Dolto, 1989). Concretely, adolescent boys or girls may be shy about taking their clothes off in front of each other, and thus modest, but without feeling any shame about their bodies.

## IMMODESTY

Now that the idea of modesty has been explained, it is easier to define immodesty. *Le Petit Larousse illustré* (2003) gives the following meaning: "Lack of physical modesty or reserve; indecency. Lack of a sense of moral decency or discretion in displaying feelings." [translation]

Immodesty can also be defined as trivialization of the experience of the body. A person who intentionally exposes his or her body so as to provoke desire is, in this sense, immodest (De Rausas, 1997).

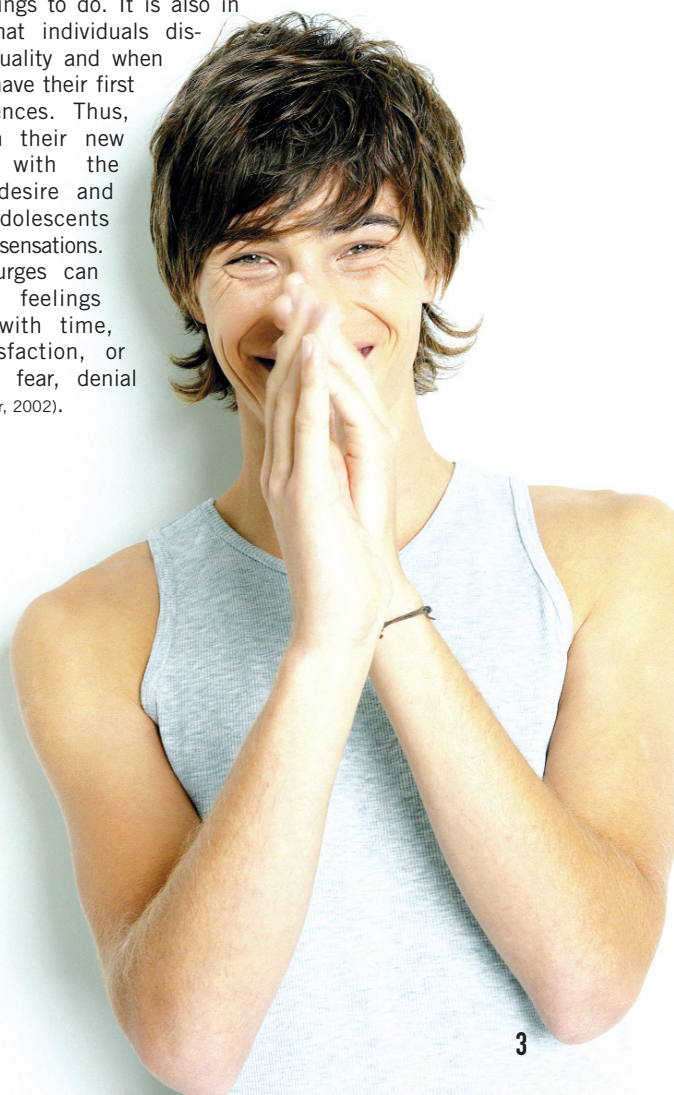
## PRUDISHNESS

Prudishness is a synonym for primness; both terms mean a show of excessive modesty (Littré, 1987). In short, a prudish or prim person rejects everything to do with sex or that makes them uncomfortable.

## MODESTY IN ADOLESCENCE

It is useful to begin by making it clear that modesty is not a feeling exclusive to adolescence. Starting in infancy we learn modesty through our parents. This training occurs hand in hand with the progressive discovery of sexuality, which develops within the limits imposed by our parents in the context of their intimacy and that of the child (Bonnet, 2003). Modesty does not disappear after adolescence, nor even in adulthood; indeed, it is present throughout life but at different degrees, depending on the individual (Bonnet, 2003; Delaroche, 2000; Dolto, 1989).

