

STAYING COOL UNDER (PEER) PRESSURE: Using Digital Education Tools to Model Assertive Communication Skills

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. List one characteristic of passive communication, one of aggressive communication, and one of assertive communication.
2. Demonstrate at least one way to say “no” to peer pressure to engage in sex.
3. Identify at least one digital education tool to use on a phone or computer to get more information about handling peer pressure effectively.

Audience

Middle school-aged youth (ages 12-14)

Time

45 minutes

Rationale

You may be looking for new and compelling ways to teach communication and refusal skills. Having the skills to deal with risky situations is one of the key elements of both effective sex education¹ and drug and alcohol education programs. This lesson uses one of Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s digital tools, “The Kickback,” which shows teens what passive, aggressive, and assertive communication styles look like when young people are being pressured to drink, use drugs, or go upstairs alone with someone at a party. “The Kickback” allows teens to view role-playing videos of effective responses for avoiding risky situations and then choose how they would handle similar real-life challenges. This lesson uses a digital tool alongside other interactive activities, including brainstorming and role-play.

Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s digital education tools are based on science about what works to help young people make good choices and engage in healthy behavior.^{1,2} They were developed with the guidance of a prestigious national advisory board that included experts in adolescent development, effective health interventions, public health, and online games and digital entertainment; and were rigorously tested and made available for beta-testing online. The tools were carefully designed to ensure that they would be appealing to and relevant for youth, particularly African-American and Latino youth who experience higher rates of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy.

¹ Kirby, Douglas (2007). *Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

² Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2008). A conceptual framework for the analysis of risk and problem behaviors: The case of adolescent sexual behavior. *Social Work Research*, 32(1), 29-45.

Materials

- Flip chart paper or board, markers, tape
- Three pieces of flip chart paper, each with one of the terms and definitions below written on it:
 - PASSIVE COMMUNICATION:**
Not expressing what you want, not saying your feelings, or saying nothing.
 - AGGRESSIVE COMMUNICATION:**
Asking for what you want or saying how you feel in a threatening, sarcastic, or mean way.
 - ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION:**
Asking for what you want or saying how you feel in an honest and respectful way.
- A computer with Internet access, projector, and speakers to use “The Kickback” tool:
<http://kickbackapp.org>
 - Note: The educator should become familiar with “The Kickback” tool by trying it out on a computer as well as a mobile phone. During this lesson, participants are going to be able to choose responses and see a tailored video based on their responses. When you review the tool beforehand, be sure to go through and choose different responses so you can see the different responses participants may see.*
- Copies of **Educator Resource - Speaking Up Role-Play: Scenarios** (1 card for every 2 participants)
- Copies of **Educator Resource - Speaking Up Role-Play: Advanced Scenarios** (1 card for every 2 participants)
- Copies of **Educator Resource - Palm Cards: Middle School Tools** (1 card per participant)
- Optional: Extra pens or pencils for participants to fill out handouts
- Optional: Brochures about healthy relationships and palm cards with health center information

Preparation

In advance of the lesson:

- Become familiar with “The Kickback” tool (<http://kickbackapp.org>) by trying it out on a computer as well as a mobile phone.
- Prepare your flip chart papers.
- Make copies of the Educator Resources.
- Cue up “The Kickback” digital tool (<http://kickbackapp.org>) at the appropriate spot (click through until you reach the house with three videos at <https://www.kickbackapp.org/scenario-select.php>) on your computer and projector.

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Tell the group that today's lesson is about responding to peer pressure and knowing how to communicate what you want in difficult situations.

Discussion Questions

- a. What do we mean by “peer pressure”?
(Peer pressure is when friends or classmates try to get you to do (or not do) certain things. Peer pressure can be about negative or positive things, and all people experience peer pressure in their lives. Even adults face peer pressure. The choice of whether or not to give in to the pressure is up to you.)
 - b. Can you name some things you might be pressured to do while you are a teen?
(Answers may include: sex, drugs, alcohol, bullying, skipping class, etc.)
 - c. Can peer pressure ever be a good thing?
(Explain that pressure from peers is sometimes imposed to make healthy decisions, like the negative looks you might get from friends when not wearing a seatbelt or texting while driving; or several people speaking up when racist or homophobic language is used.)
 - d. What are some possible negative consequences of peer pressure?
(Answers may include: getting into trouble, getting hurt, upsetting parents, going against your own values, getting pregnant, getting an STI, hurting someone, getting bad grades, etc.)
2. Explain that part of staying on track with your goals and getting what you want out of life is saying “no” to things like alcohol or sex before you’re older or ready. While saying “no” may *sound* easy, it can actually feel a lot more difficult in the moment — especially when trying to say “no” to a friend or someone you are into because you don’t want to hurt their feelings or feel left out. That is why we are going to talk about how to say “no” in a way that is both respectful of others and confident in yourself.

