

Decision-making and Teen Parenthood

Grades 7 and 8, Lessons #10 and 11

Time Needed:

One or two Class periods, depending upon whether you use a guest speaker

Student Learning Objectives:

To be able to...

1. Explain that people don't always act on their feelings...that they decide whether to act.
2. Distinguish active from passive decisions.
3. List at least three reasons to delay parenting until one is an adult.

Agenda:

1. Explain the focuses of the lesson.
2. Describe one decision-making model, using Decision Making Transparencies 1 and 2.
3. Have as a guest speaker someone who delayed parenthood until older.
4. Have volunteers, read aloud side 1 of Teen Parenthood Worksheet 1, "Mini-Scripts: Why we had babies."
5. Use side 2 of the Worksheet "Mini-Scripts: Why we aren't having babies yet," to explore reasons to delay parenting.
6. Hand out "Teen Parenthood Reference Sheet" and review it aloud.
7. Answer students' verbal and anonymous questions.

Materials Needed:

Classroom Materials, equipment: (1 per class)

- *Decision-making Transparencies 1 & 2*
- Overhead Projector

Student Materials: (1 per student)

- *Teen Parenthood Worksheet 1*
- *Teen Parenthood Reference Sheet*
- **OPTIONAL:** *Teen Parenthood Worksheets 3 & 4*
- **OPTIONAL:** *Family Homework Exercise: Teen Parenthood*

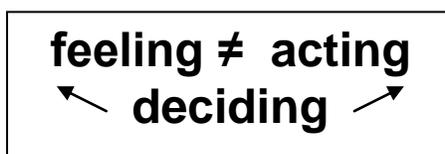
Activities, Day One

1. Explain the dual focus of the lesson:

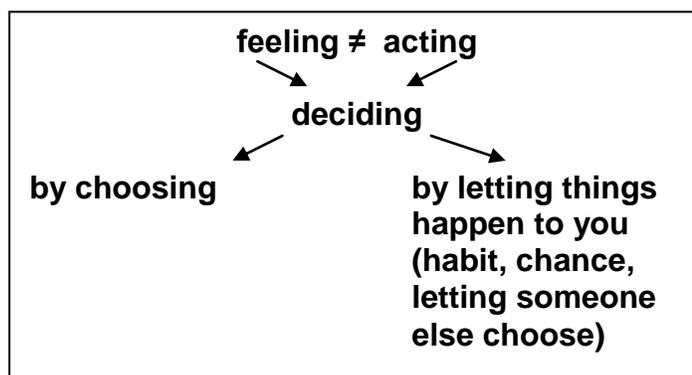
1. To give the class a model for thinking about decisions.
2. To use that model to look at teen parenthood.

2. Briefly use Decision-Making Transparencies 1 and 2 to describe this decision-making model:

In many animals, “feeling” equals “acting.” When a chipmunk is hungry, she eats. When a lion is angry, she fights. When a duck is cold, he fluffs his feathers up. He does not think, he just feels and then acts. Unlike in other animals, in human beings “feeling” does not necessarily equal “acting.” People do not always act on their feelings. You may feel like killing your little brother or sister, but you stop yourself. You may feel like eating a whole chocolate cake, but you stop yourself, because, in human beings there is a step between feeling and acting...deciding.

