



the sexeducator

23

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A magazine for educators who conduct sex education
activities with high-school students

Talking sexuality with your parents:

helping teens think about and prepare for it

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Today, with the nurse in the classroom, the science and technology teacher brought up the topic of contraception. Maïka knows she's not ready to have sexual relations, but this class has raised many questions in her mind. She didn't ask them at the time because she was afraid she'd look stupid in front of her friends. Once she's back home, Maïka feels like talking to her mother about her thoughts, but she hesitates. She imagines how her mother will react and is afraid that her mom will start asking her embarrassing questions. She doesn't know how to raise the topic of sexuality with her mother, so she decides to call her best friend Kim to talk about it with her. Maïka thinks that since Kim has had sex with her boyfriend, she'll undoubtedly be able to answer her questions which will be much less embarrassing.

Adolescents can feel apprehensive about discussing sexuality with their parents. The idea of doing so causes some teens to feel shy; others don't know how to bring up the subject. Fortunately, there are communication strategies that can make such a discussion more positive and pleasant. As an educator or a professional dealing with this topic, you can help adolescents not only to find strategies to facilitate discussion with their parents, but also to understand what can impede this type of exchange. The ultimate objective is that young people benefit as much as possible from the help and support they need in the area of sexuality, whether from parents or another adult to whom they are close.

Many adolescents consider their parents to be valuable sources of information on sexual health (Frappier et al., 2008). It has been shown that the closer teens are to their parents and the more open and positive their communication, the less likely adolescents are to let their peers influence their sexual choices (Hampton et al., 2005). Yet, many adolescents refrain from bringing up the topic of sexuality with their parents. Even teens who have good relationships with their parents are hesitant to start a conversation on a topic they consider to be difficult, sensitive and emotionally charged (Lefkowitz and Stoppa, 2006; Robert, 1999). Fear, discomfort and apprehension about a parent's possible reactions are often factors that make this type of conversation difficult. Therefore, teens turn to someone with whom they won't have to manage these kinds of emotions—often a close friend—and with whom they feel more comfortable discussing such an intimate topic as

sexuality (Lefkowitz and Stoppa, 2006; Guzmán et al., 2003). However, during these conversations, the information passed on is sometimes incomplete, incorrect or inappropriate (Athéa, 2006). Discussions young people have with their parents about sexual issues allow teens to verify and put into perspective the information they've gotten from their peers.

It can be difficult for adolescents to communicate appropriately with their parents. Young people need to think about strategies to use and define various angles from which to explore this topic with adults. Talking about sexuality does not necessarily mean telling parents everything. Adolescents have the right to some privacy. As such, they will find it useful to have points of reference that will help them determine what to say and what to keep to themselves. Here is where your role as educator becomes central. By helping adolescents recognize factors that harm or help conversations and find concrete ways to bring up the topic of sexuality with their parents, you provide an opportunity for teens to acquire and develop skills that will also help them discuss sexuality in an appropriate manner with other people when they feel a need to do so.



Positive effects for adolescents

Parents play important roles in the sex education of their children. Every day, they serve as models while also conveying values and beliefs (Kirby, 2001). Moreover, discussions give parents an opportunity to share knowledge, communicate expectations and concerns (Lefkowitz and Stoppa, 2006), as well as set boundaries and limits related to their adolescents' sexuality.

A large majority of teens say they are “influenced” or “very influenced” by what their parents tell them about romantic relationships and; 79% of these youth report being “influenced” or “very influenced” by what their parents will think of them if they have sexual relations (SexSmarts, 2000).

Overall, parents' expectations influence their children's sexuality-related choices and decisions (Aspy et al., 2007). Numerous studies have demonstrated that parent-adolescent communication about sexuality can have a positive influence on teens' current or future sexual behaviours (Martino et al., 2008; De Graaf et al., 2011; Lagina, 2002). Indeed, these conversations result in teens delaying first sexual intercourse, using contraception and having fewer sex partners (Martino et al., 2008). Parent-child communication also enriches adolescents' knowledge, enhances reflection and critical judgement regarding messages conveyed about sexuality, and encourages them to make more informed and rational choices concerning sex (Lagina, 2002).

