

Session 4

Concerns about My Fertility: Female and Male Group Discussions

Objectives

By the end of this session, the boys will:

1. Dispel three concerns about male fertility.

By the end of this session, the girls will:

1. Dispel three concerns about female fertility.



Materials Needed

- Strips of paper or note cards

Before You Begin

- Carefully read all of the **Content for Session 1** (pages 26-28), **Session 2** (pages 44-54), and **Session 3** (pages 80-95).
- Read each step of the session. Think about how you will perform each step and what you will add to every session.
- Decide how you will teach Step 2.
- Carefully read the Facilitator Notes on masturbation on pages 102-103 and 109.
- Though there is no medical evidence that masturbation is “bad” in any way, there are many myths that say it is harmful to the mind or body. As a result of such myths, many people feel extremely anxious or guilty about masturbating, and thus worry about the consequences of touching themselves. Masturbation is discouraged in some cultures, societies, and religions. Your own society might have taboos around the topic. With this in mind, you will

have to decide how to teach Step 2. At a minimum, you can define what masturbation is and dispel any beliefs around the topic that are not medical fact.

- Break the participants into two groups.
- For this lesson, boys and girls will be separated. Ideally, a male leader will work with the boys and a female leader will work with the girls.
- Tell the group in advance about the separate sessions. Explain that you want to give them time alone with an adult of the same sex in case they have any questions that they have been embarrassed to discuss in front of the whole group. Make sure that participants understand that it is very appropriate for boys and girls to discuss puberty or sexuality issues together. However, at their age, they sometimes want time alone with members of the same sex, and that is okay, too.
- Introduce the activity before separating participants by saying, “Today the girls will be with Ms. _____ and boys will be with Mr. _____. Girls will get extra information about menstruation and boys will get extra information about wet dreams. Both groups will receive additional information about their bodies.”

Session 4



Time

Activities for Boys	Activities for Girls	Minutes
Step 1: Addressing Male Fertility Concerns	Step 1: Addressing Female Fertility Concerns	45
Step 2: My Body Feels Good	Step 2: My Body Feels Good	10
TOTAL MINUTES		55

ACTIVITIES FOR BOYS

Step 1: Addressing Male Fertility Concerns

Male Group Discussion

(45 minutes)

Read each of the following statements. Tell them they are from typical boys like them:

“My first wet dream came to me as a shock because I never had any knowledge about it. Then my brother explained to me what it was.”

“I didn’t know what the erection was. I was very upset and felt shy both with my parents and my peers. I even prayed and asked God to make that thing go away. I later realized it was part of life.”

“Having these wet dreams made me miserable. I felt so embarrassed.”

“My father told me these would happen; I just didn’t realize how little control I would have.”

Ask participants if they can relate to what these boys are saying. State that most boys feel the same and that is why participants have this special time to ask questions.

Ask participants to write down any questions they have about puberty on the strips of paper or note cards. These questions can be about the material covered in all of the previous sessions or about other things about puberty and fertility awareness heard outside of the course. Collect the strips of paper or note cards and then read each question out loud. It is important not to identify any question with a particular participant. After each question, ask the group if they know the answer. If no one responds, provide your response.

Facilitator Note

As you recall from the other sessions, the **Possible Questions and Answers** are optional. If participants ask questions, the answers are there for you to use. *Session 4 is different.* Even if participants do not ask the following questions, you can try—depending on how much time you have—to raise these questions with the group. These questions are common ones among young people, and it would be beneficial for participants to know the answers.

Try to keep the discussion lively, yet be aware of boys who may be self-conscious and shy.

Facilitator Note

Although there is not a specific question below related to child abuse, it is a question that may be raised by your participants—some of them may even be victims of physical or sexual abuse, incest, or coerced sex. Therefore, it is important that you are sensitive to this issue, and that you point out to participants that no one deserves to be physically or sexually violated, and it is not their fault if they are. Young people often blame themselves if they are abused, and this makes them even more afraid to tell anyone. But a trusted adult, such as a parent, health provider, teacher, or religious leader, can often help. Anyone who has experienced child abuse, sexual abuse, incest, or coerced sex, or suspects that a young person has been the victim of such a violation, needs to tell someone and get assistance as soon as possible. People and places that can provide assistance include: health provider, school principal, teacher, women's center, religious leader, police, lawyer, etc.