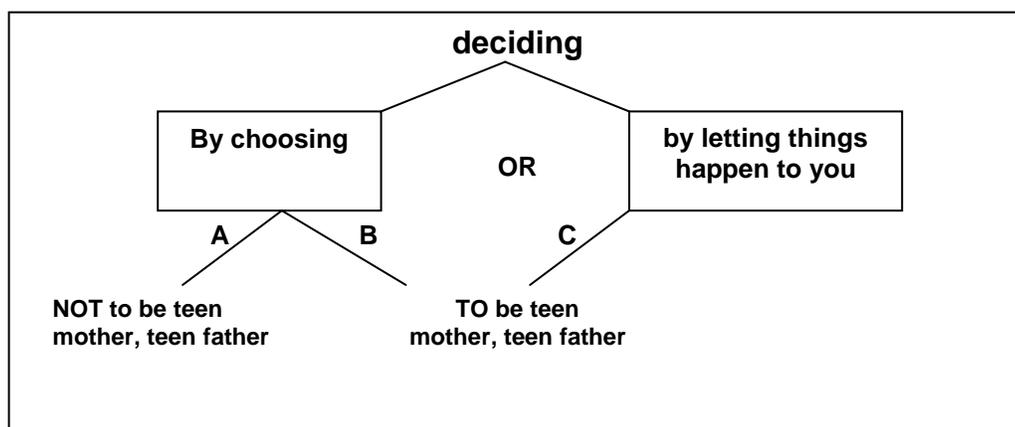


There are two ways people go about deciding: actively -- by choosing, or passively -- by letting things happen to them (by chance, habit, or letting someone else make the choice for you). For example, an active, chosen decision would be to say “I am going to have an orange popsicle.” A passive decision would be to reach in the box and take whatever flavor you happen to grab. Or to ask someone else to get you a Popsicle, without telling them a flavor. That works fine, unless you happen to really dislike one flavor. A passive decision is usually OK, as long as the situation is as unimportant as what to have for a snack.



Have the class brainstorm a few active/chosen decisions and a few passive ones, so you can be sure they understand the difference.

Now use the Decision-Making Transparency 2 to illustrate how the model can be applied to one BIG decision. One can choose NOT to become a teenage parent ... call that group of people "A." One can choose TO become a teenage parent ... those people are group "B." Or one can just let things happen (as in "If I have a baby, so be it; if not, that's OK too. I won't think about it or talk about it. If he doesn't care -- or if she doesn't care -- I don't either.") Those people, of course, will usually also become teen parents, but by chance instead of by choice. They are group "C."



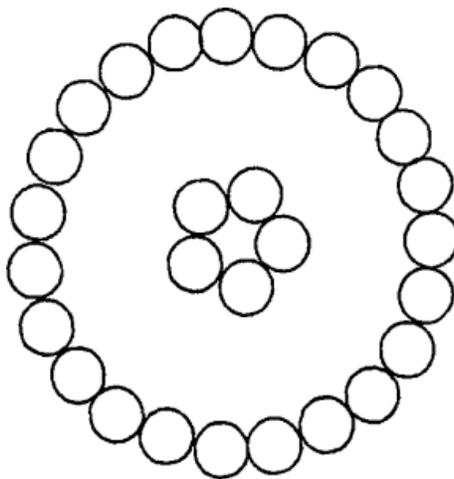
- 3. Have as a guest speaker someone who delayed parenthood until older.** Often, in the past, teachers have invited teen parents as guest, in hopes of demonstrating how difficult their lives were and the challenges that parenting had posed to their completing their education, holding down a job, etc. Unfortunately, those messages are often overshadowed by the presence of an adorable infant and by the star status afforded the teen parent (who, after all, is coping well enough to make it to class).

Instead, we recommend exposing your class to a life experience that they are less likely to have encountered if their own families are low income: someone who made a conscious decision to delay parenting until at least age 20. Questions you might pose to such a speaker or speakers:

- What made you decide to wait until you were older to have a baby?
- Were there things you were looking for in a partner that you didn't find until you were older? Like what?
- Were there experiences you wanted to be able to have before you had a baby?
- Were there goals you wanted to achieve first?
- What were the challenges for you in waiting?
- How come you were able to wait when so many people don't? What did you do or think about differently?
- How do you feel now about having waited? Was it a good choice for you?

Activities, Day Two

4. **Remind the class of the ground rules.** Ask for five volunteers (two male, three female, if possible), hand each a copy of Teen Parenthood Worksheet 1 and have them sit in a circle, facing one another, surrounded by the rest of the class. Assign each a character. Explain that they will be speaking as a group of teen parents, talking about their decisions. The situations are all fictitious, but they are based on real life.



The volunteers should take turns reading their scripts aloud. They are welcome to elaborate or to discuss their situations with one another, if they want to, but it isn't essential. The rest of the class simply observes.

NOTE: If you think your class is too immature for so much personalizing, you can simply read the mini-scripts aloud, yourself, or have students read them silently to themselves.

After they have finished or after no more than five minutes, hand everyone in the class his/her own copy of Teen Pregnancy Worksheet 1, and raise these issues for discussion by the rest of the group:

- Which groups do these people belong to; which kinds of decision-makers are they? (Some are B...those who actively chose to have babies, and some are C ... those whose decisions were passive.)
 - Are any of them glad to be teen parents? Do you agree with their reasons?
 - Are any sad about their decisions? Why?
5. **Give students 10 minutes to write their own “MINI-SCRIPTS:** Why we aren't having babies yet.” They do NOT need to write about themselves. They should just

think of three reasons people might really have to postpone parenting. They should write about at least one imaginary teenager of each sex. They should make up a name and age for each one.

