

Let's talk about it and be on the safer side: Youth Sexual Education

Introduction

This workshop aims to provide youth with the information and tools necessary for making empowering decisions about your own sexual health, exploration of the concepts of sexuality and the role it plays and the exploration of choices regarding sexuality.

Topic 1: Body Image

Body image is your perception of your physical self and the thoughts and feelings, positive, negative or both, which result from that perception. **Body image** is how you see yourself when you look in the mirror or when you picture yourself in your mind. A healthy **body image** means you feel comfortable in your body and you feel good about the way you look. It can be hard to feel good about our bodies due to the messages from the media selling the idea that we are less than. A **negative body image** refers to when somebody thinks about their body in a **negative** way, and can develop from many different influences, including family, peer group, media and social pressures. Negative body image (or body dissatisfaction) involves feelings of shame, anxiety, and self-consciousness. One of the most common external contributors to body dissatisfaction is the media, and more recently social media. People of all ages are bombarded with images through TV, magazines, internet and advertising. These images often promote unrealistic, unobtainable and highly stylized appearance ideals which have been fabricated by stylists, art teams and digital manipulation and cannot be achieved in real life. Individuals, who feel they do not measure up in comparison to these images, can experience intense body dissatisfaction which is damaging to their psychological and physical well-being. One study found saddening evidence that “the greatest decline in body satisfaction occurred in girls under the age of 19 years, following exposure to overtly thin media images.” Social media worsens these expectations. with research findings that “among 13–15-year old girls, body image concerns increased with time spent on the Internet and Facebook usage [1].

Your body, Your rules.

It is important to find ways of taking care of one's self. You should value your body. It is a healthy practice. We all deserve the right to feel healthy and beautiful for who we truly are, and work towards resisting, or ignoring any message(s) that tell a different story or convey a negative picture.

How can I accept my body?

All human bodies possess value. Therefore all human bodies deserve care. When an individual is dissatisfied with his/ her body and the appearance of his/her body it is called having a negative body image. For some people, having a negative body image may cause them to become overly obsessed about the perceived flaws in their appearance, preventing them from listening to their body when hungry or full, leading to over exercising or impacting their mental health. It is extremely important to talk with someone you trust, if you or someone you know is

struggling with their body image. This could include a teacher, school counsellor, family member or elder.

Here are some simple tips on how to feel good about yourself:

- Complimenting yourself each day. Mix it up with inner and outer qualities
- Listen to your body. Pay keen attention to what makes you feel good.
- Exercise is to feel good in a way that you enjoy. Exercise is not about losing weight, it is about moving your body in a way that feels good.
- Wearing clothes you feel good in.
- Eating a variety of healthy foods that fuel your body and mind, and that make you feel good.
- Surrounding yourself with people who support you and make you feel good about yourself.
- Do not put yourself or your body down, even when you are alone.
- Be critical of what you see or hear in the media , especially if it is making you feel bad about your body or yourself.
- Be aware that many of the bodies of the people we see in the media have been photoshopped or edited to look a certain way. Many types of bodies are left out of the media. Comparing our bodies to the ones displayed by the media is unrealistic. Finally, never compare yourself with others, you do not know their story. OOPS! An oxymoron—finally, at the end.

Remember that anyone can get pimples, no matter their skin type. There are times when we may have more pimples and that is fine.

Activity 1

Name 3 things about your body that you enjoy.

List 3 of your best personality traits.

Write down a compliment that you received that made you feel good.

Name a piece of clothing or accessory that makes you feel good.

What are eating disorders and why are they happening?

Eating disorders are an illness that takes control over someone as they struggle with disordered beliefs about their weight and shape, lack of self-esteem, and the constant societal emphasis placed on body image. Eating disorders are serious but treatable mental and physical illnesses that can affect people of all genders and ages. People with eating disorders typically become preoccupied with food and their body weight. There are three main types of eating disorders:

- Anorexia nervosa: Anorexia nervosa is diagnosed when patients weigh at least 15 percent less than the normal healthy weight expected for their height. People with anorexia nervosa do not maintain a normal weight because they refuse to eat enough, often exercise obsessively, and sometimes force themselves to vomit or use laxatives to lose weight

- Bulimia nervosa: Patients with bulimia nervosa binge eat frequently, and during these times sufferers may eat an astounding amount of food in a short time, often consuming thousands of calories that are high in sugars, carbohydrates and fat. They can eat very rapidly, sometimes gulping down food without even tasting it. After a binge, stomach pains and the fear of weight gain are common reasons that those with bulimia nervosa purge by throwing up or using a laxative. This cycle is usually repeated at least several times a week or, in serious cases, several times a day.

- Binge eating disorder: People with binge eating disorder have episodes of binge eating in which they consume very large quantities of food in a brief period and feel out of control during the binge. Unlike people with bulimia nervosa, they do not try to get rid of the food by inducing vomiting or by using other unsafe practices such as fasting or laxative abuse. The binge eating is chronic and can lead to serious health complications, particularly severe obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

Eating disorders may begin when someone has a negative body image or they may also be a way that someone is coping with their feelings. Eating disorders can have a negative impact on someone's mental wellness and physical health. It is important to understand that eating disorders are a mental illness that someone can recover from with support. If you or someone you know is living with an eating disorder, then speak with someone you trust. You can always reach out to centers such as [AMI-Québec](#).

Does taking steroids help me to build a better body image?

Definitely not. Steroids (corticosteroids) are man-made versions of chemicals known as hormones, that are made naturally in the human body. When it comes to using steroids there are risks involved. Steroids can increase muscle strength, power and endurance which is why people might use them. The longer the duration of steroid usage, the higher the chance of experiencing negative side effects. Some risks are based on an individual's sexual identity, while others can happen to all bodies.

- For people with testicles risks can include shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, development of breasts, and increased risk for prostate cancer.
- For people with ovaries risks can include growth of facial hair, changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, deepened voice.
- Some risks for all bodies include baldness, cancer, kidney problems, and extreme mood swings.

