

[The Circles of Human Sexuality](#)

A Lesson Plan from *Life Planning Education: A Youth Development Program*

Purpose: To develop and understand a broad definition of sexuality

Materials: Newsprint and markers, board and chalk, one copy of the handout, [Circles of Sexuality](#)(pdf), for each participant, and the Leader's Resources, [Circles of Sexuality](#) (see below) [An Explanation of the Circles of Sexuality](#) and [Sexual Development through the Life Cycle](#) ; pens or pencils

Time: 45 minutes

Planning Notes: Review the Leader's Resource, [Circles of Sexuality](#) (pdf), and draw a large version of it on newsprint or the board.

Procedure:

1. Explain that when many people see the words "sex" or "sexuality," they most often think of sexual intercourse. Others also think of other kinds of physical sexual activities. Tell the group that sexuality is much more than sexual feelings or sexual intercourse. It is an important part of who every person is. It includes all the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of being female or male, being attracted and attractive to others, and being in love, as well as being in relationships that include sexual intimacy and physical sexual activity.
2. Write *sexuality* on the board and draw a box around the letters *s-e-x*. Point out that *s*, *e*, and *x* are only three of the letters in the word *sexuality*.
3. Display the five circles of sexuality and give each teen a handout. Explain that this way of looking at human sexuality breaks it down into five different components: *sensuality*, *intimacy*, *identity*, *behavior and reproduction*, and *sexualization*. Everything related to human sexuality will fit in one of these circles.
4. Beginning with the circle labeled *sensuality*, explain each circle briefly. Take five minutes to read the definition of the circle aloud, point out its elements, and ask for examples of behaviors that would fit in the circle. Write the examples in the circle and ask participants to write them on their handouts. Continue with each circle until you have explained each component of sexuality.
5. Ask if anyone has any questions. Then conclude the activity using the discussion questions below.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the five sexuality circles feels most familiar? Least familiar? Why do you think that is so?
2. Is there any part of these five circles that you never before thought of as *sexual*? Please explain.
3. Which circle is most important for teens to know about? Least important? Why?
4. Which circle would you feel interested in discussing with your parent(s)?
5. Which circle would you feel interested in talking about with someone you are dating?



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Leader's Resource for the [Circles of Sexuality](#) Lesson Plan

Sexuality is much more than sexual feelings or sexual intercourse. It is an important part of who a person is and what she/he will become. It includes all the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors associated with being female or male, being attractive and being in love, as well as being in relationships that include sexual intimacy and sensual and sexual activity. It also includes enjoyment of the world as we know it through the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight.

Circle #1—Sensuality

Sensuality is awareness and feeling about your own body and other people's bodies, especially the body of a sexual partner. Sensuality enables us to feel good about how our bodies look and feel and what they can do. Sensuality also allows us to enjoy the pleasure our bodies can give us and others. This part of our sexuality affects our behavior in several ways.

- **Body image**—Feeling attractive and proud of one's own body and the way it functions influences many aspects of life. Adolescents often choose media personalities as the standard for how they should look, so they are often disappointed by what they see in the mirror. They may be especially dissatisfied when the mainstream media does not portray or does not positively portray physical characteristics the teens see in the mirror, such as color of skin, type or hair, shape of eyes, height, or body shape.
- **Experiencing pleasure**—Sensuality allows a person to experience pleasure when certain parts of the body are touched. People also experience sensual pleasure from taste, touch, sight, hearing, and smell as part of being alive.
- **Satisfying skin hunger**—The need to be touched and held by others in loving, caring ways is often referred to as *skin hunger*. Adolescents typically receive considerably less touch from their parents than do younger children. Many teens satisfy their *skin hunger* through close physical contact with peers. Sexual intercourse may sometimes result from a teen's need to be held, rather than from sexual desire.
- **Feeling physical attraction for another person**—The center of sensuality and attraction to others is not in the genitals (despite all the jokes). The center of sensuality and attraction to others is in the brain, humans' most important "sex organ." The unexplained mechanism responsible for sexual attraction rests in the brain, not in the genitalia.
- **Fantasy**—The brain also gives people the capacity to have fantasies about sexual behaviors and experiences. Adolescents often need help understanding that sexual fantasy is normal and that one does not have to act upon sexual fantasies.