Ask for five different volunteers to each read ONE of their MINI-SCRIPTS aloud. Choose at least two volunteers of each sex. Have them form an inner circle, just as the other group did.

An alternative for a 'less mature class would be to collect their scripts and read a few aloud, yourself.

Afterwards, raise these issues:

- Did they describe all the major reasons, or are there others?
- Which group from the decision model do they represent? (A,B or C)
- Do they seem, as a group, to feel different from the other group? More self—confident? Happier?

6. Hand out the Teen Parenthood Reference Sheet, and have students read it, silently or aloud.

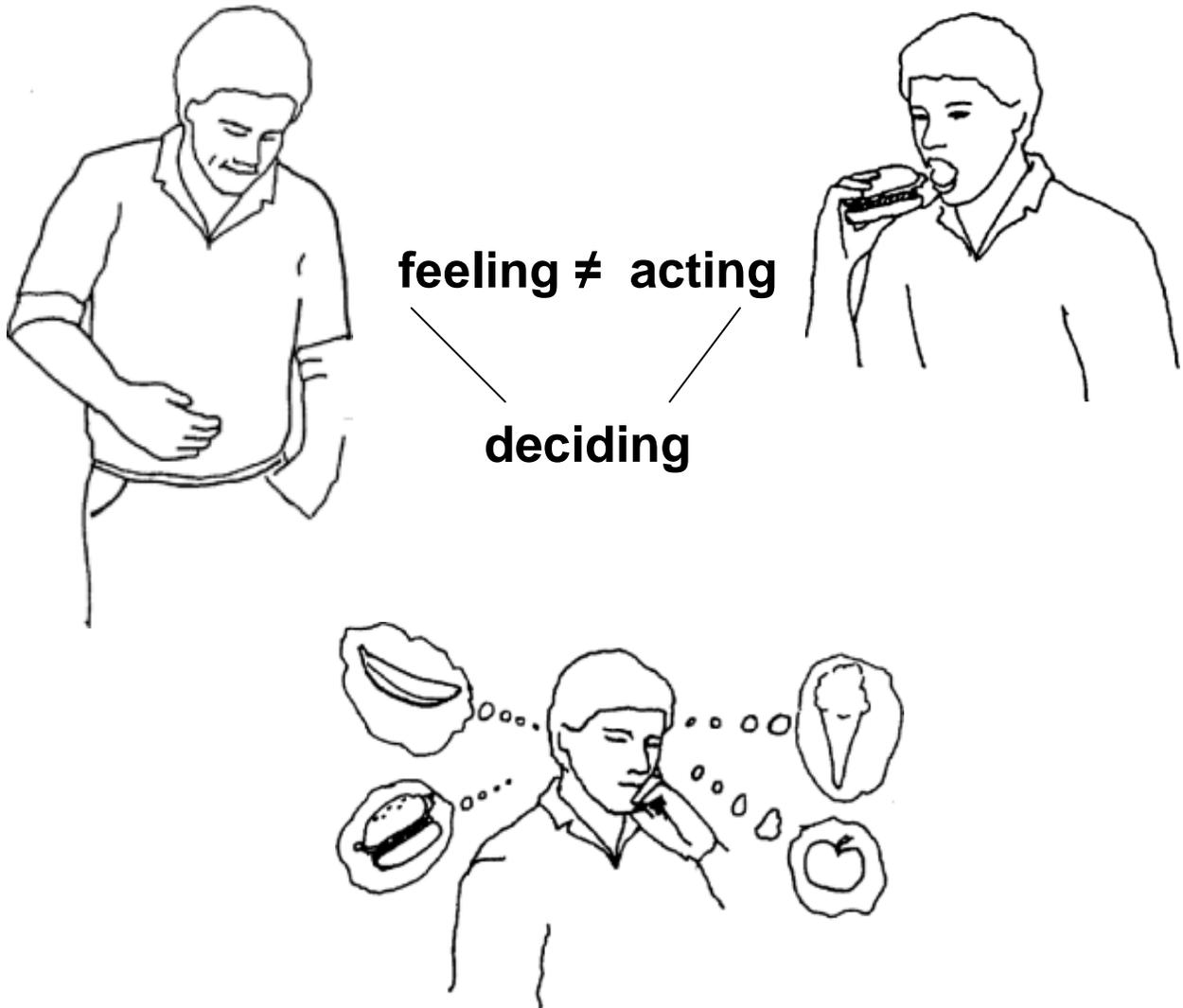
7. Answer students' verbal and anonymous questions.

