

"Should We Talk Before We Touch?": A Sexual Assault Prevention Workshop for Men & Women

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Workshop Theme: Sexual Communication and Consent

Overview of Workshop:

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Detailed Outline:

I. Introduction

The purpose of this workshop is to talk about sexual communication and consent in order to decrease the risk of some types of sexual assault. Because we will be talking openly about these issues today and will be encouraging people to talk more openly before and during sexual situations, we've called this workshop, 'Should we talk before we touch?'. "

II. Reflecting on Experience

A. Dyadic Sharing

Communicating about feelings of attraction and romantic desires is often very difficult. We want you to reflect on your own experience in this area as we begin this workshop. Was there ever a time when you were interested in someone or they were interested in you and there was a miscommunication or misunderstanding. Please think about a situation like this that may have occurred in your past and share it with a partner.

B. Group Brainstorming

Now that everyone has had a chance to reflect, let's see what types of themes emerged. Would anyone like to share their experience and we can talk about why these misunderstandings occur.

III. Assimilating and Conceptualizing

A. Legal Definition

Any unwanted, forced, coerced, or tricked sexual activity without the other person's consent.

Key Concept: An absence of consent

B. Sexual Assault consists on a Continuum

There are a range of illegal and inappropriate sexual activities that include:

- verbal harassment
- exposure
- touching
- penetration

There is also a range of interactions that result in sexual assault:

- physical force
- verbal coercion
- subtle pressure
- lack of communication

Because the majority of sexual assaults occur between people who know one another and because so many of these occur on dates, we will be focusing on clear communication as a way to prevent sexual assault. However, there are other situations which call for other types of prevention. Unfortunately, we don't have time to discuss all of these today. If you want more information about self-defense classes, please contact the Women's Center.

IV. Experimenting and Practicing - Sexual Communication Scenario

Distribute Sexual Communication Worksheet

A. Scenario

In order for us to think about these issues in a more personal way, we'd like to present a scenario about two college students on a date. As we present the scene, we'd like you to follow along on a worksheet and clarify your opinions. Although most sexual assaults involve men assaulting women, we want to talk about the idea of sexual communication in a more general way. Therefore, we have chosen the names, "Pat" and "Chris" and do not specify their genders. This is because the same issues of sexual communication are important in same-sex relationships and because in some heterosexual relationships, men are more likely to initiate and, in others, women take the lead.

Ask participants to follow along on the worksheet as you read the introduction.

Scene A. The invitation

Pat and Chris are two UH students who have been in a class with one another all semester. Gradually they have begun to talk more and more after class and each are pretty sure that the other likes them. Pat finally gets up enough nerve to ask Chris out for dinner.

- Read Question 1
- Survey responses - Ask participants to raise their hand to indicate their response if they feel comfortable doing so.

Scene B. Attractive Dress

Chris and Pat are both excited about their date and spend extra time getting ready. They both dress in a way that shows they want to look attractive to one another. When they meet for dinner they exchange mutual compliments on how good they look.

- Read Question 2
- Survey Responses

Scene C. Paying for the Date

Chris and Pat enjoy their dinner. They seem to have a lot in common and there are only a few times when the conversation lags. There is lots of eye contact and smiling so both are pretty sure they like each other. When the check comes, Pat picks it up. Chris offers to pay half, but Pat insists on paying for dinner because Pat asked Chris out.

- Read Question 3
- Survey Responses

Scene D. Going Back to Someone's Apartment

After dinner both Pat and Chris seem to want to spend more time together. They talk for a few minutes about what to do next. Chris asks if Pat wants to go to a bar but Pat suggests that it would be hard to talk in a noisy place. Pat suggests that they could go back to Pat's apartment and watch a video. Chris says that that sounds like a nice idea.

- Read Questions 4 and 5
- Survey Responses

Scene E. Kissing and Making Out

Back at Pat's place, they watch a video and talk and laugh together. After a while, they start to kiss and make out.

- Read Questions 6 and 7
- Survey Responses

Scene F. Touching and Undressing

Things start to get a little hot and heavy and Pat and Chris gradually start touching each other in more intimate places. They both seem to be enjoying themselves. Eventually, they start to unbutton one another's clothes.

