

Lesson Plan

Walk the Talk

Promoting Teen/Parent Communication

Purpose: To promote conversations between teens and their parents/guardians or other trusted adults about sexual health and relationships.

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, teen participants will:

- Identify ways to start conversations with a parent/guardian on sexual health topics.
- Practice communication skills in starting and continuing conversations with a parent/guardian.

Part 1: Introduction:

Introduce the topic of teen/parent communication by saying: **Today, we are going to provide you with some tips and tools for talking with a parent/guardian or other trusted adult about sexual health and relationships. This activity will help you start the conversation or, if already started, keep it going.**

Ask: When I said that we are going to have a lesson on talking with your parent about sexual health, what was your first thought? *Possible answers: discomfort, embarrassment, feeling hopeful, anxious, happy for the assistance, etc.*

Believe it or not, your parent/guardian may feel the same way! You may even decide that another close family member is the best person for you to bring up certain topics. The important thing is to find a way to start the conversation with a supportive, trusted adult.

Educator note: We know that parents are the most influential sexuality educators for their children. While we hope parents will be open and ready to have these conversations with their teens, it's not always the case. Each teen should gauge which parent or close family member they can seek out to start these conversations. Don't make assumptions about a teen's home situation or their relationship with their parents/guardians—some are more open than others for participating in this kind of activity. If a student is reluctant to participate (particularly in the take home activity), this may be the reason why.

Say to the students: **Let's begin with some ways for you to start the conversation.** Write the underlined tips on a whiteboard or flip chart paper.

- **Start with small talk. This will get you started by connecting with each other, which may make it easier to move onto bigger topics. What are some examples of ways you can start a conversation with small talk?** *Possible answers: talking about something that happened at school, asking how a parent's day went, talking about your pets, a sports event, asking what's for dinner, etc.*

- **Send out “trial balloons” or “test the water.”** Ask your parent if they remember what it was like for them when they were your age. For instance: *“Who were your friends?”*, *“What kinds of things did you do for fun?”*, *“What was dating like?”* Work your way up to slightly more personal topics, such as *“What kinds of information did you get from your friends around sex or relationships?”* Ask students if they have any other ways to “test the water”.
- **Know what you want out of the conversation.** Are you seeking their permission to do something? Do you have news to break to your parents? Or do you just want them to listen to you without offering any advice? It is helpful to know why you are bringing up the topic with them. Ask students if they have anything to add.
- **Consider starting the talk with one parent.** If you’re uncomfortable bringing up topics like sex and relationships, start with the parent you feel most comfortable and open with.

Part II: Walk the Talk Scenarios

Explain the activity by saying: **Now let’s use some of the tools we just went over. You will pair up and receive a scenario. Work together filling in what the teen and parent in the scenario might say in their conversation. Then write a possible next step they can take. You will have 5 minutes to work on the scenario. Then we will come back together and share the completed scenarios with the group.**

Alternative: Each student in the pair can take the part of either the parent or the teen. Midway through the scenario, you can call time and have the pairs switch roles.

After students have completed their scenarios, ask the pairs to take turns reading out loud their scenario, responses and possible next step(s). If there is time, ask other students to add to the responses.

Educator note: You will notice in the scenarios that the pronoun they/theirs is used in place of he/she and his/hers. While this may appear awkward or unfamiliar to you and your students, it is one way that we can be inclusive of people regardless of their gender and sexual orientation. If your students ask whether the character in their scenario is male or female, let them know that these situations can happen to anyone, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

Process the Walk the Talk Scenarios by asking the group:

1. **Were these scenarios realistic topics a teen may want to discuss with a parent/guardian?**
2. **How easy or difficult was it to come up with ways to start and continue the conversation? Which was the most difficult step?**
3. **Was it easier to come up with the lines for the teen or the parent? Why do you think this is?**

Part III: Starting the Conversation: Do's and Don'ts

On the board or on a piece of flip chart paper, draw a line to divide the paper in half vertically, writing **Don't** on one side and **Do** on the other.