Circle #2—Sexual Intimacy

Sexual intimacy is the ability to be emotionally close to another human being and to accept closeness in return. Several aspects of intimacy include

- **Sharing**—Sharing intimacy is what makes personal relationships rich. While sensuality is about physical closeness, intimacy focuses on emotional closeness.

- Caring—Caring about others means feeling their joy and their pain. It means being open to emotions that may not be comfortable or convenient. Nevertheless, an intimate relationship is possible only when we care.
- Liking or loving another person—Having emotional attachment or connection to others is a manifestation of intimacy.
- Emotional risk-taking—To have true intimacy with others, a person must open up and share feelings and personal information. Sharing personal thoughts and feelings with someone else is risky, because the other person may not feel the same way. But it is not possible to be really close with another person without being honest and open with her/him.
- Vulnerability—To have intimacy means that we share and care, like or love, and take emotional risks. That makes us vulnerable—the person with whom we share, about whom we care, and whom we like or love, has the power to hurt us emotionally. Intimacy requires vulnerability, on the part of each person in the relationship.

Circle #3—Sexual Identity

Sexual identity is a person's understanding of who she/he is sexually, including the sense of being male or of being female. Sexual identity consists of three "interlocking pieces" that, together, affect how each person sees him/herself. Each "piece" is important.

- Gender identity—Knowing whether one is male or female. Most young children determine their own gender identity by age two. Sometime, a person's biological gender is not the same as his/her gender identity—this is called being *transgender*.
- Gender role—Identifying actions and/or behaviors for each gender. Some things are determined by the way male and female bodies are built or function. For example, only women menstruate and only men produce sperm. Other gender roles are culturally determined. In the United States, it is considered appropriate for only women to wear dresses to work in the business world. In other cultures, men may wear skirt-like outfits everywhere.

There are many "rules" about what men and women can/should do that have nothing to do with the way their bodies are built or function. This aspect of sexuality is especially important for young adolescents to understand, since peer, parent, and cultural pressures to be "masculine" or "feminine" increase during the adolescent years. Both young men and young women need help sorting out how perceptions about gender roles affect whether they feel encouraged or discouraged in their choices about relationships, leisure activities, education, and career.

Gender bias means holding stereotyped opinions about people according to their gender. Gender bias might include believing that women are less intelligent or less capable than men, that men suffer from "testosterone poisoning," that men cannot raise children without the help of women, that women cannot be analytical, that men cannot be sensitive. Many times, people hold fast to these stereotyped opinions without giving rational thought to the subject of gender.

- Sexual orientation—Whether a person's primary attraction is to people of the other gender (heterosexuality) or to the same gender (homosexuality) or to both genders (bisexuality) defines his/her sexual orientation. Sexual orientation begins to emerge by adolescence although many gay and lesbian youth say they knew they felt same sex attraction by age 10 or 11. Between three and 10—percent of the general population is probably exclusively homosexual in orientation. Perhaps another 10 percent of the general population feel attracted to both genders.

Heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth can all experience same-gender sexual attraction and/or activity around puberty. Such behavior, including sexual play with same-gender peers, crushes on same-gender adults, or sexual fantasies about same-gender people are normal for pre-teens and young teens and are not necessarily related to sexual orientation.

Negative social messages and homophobia in the wider U.S. culture can mean that young adolescents who are experiencing sexual attraction to and romantic feelings for someone of their own gender need support so they can clarify their feelings and accept their sexuality.

Circle #4—Reproduction and Sexual Health

These are a person's capacity to reproduce and the behaviors and attitudes that make sexual relationships healthy and enjoyable.

- Factual information about reproduction—Is necessary so youth will understand how male and female reproductive systems function and how conception and/or STD infection occur. Adolescents often have inadequate information about their own and/or their partner's body. Teens need this information so they can make informed decisions about sexual expression and protect their health. Youth need to understand anatomy and physiology because every adolescent needs the knowledge and understanding to help him/her appreciate the ways in which his/her body functions.
- Feelings and attitudes—Are wide-ranging when it comes to sexual expression and reproduction and to sexual health-related topics such as STD infection, HIV and AIDS, contraceptive use, abortion, pregnancy, and childbirth.
- Sexual intercourse—Is one of the most common behaviors among humans. Sexual intercourse is a behavior that may produce sexual pleasure that often culminates in orgasm in females and in males. Sexual intercourse may also result in pregnancy and/or STDs. In programs for youth, discussion of sexual intercourse is often limited to the bare mention of male-female (penile-vaginal) intercourse. However, youth need accurate health information about sexual intercourse—vaginal, oral, and anal.
- Reproductive and sexual anatomy—The male and female body and the ways in which they actually function is a part of sexual health. Youth can learn to protect their reproductive and sexual health. This means that teens need information about all the effective methods of contraception currently available, how they work, where to obtain them, their effectiveness, and their side effects. This means that youth also need to know how to use latex condoms to prevent STD infection. Even if youth are not currently engaging in sexual intercourse, they probably will do so at some point in the future. They must know how to prevent pregnancy and/or disease.

