

# The Sex Educator

16

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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.

## COMMUNICATION IN ADOLESCENT COUPLES

BY SOPHIE GASCON

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



Kayla, 14, and Lucas, 15, have been together for two months. The two of them have had the impression that they could tell each other everything. For the past while, Lucas has wanted to make love with Kayla but has been unable to tell her because she's given no indication that she shares this feeling. Since Kayla is not giving any signs, Lucas wonders if she wants him. He's beginning to feel nervous and to have doubts: "Maybe she doesn't love me anymore..." Then one day, he blows up: "I'm making advances toward you but you never respond! You never get close to me and you act as if you don't even notice anything. Don't you want to make love with me?" Kayla doesn't understand why he's reacting so impatiently. She's sometimes felt like being more affectionate with Lucas but she was afraid that he would think she wanted to go further. She's also suspected that Lucas wants to make love, but she wasn't sure if she was ready and didn't know how to talk to him about that.

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Why is it so difficult to discuss sexuality with your boyfriend or girlfriend? How do you go about talking with your boyfriend or girlfriend about how you feel about him or her, your desire to have a sexual relation, your wish to use condoms or your sexual needs? How can you know if it's the right moment and how to communicate properly? We can see that communication can be quite challenging when it comes to topics that deal with sex and intimacy. It's not always easy to be understood and to understand the other person. And while adults may find it difficult to communicate, it can be even more so for adolescents since they are in a phase of life where they are questioning and discovering themselves and others. This issue of *The SexEducator* is designed to enable educators to help young people communicate more easily with their boyfriends or girlfriends.

## WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is a broadly used concept in many fields. It is defined firstly as an essential component of interaction among individuals (Alpe et al., 2007); however, it is through 'expressive' communication that a person (communicator) will be able to express feelings to the person who is listening (receiver) (Neveu, 2004). Communicating is not only saying what we feel or think, it's also being available, being ready to listen attentively to the other person and jumping at opportunities to get closer (Robert, 2002). To be available for the other person means giving him or her all our attention at that moment, listening attentively, looking him or her in the eyes while showing signs of interest such as nodding the head and asking clarification questions. To ensure that communication is positive, each person has to respect the values, tastes and choices of the other, and to be open to what the other person has to say (Robert, 2002).

## EXPRESSING YOURSELF IS GOOD, BUT EXPRESSING YOURSELF AND LISTENING IS BETTER

Being able to communicate well with a boyfriend or girlfriend means not only being able to express ideas, feelings and emotions, but also being able to listen to the other person. Knowing how to listen actively is just as important as knowing how to talk: it precludes one-way conversations and fosters mutual empathy (Germain and Langis, 2003). Active listening is expressed through signs (e.g. nodding) designed to show the other person that we are listening and we are interested in what this person is saying; it is also expressed by making comments and asking questions that allow us to verify if we've understood what he or she is saying (Bodenmann, 2003).

Nonverbal language (e.g. eye contact, facial expression, movements, posture, and touch) is also a form of communication; while it is more subtle, it deserves a 'listen' since various messages can be expressed without a word being spoken. It is important to pay attention to the other person's gestures, moods (e.g. fatigue, stress) and personal traits (e.g. nervous, anxious or

ious or emotional personality) to be able to listen and understand better (Germain and Langis, 2003). Nonverbal communication can even contradict words. For example, someone says that he is fine, but his eyes are filled with tears; another person tells her partner that she feels like making love but she is distant, doesn't respond to sexual advances and doesn't hug or kiss him. These are examples of gestures and eye contact that indicate the reverse of what's being said. When communicating with another person, we must pay attention to these very revealing nonverbal signs.

## STATISTICS ON COMMUNICATION IN ADOLESCENT COUPLES

Communication between two people is not always easy. According to a survey of 522 adolescent Montrealers aged 12 to 17 conducted in 2000, teens have more difficulty expressing their emotions or talking about sexuality with their partners than expressing their opinions and ideas (Lefort and Elliott, 2001). Table 1 presents some of the results of this study.

**TABLE 1**  
**DIFFICULTIES LINKED TO COMMUNICATION IN ADOLESCENT COUPLES**

	Difficulties	Percentage
<b>Respect for one's opinions and ideas</b>	• I find it difficult or very difficult to have my opinions and ideas respected by my boyfriend or girlfriend.	20%
	• I find it difficult or very difficult to express my opinions and ideas to my boyfriend or girlfriend.	15%
<b>Expressing feelings and emotions</b>	• I find it difficult or very difficult to express my feelings and emotions to my boyfriend or girlfriend.	29%
<b>Sexual protection</b>	• I find it difficult or very difficult to talk about sexual protection with my boyfriend or girlfriend.	11%
	• I don't talk about sexual protection with my boyfriend or girlfriend.	49%
<b>Sexual preferences</b>	• I find it difficult or very difficult to talk with my boyfriend or girlfriend about what kind of sexual contact I like.	16%
	• I don't talk with my boyfriend or girlfriend about what kind of sexual contact I like.	26%
	• I find it difficult or very difficult to tell my boyfriend or girlfriend what kind of sexual contacts I don't like.	20%
	• I don't talk with my boyfriend or girlfriend about what kind of sexual contact I don't like.	23%
<b>Refusing sexual advances</b>	• I find it difficult or very difficult to refuse my boyfriend's or girlfriend's sexual advances when I don't feel like it.	24%
	• I don't tell my boyfriend or girlfriend that I don't want his or her sexual advances.	22%

Source: Lefort and Elliott, 2001.