Still, one of the characteristic features of adolescence is that it is a turbulent time: a time of many physiological and psychological changes. The passage from childhood to adulthood is marked by the phenomenon of puberty, which requires that adolescents accept their newly sexualized bodies and form new body images, which are not always easy things to do. It is also in adolescence that individuals discover their sexuality and when most of them have their first sexual experiences. Thus, equipped with their new bodies and with the discovery of desire and sensuality, adolescents experience new sensations. Their sexual urges can entail various feelings that change with time, such as satisfaction, or shame, dread, fear, denial and pain (Winaver, 2002).



### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BODY AND MODESTY

In adolescence, modesty is expressed essentially in the relationship between one's body and the discovery of sexuality (Germain, 1990; Robert, 2002; Roberts and Padgett-Yawn, 1998; Stagnara, 1998). Delaroche (2000) stresses the difficulties adolescents experience in accepting their newly sexualized bodies. In doing so, adolescents feel a certain shame about their physical appearance, and are especially concerned about how they appear to others. According to Delaroche, the skin is like a border between the self and others. As well, physiological and psychological changes at puberty can lead young people to become more modest.

Young people's self-consciousness about their physical appearance is linked to the shame they can feel and to their complexes. As we have pointed out, adolescents can be modest without being in any way ashamed of their bodies. Inversely, it is also quite possible for adolescents to feel ashamed of their bodies. Feeling shame involves a very stressful emotional burden that can lead to suffering (Delaroche, 2000; Dolto, 1989). Bodily shame—a dislike for the entire body or for a specific part of the body—frequently occurs among young people (Dolto, 1989) and can be linked to distortions of body image. Concretely, this feeling of dissatisfaction arises when someone has an image of the perfect body, and this image, which he or she idealizes, does not correspond to their actual physique. The gap between ideal and reality can cause distress because the person will not have the impression of being beautiful or seductive. Since young people identify with current female and male models, this situation is by no means rare (Delaroche, 2000; Dolto, 1989). Thus, stereotypes disseminated by the media correspond to criteria of beauty that stress perfection of the body and are far from realistic. Moreover, the pace of development at puberty can cause feelings of shame. Girls may not be satisfied with the size of their breasts; they may consider them to be underdeveloped or overdeveloped. Boys worry about the size of their penises. Such concerns are called having complexes, which generally arise from comparisons with the bodies of other young people and with those of admired role models in society at large. To 'have a complex' about your body, in short, means not liking some part of it (Fil Santé Jeunes, 2006); it is not a synonym of being modest.

### THE CONNECTION WITH "THE OTHER" AND WITH MODESTY

Adolescence is a period marked by first amorous relations. Boys and girls feel attracted to each other for the first time. They thus must learn how to seduce the object of their desire, and their first attempts at reaching out to others are not always free of blunders. To take the risk of revealing how you feel and what attracts you also means taking the risk of meeting with rejection. Fear of rejection and ridicule is thus very present among young people (Delaroche, 2000; Dolto, 1989; Germain and Langis, 1990; Robert, 2002). To show some modesty when expressing your feelings is not to dare to reveal how you feel for another: to do so would be too threatening. The threat lies in the probability of being rejected by the other person, which weakens self-confidence and can even be hurtful. Sexual attraction and a desire to please are closely associated with the need to belong to a group of peers. To be rejected is not an easy experience (Germain and Langis, 1990). Modesty therefore becomes a protective shield while waiting to get to better know the other person and his or her feelings.

### SEXUAL EXPERIENCES AND MODESTY

First sexual experiences can be a source of a lot of stress for young people. Not only must they accept their new bodily appearance, but they also have to expose their naked bodies and engage in sexual acts. Some young people are timid in their interactions with their peers and act clumsily (Dolto, 1989; Robert, 2002). So how can they feel at ease and confident when it's a question of engaging sexually, or indeed of using a condom? A sexual encounter involves letting yourself go, opening yourself to the other, sharing physical and emotional intimacy and discovering your desires. It is not surprising that sexual inexperience and fear of the unknown lead to worries. Moreover, the extracts from the Tel-Jeunes Support Forum presented above clearly show the various fears young people have.