Topic 2: Gender identity

Gender identity is the personal sense of one's own gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex at birth or can differ from it. Gender expression typically reflects a person's gender identity, but this is not always the case. In our current society there are more

than two legally accepted genders.¹ Gender Assignment is the classification of an infant at birth as either male or female. It is sometimes known as sex assignment. Gender reassignment refers to individuals, who do not intend to undergo medical treatment but wish to live permanently in a different gender from their gender at birth. This is a gender assignment, and it is based on an assumption that someone's genitals match their gender. However, gender is not about someone's anatomy, it is about who they know themselves to be.

What is the difference between sex and gender?

Sex is a label — male or female — that you are assigned by a doctor at birth based on the genitals you are born with and the chromosomes you have. It is indicated on your birth certificate. Your gender identity is how you feel inside and how you express those feelings. Clothing, appearance, and behaviors can all be ways to express your gender identity. Gender expression is how you choose to express your gender identity through your name, pronouns, clothing, hair style, behaviour, voice, or body features.

What do we mean assigned at birth?

Think about one of the first things the doctor (or midwife) says when someone is born, “It’s a girl” or “It’s a boy.” This is a gender assignment, and it is based on an assumption that someone's genitals match their gender. However, as previously discussed this is not always the case and that each of us gets to decide what gender we know ourselves to be. It may not align with the genitals we are born with or be part of the gender binary (male-female). For example, someone may be born with a vagina but know themselves to be male.

What are some examples of gender identity terms?

Gender identity may be the same as the sex you were assigned at birth (cisgender) or not (transgender) which means your gender identity does not match up with the sex you were assigned at birth.

Further Gender Identity Terms:

1. *Transgender*: Someone whose gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth might identify as transgender. Sometimes trans or transgender gets used as an umbrella term for gender diverse people. However, not everyone uses it to describe themselves. When in doubt ask, and always honour someone's personal terms when it comes to gender identities.
2. *Two-Spirit (2S)*: A modern English term that an Indigenous person might identify as that comes from the traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples in Canada/Turtle Island/North America. It can mean a person who walks between genders; one who

¹ Gender identity or gender expression is protected by s.10 of Quebec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*, c-12 and by s. 3(1) of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6).

carries the gifts of both males and females, or one who is gender unique (not specific to any gender) and/or as a way to identify as 2SLGBTQ+. When Europeans arrived in North America, they introduced homophobia and transphobia to many Indigenous nations and dishonoured the idea of what it means to be Two-Spirit. Today, many Indigenous Peoples are reclaiming the ancient understanding that there are more than two genders.

3. *Non-Binary*: Someone who does not identify as a man or a woman, or solely as one of those two genders. It's often used as an umbrella term for identities that fall outside the male/female gender binary. Being non-binary means different things to different people, so this definition is purposely broad.
4. *Genderqueer*: Someone may identify as genderqueer if their gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. This identity is often related to or in reaction to the social construction of gender, gender stereotypes and the gender binary system.
5. *Gender fluid*: It refers to a gender which varies over time. Someone who identifies as gender fluid may fluctuate between genders or express multiple genders at the same time. Their gender may also vary at random or vary in response to different circumstances.

What does LGBTQ2S+ stand for?

LGBTQ2S+ is an acronym. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual (or bi), transgender, queer/questioning and Two-Spirit (2S).

What is gender expression?

Gender expression includes using facilities (like washrooms and change rooms) that match up with your own sense of gender. Society often thinks of these cues as being male/masculine and female/feminine. But what's thought to be masculine and feminine changes over time and within different cultures.

What is a gender pronoun?

A gender pronoun is the word someone uses to describe their gender. The most common ones used in our society are she/her and him/he. However, there are more pronouns, such as zi/hir or they. It is important to never assume which gender pronoun someone uses. If you are not sure what pronoun someone uses just ask them! If you have questions about your sexual orientation or gender identity, it can be comforting and helpful to talk to people who know what you are experiencing. You can find local and online support groups. If you do not know where to find support:

- talk to someone you trust and feel safe with, such as your friends, family members, teachers, school counsellors, co-workers, or healthcare providers
- look for LGBTQ2S+ clubs and organizations in the area you reside.

- contact churches and faith-based communities that welcome LGBTQ2S+ members
- look for websites and online organizations that welcome LGBTQ2S+ members

Topic 3: Relationships

There are different kinds of relationships in our lives. Our relationship with ourselves is one of the most important, because you will have this relationship your whole life. It can be helpful to work towards having a healthy, caring and compassionate relationship with yourself. You also have relationships with friends, family, your community, people at school or work, and the land that you live on. Part of having a healthy relationship with yourself is knowing what being in healthy relationships with others looks like. This includes being able to set healthy boundaries with the people in your life as well as respecting their boundaries.

Healthy Relationships

A positive relationship means that both you and your partner are: Communicative. You talk openly about problems and listen to one another. You respect each other's opinions. A positive relationship is one where you feel safe and respected. This kind of relationship is good for your emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health. However, there are some basic qualities that everyone's list should have in common, such as respect, consent, trust, honesty, and healthy boundaries. Healthy relationships can be a source of happiness and help people to feel connected. Everyone's list might look a little different, but some things you might want in Healthy Relationships include:

- Mutual Trust – This means that you trust your partner and they trust you. You trust each other to respect the boundaries and agreements you've committed to in your relationship. You have faith that you will treat each other in a kind and caring way. Trust is often something that develops over time and the people build together in a relationship.
- Respect – Respect means treating the other person with kindness, as a worthy and valuable being. It means that you treat them well and honour their integrity, rights and independence.
- Honesty – Being honest often means telling the truth, but more than that it's also about being true to yourself, honoring yourself, and communicating about who you are and what you need or want in a relationship.
- Equality – This means that both partners have equal power and say in the relationship. It means that emotional and physical workloads are shared.
- Good communication – Communicating openly and kindly can take practice. You can practice being assertive about your needs and wants every day including during a conflict and also by listening to your partner's needs and wants and by negotiating fairly. The more you practice communicating the better you will get at it.
- Kindness
- Boundaries ([link to boundaries section](#))
- Care & Compassion
- Patience