This table shows that in matters of sexuality, a fairly high percentage of young people simply do not dare to bring up certain topics with their partners. This is the case for sexual preferences (26%), for what they don't like (23%), for unwanted sexual advances (22%) and for sexual protection. The statistic for the latter is of concern since almost half of teens do not discuss it with their partner.

What are these difficulties linked to? Feeling uncomfortable or shy? A fear of being ridiculed or of losing the other person? Wanting to keep being perceived as ideal by a partner might explain why teens have difficulty talking with their partners about intimate topics such as feelings and sexuality.

“Between what I think, what I want to say, what I believe I'm saying, what I am saying, what you want to hear, what you hear, what you think you understand, what you want to understand, and what you understand, there are at least nine possibilities for misunderstanding.”

— Bernard Werber  
(from [www.bernardwerber.com](http://www.bernardwerber.com), “Innerview”)



# COMPONENTS OF GOOD AND POOR COMMUNICATION

Good communication with a boyfriend or girlfriend fosters a satisfying relationship (Kelly, 1993; Robitaille and Lavoie, 1992). The way one communicates is among the main elements that enable a couple to maintain a good relationship (Bodenmann, 2003). It is relevant to teach adolescents the components of good and not-so-good communication. You should make a point of specifying that each person has communication skills proper to him or her. For example, some people are more skilful at clarifying problems; others find they are better at proposing solutions to solve disagreements (Kelly, 1993).

To communicate well, we have to be open to the other person's opinions and feelings, while remaining aware of disagreements that can arise (Kelly, 1993). The first notion to remember to ensure positive communication is to use **I**, that is, talk about yourself and not the other person. For instance, you should say "**I** feel irritated" and not "**You're** irritating me" (Bodenmann, 2003). When the time comes to discuss a sensitive subject, we generally tend to use **you**. Using **you** gives the other person the impression that he or she is being accused or blamed; it has the effect of creating distance, or even opposition (Bodenmann, 2003). **You** focuses the discussion on the other person, and attributes intentions or faults that he or she doesn't necessarily have (Robert, 2002). Generalizations such as "always" or "never" should also be avoided, since they exaggerate the disagreement and make it appear to be more serious than it is. It is preferable to talk about concrete issues, that is, those directly related to the problem or misunderstanding at hand.

Let's go back to the example at the beginning. When Lucas talks to

Kayla, he uses **you** and generalizes: "I'm making advances toward you but you never respond! You never get close to me and you act as if you don't even notice anything. Don't you want to make love with me?" This way, Lucas puts the blame on Kayla and doesn't help her understand what he's trying to tell her.

Kayla would feel less like she's being accused if Lucas told her how he feels. To foster exchange, Lucas should use **I** and avoid generalizations. What he says would sound like this: "Kayla, I feel like making love with you but I have the impression that the feeling isn't mutual. I'd like you to think it over and then we could talk about it." In this manner, Lucas would be truly expressing what he thinks and wouldn't risk being misinterpreted; for her part, Kayla wouldn't feel accused.

Other obstacles can get in the way of communication, like words that demand something, are judgemental or are humiliating (Robert, 2002). These words are never neutral, always have negative connotations, undermine the relationship instead of enriching it, and are detrimental to self-esteem and to feelings of desire for the other person (Robert, 2002). Table 2 presents examples of this type of language.

**TABLE 2**  
**WORDS THAT UNDERMINE COMMUNICATION**

Category	Examples of terms
<b>Words that demand something</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hug me, caress me.</li> <li>• If you really loved me, you'd do what I'm asking you to do.</li> </ul>
<b>Words that are judgemental</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A guy who loves his girlfriend spends more time with her than with his friends.</li> <li>• A girl who respects herself doesn't dress like you do.</li> </ul>
<b>Words that humiliate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All girls do that. You're not normal!</li> <li>• Whenever we're out in public together, you act immature and ridiculous.</li> </ul>

Source: Robert, 2002.

