

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Many students are hindered from accomplishing their dreams by hidden, poisonous beliefs.
2. Students this age often make decisions that will affect their dreams.
3. Students have the freedom to make right choices concerning alcohol, drugs, and premarital sex.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify a number of poisonous beliefs and replace them with healthy beliefs.
2. Write a process that should be used in making decisions.
3. Understand that they should accept responsibility for their decisions.
4. Identify traps they may encounter that will cause them difficulty in making right decisions.

KEY TERMS

Steps in Making Good Decisions:

1. Evaluate how your decision will affect others.
2. Think how the decision will benefit you.
3. Think how the decision could hurt you.
4. Consider the sacrifices you may have to make as a result of your decision.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION

In the Box: Grandmother's Letter. No other item is required for the lesson.

(An optional item for the box would be a recipe for a cake on a small card.)

- Number small pieces of paper from "1" to the number of students in your class.
- A long string or a piece of tape long enough to divide your room in half.

During the "Poisonous Belief Activity" in this lesson, you will be arranging the class into groups of three or four. Each of the groups will need to report on their findings. This could easily take more than the 20 minutes allotted in the lesson plan. If time is a concern, you could make the groups larger and choose the four or five poisonous beliefs that you think your students are most likely to hold. You could also save time by having the groups write their healthy beliefs or trustworthy sources, or both, on a piece of paper that they hand to you and you write on the board.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Today, we are continuing our unit on Life Skills. In this lesson, we will consider some beliefs that can poison us and threaten our dreams. Let's begin with our three students.



STORY 5 MINUTES

[Read the following story, "Recipe for Life".]

Dima's empty stomach grumbled in protest as he shifted in his chair. Sasha gave him a "What was that?" look.

"Got up late this morning and didn't have time to eat," explained Dima.

"Every 'Yes' includes a 'No'," said Natasha.

"What are you talking about?" asked Sasha.

"It's something my grandmother always says – 'Every "Yes" includes a "No" ;'" repeated Natasha.

"I heard it the first time! What I didn't get was the meaning," persisted Sasha.

"I get it. It means that every choice for one thing is also a choice against something else. My decision to sleep in was also a choice to skip breakfast – I just hadn't thought it through when I stayed up late last night," said Dima.

Tatyana Aleksandrovna had been sitting back watching the exchange between her students.

Without a word, she simply picked up the familiar box and set it on her desk.

"Are you ever going to let us have a peek inside?" asked Natasha.

"It's against the rules," stated Sasha.

"No, it's not! No one said we couldn't take a look inside," objected Dima.

"Just because no one said it out loud doesn't mean there isn't a rule," lectured Sasha.

The teacher had yet to break her silence. She simply opened the box toward herself, using the lid to keep prying eyes from having a peek, and produced a small card with a brief list of some sort written on it, and set it on her desk.

Dima picked it up and announced, "It's a recipe card for a cake."

"Sounds promising!" said Sasha.

"If you follow the directions carefully, you will end up with a three-taste cake. First, there's the frosting. Second, there's the filling. And third, there's the cake," instructed the teacher.

"I recognize that description! That's my grandmother's recipe for Tuesday's Surprise! Whenever she makes it, she always talks about how hard it was to get all the ingredients – back when they were all on rations," exclaimed Natasha. "It's really good."

Tatyana Aleksandrovna cleared her throat as she opened today's letter from their grandmothers.

Dear Ones,

Recipes are a bit like advice. The good ones get handed down from generation to generation. Unfortunately, the same is true of a number of the bad ones. They are the product of trial and error, and subject to the judgments of personal taste. It can take a long time to get just the right ingredients in just the right combination, not to mention the details about how long to let it cook and at what temperature. Same thing is true when it comes to forming a recipe for life.

For the past few weeks, we've been trying to convince you that there are things going on beneath the surface of your lives that profoundly influence the choices you make. Choosing the right ingredients from your life, in the right combination, is the key to making decisions that will "leave a good taste in your mouth". (Yelena and I didn't want to include this last pun, but Olga insisted that it was far too clever to leave out. We did manage to edit out her next pun about "most of the bellyaching that goes on in the world being in bad taste.")

Think of decisions like a cake. The frosting is the first thing you see. That's where the surface part of choice occurs. You weigh out the likely consequences – good and bad – what it will likely cost and whether or not anyone else is likely to be involved. In other words, you use your head to sort out what you should and shouldn't do.

Next, there is the body of the cake. This is the part that gives shape to the cake – whether it will be round or square, short or tall, big or small. It is the product of the batter and the pan. We each had a couple of pans we used. That's why Olga's cakes were always round and Yelena's cakes were always square. Those were the only pans they had.

This is so basic to making the cake that you hardly think about it at all. And therein lays the problem. We have come to think of this part of decision making as the "Unspoken Family Rules". In my (Ludmilla's) family, one of the unspoken rules was, "No one is allowed to show their emotions." In Olga's family, the opinion of others was highly valued, so "How you look on the outside is more important than what's happening on the inside." And in Yelena's family, they weren't allowed to show weakness so the rule was "You can never ask for help."