- Support
- Affection
- Attraction
- Quality time together
- Time apart
- Safety

Make your own list! Having your own personal list of what a healthy relationship means for us you can make it easier to figure out what you want in a relationship and what you do not want. It can also help us think about the type of partner you want to be, assess what you are already good at, already and what you might need to work on. Creating healthy relationships is a process. Building healthy relationships does take work, but it should be fun and enjoyable too! You may not always see good examples of healthy relationships in your life or in the media, so it's important to find good role models or seek out more examples. Everyone deserves healthy, positive and caring relationships.

Dating (romantic relationships, going out) can exist on a spectrum, from healthy to unhealthy and sometimes abusive. In a healthy dating relationship, all people have equal power and are involved in decision making. You also need mutual respect and trust. If important things like respect and trust are missing, it may be an unhealthy relationship. If there is fear, threats and/or physical, sexual, financial, emotional/mental or spiritual abuse happening, then it often is an abusive relationship.

Setting Boundaries

Setting emotional and physical boundaries with people in your lives is an important part of creating healthy relationships. Talking about boundaries allows people to be aware of each other's needs and comfort levels. This sets up a foundation of respect so both people can feel safe and healthy in the relationship.

What do healthy boundaries look and feel like?

- Feeling comfortable communicating about what you want and do not want
- Respecting what your partner wants and does not want
- Recognizing when you are happy and unhappy.
- Being excited and interested in learning new things and in your own hobbies and projects
- Having personal boundaries that apply to everyone
- Having a partner that adds to your excitement in life, but is not the only source of excitement
- Encouraging others to have boundaries too
- Feeling safe and secure
- Being aware of your choices and honouring your feelings and intuition while respecting their feelings
- Recognizing that you have the right to protect your privacy without having to lie or feel guilty
- Being able to negotiate in a fair way (while maintaining boundaries & values that are important to you)

In order to build healthy relationships, you need to work on communicating your own boundaries as well as respecting other people's boundaries. Sometimes this means learning healthy ways of working through your own emotions. This could mean talking to someone you trust like a counselor or family member about it, or engaging in an activity that helps us reflect and let go like writing, art, walking, etc. Sometimes it can be hard to deal with or accept your partner's boundaries, when they are not in line with what you want. Dealing with feelings of rejection or disappointment can be challenging and are also a normal part of life.

Gender Roles

We live in a society that often only recognizes two genders, men and women. That's called a gender binary. A binary is a system that only has two options. A role is something that you play. Just like characters in a show or movie, gender roles or scripts tell us how you are supposed to act as males and females. Gender roles are based primarily on stereotypes which are taught to us by the media and society around us. In reality there are many ways to express your genders and it goes way beyond just female and male. Unhealthy relationships and abuse often stem from the binary and the way that you are taught to fit into specific gender roles.

Growing up, boys are taught:

- To be strong
- To not cry
- To not show emotions except to show anger (even when sad)
- To want sex all the time
- To do a physical job, be the boss
- To be rich/ successful

Growing up, girls are taught:

- To be weak
- To be really emotional
- To care for and nurture others
- To serve others
- To not voice opinions
- That they are not supposed to want sex
- To cry a lot
- To be passive communicators
- To be a "good girl" or be "nice"

There is a lot of pressure put on everyone to buy into gender roles. And you are often put down and discriminated against if you do not fit into these gender roles/scripts, like if a girl/woman voices her opinion or if a boy/man shows his emotions. It doesn't really matter what the genders are of the people in a relationship, there can be power imbalances because of different stereotypes like masculine/feminine, aggressive/passive, etc. Look further down this page for more information on healthy and unhealthy masculinity. You can see that because of these stereotypes, everyone loses out. It hurts all of us because it can make it harder for us to communicate respectfully and honestly within your relationships. Men/guys have a harder time speaking about their fears and are taught to communicate aggressively to fit the male gender

role. Women/girls are told that their voices don't matter and that they should put other people ahead of themselves. This often leads to unhealthy or even abusive relationships. When discussing relationships, you can see how these gender roles can lead to violence against women and girls. Gender roles do not help us meet your needs because they limit us to playing a role instead of being who you are. The roles represent only two extremes of gender when in reality someone could be anywhere in between or not identify at all with them. When you challenge gender roles, it gives us more power to say what you really want for yourself. You can also figure out ways to communicate and negotiate your sexual boundaries and desires in a respectful way.

Using healthy, assertive communication in a relationship means:

- Respectful communication
- Respectful conflict but people feel heard and not threatened
- Partners feel good and respect relationship boundaries
- Partners feel safe with one another and comfortable being vulnerable
- Partners can share their emotions in a calm and respectful way
- No abuse

Healthy Breakup

You have a right to end a relationship at any point. Sometimes it's the healthiest choice you can make. A relationship does not have to be unhealthy or abusive to end. Sometimes healthy relationships come to a natural conclusion too.

Some signs that it may be time to break up are:

- Feeling annoyed a lot or uncomfortable
- Arguing a lot (even over little things)
- Feeling like you've grown apart or want different things
- Having different levels of affection
- Falling in love with someone else somebody else
- Not feeling interested or into your partner / the relationship anymore

Some tips for healthy breakups are:

- Use assertive communication. Ideally tell your partner firsthand, not through other people or social media.
- Be honest and kind about why you want to end the relationship.
- Consider your partner's feelings. Recognize that "guilting" or begging a person into staying is not healthy or helpful to either party
- Negotiate status changes and implications for social networking sites.
- Consider taking a break from social media.
- Do not spread rumors after the break up.
- Try to stay respectful (regardless of what your ex is doing or saying.)