There are personal and impersonal messages in all interpersonal communication. Unlike personal messages, impersonal messages do not require being open about emotions. Let's go back to Kayla and Lucas for a moment. If Kayla's reply to Lucas is that he doesn't know how to talk to girls, she provokes a defensive attitude in him that could lead to confrontation or to avoiding the discussion. If Kayla adds that he's just like all the other guys his age and he only thinks about sex, the situation will worsen. This is an example of an impersonal message since it refers to a mass of anonymous individuals, that is, words that could be said to any other guy (Germain and Langis, 2003). Conversely, if Kayla clearly expressed her concerns and preoccupations (personal message), communication would be less hurtful for Lucas and more beneficial for the couple. Kayla might be worried about what her boyfriend will think of her if she tells him she's not ready to make love. Maybe she's afraid that he won't understand her and will break up with her. The fact remains that expressing fears and using more personal communication favours discussion. In other words, it's better to say what you really feel (e.g. you don't know if you're ready to make love) instead of replying with insults. Feeling anger, frustration or other negative emotions is justified but these emotions should be expressed properly.



## CONDITIONS FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION

Talking to a boyfriend or girlfriend is a good thing, but sometimes what is said is misinterpreted and the meaning of the message is not understood. Misunderstandings are due to several factors, for example, a poorly chosen time or place. When a person is in the middle of something, is just about to leave or seems preoccupied, he or she will inevitably pay less attention to what is being said. To understand what is being said, the person being spoken to must be in contact with what the person is saying (Kelly, 1993). If you want to be understood, you should wait until the other person is prepared to listen; if you or your partner is angry, let the storm pass (Rosenberg, 1999). Putting off the discussion until you're calmer helps avoid saying hurtful things that you may regret later. The place should also be sufficiently intimate—you should avoid being in the company of friends; also try to find a place that is hidden from view (Rosenberg, 1999). You can sometimes have the impression that the time is never right to talk with your partner. In this case, it is a good idea to tell the person clearly that you want to discuss something important.

You should also avoid assuming you know how the other person will react. "Deciding" ahead of time that you're wasting your time, convincing yourself that the other person knows you well enough that you don't have to talk or that the other person will get angry are all assumptions that do not foster dialogue (Germain and Langis, 2003). For example, "I don't have to tell her what I like. She knows me."; "He should know that I'm not ready to make love."

## LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS

When they're in intimate relationships, teens should feel comfortable to express their feelings and emotions to their partners. They generally tend to ask a partner what he or she is thinking instead of asking about the person's feelings (Germain and Langis, 2003). It's not that this type of discussion is harmful to communication: sharing ideas shouldn't be underestimated. However, young couples should focus some of their discussion on how they feel, insofar as many adolescents have difficulty opening up to their partners (Robitaille and Lavoie, 1992). For instance, boys often tend to tease and joke to hide their feelings; this enables them to control their emotions (Naifeh and Smith, 1987, in Germain and Langis, 1990). This tendency to not want to express emotions can conceal shyness or shame, or a certain modesty<sup>1</sup> about sharing how they feel.

Revealing emotions can be the source of many fears: of being ridiculous, of being rejected, or of losing the other person (Germain and Langis, 2003). For instance, Lucas might hesitate telling Kayla he would like to make love out of fear that she will refuse or reject him; Kayla might hesitate to say that she doesn't feel ready to make love out of fear that Lucas will break up with her. Some people do not want to reveal their feelings or thoughts because they are afraid this will make them vulnerable. The other person could perceive this kind of attitude as independence or indifference (Germain and Langis, 2003).

Despite bouts of modesty that young people can have when the time comes to express their feelings, in a romantic relationship, communication is nonetheless fundamental because it helps maintain a sense of security in the couple and to feel that the other person is supportive (Berger, McMakin and Furman, 2005).

1. To find out more about the notion of modesty, see Mireille FAUCHER, "Has Modesty Become Unfashionable?" *The SexEducator*, Spring 2008, [On line] [[www.casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en/magazine](http://www.casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en/magazine)].





# TALKING ABOUT SEXUALITY WITH A BOYFRIEND OR GIRLFRIEND: NOT ALWAYS EASY!

Given the risky sexual behaviours of some young people, the social pressures related to sexual relations, and the occurrence of sexual violence in teen couples (Halpern et al., 2001), it is pertinent for teachers and other professionals to raise the issue of communication relating to sexuality, and to encourage teens to discuss their concerns, preferences and needs with their partners. But sexuality is part of life's intimate aspects and, as we saw earlier, raising this topic with a boyfriend or girlfriend is not always easy. A study of boys at the Centre jeunesse de Laval shows that they fear being judged when expressing their feelings and find it difficult to communicate their desires, disappointments, expectations and needs to their girlfriends (Manseau, Blais and Gervais, 2005). Although study participants had particular profiles, similarities may be drawn with boys in the general population.

In view of the little experience they have with romantic relationships, adolescents wonder how far they can go when talking about sexuality with their partners and what topics they can raise (Berger, McMakin and Furman, 2005). Some feel strong social pressure to be sexually active and especially don't want to look ignorant in front of their partners and friends (Germain and Langis, 2003). Under social pressure, Kayla may give in to Lucas's desire to have sexual relations instead of sharing her fears and doubts with him. Teens can find it embarrassing to talk about sexuality when they don't know how the other person will react. Conversely, not saying anything can pave the way to ambiguity if the other person starts making incorrect assumptions (Kelly, 1993).

