

# Values Activity

## Goals:

- To discuss what values are and where they come from.
- To demonstrate how values can differ between individuals and can change over time.
- To examine how values influence our decisions and affect our perceptions when it come to sexuality.
- To emphasize that our values are individual and unique and that it is not acceptable to harm others because of opposing values nor is it okay to impose our values on others.

## Have Ready:

- “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Neutral” signs posted around the room.
- “Values” statements.

## Instructions:

- Ask youth, **“What is a value?”** A value is what is right or wrong for you, or what you believe in.
- Explain that you will read a series of statements. After each statement, the youth should move under the sign (“Agree”, “Disagree”, or “Neutral”) they feel most accurately reflects their feelings about that statement. Explain that “Neutral” includes not being sure what their feelings are, if they don’t understand a statement, if they have never thought about their position on that particular statement, and/or if they do not want the rest of the group to know their position.
- **Remind participants that this is a silent activity. This is important in maintaining a safe space where people feel comfortable participating.** Aim for no talking, pointing or laughing during the activity. Let youth know they will have a chance to share after the activity.
- Explain that this is an individual activity; it’s not about what the adults, or others think, but about what individual youth think. Everyone should start the activity at “Neutral.”

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## Values Statements

- In brackets after each statement are how Teen Talk would answer the statements based on our operating principles. (See the Introductory chapter of the Teen Talk Service Provider Manual for Teen Talk’s Operating Principles.)
  - After each of the following statements are suggested talking points; use them for debriefing the exercise.
1. *I believe that the media (TV, advertising, commercials, music, movies, internet etc.) accurately shows real life. (disagree)*
  2. *I believe that parents/caregivers should talk to their children about sex. (agree)*
  3. *I believe only girls should be responsible for birth control. (disagree)*
  4. *I believe teens can make good parents. (agree)*
  5. *I believe that masturbation (touching yourself for sexual pleasure) is okay. (agree)*
  6. *I believe that the person who is pregnant should have the option to have an abortion. (agree)*
  7. *I believe that sex should be saved for marriage/someone you love. (neutral)*
  8. *I believe that it is okay for gay/lesbian/bisexual people to marry. (agree)*
  9. *I believe that girls/women should be able to wear whatever clothes they want without being harassed or sexually assaulted. (agree)*
  10. *I believe that going out/dating someone of a different culture or ethnic background is okay. (agree)*
  11. *I believe that people with disabilities are not interested in dating or sexual relationships. (disagree)*
  12. *I believe a person can decide for themselves when they are ready to have sex. (agree)*

## Debrief:

- Ask youth, **“What did you think of the exercise?” “Have you thought about these issues before?” “Did you learn anything new about your classmates/friends?”**

- **“Where do our values come from?”** Make a list of their responses, common ones include: family, religion/spirituality, culture, self, media, friends, peers, school, past experiences, etc. We get different messages from different sources and this can be confusing. Encourage youth to check-in with how they personally feel, and let them know they get to decide what fits best for them.
- It is important to think about our values because they influence the decisions we make, what we do, and how we take care of ourselves.
- Values can change. A part of maturing means finding your own values. This is often a process of mixing and matching the values of your family, culture, or religion with the values of your friends, the media or your peer group with your own. Experiences can also impact values. Society’s values change over time. Fifty years ago it was less common for people of different ethnic backgrounds to date or get married. This is similar with openly same sex couples. Societies and personal values are shifting.
- Remind the youth that we are all allowed to have different ideas about what is right or wrong for us. Your values are entirely your business and you do not have to share them with others, especially if you feel unsafe.
- Keep in mind that no matter what our values are, no one ever has the right to insult, harass, or physically hurt someone else because of what they believe. Making others feel unsafe is called harassment, and there are laws against it to protect all of us.

## **Suggested Talking Points for Value Statements:**

Not all value statement will need debriefing, but based on how the youth respond, you may want to address specific statements (i.e. homophobic or sexist values can be used as “teachable moments”). The following are suggested talking points for debriefing value statements after the activity.

*I believe that the media (TV, advertising, commercials, music, movies, internet etc.) accurately shows real life. (disagree)*

Although there are some shows, movies, and video games that do a good job of portraying real people and real life, a lot of media shows

unrealistic bodies and situations and doesn't show all the different kinds of people or lives we see in real life (i.e. people of all body sizes, abilities, ages, genders, orientations, cultures, skin colours, etc.). We can all be critical of what we see in the media, and challenge what is presented to us as "normal".