If there is abuse happening in a relationship, this list might look different.

Regardless of whose idea it is to end the relationship, break ups can be difficult. It is important to take care of yourself, get some support, and work to accept what has happened. If you don't

seem to be bouncing back (feel depressed), it may be a good idea to talk to someone you trust about it.

What if I like someone and they don't like me back?

It can feel tough when you like someone who does not like us back. Rejection does not feel good and that's ok. At some point, everyone who is interested in dating develops a crush on someone who does not return the feelings. While it is okay to feel hurt or frustrated, you do not get to make the other person feel bad for not liking you in the same way. You also cannot try to force the other party person to like you. It's important to figure out how to deal with any difficult feelings you may be having. It can help to find a mix of things to distract you and things that give you time to reflect on your experience. Having a mix is important because if you only distract yourself you may not be working through your feelings, while only reflecting on things may start to feel overwhelming. Distractions come from things that give us a break from our thoughts and are fun. This could include hanging out with friends, watching movies oxymoron, Netflix movies, playing sports and/or playing video games. These are just a few examples. Reflecting activities give you a chance to think about and start to release your feelings. Some examples include writing, journaling, art, creating or listening to music and talking with someone you trust.

Abusive Relationship

If someone is experiencing abuse, it is **never** their fault. It is always the fault of the person choosing to use abuse. Abuse is often about one person trying to control or take away someone else's power. If you know about abuse that is happening, or if you are experiencing abuse, tell an adult you trust. Youth in Montreal can also use crisis lines for support:

- In case of an emergency, call 9-1-1.
- If the situation is not urgent, dial 8-1-1 to find the right resources for help, both for you and someone else in need. Dialing 811 promptly puts you in touch with a nurse for a **non-urgent** health problem, or with a social worker for psychosocial difficulties.

Domestic violence resources are safe and remain open and here are resources available to you:

For victims and children:

[S.O.S. violence conjugale](#)

Listening, guidance and referral, in French and English, Multilingual site

Tel: 1-800 363-9010, 24/7

Text: 438-601-1211, from 2:30 p.m. to 10 p.m.

[Shield of Athena](#)

Support for women from ethnocultural communities who are victims of family violence and their children, and translation and interpretation services

Tel: 514-274-8117 or 1-877 274-8117 (Montréal)

[Fédération des maisons d'hébergement pour femmes](#)

514-878-9757

[Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale](#)

514-878-9134

For men

[OP+ION](#)

An alternative to domestic and family violence

514-527-1657

[PRO-GAM](#)

A professional and confidential therapy program for men who have resorted to violence in their domestic or family relationships

514-270-8462

[SAC](#)

Help for men having problems in their couple relationship

514-384-6296

What are some examples of abuse?

Emotional / Mental / Verbal: Using insults, putdowns, or “jokes”, keeping someone away from their friends and family, using jealousy to control, using manipulation, guilt tripping, playing mind games, making threats², etc.

Sexual: Coercing, pressuring or trying to change someone’s no into a yes, not stopping if someone wants to stop any kind of sexual activity³, getting or waiting for someone to be drunk or high in order to have sex with them⁴, any unwanted touching or any verbal harassment /comments about someone’s body, sexuality, etc., sending someone unwanted sexy texts, pictures, nudes, or forcing someone to send them.

Financial: Stealing someone’s money, bank card, credit card, etc.⁵, bribing, keeping someone from going to work or school, forcing someone to work, trying to control what someone does with their money, or wrecking someone’s things⁶.

Spiritual: Making fun of someone’s spiritual beliefs, making someone feel like they cannot practice their spiritual beliefs, prayers or ceremonies, or forcing someone to change their beliefs.

² *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 264.1.

³ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265 et 271.

⁴ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265 et 271.

⁵ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 322(1).

⁶ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 430(1)a).

Physical: Hitting⁷, pinching, biting, “play fighting”, threats⁸, using intimidation, restraining (blocking doorways, holding wrists, etc), throwing objects, punching walls, trashing space or objects.

How do I know if I am in an abusive relationship?

Sometimes it is hard to know what is happening in a relationship because we might have strong feelings for the person, we might be in denial or we might think some types of abuse are routine or normal. We all deserve to feel safe and respected at all times in our relationships.

Do you feel comfortable around your partner and do you trust them?

Do you feel like you’re always treated with respect?

Or do you feel scared and intimidated by your partner? Do you feel worried about how they might react?

Our feelings can tell us a lot about how a relationship is doing.

Here’s a list of some of the ways abuse can happen in a relationship that are not often heard about:

- Insults and name calling
- Criticizing your clothes, your friends or the way you look
- Following you around⁹, texting/phoning you all the time¹⁰ and demanding to know where you are
- Trying to stop you from seeing your friends or family
- Hitting, or throwing things at the wall¹¹
- Threatening to hurt you¹² or themselves if you leave
- Blaming you for the hurtful things they say or do
- Trying to force you to have sex¹³
- Taking your money¹⁴
- Putting down your spirituality/beliefs

These are only a few examples. If you feel like you may be in an abusive relationship, talk to someone about it. You can always talk about a relationship with a school counselor.

What can I do if I am experiencing abuse?

- Remember that it is never your fault.
- If someone has experienced a sexual assault, it is never their fault, and they deserve support and help. The resources mentioned above also offer in-hospital support for medical exams, advocacy, legal support and in-person counseling services.

⁷ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265.

⁸ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 264.1.

⁹ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 264(1) et (2)a).

¹⁰ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 264(1) et (2)b).

¹¹ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 430(1)a).

¹² *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 264.1.

¹³ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265 et 271.

¹⁴ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 322(1).