Here again is what Lucas said: "You never get close to me and you act as if you don't even notice anything. Don't you want to make love with me?" Lucas is making an assumption, but is he right? Before giving in to impatience or anger, it is better to validate your perceptions with the other person; sometimes we find it hard to define exactly how we feel ourselves, so it's easy to admit that it is even more difficult to interpret what our partner wants or feels (Kelly, 1993). That is why Lucas should have voiced his concerns (e.g. "Do you feel all right with me? I have the impression that I'm the only one who wants to be physically close.") and what he really wants, that is, to get closer to Kayla and eventually make love with her.

Candour and honesty are essential when two partners discuss sexuality (Kelly, 1993). In this manner, there's a better chance that shyness will give way to confidence. Dialogue helps learn more about oneself and about the other person (Germain and Langis, 2003). Indeed, it appears that young couples who can discuss sexuality have more satisfying relationships (Widman et al., 2006).



**TABLE 3**  
**INCENTIVES FOR TEENS TO TALK ABOUT CONDOM USE**

1. Support ideas that condom use doesn't mean a lack of confidence in the other person. On the contrary, it is a mark of respect for oneself and for the partner.
2. Condom use indicates that a person is responsible; it is a behaviour that society values.
3. Taking the initiative of talking about condoms can relieve a partner's anxiety, especially if he or she is afraid of bringing up the subject.

Source: Lacroix and Cloutier, 2010.

To help teens reflect on communication about sexuality, we can encourage each one to ask himself or herself the following questions:

- Would talking with my boyfriend or girlfriend about my fears related to sexuality reassure me and help reduce the fears and pressure that I feel?
- Would telling my boyfriend or girlfriend what kind of sexual contacts I like and don't like improve our sexual relations and, at the same time, make me more aware of what he or she likes?
- Could talking about sexuality make us feel closer?

These questions could help them reflect and lead them to discover what they would like to share. Adolescents may also use a variety of strategies: watching a television show or a film in which there are allusions to sexuality—and there are enough of them around—could initiate a discussion on sexuality. These are opportunities to talk about sexuality without directly referring to oneself. Talking about elements that are outside ourselves is less of a commitment. Nevertheless, when we participate in such exchanges, we always reveal our values, perceptions and other personal aspects.

### SEXUAL PROTECTION: TABOO SUBJECT FOR ADOLESCENT COUPLES?

According to a study of Montréal adolescents conducted in 2000, almost half did not discuss sexual protection with their partner (Table 1). The fact that teen romantic relationships are often fleeting (youth are at the experimentation stage) is not irrelevant to this phenomenon (Widman et al., 2006). Lack of self-confidence and fear of being judged are some of the reasons that are likely to stop adolescents from bringing up the subject. A girl or boy who suggests using a condom might fear looking like someone who has been a bit too active sexually, someone who doesn't trust the other person, or someone who has a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Yet, using protection methods makes sexual relations much more satisfying since there are fewer worries about unwanted pregnancy or STIs.

According to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey, nearly 4 in 10 sexually active Canadians aged 15 to 24 had not used condoms the last time they had had sexual relations (Rotermann, 2005). These figures are highest in Québec (44.3%), followed by Alberta (40.4%). The older the youth, the less they tend to protect themselves: 43.6% of 20- to 24-year-olds had not used condoms versus 21.5% of 15- to 17-year-olds. Girls used condoms less than boys, perhaps because they take oral contraceptives. Young people seem to have difficulty integrating aspects of sexual protection and it is not surprising that STI prevalence is high among this population group.

Open sexual communication clearly favours the use of protection and contraception methods in adolescent couples and, as a result, has an effect on STI incidence (Widman et al., 2006; Tschann and Adler, 1997). Communication must be initiated early on to ensure that protection is used for the first sexual relation. Adolescents who use condoms the first time they have sexual relations are more likely to use them subsequently (Nguyen et al., 1994, in Otis, 1996). This is why it is important to equip young people so they can communicate better with their partners, especially in matters pertaining to sexuality.



## COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Good communication between intimate teens helps avoid ambiguity, mistaken interpretations and, consequently, conflicts (Kelly, 1993). Conversely, insinuations, avoidance, demands, threats and humiliation are communication devices that obstruct positive exchanges between partners and that open the door to conflict (Germain and Langis, 2003). Table 4 lists examples of communication methods.

**TABLE 4**  
**TYPES OF DISCUSSION LIKELY TO PROVOKE CONFLICT**

Type of discussion	Examples of terms
<b>Insinuation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I know. Whatever I do, it’s never right!”</li> <li>• “Looks like you got up on the wrong side of the bed again today.”</li> </ul>
<b>Avoidance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Forget what happened last night. Just put it out of your mind and everything will be fine.”</li> <li>• “I’m too tired to talk about that right now. We’ll talk about it some other day.”</li> </ul>
<b>Demand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Hurry up. Move! We’re always late because of you.”</li> <li>• “Stop complaining. I don’t want to hear you anymore.”</li> </ul>
<b>Threat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “If I see you with her again, I’m leaving you.”</li> <li>• “If you don’t make love with me, I’m gonna get it elsewhere.”</li> </ul>
<b>Humiliation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “You’re dressing like that? You must really like being noticed!”</li> <li>• “Of course. You always forget everything!”</li> </ul>

Source: Germain and Langis, 2003.

