



OUR MISSION: Women and Youth Supporting Each Other empowers young women by providing the resources and support necessary to make positive life choices and create community change.

EIGHT UNIVERSAL QUESTIONS

Mentor Training Component: 4. Working with Adolescent Girls

Knowing how to approach these “universal” questions can be helpful when confronted with tricky questions from your mentee. Though real-life questions may not be (and often are not) the same as the examples here, the basic structure, meaning, and approach to finding an answer can be very similar.

1. “What is true?”

These questions have one right answer. Try to keep the answer short, sweet, and to the point. If the mentee asks more related questions, continue to answer and always answer truthfully.

Examples: “What is an STD?” “What is a condom?” “Can you get pregnant every time you have sex?”

2. “What is right?”

This is a values question, so there is not just one right answer. Be open-minded and have a discussion with her about different values without pushing your own values onto her. You may choose to not tell her your opinions, since this might encourage her to think the same way or discourage her from expressing her own thoughts. Encourage her to consider all of the possible positive and negative aspects of the issue. **Use the “SOY” method when communicating with your mentee. (“Some people do this, other people do that, you decide what is right for you.”)**

Examples: “What do you think is the right age for sex?” “Can gay people go to heaven?” “Is it okay for people to live together before they are married?”



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3. “Can you please help me figure this out?”

This is a subset of “What is true” questions, but with some confusion or misinformation. Fill in the missing information or correct false information.

Examples: “How does the boy’s penis get in the girl’s hole if the hole is so small?” “How does a woman have an orgasm?” “How can a girl get pregnant if she’s a virgin?”

4. “How do people do that?”

This is usually about sexual behaviors. Identify slang terms and teach the proper terms. Explain answers using these terms and continue to clarify slang or misconceptions.

Examples: “What do you do when you give a guy a blow job?” “What happens when a guy ‘gets off?’” “What is the difference between making out and kissing?”

5. “Am I normal?”

These questions often sound like “What is true” questions, but a trained ear or someone listening carefully can sense the need for validation. Always be assuring and calm any concerns.

Examples: “Do you think many girls masturbate?” “Is it weird that I haven’t gotten my period yet?” “If someone thinks another girl is cute, does that mean she’s a lesbian?”



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6. “Can I trust you? Can I get to you? Will you set and stick to boundaries?”

These questions are usually asked rather explicitly, perhaps slyly, with giggles, or in a surly tone. You can tell this type of question by how you feel – like you are backed in a corner or put on the spot. These questions are not really about sexuality or a need for information, but are rather about the relationship between you and her. Sometimes these questions are asked out of pure curiosity, but it is good to set limits and answer these questions in a way that takes the focus off of you.

Examples: “How old were you when you first had sex?” “Have you ever smoked weed?” “How many people have you had sex with?”

7. “Could this hurt me?”

Present a balance, giving her all of the appropriate information. Fear tactics can easily backfire and they also give mentees the wrong idea about what WYSE’s purpose and goals are. Be reassuring, truthful, and stay positive.

Examples: “Does an abortion hurt?” “Is it safe to swallow sperm?” “Are condoms really safe?”

8. “What should I do?”

Young women often find themselves in challenging situations and may turn to trusted mentors for advice. Resist the temptation to give advice and instead help guide her to a healthy solution. Help her see all of her options and their consequences in an unbiased manner, and facilitate a healthy, but independent, problem- solving process.

Examples: “What should I do if my boyfriend asks me to have sex with him?” “My friend thinks she is pregnant, what should she do?” “I think my brother is doing a lot of drugs...should I do something?”

Source: Hoffman, Deborah. Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent’s Guide to Talking Sense about Sex. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2001.