Q. Do boys get a period?

A. Boys do not get a period, or menstruate, because they have a different reproductive system than girls. Menstruation is the breaking away of the lining of the uterus—the place where a fetus develops during a pregnancy. Since only women have a uterus, only they have periods.

Q. Do men stop having ejaculations when they get older?

A. When a man gets older, perhaps age 60 or beyond, he may have less sperm in his ejaculate. But if a man is healthy, he should be able to have ejaculations all his life.

Q. Can semen and urine leave the body at the same time?

A. Some boys worry about this because the same passage is used for both urine and semen. A valve at the base of the urethra makes it impossible for urine and semen to travel through this tube at the same time.

Q. What is the right length of a penis?

A. The average penis is between 11 and 18 centimeters long when it is erect. There is no standard penis size, shape, or length. Some are fat and short. Others are long and thin. There is no truth to the idea that a bigger penis is a better penis.

Q. Is it normal to have one testicle hanging lower than the other one?

A. Yes. Most men's testicles hang unevenly.

Q. Is it a problem for the penis to curve a little bit?

A. It is normal for a boy or man to have a curving penis. It straightens out during an erection.

Q. What are those bumps at the head of the penis?

A. The bumps are glands that produce a whitish creamy substance. This substance helps the foreskin slide back smoothly over the glans. However, if it accumulates beneath the foreskin, it can cause a bad smell or infection. It is important to keep the area under the foreskin very clean at all times.

Q. How does one prevent having an erection in public?

A. This is normal. Even though you may think it is embarrassing, try to remember that most people will not even notice the erection unless you draw attention to it.

Q. Will wet dreams or ejaculation make a boy lose all of his sperm?

A. No. The male body makes sperm continuously throughout its life.

Q. What do I do if someone touches me in a way that makes me feel uncomfortable?

A. Your body is your own, and no one should touch you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable. You have a right to ask someone to stop touching you if it makes you feel bad. If this is happening to you, remember it is not your fault, and you should talk to a trusted adult for help and keep talking to as many people as necessary until someone takes action.

Q. What if a man or woman wants to have sex and the other person does not?

A. Sex should be a pleasurable and consensual act between two persons. A man or woman should never be forced to have sexual intercourse or do anything else with his or her body that he or she does not want to do. A person must offer his or her permission before letting anyone touch him or her. If a situation arises in which someone is inappropriately touching another person without permission, the person should seek help immediately.

Step 2: My Body Feels Good

Group Exercise (10 minutes)

Ask the group to think of a favorite activity or thing. Ask them how it feels to be doing, holding, or eating this thing. Ask them to describe the feelings of pleasure they experience. Ask if they have ever heard of getting a feeling of pleasure from touching their own body. Ask them what the word for this is. If they do mention masturbation, briefly describe what it is and why it happens, stressing that medical professionals say it is completely normal, but some cultures and religions do not support it. Encourage the group to say what they have heard about masturbation. Make sure the following *myths*, and others that may be common in your community, are covered and corrected:

- Masturbation makes you insane.
- Masturbation makes you grow hair on the palms of your hands, causes pimples on your face, or makes you go blind.
- Masturbation makes you pale and uses up all the boy's sperm.
- Masturbation makes you weak and makes it impossible for a man to father children.
- Masturbation causes you to lose your desire for the opposite sex.
- Girls who masturbate are obsessed with sex.

Facilitator Note

Discussing myths around masturbation will help make the topic seem less personal. There might be different myths about masturbation in your culture. Adapt this exercise to include any myths in your society.

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

After doing the exercise, explain to participants what masturbation is. Masturbation is rubbing, stroking, or otherwise stimulating one's sexual organs—penis, vagina, and breasts—to get pleasure or express sexual feelings. Both men and women can relieve sexual feelings and experience sexual pleasure through masturbation. Boys may stroke their penises until they ejaculate. Girls' vaginas may become wet, moist, or tingly from self-stimulation, and they may experience orgasm.

Many people, males and females alike, masturbate at some time in their lives. There is no scientific evidence that masturbation causes any harm to the body or mind. Masturbation is only a medical problem when it does not allow a person to function properly or when it is done in public. However, there are many religious and cultural barriers to masturbation. The decision about whether or not to do it is a personal one.