Homework

Students' options:

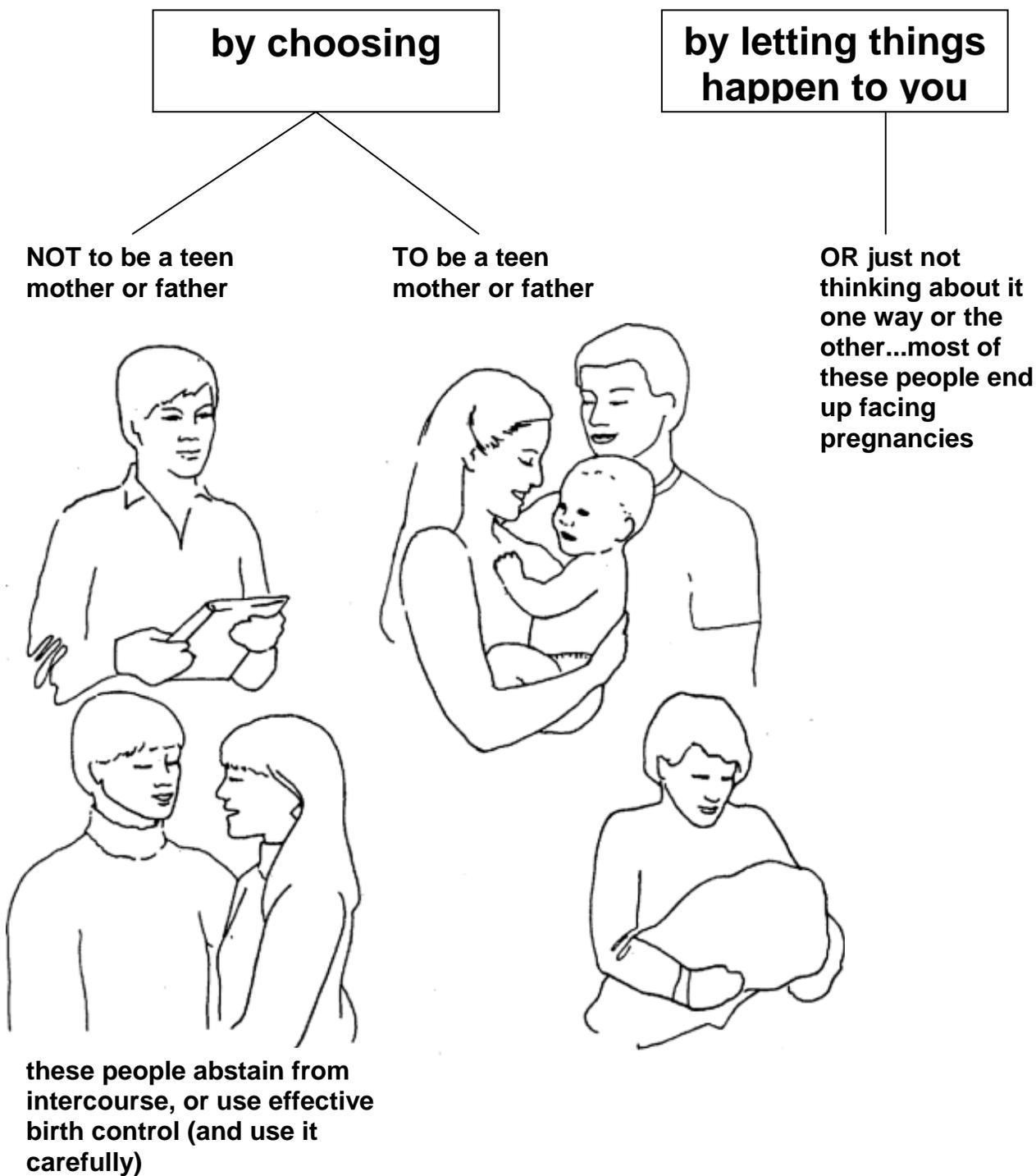
- **A Family Homework Exercise: Teen Parenthood** (Students will need to take home two copies of **Teen Parenthood Worksheet 2** to complete this Family Homework.)
- Fill out **Teen Parenthood Worksheets 2 and 3** independently. Then turn in only **Worksheet 3** (**Worksheet 2** is too personal; turning it in would violate the Washington State Superintendent's prohibition on eliciting student "beliefs ... as to sex"). (Students will need to take home both worksheets.)
- **Teen Parenthood Worksheet 4** (Students will need at least 10 days to complete this one ... three days to gather the potatoes and pillow case, and seven days to carry out the assignment.)
- Read a novel about a teen pregnancy, or a teen parent, and write a two page paper about the effect of the pregnancy on the teenagers' lives. Ask the school or public librarian for suggested titles.