Comfort level and openness in communication about sexuality, as seen by parents and teens

Parent-teen communication is often tinged with discomfort, felt by both parties. Adolescents report feeling more comfortable discussing sexual issues with their same-sex parent (Guzmán et al., 2003; Kirkman, Rosenthal and Feldman, 2005; Jerman and Constantine, 2010), but most also said they felt more comfortable discussing these issues with their mother than their father (Guzmán et al., 2003; Frappier, Duong and Malo, 2006). Indeed, one Canadian study has shown that a majority of mothers consider they are “very comfortable” or “quite comfortable” discussing sexuality with their teenage children (Frappier, Duong and Malo, 2006). However, adolescents do not always have the same opinion as their parents about what constitutes open communication about sexuality. For adolescents, open communication resides in parents' willingness to answer any questions; parents perceive it as their children disclosing their feelings and thoughts, and delving deeper into sexuality-related topics (Xiao, Li and Stanton, 2011). Yet, adolescents do not necessarily look below the surface, ask deeper questions or examine their feelings about sexuality more closely.

Adolescents' needs and parents' roles

Needs of adolescents who are acquiring identities of their own

During adolescence—the transition period to adulthood—young people need to explore on their own and have experiences apart from the family to define themselves as distinct individuals (Athéa, 2006); they also need to forge their sexual and gender identities. Teens' behaviours and attitudes change. They strongly and loudly assert their independence by protesting, arguing or negotiating. They adopt contrary attitudes and rear up against their parents' decisions (Sonet, 2008).

The adolescence period is characterized by sexual awakening; young people discover that their bodies can be sources of sexual pleasure, desire and attraction to others (Robert, 1999). Teens automatically react to these new physical sensations and discoveries by wanting to protect this intimate sphere and distancing themselves from their parents; they want to show that they're involved in a process of change and have a need for privacy. Their actions prove it: they become prudish, shyer and more distant (Sonet, 2008). During this process, teens often question their psychosexual development and sexuality in general.

At the same time as they wish to distance themselves from their parents, they also need to be reassured and often test the restrictions set by parents (Sonet, 2008). It is reassuring for teens to know there are limits they cannot overstep; but it is especially comforting to know that there is an adult around to provide support and guidance, and to act as a stabilizing force. It goes without saying that everything happening inside an adolescent who is developing his or her own identity risks complicating communication with parents.





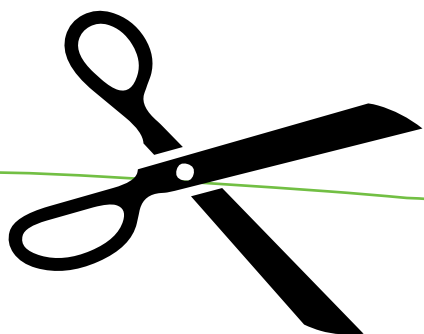
Parental support and authority

When youth ask questions about sexuality, it is because they need to be reassured and to find their way as they deal with their own sexuality (Kirkman, Rosenthal and Feldman, 2005). Parents play an important role: although adolescents are seeking independence, they still need guidance and support to make choices and decisions (Robert, 1999). Parents, who were once adolescents, also learnt from experiences, especially romantic ones. Therefore, they can engage in discussions where they can offer support, advice and sometimes even reassurance to adolescents dealing with issues of sexuality (Pluhar and Kuriloff, 2004).

A parent who can listen and give advice, but who must also set limits

Parent-adolescent discussions about sexuality go beyond conversations and concerns about other, perhaps easier topics. Such discussions require parents to set limits and take positions either by acquiescing to or denying some of teens' requests. Young people who have good communication with their parents have better chances of going through these changes in a positive manner and of understanding their parents' choices regarding various situations (not being allowed to wear clothes that are "too sexy", permission to go out with a friend or inviting the friend to stay the night, etc.); this is why it is necessary to set up ways to communicate based on both listening to and respect of each person's needs and roles.

The quest for identity might cause an adolescent to go against the standards and values set by the family. It is also possible that the adolescent voluntarily avoids certain topics and the confrontations that could result from them (Mazur and Ebesu Hubbard, 2004).