Communication Styles: Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive (15-20 minutes)

3. Review the flip chart paper with the explanations of passive, assertive, and aggressive communication. Explain that there are three types of communication: Passive, Assertive, and Aggressive.
4. For each type of communication, have someone read the definition aloud and then ask the following questions:

Discussion Questions:

- a. For this type of communication, what would your voice sound like?

- b. For this type of communication, what type of body language would you use?
5. Explain that everyone is going to look at a digital tool or “app” where we will watch a set of videos that will show us what these types of communication look like in action. This app is called “The Kickback” and you can use it on a computer or look at it using your phone. Write the URL (<http://kickbackapp.org>) on the board/flip chart.
 6. Ask the participants if they know what a “kickback” is? *A kickback is a party.* Explain that the app allows us to look at different situations teens may face at a party by exploring different rooms.
Note: This lesson uses a computer to look at “The Kickback” digital tool with the full group to facilitate a large group discussion. If cell phone use is allowed in your setting and participants work better in small groups, you can adapt this activity by allowing the participants to look at the app on their phones individually (they’ll need headphones/earphones) or in small groups. You could also have them use the tool in a computer lab.
 7. As directed in the preparation section, pull up the videos on the app by clicking through until you reach the house with three videos (you will see the URL: <https://www.kickbackapp.org/scenario-select.php>).
Note: The videos may appear small on a computer screen. You can zoom in by clicking the “Ctrl” and the “+” (plus/equal) buttons on a PC or the “Command” and the “+” (plus/equal) buttons. Also make sure to pull up the videos in full screen mode by clicking the “[]” symbol on the bottom right of the video.
 8. Ask the group to vote on which room to go in first.
 9. Go through the following procedure for all three rooms:
 - i. Watch the video
 - ii. After the video, ask the following questions:
Discussion Questions:
 - a. What would go through your mind if you got into this situation at a party?
 - b. What do you think of how the person said “no”?
 - c. What made the answer effective?
 - iii. After the group has discussed what worked, click on “next” and mention any of the bullet points on the site that weren’t mentioned.
 - iv. When the screen says “your turn,” ask for a volunteer to choose a response from the multiple choice options.

If the choice is *assertive*, you will see the video and a validating response. If the choice is *not assertive*, you will get an explanation why it doesn't work and then click on "watch an assertive response."

Note: If the class seems to always choose the assertive response, you may want to ask them to identify a passive or aggressive response (based on the definitions) so the class can see what this may look like and the kind of response they are likely to get.

- v. After you've seen the assertive response, allow the class to vote on pressing "I'm unsure" or "I'm confident."

10. After you finish walking through the videos, ask the following process questions:

Discussion Questions:

- a. Are these situations things that you have experienced or think you will experience? Why or why not?
- b. When you think about facing these kinds of situations, how do you feel?
- c. What are the main things you need to keep in mind to say "no" in a way that you are less likely to get additional pressure?
- d. In addition to what you say, how else do people communicate?
(Communication also includes body language, eye contact, and tone of voice.)
- e. Hearing "no" is also a critical skill. You need to pay careful attention to make sure that if someone is uncomfortable with an action, you don't put pressure on them. What are some signs that someone may be telling you "no" even though they aren't saying it?
(Lack of eye contact, nervous or scared tone of voice, nervous body language like crossing their arms or turning away from you)
- f. What do you need to do if you get any sense that someone doesn't want to do something you ask them to do?
- g. What are the consequences if you don't hear the other person's decision to communicate "no" to you?
(You could hurt their feelings, get in trouble with the law, etc.)
- h. How confident do you feel about being able to say "no" to pressure? To hear "no"?
- i. When might a person decide to say "yes"?

Practicing How to Say “No” (15-20 minutes)

11. Explain that you are now going to break into pairs to practice speaking up for your decisions. Divide the group into pairs. Explain that in these scenarios, one person wants something that the other does not. In each pair, **Person 1** will open up the conversation, and **Person 2** will practice saying “no.” Each person will have a chance to speak as Person 1 and Person 2.
12. Give each pair a card from the **Educator Resource: Speaking Up Role-Play: Scenarios** and ask the pairs to work together for 1 minute to fill in the blanks on the cards to create a realistic conversation.
13. Tell the pairs to act out the conversation for 1 minute.
14. After 1 minute, they will switch roles.
15. Ask for one or two volunteers to role-play in front of the large group and ask the following process questions after each role-play.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What worked well?
 - b. What are some ways that the second person could say “no” more effectively?
 - c. Did the first person hear “no”?
 - d. How could the first person improve their response to the “no”?
16. For the second step, participants will practice saying “no” to more challenging situations. Give each pair a card **Educator Resource: Speaking Up Role-Play: Advanced Scenarios**. One person (Person 2) in each pair will practice saying “no” to the other person (Person 1). After 2 minutes, they will switch roles.
 17. Ask for one or two volunteers to role-play in front of the large group and ask the following process questions after each role-play.