Finally, youth also need to know that traditional methods of preventing pregnancy (that may be common in that particular community and/or culture) may be ineffective in preventing pregnancy and may, depending on the method, even increase susceptibility to STDs. The leader will need to determine what those traditional methods are, their effectiveness, and their side effects before he/she can discuss traditional methods of contraception in a culturally appropriate and informative way.

- Sexual reproduction—The actual processes of conception, pregnancy, delivery, and recovery following childbirth are important parts of sexuality. Youth need information about sexual reproduction—the process whereby two different individuals each contribute half of the genetic material to their child. The child is, therefore, not identical to either parent. [Asexual reproduction is a process whereby simple one-celled organisms reproduce by splitting, creating two separate one-celled organisms identical to the original [female] organism before it split.] Too many programs focus exclusively on sexual reproduction when providing sexuality education and ignore all the other aspects of human sexuality.

Circle #5—Sexualization

Sexualization is that aspect of sexuality in which people behave sexually to influence, manipulate, or control other people. Often called the "shadowy" side of human sexuality, sexualization spans behaviors that range from the relatively harmless to the sadistically violent, cruel, and criminal. These sexual behaviors include flirting, seduction, withholding sex from an intimate partner to punish her/him or to get something, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and rape. Teens need to know that no one has the right to exploit them sexually and that they do not have the right to exploit anyone else sexually.

- Flirting—Is a relatively harmless sexualization behavior. Nevertheless, upon occasion it is an attempt to manipulate someone else, and it can cause the person manipulated to feel hurt, humiliation, and shame.
- Seduction—Is the act of enticing someone to engage in sexual activity. The act of seduction implies manipulation that at times may prove harmful for the one who is seduced.
- Sexual harassment—Is an illegal behavior. Sexual harassment means harassing someone else because of her/his gender. It could mean making personal, embarrassing remarks about someone's appearance, especially characteristics associated with sexual maturity, such as the size of a woman's breasts or of a man's testicles and penis. It could mean unwanted touching, such as hugging a subordinate or patting someone's bottom. It could mean demands by a teacher, supervisor, or other person in authority for sexual intercourse in exchange for grades, promotion, hiring, raises, etc. All these behaviors are manipulative. The laws of the United States provide protection against sexual harassment. Youth should know that they have the right to file a complaint with appropriate authorities if they are sexually harassed and that others may complain of their behavior if they sexually harass someone else.
- Rape—Means coercing or forcing someone else to have genital contact with another. Sexual assault can include forced petting as well as forced sexual intercourse. Force, in the case of rape, can include use of overpowering strength, threats, and/or implied threats that arouse fear in the person raped. Youth need to know that rape is always illegal and always cruel. Youth should know that they are legally entitled to the protection of the criminal justice system if they are the victims of rape and that they may be prosecuted if they force anyone else to have genital contact with them for any reason. Refusing to accept *no* and forcing the other person to have sexual intercourse always means rape.
- Incest—Means forcing sexual contact on any minor who is related to the perpetrator by birth or marriage. Incest is always illegal and is extremely cruel because it betrays the trust that children and youth give to their families. Moreover, because the older person knows that incest is illegal and tries to hide the crime, he/she often blames the child/youth. The triple burden of forced sexual contact, betrayed trust, and self-blame makes incest particularly damaging to survivors of incest.

Adapted from *Life Planning Education*, a comprehensive sex education curriculum. Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth, 2007.