What hinders communication with parents

Issues perceived by adolescents

An adolescent's anticipation of a parent's sometimes intense reactions in daily life can be a barrier to communication. How can a teen talk about a breakup when parents don't permit romantic relationships? How can the adolescent bring up the topic of sexual orientation when he or she is aware of the parents' prejudices against homosexuality? How to talk about contraception if the parents don't accept that their child can have sexual relations before a certain age or before marriage? The fear of being rejected by their families is so strong that it can prevent teens from openly discussing these topics (Robert, 2002; Elliott, 2010).

Adolescents are afraid that their parents will question them, judge them or voice their concerns about sexuality (Fitzharris and Werner-Wilson, 2004; Pluhar and Kuriloff, 2004). Parents' discomfort or lack of openness, as well as comments they might make about sexuality, risk deterring their children from confiding in them (Kirkman, Rosenthal and Feldman, 2005; Elliott, 2010).

One way of improving parent-adolescent communication is to be aware of factors that can hinder discussion and those that can create a closer relationship that will facilitate exchange.

Attitudes that undermine communication

Despite the fact that most adolescents want to bring up the topic of sexuality with their parents, they sometimes adopt attitudes that hamper communication. Some youth might conceal or omit details of their private lives, shy away from discussion, or tell their parents they don't want to talk with them. Others will choose to act unpleasantly during the discussion, whether by using a disagreeable tone of voice or adopting an attitude of indifference that closes the door to communication. Others will try to reassure their parents, telling them they know enough about the topic and they can be trusted. Finally, some will show discomfort by laughing or crying, which does not make discussion any easier (Mazur and Ebesu Hubbard, 2004). These attitudes might be adopted by adolescents but also by parents who, despite their good intentions, will have difficulty establishing good communication with their adolescents.

What facilitates communication with parents

It is important for teens to know that some communication styles or contexts make discussion easier while others hinder it. In the end, all these elements will affect the way teens broach the topic of sexuality with their parents. A focus on sharing feelings and emotions can foster open and receptive communication with the other person, and thus increase the chances of establishing positive dialogue with this person instead of an argumentative or persuasive fight (Pluhar and Kuriloff, 2004). One thing is sure: overall, open and receptive communication between teens and parents will make future sexuality-related discussions easier (Jaccard, Dittus and Gordon, 2000).

By questioning their mother or father, young people want to know if their parents had similar experiences or questions about sexuality when they were teens themselves (Kirkman, Rosenthal and Feldman, 2005). This communication strategy can bring parents and adolescents closer to each other. We need to help young people find situations or come up with general questions that they can use as pretexts to discuss sexuality with their parents. For instance, they can ask their father or mother if young people of their time used to talk to their parents about romantic relationships or sexuality, what concerns they had regarding sexuality, or if they were prepared for the onset of puberty. These types of questions allow young people to indirectly compare their reality with that of their parents when they were adolescents themselves. For parents, the discussions that ensue provide opportunities to discover questions their children have about sexuality and to pass on useful information that will help teens make informed choices regarding sexuality (Somers and Paulson, 2000; Pluhar and Kuriloff, 2004; Martino et al., 2008).

Talking about sexuality... Sure, but how?

For an adolescent who has communication or relationship problems with his or her parent, the challenge is even greater; but the teen still has a need to talk. When discussion is impossible or too difficult, the adolescent can consider talking with another adult to whom he or she is close.

Table 1 proposes strategies designed to help young people initiate discussion about sexuality with their parents or another adult they trust. Though they may not be magic formulas, these strategies can be used as starting points for teachers and professionals who want to help adolescents discover their needs related to communication about sexuality.



Table 1 | Tips to help teens talk about sexuality with their parents about sexuality