**TABLE 1**      **FEARS THAT CAN BE RAISED BY FIRST SEXUAL EXPERIENCES**

**Fear of feeling pain.**

**Performance anxiety and fear of not being good enough (disappointing the other).**

**Fear of rejection, of not pleasing, of ridicule.**

**Fear of intimacy, of revealing one's feelings, desires and anxieties.**

**Worry about nudity, about being looked at by another.**

**Difficulty of talking about sexuality and contraception.**

### FEAR OF NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH AND OF NOT PLEASING

The model of sexuality offered in society reflects the prevailing cult of performance. According to this model, sexual encounters are focused on the genitalia, and they must at all costs succeed: the two partners must necessarily reach orgasm, and reach it at the same moment (Robert, 2005). Now, the context of a first sexual experience involves a measure of discovery and learning, and thus of awkwardness. Young people, therefore, are at risk of feeling they are not good enough and of being afraid of not knowing how to do it. Moreover, this fear is frequently apparent in questions that young people ask in various forums. It finds expression in a certain sense of propriety, such that young people do not dare share their apprehensions with their partners. To this fear can be added that of the other person reacting with mockery or rejection if the performance that is thought to be expected is not attained.



### FEAR OF FEELING PAIN AND ANXIETY ABOUT NUDITY

Modesty plays a very important role in the context of intimacy in adolescents' first sexual experiences. Intimacy involves sharing emotions, desires, and fears. One of the things that girls fear is feeling pain and bleeding during the first sexual experience involving vaginal penetration (Robert, 2002; Winaver, 2002). This fear is very real, and quite often a girl does not know how to talk about it with her partner. As for boys, they are scared of hurting their girlfriends, but still they don't talk about it. For boys as for girls, this can be explained by the embarrassment of acknowledging to the other that one is a virgin.

Likewise, both girls and boys feel anxious about nudity. Taking your clothes off in front of someone makes you vulnerable: this situation implies great intimacy because it is a time when one is unshielded from the gaze of the other. If, moreover, an adolescent is not yet completely at ease with his or her freshly sexualized body and has complexes, the possibility of being nude becomes very stressful. In this case, modesty allows young persons to know what their limits are. It is in respecting these limits that a young person can gradually learn to master the anxiety nudity causes. Modesty, quite likely, will lead them to take more time with their sexual experiences. It is by mutual exploration of their bodies and of what gives them pleasure that two young partners will get to know and learn to trust each other (Robert, 2002; Stagnara, 1998). In coming to grips with one's own modesty and with that of the other, one creates an intimate relationship based on respect and trust. Such intimacy can, among other things, help young persons better quell their fear of nudity.

### FEAR OF INTIMACY, OF REVEALING EMOTION, AND OF TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY

According to Badeau (1998: 257), intimacy "can be defined as a personal zone in which you are sheltered from the eyes of others and to which you only admit others of your own free will" [translation]. And to reveal yourself to another person, to express your feelings, desires, and fears, you must trust the other person. To be intimate with another person, adolescents must first of all be able to feel comfortable putting themselves in the hands of another. From this perspective, the two partners must show that they respect and can listen to each other. To facilitate this mutual exchange, it would be very useful to help young people communicate better. Why is it so difficult to talk about sexuality? Sometimes, modesty and embarrassment prevent adolescents from having frank discussions about what they feel and wish for, about contraception and prophylactic methods, and about each person's sexual history (Robert, 2002). To better equip young people for communication with their partners, Jocelyne Robert (2002: 117) proposes three stages of verbal communication (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION

1. What you mean to say (intent).
2. What you say and how you say it (formulation).
3. What the other person understands (interpretation).