Manseau’s study of boys at Centre jeunesse de Laval shows that some teens turn to violence to express their ideas and feelings; others decide to withdraw from a conversation (avoidance strategy) instead of solving the problem. Although the study population was composed of young men in difficulty, it provides an interesting starting point for reflecting on problems young people experience related to communication strategies and conflict management. We know that some youth use domination, confrontation and control to influence their partners (Tuval-Mashiach and Shulman, 2006; Nieder and Seiffge-Krenke, 2001).

When violence is not part of a relationship, however, positive discussion and compromise are the most common strategies used to solve conflicts (Tuval-Mashiach and Shulman, 2006; Feldman and Gowen, 1998). Likewise, positive communication (using I, being direct when expressing opinions and feelings, abstaining from humiliating the other person) improves conflict management and reduces the risks of violence in the relationship. From this viewpoint, if Lucas and Kayla express themselves clearly, formulate requests instead of making accusations, let the other one react, and listen to what each other says, the discussion is unlikely to turn into a fight. Avoiding a discussion doesn’t solve anything—it just postpones the problem and lets frustrations accumulate. But as we said early, it is often better to let the dust settle before bringing up a difficult or contentious subject.

## CONCLUSION

Communication is an element that shapes romantic relationships since it enables individuals to express their feelings, opinions, tastes, preferences and desires, among others. Sometimes it is easy to communicate, sometimes there are obstacles to it, but the one thing you can count on is the way a person communicates has repercussions in a romantic relationship. Communication also plays a role when it comes to sexual protection and contraception. Therefore, it is pertinent that young people acquire communication skills and be made aware of the importance of having constructive exchanges with their partners to improve their romantic relationships and sexual health.

# Learning activities

Now that you are aware of various issues related to communication and romantic relationships at adolescence, you can discuss this topic during group activities. The learning activities suggested below are designed to help young people acquire knowledge about various facets of communication. They are intended for secondary II, III, and IV students (14-16 years old).

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](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss), section Documentation/For education professionals). These two pages contain the section “Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education.”

The table below shows how the proposed activities can be integrated with the Québec Education Program. To maximize the effects, these activities should be carried out in collaboration with complementary educational services (for instance, the librarian could select a few books on the topic of communication).

## Possible associations with the Québec Education Program and with complementary educational services programs

### GOALS OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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

### SUBJECT PROGRAMS AND SUBJECT SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

#### Drama Program

Exploring various ways of conveying creative ideas through dramatic action, listening to others, reviewing or confirming artistic choices, and analyzing communicative purpose and progress are elements of learning the art of acting. Learning these skills could help adolescents work out their own ways of communicating (express choices, listen to others, consider various options for expression). The activity suggested for drama class is compatible with the three competencies for this subject area: *create dramatic works*, *perform dramatic works*, and *appreciate dramatic works*.

#### Français, langue seconde or Secondary English Language Arts Program

Writing a text helps adolescents make connections between the French or English language and the expression of feelings. Taking the time required to ask questions, organize thoughts and write about emotions felt in a given situation is compatible with the competency *write various texts* in French or *Produce texts for personal and social purposes* in English.

### BROAD AREAS 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.

#### *Focuses of development*

##### Self-awareness and awareness of own fundamental needs

Need for self-affirmation, need for respect of own physical and psychological integrity, need for acceptance and development, need for appreciation and updating, need for expressing emotions.

##### Awareness of the consequences of personal choices with respect to own health and well-being

Awareness of the principles of balanced sexuality.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

#### Communicate appropriately

Use various modes of communication, manage the communication process and become familiar with various modes of communication.

#### Achieve his/her potential

Recognize his/her personal characteristics, take his/her place among others, and make good use of his/her of personal resources

#### Exercise critical judgement

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

### 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.

# HOW TO BECOME A GOOD COMMUNICATOR

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
75 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize the difference between good communication and not-so-good communication.</li> <li>Know where and when to speak about subjects that concern the couple.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section “Components of good and poor communication” (p. 4 of the magazine)</li> <li>Section “Conditions for good communication” (p. 5)</li> <li>Section “Learning to communicate your feelings” (p. 6)</li> </ul>

## PREPARING THE ACTIVITY

1

Ask the group the following questions:

- What does communication mean to you?
- What are the characteristics of good communication?
- What elements interfere with good communication?

If needed, complete the students' answers using magazine content.

## DOING THE ACTIVITY

2

Ask students to make teams of four where each team includes both sexes. Teams must write a short scenario (five minutes long) where a teenage couple is trying to communicate, **but is not using effective means**. The scenario should focus on a difficulty in its broader meaning and not on sexuality in particular. The trigger elements could be the following:

- One finds that the other is spending too much time with his/her friends*
- One finds that the other does not trust him/her enough*
- One finds that the other seems jealous when he/she talks to people of the opposite sex.*

3

Roles can be attributed equally to the girl or the boy. Teams are given ten minutes to write the scenario. Teams take turns presenting the story they wrote.