- Tell someone that you trust about what is going on. This could be a family member, close friend, counselor, elder, teacher and other resources.
- Go for counselling somewhere that will help you and be non-judgmental.
- Make a safety plan for yourself. If you decide to end the relationship, try to do it in a public place with lots of people around. If you are deciding to stay in the relationship, your safety plan could include having a bag packed in case of emergency, having a list of people you can call and safe places to go any time of day.
- Make a break-up plan. If you are ready to end the relationship, make a plan to ensure your safety including when, how and who you can talk to or spend time with for support.
- Do things that make you feel good about yourself as it can be hard to feel good when you are being treated badly.

What can I do if a friend is experiencing abuse?

- Let them know it is not their fault.
- Listen without judging the other person.
- Be supportive and don't try to control or criticize them as that will make them less likely to get help.
- Check in with them as much as you can.
- Tell an adult you trust.
- Encourage them to call one of the resources above.
- Talk to someone about it yourself, because it is difficult seeing a friend in that situation.

Often people find it hard to talk about abuse because they do not know how other people are going to react. That means it is important to be open and non-judgmental, so that people don't do not keep abuse a secret.

What can I do if a friend is an abuser?

Sometimes people think that if you are witnessing abuse or disrespectful behavior you only have two choices: get physically involved or do nothing. In reality, getting physically involved often leads to the abuser further hurting their partner or 'getting them back' later. It is important to do something, because by doing nothing you are telling the abusive person that what they are doing is okay.

Here are some ways that you can intervene in any situation. Remember, you should always think about our safety, the safety of the person experiencing abuse and the safety of the people around us. For example, if someone is using abusive language you could:

- When alone, ask your friend how they are feeling about the situation because their behavior is probably coming from a place of hurt or anger. Let them know you are not satisfactory with what is happening.
- Offer them support and help to change.
- Share resources & information with them
- Some things you can say to a friend who is an abuser could be:
 - "Feeling upset is ok, but your behavior isn't"
 - "That's not cool."
 - "I believe that you can work on yourself and do better."
 - "I don't like seeing you act that way"

- “I see this causing problems for your relationship and for you”
- “I can’t stand by and watch you continue to hurt someone, and I feel like this is driving a wedge between us”
- “You are not a bad person, but your behavior is harmful and unhealthy”
- Check in with their partner and ask how they would like to be supported.
- Role models positive ways to be in a relationship.
- Tell an adult that you trust.
- It is important to take care of yourself. Someone who is an abuser deserves support and care; however, you can’t always be the ones to provide that. You have the option to give them resources and take space away from that friendship, especially if you are being negatively impacted because your friend is not taking responsibility for his/her behavior, has continued abusing his/her partner or other people, or is being manipulative towards you.
- If you choose to stop hanging out with your friend who is an abuser you could say something like “It hurts me to say this, but I don’t think I can stay friends with someone who is hurting others and themselves like this”. You can also let them know if they are ready to stop and need help & support, you will be there for them.
- Reach out for support. Supporting a friend can be difficult so you need to reach out for non-judgmental support from friends, family, teachers, or guidance counsellors you can trust.

How about if I am an abuser?

- Take responsibility and admit to yourself that you have a problem.
- Talk to someone you trust about it like a counsellor, support group, family member, friend, or phone line, etc.
- Try to learn different ways of communicating and expressing your feelings.
- Be aware of your “triggers” such as noticing when you start to get angry by your face turning red, clenching teeth or fists and what you can do to stop yourself.
- Leave the relationship and give the other person space.
- Work on changing your behavior. (remember that you are not a bad person just have bad behavior.

If my partner hits me, is it OK if I hit him/her back (retaliate)?

This is a really good question, but that is somewhat too complex to answer without more information. What we can tell you is that responding to violence with more violence tends to worsen the situation. Sometimes we do have to use self-defence¹⁵, but this is different than hitting someone back. Hitting someone back is an act of violence¹⁶, while self-defence may have to be used to leave a situation. No matter what the situation is, you do NOT have to go through this alone. Try talking to someone who can help you: a family member, a school counselor, teacher, social worker, teen clinic.

Can boys get abused or is it just happen to girls?

Abuse can happen to anyone. While it is true that most sexual and physical violence is done by men, present day society does not always talk openly about when guys(males) experience abuse. Sometimes guys are called weak or made fun of if they try to come forward with their

¹⁵ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 34.

¹⁶ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265.

experiences. This makes it difficult for males to admit they have been victims of abuse. No one deserves to be abused, and it's ok it is fine to ask for help.

Topic 4: Sex

Sex is a small word, with a lot of different meanings. It often refers to pleasure that comes from the genitals, but it is not solely limited to that. Sex often involves our emotions and other body parts like our brain and skin. Ultimately, people can decide for themselves what sex means to them. What we know is that if two people have decided that they are ready to have sex and have talked about consent, what they are comfortable with, what they are interested in and what their limits & boundaries are, then they can figure out what works best for them.

Age of Consent to Sexual Activity

The age of consent is the age at which a young person can legally agree to sexual activity. Age of consent laws apply to all forms of sexual activity, ranging from kissing and fondling to sexual intercourse.

*All sexual activity without consent is a criminal offence, regardless of age.*¹⁷

These are serious offences that carry serious penalties, including mandatory minimum penalties. In Canada, there are some laws about how old you have to be before you can say “yes” to sex. It breaks down like this:

When someone is:

- 16 years old: They can say “yes” to sex with almost anyone 16 years or older¹⁸.
- 14-15 years old: They can say “yes” to sex with someone less than five years older than them¹⁹.
- 12-13 years old: They can say “yes” to sex with someone less than two years older than them.

Even at these stated ages, an individual cannot legally have sex with someone in a position of trust or authority in their life²⁰. These are people such as your teacher, coach, family doctor, babysitter or boss. This is because these people have power to affect your life. A teacher could change your grade, a boss could try to take your pay cheque. The law is written to prevent someone from being taken advantage of or exploited.

When is your consent legal?