This communication represents a good way to react to a situation that makes you uneasy and thus to progressively manage your personal modesty.<sup>1</sup>

### EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT SEXUALITY BY FACILITATORS AND TEACHERS

Modesty is a natural, normal, and indispensable aspect of psychosexual development, in as much as a person sets his or her own limits of modesty (Brenot, 2004; Bologne, 1986). Thus adolescents may be uncomfortable telling their friends that they are in love. Modesty makes them keep quiet about their feelings and thus avoid momentary embarrassment or discomfort. This being said, facilitators and teachers must sometimes bypass their own sense of modesty, and that of young people, to foster prevention in sexual matters. This is necessary when, for example, they have to use appropriate terms in speaking openly about the various modes of transmission of infections. Nevertheless, they must take into account the fact that young people do not always have a choice as to whether or not to be educated about sexuality, and this subject can be embarrassing to them. As well, one should respect the personal limits of young people as much as possible. Facilitators and teachers must also target their own zones of sexual discomfort before bringing up the subject with adolescents. Talking about sexuality is not always easy, for it is a delicate subject that comes close to invading other people's intimacy (Stagnara, 1998). Meanwhile, it is very likely that young people will notice a teacher's uneasiness. To acknowledge this sense of discomfort and share it with young people can prove to be the best strategy; in doing so, one shows them that adults, too, can have a sense of modesty, and that this is normal. Moreover, this can present a good opportunity to introduce the concepts of self-respect and respect for others into the discussion without in any way inhibiting adequate and explicit sex education.

### SHOWING MODESTY

Talking about the role of modesty in adolescence is not enough; young people also need to know what it means to show modesty. Showing modesty implies respecting social norms of decency and acceptability, but also respecting one's own limits and those of others. There are several ways in which this can be made concrete. Since we are in a sex education context, the subject of modesty could be raised by remarks about the consequences of how you talk about sexuality. Using vulgar language can offend the feelings of someone for whom certain words connote contempt. To respect the other is also to respect shared intimacy. In this case, you show modesty by refraining from disclosing details about the secrets confided by others, about couples and what they do together. The question of shared intimacy can be an interesting theme to get young people to understand the importance of modesty.

Modesty is a notion that has always been present in social history. It allows recognition of someone's personal limits. These limits serve to protect a person's physical and emotional integrity by avoiding discomfort and shame. However, in contemporary Québec society, where various media bombard individuals with explicit representations of sexuality, there hardly seems to be any place for modesty. This is why it is important that facilitators and teachers bring up this notion with young people. Modesty has the particularity of allowing young people's fears (some quite legitimate) about their sexuality and their sexual experiences to be raised, and thus to deal with psychoaffective dimensions. Though modesty is not limited to the domain of sexuality, sexuality is what adolescents are very concerned about. Consequently, the activities suggested here aim to raise awareness of the importance of respecting personal limits in sexual relationships: that is, respecting one's own modesty and that of others.

1. Also, in the section Teens>Tips and Tools of the website <http://www.sexualityandu.ca/>, you can find information and tips on how to talk about sexuality and contraception with a partner, with parents, and with health professionals. The information needs to be adapted, of course, but it is clear and detailed. And while on this subject, it would be interesting and pertinent to stimulate young people to think about the difficulties of talking about preventing STIs and pregnancy.

# Suggested teaching activities for secondary 1 students

## BROAD AREA OF LEARNING

Health and Well-being

## EDUCATIONAL AIM

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

## FOCUS OF DEVELOPMENT

To become aware of one's basic physical and emotional needs while thinking about one's own sense of modesty.

## ACTIVITY 1

# Am I modest?

### DURATION

25 minutes

### LEARNING CONTEXT

Physical Education and Health, or Ethics and Religious Culture.

### CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

Exercise critical judgment, achieve one's potential, and cooperate with others.

### SPECIFIC GOALS

- Develop a definition of modesty that distinguishes it from shame
- Think about one's modesty.

1

### Modesty and shame (5 to 10 minutes)

In a large group, ask students to define what modesty means to them (see the section "What is modesty?" p. 3).

Write on the board the definition of modesty suggested by the students.

In a large group, ask the students to define shame (see the section "What is modesty?" p. 3).

Write on the board the definition of shame suggested by the students.

With the students, establish a distinction or distinctions between modesty and shame.