Decision Making Transparency 1



There are 2 ways to decide
1. by choosing
2. by letting things happen to you

Decision Making Transparency 2



Teen Parenthood Worksheet 1

Name _____ Date _____

MINI-SCRIPTS: Why we had babies

Amberly, age 15: I didn't plan to have a baby. I didn't even plan to have sex. It just happened. We'd had a few beers and, well, we didn't say let's do it...we just did. Then I found out I was pregnant. It's OK, except I wish I could afford to move out of my mother's house. She's always telling me what to do. I quit school, but I only make \$7.63 an hour at a fast-food place and that's not even enough to pay for rent, never mind food or diapers.

Rick, age 16: Sure I'm a father. I have three kids by three different girls. I like being a father. I like taking them places and showing them off. It makes me feel proud, like "look what I made." My friends look up to me. I see two of the kids at least once every couple of weeks. The other one I don't see. I don't get along with his mother. But, yes, I like being a father!

Susanna, age 14: I had a baby because I wanted to be grown. You know, my sister had her baby and it sort of made her and my mother close. Well, I guess I'm a woman, too, now. I do miss my friends my own age, but I also really enjoy taking care of the baby. I couldn't do it all alone. But the baby's father takes him out sometimes and my mother is helping a lot.

Marcelo, age 15: I didn't plan to become a father. I thought my girlfriend was using something, the pill or whatever. I didn't really think about it. Now I guess that was stupid. Plus, I wish we'd thought about prenatal care and stuff, because the baby's developmentally delayed, and I'll never know if we could've done anything to keep that from happening.

Corrine, age 12: My uncle sexually abused me from the time I was nine until he got me pregnant last year. They wanted me to give the baby up for adoption, but I kept her just to show them they can't push me around anymore. Plus she's mine. She's all mine.

Brittnee, age 16: My boyfriend and I were really in love. We couldn't wait (or we thought we couldn't). We didn't think we'd get pregnant though, because he usually pulled out. Then after a while, we thought maybe I was infertile because I hadn't gotten pregnant, so we stopped being so careful. Now we have a baby and I'm not sure we are even in love anymore, we fight so much.

Worksheet 1 continued ...

MINI-SCRIPTS: Why we aren't having babies yet

_____, age ____: _____

Teen Parenthood Reference Sheet

Name _____ Date _____

A. In some cases, teen parents and their children are happy, healthy and secure. Unfortunately, that's not always true. There can be many sad consequences when a young person becomes a parent. Did you know that...

Babies of teens are more likely:*

- to have birth defects
- (developmental delays, breathing problems, spinal problems, etc.)
- to be premature (born too young)
- to be low-birth weight (too small)
- to be abused or neglected
- to die before their first birthday
- to grow up in poverty
- to do less well in school

Teen mothers are more likely:**

- to have health problems during pregnancy
- to feel lonely and overwhelmed after the baby's born
- to drop out of school
- to have to live at home longer
- to spend their lives in poverty
- to commit suicide

Teen fathers are more likely:**

- to feel left out and powerless
- to drop out of school
- to spend their lives in poverty

B. It is a MYTH that teenage fathers always split. In FACT, most spend at least some time and money on their children.

It is a FACT that many birth defects are caused by something wrong with the sperm or the egg...where there is no way to prevent the defect. So waiting until adulthood won't guarantee a healthy baby...but it does reduce the risk of problems.

* Than babies born to women in their 20s and early 30s.

** Than people who have babies as adults.

It is a FACT that teen parents can improve their chances...and their babies' chances if they:

- both avoid drugs, including alcohol and cigarettes, before (and for the girl-during) the pregnancy
- eat really well (or help their girlfriend eat well) during the pregnancy; not lots, just balanced
- get a pregnancy test and prenatal care as soon as they suspect a pregnancy
- prevent a second pregnancy until they are grown

C. The law says...

- that a pregnant girl or woman has three alternatives...
 1. Keeping the baby
 2. Placing the baby for adoption
 3. Having an abortion

She would want to talk it over with people she trusts before deciding. No alternative is easy.

- that a boy or man who's involved in a pregnancy has few alternatives; it's not up to him which decision the girl or woman makes. If she chooses to keep the baby, the law says he must help pay for the child's care for at least 18 years.