Your consent is legal if it meets all of these conditions:

- Your consent is clearly expressed.
- You agree to **involve in sexual activities**. You give your consent freely and don't feel forced or obliged to have sex.

¹⁷ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265(1)a), 273.1(1), 273.1(1.1) et 273.2.

¹⁸ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 150.1(1).

¹⁹ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 150.1(2.1).

²⁰ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 150.1(2)b), 150.1(2.1)b) et 153(1).

- You are in a condition to agree. For example, you must be awake²¹. Also, you must not be so drunk that you do not know what you are doing²².

Remember ! You have the right to change your mind at any time. Your partner must respect your choice. If not, your partner might be accused of a crime.

When is the consent NEVER legal?

Until you turn 18, your consent is not legal if you are in a vulnerable position in relation to your partner²³.

What does it mean to be in a vulnerable position?

- Your partner is in a position of authority over you or is in a position of trust in relation to you. Some people are in a position of authority because of their jobs, for example, school teachers²⁴.
- You're dependent on your partner or are being exploited by your partner.
- Your partner uses your difference in age to take advantage of you.
- Your partner gives you a place to live when you have nowhere else to go

A Must- Do List before Having Sex

Before sex happens, it's a good idea to talk about a few things. The more comfortable you get having these conversations, the better equipped you will be. It doesn't guarantee that your partners will always be a perfect match, but it can help you decide if you want to be sexually active with someone.

1. Consent

As was earlier discussed the only way of knowing if someone wants to have sex is by asking. This is called obtaining consent. It's a voluntary agreement people make together around any sexual activity. Sexual activity does not just mean sex, it includes kissing, hugging, making out, cuddling, and touching someone's body in a sexual way. With consent, only yes means yes. Anything else including a **maybe, I don't know, or No words** at all count a No.

If sex takes place it is considered a sexual assault²⁵. Sexual assault is when there is unwanted sexual contact or sexual attention, which includes coercion and harassment. If you have ever dealt with or are dealing with sexual assault it is never your fault.

This will be addressed in our next workshop

²¹ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 273.1(2)a.1).

²² *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 273.1(2)a.1)b).

²³ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 150.1(2)b), 150.1(2.1)b) et 153(1).

²⁴ *R c Audet*, [1996] 2 RCS 171.

²⁵ *Code criminel*, LRC, (1985) ch C-46, art 265 et 271.

2. Boundaries and Comfort Levels

Sex can look a lot of different ways. Sex can be viewed from different angles. What is interesting to one person may be a total turn off for another. Discuss your comfort level(s) and boundaries before sexual intercourse takes place. What are you into? What would you/they never be into? Talking about these things may help you decide if you are a good fit for each other and can mean both people feel good about the type of sex that takes place.

Remember, the conversation does not end once sex begins. Checking in with partners during the sex act to see if things still feel good is also part of talking about comforts and boundaries (and consent!). Sometimes you may think you like a certain type of sex, sexual position or movement but once started it does not produce the desired sensation. We all have the right to change our minds and stop sex at any point during the activity.

3. SEX-Pectations

Sex can mean different things to different people. For some, having sex means being in a committed relationship. For others, sex is a more casual thing that does not always mean having a romantic relationship. Talking about what your expectations are before sex happens may help in avoiding conflicts or hurt feelings later.

4. Condoms and Sex Dams

For any type of sexual activity there is the possibility of Sexually Transmissible and Blood-Borne Infections (STBBIs/HIV) being transmitted from one partner to another.

Condoms and sex dams are the only things that provide protection against STBBIs/HIV. Sex dams, also called “oral dams” or “dental dams”, are latex or polyurethane sheets that can be used for oral sex on a vulva, vagina, scrotum, or anus to prevent the spread of STIs. Condoms can also work as birth control for people having penis-vagina sex.

Condoms can be purchased at pharmacies and some corner stores. The following 2 community organizations [À Deux Mains / Head & Hands](#) and [REZO](#) offer free condoms

5. Sexually Transmissible and Blood-Borne Infections

With any type of sex there it's possible for an STBBIs/HIV to be transmitted from one partner to another. You cannot tell just by looking at someone's genitals if they have STI/HIV and if asked they may not know. The only sure way to know if you or someone else has STI/HIV is through testing of this, On account of this it is a good idea to talk about testing. Ask non-judgmental questions like “When were you last tested” or “I haven't been tested since my last partner, want to go together?”. You can both get tested at any Health Centre.

6. Pregnancy

If you are having penis-vagina sex, then there is a possibility of becoming pregnant. Using birth control is a very effective prevention tool, but it can sometimes fail. Only abstinence (not having sex) is guaranteed to work 100% of the time. It is also helpful to talk about what you would do if a pregnancy occurs.

In Canada, there are three legal pregnancy options: (a) abortion²⁶, (b) adoption²⁷ and (c) parenting²⁸.

We each have our personal values around these options. Talking about your choice of would be an easier conversation to have before a pregnancy happens. Ultimately, the ultimate decision of

²⁶ *R c Morgentaler*, (1988) 1 RCS 30.

²⁷ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 543 et ss.

²⁸ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 597 et ss.

what to do with a pregnancy is always up to the individual who is pregnant. It is their body, and their life that will be most affected.

This topic will be further discussed in the next sections

7. Birth Control

If you are having penis-vagina sex, then there is also the possibility of creating a pregnancy. If you don't do not want to become pregnant then it is important to talk about what type of birth control will be used. Some types of birth control need to be started a few weeks before engaging in sex in order to be effective.

Your family doctor can assist with evaluation, determination and administration of birth control products.

Remember : Birth control is by prescription.

Topic 5: Sexually Transmitted Infection and HIV

When it comes to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) sometimes it is harder for youth to access safer sex supplies (condoms, for example), or to know where to get accurate information. This helps to explain why 15-24 year olds have high rates of STIs. There is also a lot of misinformation about STIs and stereotypes about who can get one. Myths (like only "those" people get STIs) and wrong information put us at risk. If we don't have accurate info we might not use barriers (like condoms) or get tested if we are deciding to have sex.