4

Ask two volunteers to play a scene. In the meantime, the rest of the group must pay attention to the elements that interfere with communication and find ways to modify the scene to make it more positive.

## ACTIVITY 1 (CONTINUED)

### DOING THE ACTIVITY

5

Ask two different volunteers to play the scene again but, this time, add elements of “good” communication. If students wish to add some elements during the presentation, they must clap their hands and the play stops; they must then take the place of one of the two characters and continue playing the scene.

### INTEGRATING THE ACTIVITY

6

Give feedback on the elements that were modified and ask students what are some elements of good communication. The moderator can use questions along these lines:

- a) Why did the discussion not go so well the first time? And why did it go better the next time?
- b) What are the consequences of good and bad communication?
- c) Does expressing opinions and feelings shape the discussion? In what way?

7

Invite the adolescents to share what they have learnt and give their appreciation of the activity. Conclude the activity with a presentation aimed at helping participants remember the main elements of good and bad communication.

In schools, all the stories written during the activity can be presented to schoolmates at a lunch break (with the collaboration of complementary services professionals). This would not only raise awareness among schoolmates with regards to good and not-so-good communication, but would also reinforce these elements in students who have participated in the activity.

## ACTIVITY 2

SUBJECT PROGRAM  
FRANÇAIS LANGUE SECONDE /  
SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

# LEARN TO EXPRESS FEELINGS TO COMMUNICATE BETTER

DURATION	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS	CONTENT
75 min.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help young people reflect on their feelings and opinions when they are communicating.</li><li>• Help young people distinguish between communication where feelings and emotions are repressed and communication where, on the contrary, they are expressed.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Section “Learning to communicate your feelings” (p.6)</li></ul>

### PREPARING THE ACTIVITY

1

Give a short presentation on the topic of communication and feelings.

### DOING THE ACTIVITY

2

Divide the group into two: girls on one side, boys on the other. They will work on the two situation scenarios below (Clara's case for girls, Raphaël's case for boys).

3

The two teams are asked to find a solution for Clara and Raphaël in approximately 15 minutes. Then a representative of each team presents and explains the answers found.

## ACTIVITY 2 (CONTINUED)

### CLARA'S CASE

*My boyfriend often talks about other girls and this makes me uncomfortable because I'm afraid that he'll leave me for another girl. To make him understand, I've often said to him, "If you're so interested in other girls, why don't you approach them?" But when I talk to my boyfriend like that, I feel a bit bad and I wonder if I'm doing the right thing. What should I do?*

**How can you help Clara clearly express her feelings? What could you suggest to her?**

### RAPHAËL'S CASE

*I really like my girlfriend but I don't dare tell her because she's very independent and I'm afraid she'll find me annoying. I'm wondering whether I'm the one who's too dependent. What should I do?*

**How can you help Raphaël clearly express his feelings? What could you suggest to him?**

#### 4

Invite the adolescents to recall a situation with a boyfriend or girlfriend where they felt offended with respect to communication (adolescents who haven't had a romantic partner can think of a situation they experienced with a friend). Individually and in silence, students can answer the following questions:

- *What happened in this situation?*
- *What was the topic of discussion?*
- *Why did you feel offended?*
- *What were you feeling at the time?*
- *Why did you have trouble expressing yourself around this person?*
- *How would you go about expressing your feelings if a similar situation took place?*
- *How do you think your partner would react if you told him/her how you feel?*

## INTEGRATING THE ACTIVITY

#### 5

During the plenary, ask students to point out differences between communication where feelings and emotions are repressed and communication where, on the contrary, they are expressed. Go over the situation scenario described at the beginning (Lucas and Kayla) by asking the question, "Why was Lucas having trouble revealing to Kayla his desire to make love with her?" Use the opportunity to reiterate that communication may seem especially difficult when related to sexuality, as it is a private and touchy subject.

#### 6

Conclude the activity by going back to the message you want to leave with the adolescents: even if sometimes it is hard to express feelings and emotions, the quality of communication is a key component of the quality of a romantic relationship.

#### 7

In schools, you can ask adolescents to do exercise 4 of the activity as homework. This time, the students will put the fruits of their reflection in writing (approximately one page). The teacher can correct the exercise according to French or English course requirements.

# LET'S PLAY RISK-FREE!

In schools, this activity can be carried out by complementary educational services professionals as part of a theme day on romantic and sexual relations or during a free period.

## DURATION

75  
min.

## PEDAGOGICAL GOALS

- Become aware of the importance of communication when it's time to talk about sexual protection.
- Name the fears raised by talking about sexual protection with a partner.
- Recognize the advantages of talking about sexual protection.