A Family Homework Exercise: Teen Parenthood

ALL FAMILY HOMEWORK EXERCISES ARE OPTIONAL.

First, read this aloud together:

Over a million teenagers get pregnant in the U.S. every year. Four out of every 10 young people (male and female) is involved in a pregnancy before age 20. Over three-quarter of those pregnancies are unintended. It is something families need to think about. They need to talk with one another about what they believe.

Next:

Each of you try filling out Teen Parenthood Worksheet 2 by yourself.

Finally:

Discuss your answers. Did you give similar or different advice? Do you like each other's ideas or do you disagree? If a teenager in your family got pregnant or got someone pregnant, what would you hope they would do first? Then?

When do you think a person is ready to be really sexually involved? At marriage? Is there a particular age? Are there other things that mean a person is mature enough?

What do you believe about birth control? For married people? For unmarried people?

What do you believe about abortion? Adoption?

When do you think a person is ready to be a really good parent? At marriage? Is there a particular age? Some signs of maturity?

NOTE: Turn in a Family Homework Confirmation Slip by _____ if you want credit.

Teen Parenthood Worksheet 2

Name _____

Directions: Pretend you are “Dear Abby.” How would you answer the following letters? If you are not sure how to respond, ask someone in your family, your doctor or clergy person, or, in the Seattle area, call the Facts of Life Line (206-328-7711). Then, in your own words, answer the letter.

1. Dear Abby,

I want a big family. I am an only child and I have always wished I had lots of brothers and sisters. I don't want to wait until I'm old to start, but my girlfriend disagrees. When should we start our family? How should we decide? — 17 and not getting any younger

Dear 17 and not getting any younger,

2. Dear Abby,

I'm 14. I'm thinking about having a baby because my parents really want a grandchild. In our culture, it's not unusual to have babies when you're young. The whole family lives together and helps take care of the children. I know it's different for many people in this country. What do you think? — From another culture

Dear From another culture,

3. Dear Abby,

My friend has a baby. We're both 15. She gets mad because I won't hang out with her all the time or babysit while she goes out. I help her sometimes, but it wears me out. Do you think I'm selfish to not do more? — Free at 15

4. Dear Free at 15,

5. Dear Abby,

My brother is 16. His girlfriend had a baby a few months ago. I think he should get a job and help to support her and the baby. He says he wanted her to have an abortion or place the baby for adoption. He says it's not his fault she wouldn't. What can I say to him, or do you think he's right? — Little brother

Dear Little brother,

6. Dear Abby,

I had a baby last year when I was 12. I placed her for adoption with a really nice couple. I met them through the agency. But I miss her. I feel like trying to get pregnant again so I'll have one to keep. What do you think? — Birth mother

Dear Birth mother,

DO NOT TURN IN THIS WORKSHEET. YOUR OPINIONS ARE YOUR OWN PRIVATE BUSINESS.

For credit, use this worksheet to do **Family Homework Exercise: Teen Parenthood** or **Teen Parenthood Worksheet 3**.

Teen Parenthood Worksheet 3

Name _____ Due Date _____

Directions:

1. Complete Teen Parenthood Worksheet 2. You will not be asked to turn it in, because your opinions are your own private business.
2. Now pick one of the Dear Abby letters to think about some more. Which one did you pick? _____
3. Make a list below of alternatives the letter writer has ... at least four different things they could do in this situation. You don't have to agree with any of these choices.

1. They could _____

2. They could _____

3. They could _____

4. They could _____

Teen Parenthood Worksheet 4

Name _____ Due Date _____

THIS ASSIGNMENT IS WORTH QUADRUPLE CREDIT.

You are about to become an imaginary parent for a week. How much does a brand-new baby weigh? - 5-10 pounds. Your new baby will be represented by a 10 pound sack of potatoes.

Directions:

1. Get a 10 pound sack of potatoes and a pillow case.
2. Put the sack of potatoes in the pillow case and pretend you have just become the teenage mother or father of this (beautiful) baby!
3. Carry it with you everywhere for one week. (If you must leave it once or twice, you may find a babysitter, but it has to come to school with you every day ... it needs you.)
4. You can set it down when you are busy doing other things, but it must be in your sight at all times and you must hold it, to cuddle and “feed” it, for at least half an hour every two hours, except between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.
5. One night ... not a school night ... set your alarm for 2:00 a.m. and stay up, rocking your baby, for two hours. (He/she is cutting teeth and cannot sleep.)
6. After a week, write a 50-100 word essay about the experience.