<p>1. Identify what you want to know.</p> <p>How: Take time to think about the questions you want to ask your parent. Write them down so you don't forget them. You can also jot down the answers your parent gives you. A good way to start the conversation is to ask, "What do you think I need to know about sex?"</p>	<p>2. Pick a good time and place.</p> <p>How: Find times during the day when you think your parent will be available and able to talk (e.g. after dinner). Pick a place where there will be no distractions and where you feel comfortable. If you're embarrassed or bringing up the subject and talking face-to-face makes you nervous, choose a time when you're doing something together (e.g. taking a walk, doing the dishes, going somewhere in the car).</p>
<p>3. Break the ice.</p> <p>How: Bring up a topic that is related to sex but that doesn't concern you directly (e.g. a sex education class you've had, a TV show you've seen, or an article you've read in a magazine).</p>	<p>4. Don't be surprised if it's a bit weird at first.</p> <p>That is: It's normal that you both feel nervous if it's the first time you talk about it. You can tell your parent how you feel. Sometimes when we acknowledge a feeling that we have, then we feel better and this helps reduce the discomfort, especially if the other person also feels nervous.</p>
<p>5. Listen and ask to be listened to.</p> <p>That is: To have a good discussion, it's important to listen to what the other person has to say about something and vice-versa. Listening also means hearing the other person and respecting his or her values; the parent you talk to may have different values than you about sex and sexuality.</p>	<p>6. Don't expect your parent to have all the answers.</p> <p>That is: Your parent may have life experiences but that doesn't mean he or she has all the answers. If, at the beginning of the discussion, you tell your parent that you just want their perspective and their support about a specific situation, he or she won't feel the need to give you "the" best answer. If your parent doesn't know the answer to something, ask where you might find the information.</p>
<p>7. Show what you know.</p> <p>How: You've learnt new things about sexuality and you know a Website that talks about this topic. Why not talk to your parent about it? It's a chance for her or him to learn something too and for you to share what you know.</p>	<p>8. If you feel irritated about the discussion, express your feelings constructively.</p> <p>How: Rather than blaming or accusing your parent (e.g. Why do you do that?), tell him or her how you feel and how you hoped or would have liked your parent to react (e.g. I don't like it when you act like that; I would have preferred that we talk about it just you and me).</p>
<p>9. Express your appreciation.</p> <p>How: Rather than evaluating your parent (e.g. "you're cool" "you're a drag"), describe what he or she did and talk about how you feel (e.g. Thanks for allowing me to do that. It really makes me happy).</p>	<p>10. You still have questions that remain unanswered.</p> <p>For example: Ask your parent to refer you to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health organizations in your community.</p>
<p>11. If you can't discuss it with your parent, pick someone you want to talk to.</p> <p>How: Ask yourself which adult you trust and with whom you would feel most comfortable talking about sexuality. Once you've picked someone, tell the person this is why you decided to talk about sexuality with him or her, and that you'd like your discussion to stay confidential (between this person and yourself only).</p>	<p>12. You're in a situation where it's important to talk to your parents or another adult you trust.</p> <p>For example: You're going through a breakup; you're planning on having sexual relations and you want to know how to use a condom; you're pregnant but don't want to be; you have questions or want to talk about your sexual orientation; or you're a victim of homophobia or other form of sexual violence.</p>

Adapted from: CANADIAN FEDERATION FOR SEXUAL HEALTH (2011), How To Talk About Sex With Your Parents, [On line], <http://www.cfsh.ca/Your_Sexual_Health/How_to_Talk_about_Sex/With-Parents.aspx>.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Since adolescents are still learning, they don't always have the experience needed to react calmly. The educational activities proposed in this issue are designed to help young people understand what can get in the way of having good discussions with their parents, and find effective strategies and ways to communicate. Ultimately, this will enable adolescents to benefit from the expertise and support of their parents or another adult to whom they are close, with regard to sexuality-related issues.

The learning activities can be conducted in schools or in community settings. They are intended for young people aged 14 to 17 years (Secondary 3, 4 and 5). To facilitate sex education interventions, we suggest following ten ground rules (see Table 2). Other rules suggested by students or the person leading the sessions can also be added.

At the beginning of the activity, the facilitator mentions that there are challenges as well as benefits for youth who discuss sexuality with their parents or other significant adults; some of these benefits include obtaining relevant information, being reassured about sexuality-related questions the adolescent has, getting the opinion of an adult who has life experience and who knows the teen's personality and needs, and being able to ask for permission.

Table 2 | Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education

1	Be sensitive to and respectful of other people's feelings, and listen to what they have to say.
2	Don't make heavy-handed or judgemental comments, and don't insult others or make fun of their comments or questions.
3	Feel free to respond, or not, to a question.
4	Try to use precise terms.
5	Don't personalize questions or situations.
6	Don't repeat elsewhere what other people say during the session.
7	Keep in mind that all questions are welcome and helpful.
8	If you need to, discuss the issue with your parents*.
9	Use the pronoun "I" when talking about your own opinions and feelings.
10	Let the teacher or session leader know if you're dissatisfied with the session.