The good news is, there are lots of things you can do to help keep yourself and your partner(s) safe. Choosing not to have sex with stranger, doing lower- risk activities, using barriers like condoms and sex dams each and every time, and getting tested regularly can all help to prevent the spread of STIs. You don't do not have to be having sex sexually active to get accurate information. Ideally, people get safer sex information before they decide to have sex.

[Read on to find out more!](#)

Sign of STD

It is impossible to tell by looking at someone if they have a sexually transmitted infection and often STIs do not show many signs. If someone does have signs, they might notice as an infected individual may manifest the following signs and symptoms:

- Sex organ discharge: Fluids like semen, pre-ejaculate (pre-cum), vaginal fluid and discharge, menstrual blood and rectal (anal) fluid are common and healthy. However, if anything changes, looks different, is of a different consistency, or smells different it could be a sign of an STI.
- Irritation when urinating, pain during urination and feeling like you have to pee all the time, or trouble peeing.
- Genital itching
- Noticeable pelvic pain: dull aching in the pelvic or abdominal (stomach) area.
- Skin changes: rashes, lumps, bumps, or sores on your anus, penis, testicles, vulva, or vaginal area.

Regular examination of all your body parts is a great way to find out what you normally look like, but it is not a reliable way to tell whether or not you have a STI. The way to find out for sure is to get tested at a health centre such as CLSC. Testing for STIs can be quick, easy, and confidential

If I get STD, is it forever?

It depends on the STD. Some are curable, but others are not . Of the STDs 4 are currently curable: syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and trichomoniasis. The other 4 are viral infections which are incurable: hepatitis B, herpes simplex virus (HSV or herpes), HIV, and human papillomavirus (HPV).

Syphilis can be cured through a simple treatment of penicillin.

Chlamydia can be cured with antibiotics, repeat infection is common

Gonorrhoea can be cured with a one-time antibiotic injection and oral antibiotics.

Chlamydia can be cured with oral antibiotics

If an STI cannot be cured, then it is treatable. This means you will live with it for the rest of your life. However, treatment has gotten really good.

All STIs now have a cure or treatment.

Can I get STD without having sex?

Yes and no, it depends on a few things. Some STIs are spread through skin-to-skin contact so genital warts and herpes, or pubic lice are spread by rubbing or touching genitals together . HIV and Hepatitis C can be spread through sex fluids and also through blood, so other activities like sharing needles can put someone at risk. Having said that, if you are not having sex or sharing sex fluids with someone your risk for STIs is very low. In fact abstaining from sex (aka, not doing it) is the most effective way of avoiding an STI.

What is the difference between STI and STD

STI and STD are the same thing. STI or sexually transmitted infection is the newer term. STD or sexually transmitted disease is the older term. The bottom line: STDs and STIs are basically the same things—but STI means the infection doesn't show symptoms. The mainstream community have begun transitioning from “**STD**” to “**STI**” in an effort to clarify that not all sexually transmitted infections turn into a disease. Another reason why STI has become more mainstream than STD: the stigma attached to the term STD because of the word “disease.” Somehow, infection seems to be a bit more “palatable”. When something has stigma, it may make it harder for people to feel comfortable getting tested, accessing treatments or cures and talking openly with partners. The major difference in terminology, however, is that one is symptomatic (STD) while the other (STI) is not.

Topic 6: Teen Pregnancy

When it comes to pregnancy, there are three legal options in Canada: abortion²⁹, adoption³⁰, and parenting³¹. Ultimately, the choice of what to do with a pregnancy is always up to the girl, woman or person who is pregnant³². This is because it is their body and their life that will be most affected³³.

Abortion

An abortion is a procedure to end a pregnancy. It uses medicine or surgery to remove the embryo or fetus and placenta from the uterus. The procedure is done by a licensed health care professional. The decision to end a pregnancy is very personal. An abortion is sometimes called 'termination of pregnancy'. Under some circumstances, abortion can be done up to 23 weeks, but the procedure is safer and simpler done early.

Abortion Procedure

There are two types of abortions - medical abortions and surgical abortions. Medical abortions use drugs to empty the uterus, surgical abortions use instruments to remove the contents of the uterus. There are many factors that influence the decision about which abortion procedure is best for you. A woman who wants an abortion can have one at no charge by showing her health insurance card, also commonly called a medicare card. Abortions are covered by Quebec's health insurance plan and are free in hospitals, CLSCs and private clinics. If you don't have a health insurance card and you are not covered by the public health insurance plan, then you have to pay to have an abortion.

Note that abortion is usually considered care necessary for a person's health. A 14-year-old girl who wants an abortion does not need her parents' permission³⁴. Abortion in Canada is legal at all stages of pregnancy and funded in part by the Canada Health Act. While some non-legal barriers to access continue to exist, such as lacking equal access to providers, Canada is the only nation with absolutely no specific legal restrictions on abortion.

Abortion Is Legal

In **Québec**, **abortion** is a **legal** medical procedure. In Quebec, abortion is legal³⁵, free and available at any time. A woman doesn't lose her right to an abortion after a certain number of weeks. No matter how far along the pregnancy is, a woman always has the choice to do what she believes is best for her.

Abortion Time Limit

The law does not take away your right to an abortion after a certain number of weeks. So, whether you are in your 8th, 12th or 24th week of pregnancy, you still have the choice to do what you believe is best for you. However, most abortions in Quebec are performed during the first 13 weeks of pregnancy.

²⁹ *R c Morgentaler*, (1988) 1 RCS 30.

³⁰ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 543 et ss.

³¹ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 597 et ss.

³² *R c Morgentaler*, (1988) 1 RCS 30 aux paras 237-239.

³³ *R c Morgentaler*, (1988) 1 RCS 30 au para 237.