[Sexual Development through the Life Cycle](#)



A Lesson Plan from *Life Planning Education: A Youth Development Program*

Leader's Resource for the [Circles of Sexuality](#) Lesson Plan

Many people cannot imagine that everyone—babies, children, teens, adults, and the elderly—are sexual beings. Some believe that sexual activity is reserved for early and middle adulthood. Teens often feel that adults are too old for sexual intercourse. Sexuality, though, is much more than sexual intercourse and humans are sexual beings throughout life.

Sexuality in infants and toddlers—Children are sexual even before birth. Males can have erections while still in the uterus, and some boys are born with an erection. Infants touch and rub their genitals because it provides pleasure. Little boys and girls can experience orgasm from masturbation although boys will not ejaculate until puberty. By about age two, children know their own gender. They are aware of differences in the genitals of males and females and in how males and females urinate.

Sexuality in children ages three to seven—Preschool children are interested in everything about their world, including sexuality. They may practice urinating in different positions. They are highly affectionate and enjoy hugging other children and adults. They begin to be more social and may imitate adult social and sexual behaviors, such as holding hands and kissing. Many young children play "doctor" during this stage, looking at other children's genitals and showing theirs. This is normal curiosity. By age five or six, most children become more modest and private about dressing and bathing.

Children of this age are aware of marriage and understand *living together*, based on their family experience. They may role-play about being married or having a partner while they "play house." Most young children talk about marrying and/or living with a person they love when they get older. School-age children may play sexual games with friends of their same sex, touching each other's genitals and/or masturbating together. Most sex play at this age happens because of curiosity.

Sexuality in preadolescent youth ages eight to 12—Puberty, the time when the body matures, begins between the ages of nine and 12 for most children. Girls begin to grow breast buds and public hair as early as nine or 10. Boys' development of penis and testicles usually begins between 10 and 11. Children become more self-conscious about their bodies at this age and often feel uncomfortable undressing in front of others, even a same-sex parent.

Masturbation increases during these years. Preadolescent boys and girls do not usually have much sexual experience, but they often have many questions. They usually have heard about sexual intercourse, petting, oral sex, and anal sex, homosexuality, rape and incest, and they want to know more about all these things. The idea of actually having sexual intercourse, however, is unpleasant to most preadolescent boys and girls.

Same-gender sexual behavior is common at this age. Boys and girls tend to play with friends of the same gender and are likely to explore sexuality with them. Masturbating with one's same-gender friends and looking at or caressing each other's genitals is common among preadolescent boys and girls. Such same-gender sexual behavior is unrelated to a child's sexual orientation.

Some group dating occurs at this age. Preadolescents may attend parties that have guests of both genders, and they may dance and play kissing games. By age 12 or 13, some young adolescents may pair off and begin dating and/or "making out."

Sexuality in adolescent youth (ages 13 to 19)—Once youth have reached puberty and beyond, they experience increased interest in romantic and sexual relationships and in genital sex behaviors. As youth mature, they experience strong emotional attachments to romantic partners and find it natural to express their feelings within sexual relationships. There is no way to predict how a particular teenager will act sexually. Overall, most adolescents explore relationships with one another, fall in and out of love, and participate in sexual intercourse before the age of 20.

Adult sexuality—Adult sexual behaviors are extremely varied and, in most cases, remain part of an adult's life until death. At around age 50, women experience menopause, which affects their sexuality in that their ovaries no longer release eggs and their bodies no longer produce estrogen. They may experience several physical changes. Vaginal walls become thinner and vaginal intercourse may be painful as there is less vaginal lubrication and the entrance to the vagina becomes smaller. Many women use estrogen replacement therapy to relieve physical and emotional side effects of menopause. Use of vaginal lubricants can also make vaginal intercourse easier. Most women are able to have pleasurable sexual intercourse and to experience orgasm for their entire lives.

Adult men also experience some changes in their sexuality, but not at such a predictable time as with menopause in women. Men's testicles slow testosterone production after age 25 or so. Erections may occur more slowly once testosterone production slows. Men also become less able to have another erection after an orgasm and may take up to 24 hours to achieve and sustain another erection. The amount of semen released during ejaculation also decreases, but men are capable of fathering a baby even when they are in their 80's and 90's. Some older men develop an enlarged or cancerous prostate gland. If the doctors deem it necessary to remove the prostate gland, a man's ability to have an erection or an orgasm is normally unaffected. Recently, There are medications to help older men achieve and maintain erections.