* Or any other adult to whom the youth is close and can trust to talk about sexuality or, in some cases, an adult who acts as his or her guardian.

Source: GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Sex Education in the Context of Education Reform*, Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, p. 39-40.

Possible associations

with the Québec Education Program and with the complementary educational services programs.

Goals of the Québec Education Program

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

Cross-curricular competencies

- Achieve one's potential
- Solve problems
- Communicate appropriately

Broad area of learning

Health and Well-Being

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 his or her basic needs

Self-affirmation; respect for his or her physical and psychological well-being; need for recognition and fulfilment; need to express his or her emotions.

Awareness of the impact of his or her choices on health and well-being

Awareness of how behaviour and attitudes influence his or her psychological and physical well-being.

Complementary educational services framework

Program offering help services

Help students throughout their studies, with their academic and career choices and with any difficulties they encounter.

Associations could be made with other disciplines, other elements of the Quebec Education Program or with complementary educational services programs, depending on the expertise and interest of the individuals called upon to facilitate these activities.

Student life services program

Foster students' autonomy and sense of responsibility, their moral and spiritual dimensions, their interpersonal relationships, as well as their feeling of belonging to the school and the community.

ACTIVITY 1

Duration

75 minutes

Educational goal

- Encourage teens to define their feelings and perceptions concerning discussions with their parents about sexuality.

Content

- Positive effects for adolescents (p. 4)
- Comfort level and openness in communication about sexuality, as seen by parents and teens (p. 4)
- Adolescents' needs and parents' roles (p. 5)

Discussing sexuality with your parents: A challenge?

- 1 Explain to participants the theme of the activity and the Ten Ground Rules for Providing Sex Education (see Table 2), if needed.

- 2 Ask the teens to talk about how they perceive discussions about sexuality with one of their parents. Use the following questions to stimulate discussion:
 - How do you feel about the idea of talking with your parent about sexuality?
 - What are the benefits and inconveniences of discussing sexuality with your parents?

- 3 Hand out a copy of the following exercise to participants and tell them what the objective of the activity is. Explain that the goal is for them to think individually about the issue, and that they don't have to write their names on the sheet since they can keep it after the exercise is done. Give them about 15 minutes to answer the questions.

Imagine that you are discussing sexuality with your parents...

- a. Imagine the "ideal" discussion about sexuality that you could have with your parents. How would it be (time, place, feelings you have, your parent's attitude, the topic that would be discussed, the tone of the exchange, etc.)?
- b. What's the discussion about?
- c. What obstacles could arise during the discussion?
- d. How would you like to overcome these obstacles?
- e. Do you think that this "ideal" discussion could happen? What can you do for it to happen?

4

Ask the teens to talk about the benefits they see to communicating with their parents and the circumstances under which discussions with them usually take place.

Questions to ask during the in-class discussion:

- What characterizes the ideal discussion that you imagined?
How would you describe it?
- In what circumstances do you discuss sexuality with your parents?
Give examples of topics that are addressed.
- What sex-related situations would you feel comfortable discussing with your parents that you believe could help you clarify your thoughts?
- What situations seem touchier and that you would hesitate to bring up with your parents?

5

End the session by presenting information on adolescent-parent communication (see the section entitled “Comfort level and openness in communication about sexuality, as seen by parents and teens”, p. 4), and start a discussion with the following question:

- In your opinion, what could you do to help you feel comfortable talking about sexuality with your parent?



ACTIVITY 2

Duration

75 minutes

Educational goal

- Know the factors that facilitate or hinder good discussions with parents about sexuality.

Content

- What facilitates communication with parents (p. 8)
- What hinders communication with parents (p. 7)
- Talking about sexuality? Sure, but how? (p. 8)
- Table 1: Tips to help teens talk with their parents about sexuality (p. 9)

What facilitates or hinders discussions with parents about sexuality

1

Form two groups (A and B) and ask teens to write down their responses to the question they will be given. Set aside about 10 minutes for this exercise.

- Group A: What make it difficult talking with your parents about sexuality?
- Group B: What is helpful for talking with your parents about sexuality?