³⁴ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 14(2).

³⁵ *R c Morgentaler*, (1988) 1 RCS 30.

Abortion after Week 13 (Montreal, the Eastern Townships region and Quebec City)

14 to 22 Weeks of Pregnancy

Most health-care institutions in Quebec can also perform abortions during this period. However, as the pregnancy advances, fewer institutions are equipped to perform the abortion. Women are therefore referred to health-care institutions in Montreal, the Eastern Townships region and Quebec City.

23 Weeks of Pregnancy and Later

Only a few hospitals in Quebec can carry out these abortions, such as Hôpital Sainte-Justine. Other health-care institutions are not equipped to deal with abortions at this stage of a pregnancy. Under the Quebec health-care system, a woman can travel to the United States to have an abortion at this stage of pregnancy. The Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec (public health insurance agency) covers travel expenses and the cost of the procedure. The Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de services sociaux du Centre-Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal (Montreal health and social services board) helps women who need an abortion in the third trimester.

To find contact information for the health care institutions in your area, see the Quebec government's "[Portail santé mieux-être](#)" web page.

<https://sante.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoire-ressources/>

Abortion Decisions

As is the case with any other medical procedure, if you decide to have an abortion, you must make your decision with full knowledge of the facts. You must also understand the risks of the procedure, how serious these risks are, and the impact of the procedure. The health care professionals you meet with will give you all the information you need to make an informed decision.

At what age can I make an abortion decision on my own?

If you are 14 years old or older and want to have an abortion, you can usually make this decision on your own³⁶. In some cases, you need your parents' agreement or the agreement of the adult who is responsible for you. The different situations are explained below.

As of age 14, you can decide on your own:

³⁶ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 14(2).

If you are 14 years old or older, you can make the decision to have an abortion on your own³⁷. You have the right to decide whether to continue the pregnancy³⁸. You do not need anyone else's permission, either from your parents, partner, friends or health professionals. They cannot make the decision in your place, and they cannot force you to have an abortion³⁹ or continue the pregnancy⁴⁰.

However, if you have to stay in a health care institution, hospital or clinic for more than 12 hours, your parents or guardian must be notified⁴¹.

If you are 13 years old or younger, you cannot decide on your own.

If you are 13 years old or younger, you cannot make the decision on your own: you need permission from your parents or guardian to have an abortion⁴². If your parents don't agree on what to do, or if you and your parents do not agree, a court can make the decision in your parents' place⁴³.

If you are 18 years or over and you don't have the legal capacity to decide, you cannot make the decision on your own⁴⁴. A person lacks the legal capacity to decide if she does not understand what an abortion is or does not understand the consequences of an abortion⁴⁵.

If you are 18 years or older and you do not have the legal capacity to decide, you need another person's agreement to have an abortion. This person can be a partner, guardian or close relative⁴⁶.

How can others (parents or guardian) make abortion decision for me?

If someone else has to make a decision for you about whether or not to have an abortion, the decision must be based on your interests alone⁴⁷. The person who makes the decision must take your wishes into account⁴⁸, if you can express them.

Adoption

If someone is considering adoption, they will need to contact an adoption agency. This can be done at any point during a pregnancy or soon after birth. An adoption agency will work with the birth parents to choose adoptive parents for the baby. There will also be an opportunity to meet with the adoptive parents before proceeding. An extended family adoption is also an option.

³⁷ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 14(2).

³⁸ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 10.

³⁹ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 11(1).

⁴⁰ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 10(2).

⁴¹ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 14(2).

⁴² *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 14(1).

⁴³ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 16(1), 18, 23(1).

⁴⁴ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 15.

⁴⁵ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 258(1).

⁴⁶ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 15.

⁴⁷ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 12(1).

⁴⁸ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 12(1).

This is where the guardianship is given to a family member of the birth parents. The birth father must also agree to the adoption before the process can continue⁴⁹. If they want, they may choose to parent the baby instead with an understanding that the birth mother will not be parenting. If the birth father is unknown, or cannot be reached, then a judge may sign the adoption application indicating this.

During the first 48 hours after birth, the baby will stay at the hospital. The birth mother may stay with the baby during this time if she so desires. After 48 hours a Voluntary Surrendership Agreement is signed, and the baby is given to the adoptive parents. Once the form is signed, the birth parents have 30 days in which to change their mind. This 30day period is to give an opportunity for the birth parents to change their mind if they choose. After the 30 days, all parental rights are permanently passed to the adoptive parents.

Adoption Steps

Adopting a child who resides in Québec involves the following steps:

1. Registering with CISSS or CIUSSS Adoption Service
2. Attending an information session.
3. Conducting a psychosocial assessment of persons wishing to adopt a child.
4. Pairing a child with prospective adoptive parents who could meet his/her needs
5. Placing a child with adoptive parents following a Court Order.
6. Adoption judgement.

Parenting

As we talked about in our previous workshop (Home a safe haven), whether someone is parenting by themselves, with a partner or support from their family, it's important to think about how they can provide a positive environment for the baby as it grows. Babies need safety, food, clothing, diapers, toys, day-care etc.

Social assistance is available to help with the cost of these things, providing that the parent qualifies, but it also means living on a tight budget. The biggest and most important thing a baby needs to be happy and healthy is love. It is also important for parents to think about how they can take care of themselves since it can be stressful raising a baby. Making time for yourself to do something you enjoy is still important because stress levels can affect both a parent's and baby's health and wellbeing. Finding people that you trust and can talk with can also make a big difference. This could be a friend, a family member, a counsellor or a parenting group. Parenting programs, supports and resources including parenting friendly schools are available.

⁴⁹ *Code civil du Québec*, RLRQ, c C-1991, art 551(1).

Reference:

[1] Voelker, D. K., Reel, J. J., Greenleaf, C. (2015). Weight status and body image perceptions in adolescents: current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine, and Therapeutics*, 6.