**Modesty:** embarrassment felt when faced with something that can undercut decency or offend one's sense of modesty, reserve or wanting to protect your feelings.

**Shame:** not liking your body and not wanting to expose it. Implies a very agonizing emotional burden that can cause suffering.

2

### The questionnaire (15 minutes)

Distribute a copy of the questionnaire "Am I modest?" (Table 3) to each student.

Read the instructions to the group.

Ask the students to individually answer all the questions.

With the group, review the results obtained.

Make it clear to the young people that they are not obliged to share any of their responses, which could be embarrassing for them. Instead, stress the fact that each person feels modesty in different degrees and in different situations, that this is a normal and healthy feeling that allows you to determine your personal limits, and that above all, you have to respect your own modesty and that of others.

3

### Plenary

Suggested questions:

- *For all the questions, did you always assign the same numerical rating on the comfort scale?*
- *Is modesty always felt with the same intensity in different situations and contexts? If yes, why? If no, why?*
- *Is it possible that girls' experience of modesty differs from boys'?*  
*If yes, give examples.*
- *Of what use is modesty?*

This first activity is a good way to bring up the notion of modesty with young people. Thus, the teacher or facilitator will be able to define with them what modesty is and how it is expressed (see the section "What is modesty?" p. 3). Modesty can be expressed in the words and statements of young people, for example, when they have to share personal principles such as values, ideas, opinions, and religious beliefs. Talking about their own feelings or sexuality may embarrass some people, and thus trigger feelings of modesty. Modesty can also be expressed in how young people behave when they have to undress in locker rooms (not wanting to change in front of others is perfectly legitimate). In short, modesty can be expressed in language, feeling, and behaviour.

**TABLE 3**      **QUESTIONNAIRE “AM I MODEST?”**

*Indicate, with a number from 1 to 4, your degree of comfort or discomfort with each of the statements.*  
 1 = not at all comfortable  
 2 = somewhat comfortable  
 3 = quite comfortable  
 4 = completely comfortable

*If you don't have a boyfriend or a girlfriend right now, answer the questions about a former relationship or about an imaginary one (How would you feel if you were in a relationship?).*

Sex    Girl ☐                      Boy ☐

A. Walking around in underclothes in front of my parents.	_____
B. Changing in front of others in the school locker room.	_____
C. Leaving the bathroom door open when I go to the toilet in my home.	_____
D. Asking my parents questions about sexuality.	_____
E. Talking about sexuality with my friends.	_____
F. Looking at an intimate scene in a film (e.g. two people making declarations of love, a couple dancing to romantic music, etc.).	_____
G. Telling my best friend (male or female) how my boyfriend or my girlfriend kisses.	_____
H. Going to buy condoms at a drugstore.	_____
I. Speaking openly about contraception with my boyfriend or my girlfriend.	_____
J. Undressing in front of my boyfriend or my girlfriend.	_____

#### Results

Add up the numbers given in response to the questions to see your overall result.

10: I am generally modest.

Between 11 and 20: I am modest in many situations.

Between 21 and 30: I am only modest in certain situations.

Between 31 and 40: I am rarely modest.

The results of this questionnaire are only a rough guide. They cannot be generalized to your overall personality because the questions have not been validated by scientific research.



The aim of this type of activity is not to place young people in a humiliating situation, but rather to create a context for concrete learning. It will be easier to make them aware of this notion, and the notion of individual limits, because they will possibly feel embarrassed or uncomfortable being so close to another young person.

## ACTIVITY 2 Couple dancing

**DURATION**  
50 minutes

**COMPLEMENTARY  
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**  
Sporting, cultural,  
and social support services.

**CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES**  
Achieve one's potential,  
cooperate with others,  
and communicate appropriately.

**SPECIFIC GOAL**  
Facilitate an experience  
for young people in which  
they might feel modesty.

①

Find someone who can teach a couple dance (tango, Latin dances). The course in couples dancing may be replaced by a martial arts course or a course in resuscitation. In all cases the goal remains the same: to place young people in a situation in which they are close to another person, and thus to trigger the feeling of modesty. What is important is that it be an activity that involves two people and requires them to be very close to each other.