2

Lead a discussion aimed at bringing out the elements each group has identified. Ask Group A to respond first, and then Group B. Next, using questions addressed to both groups, encourage participants to discuss what they can do to prepare for talking with their parents about sexuality.

Questions for group A:

- What elements did you identify?
- Among these elements, which help the most to talk with parents difficult?

Questions for group B:

- What are the elements you identified?
- Among these elements, which ones are most useful to facilitate discussions with your parents?

Questions for all participants:

- What elements should you consider before starting a discussion about sexuality with one or both of your parents?
- How can you overcome the obstacles to discussing the topic with your parents so the conversation is possible and beneficial?
- In what contexts do you think discussing with your parents is essential (see the “box A parent who can listen and give advice, but must also set limits” on p. 6)?

3

Summarize what participants have said, focusing first on what they find difficult when it comes to talking with their parents about sexuality, and then on the facilitating elements they identified. Present other elements they did not mention during the discussion (see Table 1, p. 8-9); encourage them to discuss their interest in and comfort level with using these suggestions.

Explain that talking about sexuality with a parent can generate all kinds of emotions. End the activity by presenting the following idea: Taking a moment to think about the various positive and negative aspects of discussing sexuality before bringing up the topic with a parent can help you express your discomfort more clearly and make the exchange more beneficial.

ACTIVITY 3

Duration

75 minutes

Educational goal

- Identify strategies that enhance sexuality-related discussions with parents.

Content

- Talking about sexuality? Sure, but how? (p.8)
- Table 1: Tips to help teens talk with their parents about sexuality (p. 9)

1, 2, 3 Go! Talking with my parent

- 1 Show participants a clip from the Radio-Canada TV series: Les Parent, season 1¹, episode 7: "Scènes de la vie conjugale" (duration: 2 minutes, 8 seconds).

The show is about the daily life of a family, Natalie and Louis-Paul (parents) and their three boys, Zachary, 8 years old, Olivier, 12 years old, and Thomas, 14 years old.

Synopsis of the scene "Scènes de la vie conjugale"

Thomas is in his room getting ready for a party. His mother, Natalie, knows about the party. She decides to knock on his door and talk to him about sexual protection. Natalie brings up the topic in different ways, but never clearly. Thomas isn't interested in what his mother is trying to tell him. When Natalie finally shows him the condoms she's bought for him, Thomas sighs in discouragement and, using an irritated tone of voice, tells her that he doesn't need her to buy them. Natalie is destabilized by her son's response. She decides nonetheless to leave them in one of his drawers and, before leaving his room, tells him to have a good time at the party. Thomas quickly shuts the door behind her and takes the condoms out of the drawer. He seems happy and wears a smile of satisfaction.

- 2 Lead a discussion using the following questions:

- What are your first reactions to this clip?
- How does Thomas react before and after the exchange with his mother?
- What do you think about Thomas's reaction? In your opinion, why does he react this way?
- How does Thomas feel when his mother tries to talk to him about contraception?
- What strategies does Natalie use when she attempts to talk to her son about condoms?
- What do you think of Thomas's mother's strategies and attitude? How would you have reacted, if you were Thomas?
- If you could rewrite this scene to make it ideal for Thomas and his mother, what would you change?

1. This episode is available on the Website www.tagtele.com; enter "Les Parent, saison 1, épisode 7" in a search engine. The clip starts at 11 minutes 27 seconds and ends at 13 minutes 35 seconds.

3 Ask participants to form teams of three or four and to create a script based on one of following scenarios. Each team has 15 minutes. The script must meet these requirements:

1. Identify actions that could help Alex or Maïka raise the topic with their parent.
2. Indicate what Alex or Maïka will do to talk to their parent.
3. Describe the context in which the discussion will take place.

Scenario 1

Alex is 16 years old. He'd like his girlfriend, Charlotte, to sleep at his house. He has to ask his parents for permission but he doesn't know how to go about it so that they'll agree.

Scenario 2

Today in class, the science and tech teacher and the nurse brought up the topic of contraception. Maïka doesn't feel ready to have sexual relations, but this class has raised many questions in her mind. She didn't ask them in class because she was afraid she'd look stupid in front of her friends. Once she's back home, Maïka feels like talking to her mother about her thoughts.