## MATERIAL

- Dice, pawns and the solution sheet for each team
- Game board "Let's play risk-free" available at [casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en](http://casexprime.gouv.qc.ca/en)

## CONTENT

- Table 1 «Difficulties linked to communication in adolescent couples» (p.3)
- Section "Sexual protection: Taboo subject for adolescent couples?" (p. 8)
- Section "Talking about sexuality with your boyfriend or girlfriend: Not always easy!" (p. 7-8)

## ACTIVITY 3 (CONTINUED)

### LET'S PLAY RISK-FREE!

#### PREPARING THE ACTIVITY

1

Present the statistics regarding difficulties young people encounter when talking about sexuality and sexual protection with their partners (Table 1, page 3).

2

Ask students to form male or female teams of four; hand out the two situation scenarios below.

#### Scenarios

##### KAYLA, 14 YEARS OLD

*I've been dating my boyfriend for two months and I am still a virgin. I think he'd like us to make love together but I don't know if I'm ready. Also, when we do make love, I'd like us to use a condom but I don't know how to bring it up with him. I don't want him to take it badly. I find it hard to talk about it.*

##### LUCAS, 15 YEARS OLD

*I've had a girlfriend for two months and I'd really like to make love with her. But I don't know if she feels the same. When I make advances, I get the impression that she's rejecting me. I'd like to talk to her about it, but I'm afraid it'll come out all wrong. Also, when we do make love, I'd like us to use a condom but I don't know how to bring it up with her. I am afraid she'll think that I don't find her "safe" enough or that I don't love her enough to sleep with her without using a condom.*

#### DOING THE ACTIVITY

3

In teams, students must answer the following questions:

- *What are some of the reasons Kayla and Lucas find it difficult to talk about their respective desires to make love?*
- *What are the reasons why Kayla is finding it hard to talk about sexual protection? And what about Lucas?*
- *What are the advantages that Kayla could think of to talk about sexual protection? And what about Lucas?*
- *How should Kayla go about starting a discussion on sexual protection with her romantic partner? And what about Lucas?*
- *Whose responsibility is it to talk about sexual protection – girls' or boys'? Why?*

4

Each team explains to the group how they would help Kayla and Lucas begin discussing sexual protection.





5

To practice the acquired communication skills with regards to sexuality, contraception and sexual protection, invite the adolescents to play (again in teams of four) the game presented on page 18.

## INSTRUCTIONS

Each player puts their pawn on square one of the game board. The highest score obtained in throwing the dice determines who goes first. In turn, each player throws the dice and puts the pawn in the appropriate square. But watch out: when a square contains a question, it must be answered to remain in place; otherwise the player must go back to the square where he/she was before throwing the dice. The first one to reach the finish box wins the game. The answers to the questions are on the next page.

6

Give each team a dice, four pawns, the game, and the solution. The solution contains elements for giving answers and players must look at them **only as the game moves along**. Each team designates a person who will be in charge of checking the answers.

## INTEGRATING THE ACTIVITY

7

When the game is over, ask if students had any specific difficulties finding some of the answers; ask them what they learnt from this activity. Conclude the activity by reminding them of the advantages of good communication with a boyfriend or girlfriend in matters of sexuality.

- *Our sexual practices have consequences for our sexual health, which is why it is important for romantic partners to talk to each other about sexuality, even if it may seem difficult.*
- *Using a condom makes sexual relations much more pleasant because there is much less worry about STIs and pregnancy.*
- *Suggesting condom use is a sign of self-respect and, above all, a sign of respect for our partner: we don't want to transmit an STI that we are unsure of not having ourselves! This applies even in the case of a first sexual relation with vaginal penetration for the boy and the girl since oral-genital relations and anal penetration are also modes of infection transmission. Also, never forget that (oral) contraception is not synonymous with protection against STIs.*
- *Last, but not least of the advantages: couples who are able to talk openly about their sexuality are more likely to enjoy being together in every way.*

DOWNLOAD THE GAMEBOARD AT  
[CASEXPRIME.GOUV.QC.CA/EN](http://CASEXPRIME.GOUV.QC.CA/EN)