- Read Questions 8 and 9
- Survey Responses

Scene G. Consent

- Read Question 10
- Survey Responses

B. Structured Discussion

Particularly for the last few questions, it is important to move toward an open discussion by asking participants to explain their responses. Make sure that participation is voluntary.

Summarize the responses, pointing out that there is disagreement about how people should communicate and whether consent should be verbal.

1. Nonverbal and Verbal Communication

In most cases, there will be at least some disagreement about whether communication and consent should always be verbal (Q. 10). Make this observation and make a transition to page 2 of the worksheet.

It sounds like there is some disagreement over whether communication and consent should be verbal or nonverbal. Let's think about the advantages and disadvantages of each. If you turn your worksheet over, there's a place for you to write some of your thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of nonverbal and verbal communication. Please take a minute or two to jot down some ideas and then we'll talk about your thoughts.

Give participants time to fill out section A and B on page 2 of the worksheet. Have participants share their responses. Write these on the board to highlight themes.

You may want to ensure that the disadvantages of verbal communication include "Fear of Rejection" and "Embarrassment."

You may want to make sure that the disadvantages of nonverbal communication include sexual assault, hurt feelings, STDs, and unwanted pregnancy.

Summarize by pointing out that although it may be difficult or awkward to communicate verbally that the negative consequences of relying on nonverbal communication are much more severe than those of using verbal communication.

"As you can see, there are disadvantages to both verbal and nonverbal communication. Although we're not going to tell you what to do (or follow you around with a bucket of cold water), we want you to be aware of the risks of not communicating verbally...

For these reasons, we think verbal communication is very important and worth the risk of embarrassment or awkwardness."

1.5. Other Factors (optional section based on time availability)

If you have time, you may want to address complicating factors like alcohol or drug use or the longevity of a relationship and discuss how these issues impact the ability or need for verbal communication.

- **Alcohol**
Would any of this be different if Pat and Chris had each consumed three drinks at dinner?
What if they had consumed six drinks?
- **Longevity of Relationship**
Would anything be different if this was their third date rather than the first?
What if they had been dating for several months?
- **Safer Sex / Contraception**
When and how should couples talk about safer sex?
When and how should heterosexual couples talk about contraception?

2. What Do You Say?

Since it's hard to talk about sexual desires, expectations, and limits, let's think of some things that people can say. On the last part of your worksheet, there's a place to think about things that people can say if they are interested in more intimacy or if they know they don't want to go any further.

Read the last two questions (Section C) and ask participants to write their answers.

Ask for volunteer participants to share their responses.

You may want to share some examples like:

- Does this feel okay?
- Do you want to keep going?

- I think I have some condoms; should I go get them?

Examples for not being ready might include:

- I really like you, but I'm not ready to go any further
- Hey, let's slow down
- I don't think I'm ready for this yet.

3. Scenario Summary

As you can probably tell, we think verbal communication and verbal consent is preferable. Obviously, the choice is yours and if you choose to rely only on nonverbal communication, we want you to be aware of the risks. If you do choose to try to use more verbal communication, we hope that some of the things we've discussed today have helped you think about the things you might say in these situations.

V. Planning for Application

A. Prevention Strategies

Distribute *Sexual Assault Prevention Strategies* handout

Have participants take turns reading the strategies

If time allows you may want to encourage some group discussion of these strategies before moving to the action plan

B. Personal Action Plan

Please share with a partner, which of these strategies you would like to apply in your own life. If none of them seem applicable to your situation, you may want to think of another way to decrease the incidence of sexual assault in our community.

VI. Conclusion

We'd like to end the workshop with a punchline but I would like for us as a group to come up with that conclusion. If you were to tell a friend what this workshop was about in one sentence, what would you say?

Brainstorm possible "punchlines" with the group.

The group may come up with something like:

- It's better to talk before you touch.

- It's okay to say 'no'.
- Sex is serious -- having sex one time can change your whole life.
- Communication is your best defense.
- Intimacy includes words, not just actions.