4 Ask the teams to present, one after the other, their scripts inspired by the scenario they chose. Lead the discussion by suggesting some actions the teens didn't mention (see Table 1, on p. 9). Encourage them to answer the following questions:

- What do you suggest to Alex or Maïka, who feel unable to bring up the topic with their parents? Why did you choose this way of doing it?
- Based on the exercise we have just done, how would you summarize the various ways you could use to talk with your parents about sexuality?
- If you were in a situation similar to Alex's or Maïka's, what would you do?

5 Conclude the activity by reminding the adolescents that they can facilitate exchanges with their parents and reduce the stress they may feel by preparing for the discussion beforehand and by making sure they use the right words and pick the right time.

Duration

75 minutes

Educational goal

- Start a discussion about sexuality with your parent or another significant adult.

Content

- What facilitates communication with parents (p. 8)

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY

Homework to do with one or both parents, or with another adult

1

Present the activity's theme to participants.

2

Tell participants that an interesting way to start a constructive dialogue with their parents about sexuality is to discuss the similarities and differences between the experiences of teens today and those of their parents, when they were adolescents.

3

Give each participant a copy of the sheet "When you were my age..." (see following page), which contains questions to ask one or both parents, or another adult to whom the teen is close.

Tell the adolescents they are free to use the questionnaire as they wish: They can choose questions they feel like asking or make up their own. Tell them you can help them formulate questions they would like to add.

Give them instructions to share with the person they will choose to talk to before they initiate the discussion. Discuss these instructions with the teens beforehand, if needed.

- The person who will be questioned is free to skip a question he or she doesn't want to answer.
- The conversation will remain confidential, that is, what is said will not be shared with their classmates. Rather, the goal of the group discussion that will occur later will be to have teens give their impressions of the experiences they had talking with the adult.

When you were my age...

Examples of sexuality-related questions that you can ask your parent or another adult you trust

- When you were an adolescent, what would you say about sexuality when you talked with other teens?
- Did you discuss sexuality with your parents or other family members?
 - Was it easy for you to discuss with them?
 - What did they tell you about sexuality?
 - What would you have liked them to tell you?
- What kinds of ideas about sexuality were conveyed by people around you and by the media?
 - What were the messages, standard or behaviours-either valued or discouraged?
 - How did what was told to girls differ from what was said to boys?
- How did romantic relationships unfold when you were an adolescent?
 - At what age did young people have romantic relationships?
 - How did young people approach each other?
 - What types of dates were you allowed to go on?
 - What were the first physical contacts (kisses, caresses, sexual relation)?
 - To whom could you talk to when your heart was broken?
 - Was it different for girls and boys? In what ways?

Instructions:

- The person who will be questioned is free to skip a question he or she doesn't want to answer.
- The conversation will remain confidential, that is, what is said will not be shared with classmates. Rather, the goal of the group discussion that will occur later will be to have teens give their impressions of the experiences they had talking with the adult.

Reminder: Write down your impressions during and after the discussion (e.g. your feelings, how the discussion evolves, the context of the exchange). Indicate what you liked about this experience and what you found difficult. Also, ask the other person what they thought about the discussion you had together.

4

A few days later, ask the teens to talk about their experiences and impressions concerning the discussion about sexuality they had with their parents or other adults. It's not necessary for all teens to speak up. Remind them that this isn't about exposing the personal experiences of the person they talked to, but rather to say what they got from this experience and how it could be useful the next time they discuss sexuality with their parents or other adults they trust.

Here are a few examples of questions to ask to guide the discussion:

- What did you learn from this exercise?
- What is your assessment of this experience?
What is the assessment of the person you talked to?
- How did you feel during the discussion?
How did the adult you talked with feel?
- How could this experience help you discuss sexuality with your parents or other adults you trust the next time you feel the need to confide in someone, be reassured, ask questions or need permission for something?
- What do you find similar and different in the ways sexuality is experienced and expressed now compared to when your parents were young? (This question could lead to another interesting discussion about how social norms related to sexuality have evolved.)

You can also hand out copies of the brochure entitled “*Transformation, Butterflies, Passions... and All Sorts of Questions: Parents' guide for discussing sexuality with their teens*” for adolescents to give to their parents. This brochure is intended for parents and is designed to help them in their role as their children's sex educators. It is free and can be ordered from www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss, under **Documentation**, section for **Parents**.

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