Say,

Now, let's brainstorm some settings and situations that can make conversations with a parent or guardian easier or more difficult. Let's start with the "don't" list. If students have a difficult time coming up with ideas, give some examples, such as: *interrupt a parent's conversation with another family member.*

After students have completed the "don't" list, move on to the "do" list. You may need to prompt student responses using some of the examples below:

Don't:	Do:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Put your parent on the spot by demanding an immediate answer.• Start the conversation in front of other people.• Start the conversation when your parent is busy or stressed out.• Don't get mad and walk away if you don't like their response.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find a time to bring up the situation that isn't busy or stressful, so your parent can give you their full attention.• Use situations from school, tv shows or movies to bring up the subject.• Give your parent time to think before responding.• Give some options if you are asking for permission to do something.• Ask them if they've ever experienced a similar situation when they were your age.

After the lists are made, ask: **Can you think of other situations and ways to make the conversation easier?** *Possible answers: start the conversation when riding in the car, doing the dishes, watching tv, hiking/walking together.*

Say, **sometimes using situations where you don't have direct eye contact is helpful for both of you. Sending a parent a text or email gives them a heads up about what you would like to talk about and gives you both a chance to prepare for the conversation.**

Now we are going to put these tools into practice and "walk the talk" in a take-home assignment you can do with a parent/guardian or another trusted family member.

Part IV: Take-Home Assignment

Make sure each student gets two copies of the take home questionnaire: one for them and the other for their parent/guardian or other chosen trusted adult.

Now say, **I have a take-home assignment that you can do with a parent/guardian or other adult family member to help start the conversation. This is something for you and your parent to do together; you won't need to share this with the rest of the class. The purpose is for you to start these conversations at home.**

Alternative: You could have the students take home the assignment and ask both student and parent to write a few sentences reflecting on the experience. Ask the student to bring these reflections back to class. Decide how you will use the feedback. For example, as a general discussion with the class or for extra points/credit for individual students.

Summary and Conclusion:

In summarizing and closing the lesson, ask the students: **What is one thing you learned from doing this activity that helped you start (or continue) the conversation with a parent?**

Students can respond out loud or you can ask them to write their responses on an index card (with or without their name on it) and turn it in to you.

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #1: Kelly

Kelly really likes someone at school and wants to go out with them. Kelly has tried to talk to them, sit next to them at lunch, hung out at their locker, and they still haven't shown any interest. Kelly wants to ask a parent if this ever happened to them and how they handled the situation.

Kelly (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Kelly's parent: _____

Kelly (tests the water): _____

Kelly's parent: _____

Kelly (brings up the topic): _____

Kelly's parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #2: Jamie

Jamie has been dating someone for two months. Jamie’s parents don’t really think this person is a good match for Jamie, but they let Jamie make the decision about who to date. Now the relationship is starting to become controlling. Jamie’s partner always wants to know where Jamie is and does not want Jamie to talk with or see any friends. Jamie is getting uncomfortable with the situation and would like to bring it up with a parent for some advice, but is afraid they will say, “I told you so.”

Jamie (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Jamie’s parent: _____

Jamie (tests the water): _____

Jamie’s parent: _____

Jamie (brings up the topic): _____

Jamie’s parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #3: Sam

Sam has been dating Terry for over a year. They have started to talk about having sex. Sam is not sure about moving to this next level in their relationship. Sam would like to ask a parent how someone can really know if they are ready to have sex. Sam is nervous to start the conversation, in case the parent(s) immediately assume they are already having sex. Sam really wants to talk about this with a parent but doesn't know where to start.

Sam (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Sam's parent: _____

Sam(tests the water): _____

Sam's parent: _____

Sam (brings up the topic): _____

Sam's parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #4: Chris

Chris is in a relationship and is ready to have sex. Chris wants to go to family planning to get more information about preventing pregnancy and STDs and would really like a parent to come along for support. Chris has always been able to talk with their parent about anything, but thinks this will push them over the edge!