Although adult men and women go through some sexual changes as they age, they do not lose their desire or their ability for sexual expression. Even among the very old, the need for touch and intimacy remains, although the desire and ability to have sexual intercourse may lessen.

Adapted from *Life Planning Education*, a comprehensive sex education curriculum. Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth, 2007.

Circles of Sexuality

SENSUALITY

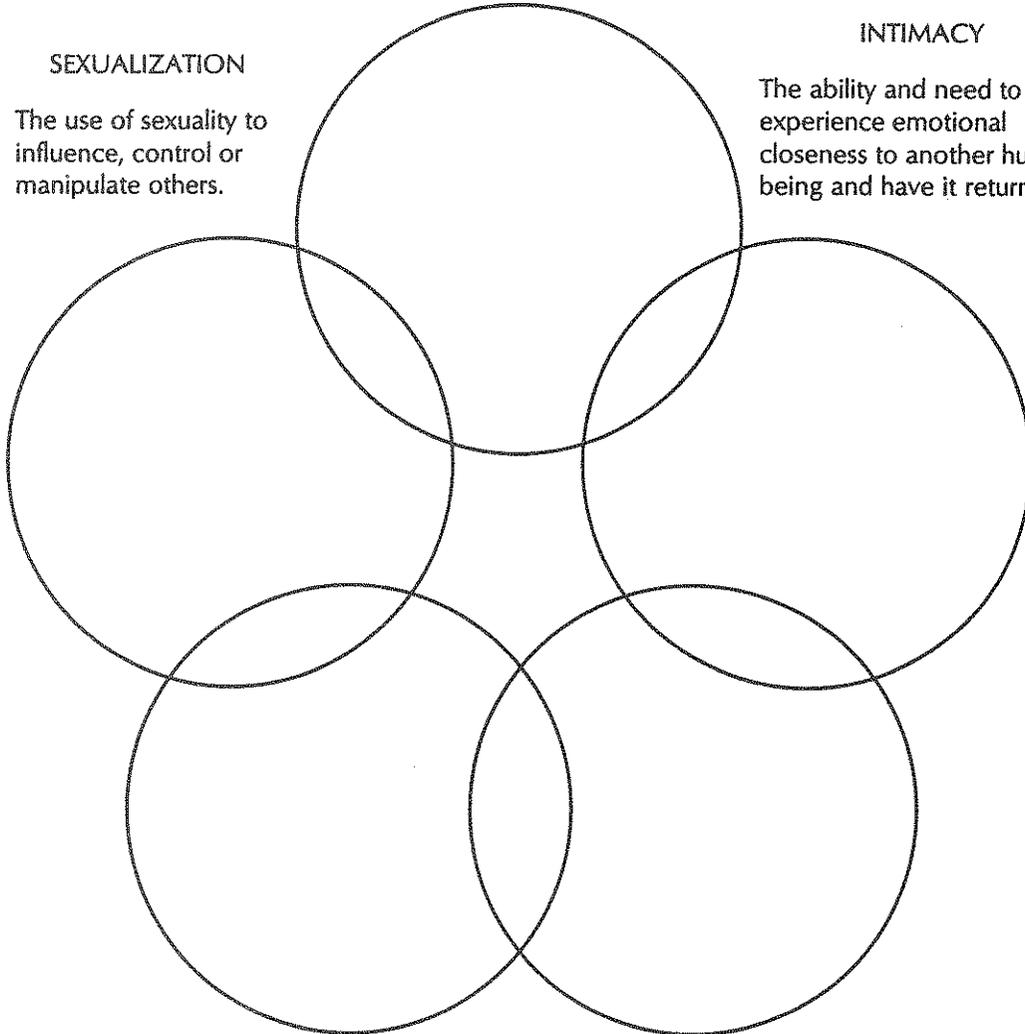
Awareness, acceptance of and comfort with one's own body; physiological and psychological enjoyment of one's own body and the bodies of others

INTIMACY

The ability and need to experience emotional closeness to another human being and have it returned.

SEXUALIZATION

The use of sexuality to influence, control or manipulate others.



SEXUAL HEALTH AND REPRODUCTION

Attitudes and behaviors related to producing children, care and maintenance of the sex and reproductive organs, and health consequences of sexual behavior.

SEXUAL IDENTITY

The development of a sense of who one is sexually, including a sense of maleness and femaleness.