*I believe that parents/caregivers should talk to their children about sex. (agree)*

Parents and guardians are an important and primary source of guidance for young people concerning sexual behavior and values. While many youth look to parents/caregivers as a valuable source of sexuality information, it is important to note that parents/caregivers may not have all of the answers, and may not be open to discussing sexual health. Having other sources such as school can also be helpful.

*I believe only girls should be responsible for birth control. (disagree)*

Girls can't get pregnant on their own. It takes a sperm and egg for pregnancy to happen so and both people are responsible for birth control. Both people can get involved in birth control if they don't want to get pregnant. A guy partner can share the responsibility by getting and wearing condoms, sharing birth control costs, and going to the nursing station/health centre with a partner.

*I believe teens can make good parents. (agree)*

Sometimes teen parents may feel judged for their decision to parent. Ask youth "**What do babies/children need?**" Things like love, attention, food and shelter. "**Can youth provide these things?**" Yes, especially when they have support and help from community. Teen parents may need extra resources to help them be great parents, but all parents do better when they have help. If someone is not prepared to have a child or to deal with an unplanned pregnancy, stress the importance of abstinence, access to birth control (such as condoms and/or hormonal birth control) and the availability to all three pregnancy options.

*I believe that masturbation (touching yourself for sexual pleasure) is okay. (agree)*

Some people masturbate and other people don't, either way a sex positive approach believes that we can all be familiar and comfortable with our bodies and that masturbation can be a part of a healthy sexuality (see the Introductory chapter of the Teen Talk Service Provider Manual for Teen Talk's Operating Principles). Remember some youth may think masturbation is not okay. Many of us have been taught/told that we should not touch ourselves in a sexual way.

*I believe that the person who is pregnant should have the option to have an abortion. (agree)*

Pro-choice means believing people should have the right to decide what happens with a pregnancy in their body. Agreeing that girls and women should have this option (being pro-choice) does not mean being "pro-abortion." Rather, it acknowledges the rights that everyone has over their body.

*I believe that sex should be saved for marriage/someone you love. (neutral)*

For some, sex is an intimate/special activity they would share with someone special to them. Explain this is normal and affirm that following one's values is important. However, for some sex before marriage/sex with different partners is also normal. Values differ among everyone - neither are "wrong or right", just different.

Note: we stand under neutral, regardless of our own personal opinions, so that we do not influence the youth on this one.

*I believe that it is okay for gay/lesbian/bisexual people to marry. (agree)*

We each can decide who we want to marry. Everyone is entitled to their own values. We may have different values, but we can and should treat everyone with respect. In Canada everyone legally has had the right to marry regardless of their sexual orientation since 2005.

*I believe that girls/women should be able to wear whatever clothes they want without being harassed or sexually assaulted. (agree)*

Some believe that by showing skin/flirting/“being a tease” makes assault ok. Teach youth that we all deserve respect, regardless of our clothing choices. Explain that sexual assault an act of violence that involves power and control.

FYI: Blue jeans are the most common recovered article of clothing after sexual assault which debunks the myth that someone can “dress too sexy.”

When talking about sexual assault reinforce key messages: If anyone is sexually assaulted, it is never their fault. There’s a lot of victim blaming when it comes to sexual assault and youth need to hear they are not to blame if they have been assaulted and provide a resource.

*I believe that going out/dating someone of a different culture or ethnic background is okay. (agree)*

Some youth may feel pressure to date within their culture for religious/spiritual reasons or social acceptance. However, most young Canadians believe in interracial marriage. We can relate this to same sex couples, and use this to show how opinions/values have changed over time/throughout history.

*I believe that people with disabilities are not interested in dating or sexual relationships. (disagree)*

Anyone, regardless of their abilities can be interested in dating or sexual relationships.

*I believe a person can decide for themselves when they are ready to have sex. (agree)*

Every person knows themselves best and can choose when and if the time is “right” for them. **“What does “ready” for sex mean?”** Using the Head, Heart, Body model<sup>1</sup>, being ready involves checking in with thoughts, feelings and the physical body’s reaction. Teen Talk would add being able to communicate with a partner about birth control and STI prevention, knowing how to put on a condom and talk to a partner about using them, being able to talk about testing for STI/HIV, sexual boundaries, expectations of how sex will change/not change your relationship with that person, etc.

# Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>Calgary Sexual Health Centre, [www.calgarysexualhealth.ca/2013/04/sex-without-regret-checking-in-with-head-heart-body/](http://www.calgarysexualhealth.ca/2013/04/sex-without-regret-checking-in-with-head-heart-body/), accessed, August 2016.