Chris (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Chris' parent: _____

Chris (tests the water): _____

Chris' parent: _____

Chris (brings up the topic): _____

Chris' parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #5: Maggie

Maggie believes she had done everything right. She and her partner are very comfortable with each other and can talk about everything; including when they were ready to have sex and what they will do to prevent a pregnancy and STDs. They always use condoms, but one time they had sex without one. Maggie is now afraid she may be pregnant and wants to talk with her parent(s).

Maggie (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Maggie's parent: _____

Maggie (tests the water): _____

Maggie's parent: _____

Maggie (brings up the topic): _____

Maggie's parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #6: Todd

Todd believes he has done everything right. He and his partner are very comfortable with each other and can talk about everything; including when they were ready to have sex and what they will do to prevent a pregnancy and STDs. They always use condoms, but one time they had sex without one. Now Todd is afraid his partner may be pregnant and wants to talk to his parent(s).

Todd (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Todd's parent: _____

Todd (tests the water): _____

Todd's parent: _____

Todd (brings up the topic): _____

Todd's parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Scenario #7: Dylan

Dylan has already come out to some good friends about being gay and now feels it's time to let close family members know. Dylan is very nervous about it. While Dylan's parents have always been loving and supportive, this may not be something that's even on their radar!

Dylan (starts the conversation with small talk): _____

Dylan's parent: _____

Dylan (tests the water): _____

Dylan's parent: _____

Dylan (brings up the topic): _____

Dylan's parent: _____

Possible next step(s): _____

Walk the Talk ~ Take-home Assignment

Dear Parent/Guardian: In class, your student recently participated in an activity called *Walk the Talk*. It was an opportunity for them to practice skills to start conversations regarding sexual health and relationships with a parent, guardian or trusted family member. For some teens and parents, these conversations have already taken place; for others, it may be the first time. The activity provided your teen with some helpful tools to start and keep these important conversations going. The next step is to complete this take-home assignment.

It can be difficult for both teens and parents to talk about sexual health and relationships. Before getting started, think about what your conversations could sound like and your feelings about having these conversations with each other. It's normal to not always know what to say or to feel awkward! The following activity may help both of you feel better prepared.

Directions: Each of you should complete the following questions separately, and then share your responses with each other. Read what the other person has written with an open mind and ask for clarification before making assumptions or reacting to something that may touch a nerve. Establish some ground rules: Use "I" statements; listen; do not interrupt, criticize or blame. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Just use this activity to start talking.

Part 1: A typical conversation with your teen/parent

1. What topics do you usually talk about with your teen/parent? _____

2. When is usually the best time and place for you to have conversations? _____

3. When you are having a conversation with your teen/ parent, what do you appreciate most?

4. What do you wish was different? _____

5. Are there things you would like to discuss with your teen/parent, but feel you can't? Why/why not?

Part 2: Rate your communication with your teen/parent by circling the response that best describes your relationship. Give examples to help the other person understand your responses.

1. My teen/parent understands my point of view. Always Sometimes Never

Give an example: _____

2. My teen/parent respects my feelings. Always Sometimes Never

Give an example: _____

3. We can talk about difficult topics. Always Sometimes Never

Give an example: _____

4. Our conversations usually end in a positive way. Always Sometimes Never

Give an example: _____

5. I am available to talk, but my teen/parent is too busy. Always Sometimes Never

Give an example: _____

6. We are good at listening to each other. Always Sometimes Never

Give an example: _____

Part 3: On a piece of paper, write a note or letter (if you have a lot to say) to your teen/parent.

In the note or letter you can talk about how you feel about the current state of your relationship, what you like about it and/or how you would like to see it improve. Provide some suggestions and opportunities to help keep the conversations going and stay connected.