Session 4

Stress the Following

- Masturbation is often the first way a person experiences sexual pleasure.
- Many boys and girls begin to masturbate for sexual pleasure during puberty.
- Some boys and girls never masturbate.
- Masturbation does not cause physical or mental harm.
- Some cultures and religions oppose masturbation. If you have questions about your religion's position, talk to your religious leader.

Thank them for being an enthusiastic group. Tell them that it is hard to talk about one's body sometimes and that you are proud of them for participating and sharing with each other.

ACTIVITIES FOR GIRLS

Step 1: Addressing Female Fertility Concerns

Female Group Discussion (45 minutes)

Read each of the following statements. Tell them they are from typical girls like them:

“My period came to me as a shock because I never had any knowledge about it. Then my mother explained to me why I had to go through it.”

“I didn’t know what the period was. I was very upset and felt shy both with my parents and my peers. I even prayed and asked God to make that thing go away. I later realized it was part of life.”

“I was unsure of what was going on. I had no information on how to deal with it. Menstruation made me miserable.”

“I was happy when I got my period because I knew that meant I was growing up.”

Ask participants if they can relate to what these girls are saying. State that most girls feel the same and that is why participants have this special time to ask questions.

Ask participants to write down any questions they have about puberty on the strips of paper or note cards. These questions can be about the material covered in all of the previous sessions or about other things about puberty and fertility awareness heard outside of the course. Collect the strips of paper or note cards and then read each question out loud. It is important not to identify any question with a particular participant. After each question, ask the group if they know the answer. If no one responds, provide your response.

Facilitator Note

Explain that most girls wonder about situations they will find themselves in when they begin menstruating. State that it can be helpful to think about those situations and plan what you would do. Stress that even if you already have had your period, this exercise will be useful because you might not know all there is to know.

Facilitator Note

As you recall from the other sessions, the **Possible Questions and Answers** are optional. If participants ask questions, the answers are there for you to use. *Session 4 is different.* Even if participants do not ask the following questions, you can try—depending on how much time you have—to raise these questions with the group. These questions are common ones among young people, and it would be beneficial for participants to know the answers.

Try to keep the discussions lively, yet be aware of girls who may be self-conscious and shy.

Facilitator Note

Although there is not a specific question below related to child abuse, it is a question that may be raised by your participants—some of them may even be victims of physical or sexual abuse, incest, or coerced sex. Therefore, it is important that you are sensitive to this issue, and that you point out to participants that no one deserves to be physically or sexually violated, and it is not their fault if they are. Young people often blame themselves if they are abused, and this makes them even more afraid to tell anyone. But a trusted adult, such as a parent, health provider, teacher, or religious leader, can often help. Anyone who has experienced child abuse, sexual abuse, incest, or coerced sex, or suspects that a young person has been the victim of such a violation, needs to tell someone and get assistance as soon as possible. People and places that can provide assistance include: health provider, school principal, women's center, teacher, religious leader, police, lawyer, etc.

Session 4

Q. How does a girl know when her period is about to start?

A. No one can be sure exactly when this will happen. Most girls begin menstruating between the ages of 12 and 16. The average age is 12 or 13. The best way a girl can know is to look for signs. Underarm hair and a whitish discharge from the vagina are signs that the period probably is not too far away.

Q. What if a girl's period never starts?

A. Periods will start sooner or later. However, if a girl

reaches age 16 and has not yet had her first period, she should visit a health provider.

Q. What causes period pain?

A. During a period, the uterus contracts, tightening and relaxing so that the menstrual flow empties from the body. Some girls and women get cramps that are more severe than others. Pain relievers, such as aspirin, exercise, a hot bath, or a heat compress can help this.

Q. Can anyone tell when a girl has her period?

A. No. Unless she tells someone, it is her private secret. When she gets her first period, she should tell her mother (or father or another adult she trusts). That way, there will be somebody to answer questions she might have.