Make sure you have a big enough room and, if needed, a stereo system to play music.

②

Ask the young people to form teams of two (either mixed or non-mixed). Mention that it is often the case in dance, martial arts, or resuscitation classes that persons of the same sex must practice together. (5 minutes)

The teacher explains the basics and the dance steps (martial arts or resuscitation techniques). (20 minutes)

Have the young people practice for 20 to 25 minutes.

③

Re-form in a large group for discussion.

Suggested questions:

- *How did you find this experience?*
- *What did you find difficult in the couple dance (in practicing with a male or a female partner)?*
- *Was it easy to find yourself a male or a female partner? Why?*
- *What did this experience teach you about your own sense of modesty?*

### EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIVITY

Proximity with another person involves smells, sensations, and visual and even physical contacts. Sometimes it is easy, and sometimes not. It depends on the situation and the person. Proximity requires a period of adaptation, that is to say, a period when you are less at ease (you are embarrassed, you feel modest), and a period when you discover the other. In a dance class, you learn to move as part of a couple, to share your space with another person, and to agree on the steps and on who leads the dance.

In martial arts classes, you have to learn to work with a partner when practicing the required moves, which entails being close to and touching the other person.

In resuscitation classes, you are asked to touch the other person so as to learn resuscitation techniques, and to be very close to him or her to do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and heart massage.

You have to enter another individual's person space, and thus invade their intimacy a little. This kind of situation causes embarrassment and discomfort, but after some time or after getting used to the other person, this modesty diminishes. It is, to some extent, the same with relationships in general because the better you know someone the easier it can be to be both physically and emotionally close to them.

## ACTIVITY 3

# With whom can I talk about sexuality?

**DURATION**  
30 minutes

**LEARNING CONTEXT**  
Ethics and Religious Culture or  
English as a language of instruction

**CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES**  
Exercise critical judgment,  
communicate appropriately.

### SPECIFIC GOALS

- To get young people to think about respect for their own and others' intimacy.
- To get young people to distinguish between talking about sexuality and revealing their own sexuality.

①

Ask the young people to form mixed or non-mixed teams of three or four persons each. (2 minutes)

Distribute to each young person a sheet of paper entitled "To whom can I talk about sexuality?"

Ask the teams to answer the questions. (5 to 10 minutes)

②

Re-form into a large group. (20 minutes)

The teacher or facilitator should go over all the questions with the young people so as to bring out the major elements. Make sure that notions of respect for personal limits, confidentiality, trust, and intimate relations between two people are introduced. Finally, stress the difference between talking about sexuality in general and revealing specific details of one's sexual experiences.

### ACTIVITY: "TO WHOM CAN I TALK ABOUT SEXUALITY?"

1. *What is the difference between talking about sexuality and talking about one's own sexuality?*
2. *With whom can you discuss sexuality and in what contexts is it appropriate to do so? Explain your answer.*
3. *With whom can you talk about your sexuality (fears, concerns, questions about your body, your love affairs, your dreams, your relationships with boys or girls)? In what contexts are such discussions appropriate? Explain your answer.*
4. *Other than with your friends, with whom can you talk about your emotions, about what you are experiencing, about what worries you:*
  - a) at school?
  - b) in your extended family?
  - c) in your family?
  - d) in your community (resources, professionals)?
5. *What would be the criteria for considering a person to be trustworthy and able to keep your secrets?*
6. *How would you react if, after you confided in someone, he or she told other people what you said?*

### SUGGESTIONS FOR ENDING THIS ACTIVITY

When you tell a secret to a person that you respect, you expect them to keep that secret. If the person uses these secrets and personal information, he or she breaks the bond of trust. It's normal, then, to feel betrayed, duped, and even hurt. For this reason it is important to determine with whom you really can share your secrets, feelings, and concerns. When you feel the need to confide in someone about your emotions, sexual experiences, or sexuality, you must make sure that the person is discreet and respectful, and will not tell everybody else what is confided to them. We have to know how to tell which of our friends can be trusted, and which cannot keep a secret. Otherwise, we risk being hurt or having our sense of modesty really offended.