Discussion Questions

- a. What worked well?
- b. What are some ways that the second person could say “no” more effectively?
- c. Did the first person hear “no”?
- d. How could the first person improve their response to the “no”?

18. Process the role-plays using the following discussion questions:

Discussion Questions

- a. What happened during the role plays?
- b. How did it feel to practice saying “no”?
- c. How did it feel to hear “no”?
- d. What could happen if you don’t hear “no” from someone?
(Answers may include: you might hurt someone you care about; you might get in trouble with parents, school, or even the law.)
- e. Under what circumstances might you decide to say “yes” to any of these situations?
- f. What are the benefits of assertive communication?
(Answers may include: you get what you want; you can still be friends with someone; you won’t be mean; you won’t sound too weak or indecisive; you can make healthy choices; etc.)
- g. What could make it difficult to use assertive communication in certain situations?
What could you do to make it easier?
- h. What will you do differently now that you’ve seen the videos in “The Kickback” and practiced the role-plays?
- i. How confident do you feel about using assertive communication in your life?

Summary and Conclusion (2 minutes)

19. Thank the participants for their efforts and emphasize the following key messages:

- Part of staying on track with your goals and getting what you want out of life is saying “no” to things like alcohol or sex before you’re older or ready.
- Responding to peer pressure and knowing how to say “no” are skills that you will need for lots of situations throughout your lifetime. It may take some practice at first, but you will feel yourself becoming more and more confident as you practice.
- Hearing “no” is also a critical skill. You need to pay careful attention to make sure that if someone is uncomfortable with an action, you don’t put pressure on them, as that can lead to hurting someone and/or getting in trouble with parents, school or even the law, depending on the situation.

20. Hand out the palm cards from the **Educator Resource - Palm Cards: Middle School Tools** and tell participants that there are some apps that can help them think about other situations in their lives. Refer the participants to the palm cards, and write the address **plannedparenthood.org/apps** on the board/flip chart.
21. Optional: You can also hand out other resources, such as brochures about healthy relationships or palm cards with information about health centers to access testing, condoms, birth control, and other services.

Speaking Up Role-Play: Scenarios

Copy and cut this page into cards. Each pair will share one card. You may need to make multiple copies if you are working with a larger group. It's okay for multiple groups to get the same card.

(1) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "Why don't you give me your number? I'll call you."

Person 2: *You don't know this person well. You aren't sure it's safe. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:*

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

(2) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "Why don't you sleep over my house tonight?"

Person 2: *Your friend asks you to spend the night, but you want to stay home. You have to get up early for basketball practice. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:*

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

(3) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "Can I borrow your homework? I didn't get to do mine last night."

Person 2: *Your friend wants to "borrow" your homework. You don't want to get in trouble for cheating. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:*

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

(4) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "Let's skip basketball practice today. I'm mad at Coach."

Person 2: *Your friend wants you to skip basketball practice, but you don't want to and it's important to you to go. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:*

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Speaking Up Role-Play: Advanced Scenarios

Copy and cut this page into cards. Each pair will share one card. You may need to make multiple copies if you are working with a larger group. It's OK for multiple groups to get the same card.

(5) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "This beer doesn't taste too bad. Try it!"

Person 2: *Your friend asks you to try a sip of beer. You don't want to drink alcohol. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:*

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

(6) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "Your parents aren't home. Can I come over?"

Person 2: *Your boyfriend or girlfriend asks to come over. Your parents aren't home and it's against your family's rules to invite guests over without permission. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:* _____

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

(7) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "Here you go." (passes marijuana (a joint) to Person 2.

Person 2: *You are at a party and someone next to you passes you marijuana (a joint). You don't want to try any drugs, How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:* _____

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

(8) Your Task: Write a Script to Show What Assertive Communication Looks Like

Person 1: "I like talking to you. Let's go upstairs and find someplace more private to talk more."

Person 2: *You are at a party and flirting with your crush. Your crush asks you to go someplace more private, but you're not ready for that and want to stay near your friends. How can you respond using **assertive** communication? Fill in here what you will say:*

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

Palm Cards: Middle School Tools

Make copies of these cards and hand them out to participants to access the tools on their own for further learning.

**Want to learn more?
Try out these apps!**

What's Your Love Personality? (for Girls):
lovepersonalityapp.org

Where Do You Stand? (for Boys):
whereyoustandapp.org

What's Your Future Plan?
yourplanapp.org

The Kickback
kickbackapp.org

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