# The SexEducator

# LET'S PLAY RISK-FREE!



<p><b>19</b></p>	<p><b>20</b></p>	<p><b>21</b></p> <p>Lucas was pleased that Kayla spoke to him about condoms. He used the opportunity to touch on the issue of screening tests!</p> <p>Why was Lucas pleased?</p> <p><b>MOVE TO THE NEXT BOX IF YOU HAVE THE RIGHT ANSWER.</b></p>	<p><b>22</b></p>	<p><b>23</b></p> <p>Lucas and Kayla decide to both undergo a screening test, and until they get the results, to use condoms. If the results come back negative for both, they can stop using condoms.</p>	<p><b>FINISH</b></p> <p>Lucas and Kayla made love and all went well.</p>
<p><b>18</b></p> <p>Although Lucas wants to use a condom, he would also like to ask Kayla to undergo an STI screening test.</p> <p>How should he go about handling this touchy issue with Kayla?</p>	<p><b>17</b></p>	<p><b>16</b></p>	<p><b>15</b></p> <p>Lucas is too shy to tell Kayla that he wants to use a condom while they are having sexual relations. But he is thinking about the advantages of condom use.</p> <p>What are these advantages?</p> <p><b>MOVE TWO BOXES FORWARD IF YOU HAVE TWO CORRECT ELEMENTS IN YOUR ANSWER.</b></p>	<p><b>14</b></p> <p>Kayla is wondering whether she should speak with Lucas about condom use. For the time being, she decides to leave it at that.</p> <p>Is this the right decision?</p>	<p><b>13</b></p>
<p><b>7</b></p> <p>Not knowing how to admit to Kayla that he wants to make love with her, Lucas asks his friend Ali for advice.</p> <p>What can Ali suggest to him?</p>	<p><b>8</b></p>	<p><b>9</b></p> <p>Lucas decides to admit to Kayla that he wants to make love with her. However, he is nervous about how Kayla will react. He thinks that Lucas will be disappointed if she doesn't want to have sex with him. How should he go about it?</p> <p><b>MOVE TWO BOXES FORWARD IF YOU HAVE TWO CORRECT ELEMENTS IN YOUR ANSWER.</b></p>	<p><b>10</b></p>	<p><b>11</b></p> <p>The discussion between Lucas and Kayla (box 9) went very well. Lucas admitted his desire; he is also pleased that Kayla trusts him enough to talk with him about a touchy topic.</p> <p>Kayla has realized that Lucas is the person she wants to have her first sexual relation with. She likes him and, moreover, he is kind and understanding; he took the time to listen to her concerns and to reassure her.</p>	<p><b>12</b></p> <p>Lucas asks his friend Ali for advice on how he should talk about condom use with Kayla.</p> <p>What could Ali reply to him?</p>
<p><b>6</b></p> <p>Lucas thinks he should tell Kayla about his desire to make love with her. However, he has some fears.</p> <p>What could these fears be?</p>	<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p>Kayla and Lucas have been dating for two months. Kayla is under the impression that Lucas would like to make love with her, but she doesn't know if she is ready. She is afraid of losing Lucas if she tells him that she is not sure she's ready. How can you help her?</p>	<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p>Lucas and Kayla are in love but are too shy to admit their feelings.</p> <p>How can you help them? Are there any signs that show us when someone is interested in us?</p>	<p><b>START</b></p> <p>Lucas and Kayla meet.</p>

# SOLUTION FOR THE GAME “LET’S PLAY RISK-FREE”

## ANSWER FOR BOX 2

Kayla and Lucas should use a moment when they are alone to talk to each other about their feelings. They should also both be available, for instance: they are not worried, they are not about to go into class... Non-verbal signs (such as looks and smiles) can speak volumes about feelings others have for us.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 4

It is normal for Kayla to have fears, but she should confirm her perceptions with Lucas before worrying too much. We sometimes have trouble interpreting our own feelings, so it is all the more difficult to interpret someone else's ideas or feelings. Perhaps talking to Lucas would help Kayla figure out whether she is ready or not. Perhaps Lucas does indeed want to make love but is unable to understand Kayla's doubts.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 6

Lucas could fear several things: being rejected, being ridiculed, having his relation come to an end, having his admission distance him from Kayla.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 7

Ali can reply that when Lucas expresses his desire to make love to Kayla, he should also express his feelings for her. If Lucas is sincere and respectful, Kayla won't feel rushed. Perhaps Kayla also wants to make love with him, but she doesn't know how to tell him.

## ANSWERS FOR BOX 9

Sincerity and honesty are essential when the time comes to talk about sexuality with your partner. By being sincere, Kayla shows Lucas she trusts him. As for Lucas, he has a good chance of understanding her concerns and reassuring her. Furthermore, by opening up to Lucas, Kayla will perhaps learn more about herself and her boyfriend.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 12

Ali could reply that taking the initiative to use a condom does not mean you don't trust your partner but, on the contrary, it is a sign of self-respect and respect for your partner. In fact, perhaps Kayla too wants to use a condom and is also wondering how to handle the issue.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 14

Sexual protection (condom) has a direct impact on our sexual health and well-being (STIs, unwanted pregnancy). Therefore, keeping silent about it is not the solution.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 15

Using a condom shows that we respect our partner and ourselves. When using a condom, we worry less about STIs and pregnancy, so the sexual relation can be all the more pleasant.

## ANSWER FOR BOX 18

It is not easy to suggest undergoing a screening test, but it shows that we are responsible and that we obviously want to invest in our new romantic relationship. In fact, it makes us even more responsible because, before stopping condom use, both partners must make sure they don't have anything. The ultimate proof of commitment to the romantic relationship: going for the screening test together!

## ANSWER FOR BOX 21

By taking the initiative of talking about condoms, Kayla has relieved Lucas's anxiety, since he was too shy to bring up the topic. Also, it made him realize that his new girlfriend is responsible and mature **and that she wants to continue their relationship.**

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