Q. Are there any foods to avoid during a period?

A. No. The idea that certain foods should not be eaten at this time is a myth.

Q. Why are periods irregular?

A. Once a girl starts getting her period, it will probably take two or more years for the menstrual cycle to settle into a regular pattern. During this time, hormone levels change and ovulation does not necessarily occur on a regular basis. So, the interval between periods, the amount of menstrual flow, and the duration of the period are likely to vary considerably from cycle to cycle. Girls may be concerned about differences between their cycle and that of their friends. They may worry if, after their first period, they do not menstruate again for two to three months. Such variation is normal.

Q. Can a virgin use tampons?

A. Yes. A virgin is simply someone who has not had sexual intercourse. The vagina has an opening that

allows menstrual fluid to flow out, and that same opening can hold a tampon inside.

Q. Why do my sister and I get our periods at the same time each month?

A. Although it is not completely understood, it is not unusual for women who live together to have their periods around the same time. Sisters, mothers, daughters, and close friends may have their periods around the same time if they live together.

Q. I am scared about getting my period. Does it hurt?

A. The process of menstruation itself is painless. As we discussed, some women do experience cramps or other symptoms before or at the start of their period. A woman should not be scared of getting her period. It is a completely normal event.

Q. What do I do when I first get my period?

A. If you know about menstruation before it happens for the first time, you will be better prepared to handle this situation without fear or embarrassment. If it does come unexpectedly, do not panic. Your teachers, family members, and youth leaders usually can provide you with directions on what products to use to soak up the menstrual flow.

Q. What do I do if someone touches me in a way that makes me feel uncomfortable?

A. Your body is your own, and no one should touch you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable. You have a right to ask someone to stop touching you if it makes you feel bad. If this is happening to you, remember it is not your fault, and you should talk to a trusted adult for help and keep talking to as many people as necessary until someone takes action.

Q. What if a man or woman wants to have sex and the other person does not?

A. Sex should be a pleasurable and consensual act between two persons. A man or woman should never be forced to have sexual intercourse or do anything else with his or her body that he or she does not want to do. A person must offer his or her permission before letting anyone touch him or her. If a situation arises in which someone is inappropriately touching another person without permission, the person should seek help immediately.

Step 2: My Body Feels Good**Group Exercise
(10 minutes)**

Ask the group to think of a favorite activity or thing. Ask them how it feels to be doing, holding, or eating this thing. Ask them to describe the feelings of pleasure they experience. Ask if they have ever heard of getting a feeling of pleasure from their own body. Ask them what the word for this is. If they do mention masturbation, briefly describe what it is and why it happens, stressing that medical professionals say it is completely normal, but some cultures and religions might not support it. Encourage the group to say what they have heard about masturbation. Make sure the following *myths*, and others that may be common in your community, are covered and corrected:

- Masturbation makes you insane.
- Masturbation makes you grow hair on the palms of your hands, causes pimples on your face, or makes you go blind.
- Masturbation makes you pale and uses up all the boy's sperm.
- Masturbation makes you weak and makes it impossible for a man to father children.

- Masturbation causes you to lose your desire for the opposite sex.
- Girls who masturbate are obsessed with sex.

Facilitator Note

Discussing myths around masturbation will help make the topic seem less personal. There might be different myths about masturbation in your culture. Adapt this exercise to include any myths in your society.

After doing the exercise, explain to participants what masturbation is. Masturbation is rubbing, stroking, or otherwise stimulating one's sexual organs—penis, vagina, and breasts—to get pleasure or express sexual feelings. Both men and women can relieve sexual feelings and experience sexual pleasure through masturbation. Boys may stroke their penises until they ejaculate. Girls' vaginas may become wet, moist, or tingly from self-stimulation, and they may experience orgasm.

Many people, males and females alike, masturbate at some time in their lives. There is no scientific evidence that masturbation causes any harm to the body or mind. Masturbation is only a medical problem when it does not allow a person to function properly or when it is done in public. However, there are many religious and cultural barriers to masturbation. The decision about whether or not to do it is a personal one.

Session 4

Stress the Following

- Masturbation is often the first way a person experiences sexual pleasure.
- Many boys and girls begin to masturbate for sexual pleasure during puberty.
- Some boys and girls never masturbate.
- Masturbation does not cause physical or mental harm.
- Some cultures and religions oppose masturbation. If you have questions about your religion's position, talk to your religious leader.

Thank them for being an enthusiastic group. Tell them that it is hard to talk about one's body sometimes and that you are proud of them for participating and sharing with each other.