*Talking about sexuality  
or talking about one's own sexuality?  
Modesty or immodesty?*

By specifying factors that contribute to feeling ashamed of exposing their bodies, young people will be in a position to better understand what they might feel in similar situations. Although modesty is a normal feeling, especially in adolescence, it is difficult to clearly define this feeling. Moreover, the reason people are modest about exposing their bodies is often that they do not accept their body image. This lack of acceptance can be explained by a lack of self-confidence, fear of being judged by one's peers, and fear of not pleasing. It thus becomes important, in this context, to guide young people to reflect on the elements that advance acceptance and self-confidence.

During this activity the teacher or facilitator will ensure that students remain respectful. The scenario may make young people react because it is close to their reality. Nevertheless, one should not tolerate remarks or mockery directed at a student. Finally, even if the character in the scenario is an adolescent girl, it goes without saying that boys should express their points of view.

## ACTIVITY 4 Support forum

DURATION	LEARNING CONTEXT	CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCIES	SPECIFIC GOALS
30 minutes	Ethics and Religious Culture	Solve problems, cooperate with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine the factors that contribute to feeling shy (embarrassed) about exposing your body to others.</li> <li>Specify the elements that foster acceptance and self-confidence.</li> </ul>

1

Ask the young people to form mixed or non-mixed teams of four or five persons. (2 minutes)

Ask the young people to read the scenario below and, as a team, to answer the two questions. (15 minutes)

### Scenario

As part of her physical education course, 13-year-old Delphine has to go to the swimming pool for the swimming activity. Delphine is very stressed by the idea of putting on a swimsuit in front of the other students in her class. She finds her breasts are too small compared to those of the other girls in her class, and she is afraid that her classmates will make fun of her. She is especially scared that her boyfriend, Pierre-Luc, with whom she's been going out for a little while, will not find her pretty enough and will drop her. How can she be helped?

2

Ask each team to determine what can be embarrassing about the fact of being in a swimsuit in front of others and in front of your boyfriend or girlfriend.

Ask the teams to specify what they would say to Delphine.

3

When the whole group is back together, the teams are invited to summarize their responses to the first question, and then to say what advice they would give Delphine.

4

### Discussion (10 to 15 minutes)

Suggested questions:


- *Why is it difficult to be in a swimsuit in front of another person?*
- *What is threatening or intimidating in the gaze of another person?*
- *Do girls tend to have more complexes about their bodies than do boys?*

The teacher or facilitator can wrap up by summarizing the main points the young people made. Their answers should demonstrate the idea of respect for personal limits and the importance of communicating these limits to one's partner. Once again, it will be useful to stress that it is normal to feel shame and modesty about uncovering your body (see the section "Modesty in adolescence", p. 3).



## CONCLUSION

Bringing up the idea of modesty with adolescents is not obviously easy because they may not clearly understand how modesty can be expressed in their lives. This concept is not part of their vocabulary and seems absent from the discourse and the preferred models in society and the media. Adolescent modesty is nevertheless demonstrated in the expression of feelings and desires, or in relation to the body, in nudity or sexuality, as the fears and apprehensions expressed by young people testify. The activities presented have been designed to bring up the role of modesty in the lives of young people. They will thus be led to reflect on the nature of modesty and to become aware of the fact that they feel it in various contexts and for different reasons. The goal of the suggested pedagogic activities is to help young people recognize these contexts and reasons. Though activities are intended for students in the first cycle of secondary school, teachers and facilitators can adapt them to the realities of students in the second cycle. These activities must be carried out in a context of total respect so as not to infringe on the personal limits of young people. Moreover, the importance of respecting one's own personal limits and those of others is the key message that teachers and facilitators must deliver to young people.



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