I don't remember exactly when we stumbled on the notion of unspoken family rules, but we were all going through tough times in our marriages. Turns out our husbands also had a set of unspoken family rules, and many of them were at odds with our own! Olga was brought up to believe that "Being on time is a big deal." But her husband was taught that "Time is a mystery better ignored for the most part."

It turned out that we all had two rules in common. First, "You don't talk about the 'rules' or question them – they just are." And second, "It is a terrible thing to ever break a family rule." Of course, we also judged each other whenever one of us happened to break another's unspoken rule – even though that person had no idea that such a rule existed!

This is why we had you play the crossed or uncrossed game with the scissors. The rightness or wrongness had nothing to do with how you passed the scissors but everything to do with the unspoken rule.

The third part of our decision-making cake is the filling. You can't see the filling at all. It may be a complete surprise when you bite into it for the first time.

Remember when we went through the unknottting ceremony to discover some of the hidden motivations in our lives? Everyone has them. Sometimes they're unreasonable fears planted deep in us, like "If I ever mess up, the consequences will be horrible." Sometimes they're lies spoken about us that we've accepted as true: "I'm not really worth much." Sometimes they're vows we've made after being hurt: "I'll never share my feelings with anyone again."

All three parts of our "cake" play an important role in the decisions we make. We've designed an exercise for your teacher to take you through that will help you see how all this works out in your life. It has

taken us a long time to even recognize that there are hidden persuaders that have been undermining our lives. The good news is that there have also been hidden strengths in each of us that have surfaced during the journey. You, too, have a mix of good and bad ingredients to draw from. The question is which ones you will allow to influence the direction you choose.

Your Grandmother,
Ludmilla

EXPLORING THE LESSON



POISONOUS BELIEF REPLACEMENT ACTIVITY

ABOUT 20 MINUTES

In this activity, you will be arranging your class into groups of three or four students. You will probably get the best interaction if each group is either all boys or all girls. If you have fewer than 27 students or more than 36, you will need to adjust the number of groups and have one group take two beliefs or have two groups work on the same belief.

Take one the following poisonous beliefs to each group. Have one of the students in each group write down the poisonous belief as you dictate it to him or her, and then tell them to begin.

1. I was never wanted.
2. I am ugly and unlovable.
3. I have never done anything right.
4. I am a failure.
5. If I ever mess up, the consequences will be horrible.
6. I've never made anyone happy.
7. I'm not worth anything.
8. I will never be important.

Let's take the grandmother's cake recipe idea and apply it to decisions about drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex.

We will start with the filling. I have eight poisonous filling ingredients that are often used in making decisions. The problem with these ingredients is that they poison the decisions and then they poison the decision-makers and even the people around the decision-makers.

So, I want you to form groups of three or four. When you are reseated in groups, I'll give you your next instruction.

[Facilitate group formation. While groups are forming, write the following words on the board:]

- **Poisonous Belief (PB)**
- **Healthy Belief (HB)**
- **Trustworthy Source (TS)**

Each group will be assigned to work on a different poisonous belief. These are statements that young people and many adults come to believe about themselves.

I want your group to work together to replace the belief I give you with a healthy belief plus a trustworthy source for it. You will have five minutes to come up with your healthy belief and trustworthy source.

Here is an example:

- **Poisonous Belief (PB):** I am not smart enough to go to a university.
- **Healthy Belief (HB):** Not everyone who goes to a university is brilliant, and I am smart enough to know that if I work and study hard, I can succeed at a university.
- **Trustworthy Source (TS):** Several teachers have told me they appreciate my diligence and that I should plan to go to a university.

[Before getting group reports, ask everyone to have their notebooks ready. Write down each group's poisonous belief (PB), healthy belief (HB), and trustworthy source (TS).

Listed below are possible healthy beliefs for each of the poisonous beliefs listed above. If any group of students is having difficulty generating a healthy belief, you might give them some hints based on the following list. But if you can elicit plausible healthy beliefs from your students, they will be more likely to let go of their poisonous beliefs than if you simply tell them one that is listed below.]

1. PB: I was never wanted.

[HB: My family wanted me; they just never expressed it to me directly.

HB: I can find people to belong with if I search carefully and patiently.

TS: My parents never told me they wanted me, but my grandparents or others did.]

2. PB: I am ugly and unlovable.

[HB: Inner beauty lasts far longer than surface beauty and also produces beautiful results.

HB: Some people may think I'm unattractive, but they only know my appearance and are too shallow to discover who I really am.

HB: I am lovable. The more a person knows me, the more they love me.]

3. PB: I have never done anything right.

[HB: If I stop and think about it, I realize there are many things I have done right.

HB: I am not perfect, but I am growing and improving.

HB: Being human and alive means I can begin anew.]

4. PB: I am a failure.

[HB: I have failed many times, but that does not make me a failure.

HB: "Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm." – Sir Winston Churchill]

5. PB: If I ever mess up, the consequences will be horrible.

[HB: I am only incompetent in endeavors I have not learned well.

Have students make a list of positive reference points in their life in their Personal Journal. Examples: excellent achievement in _____, a favorite place, a favorite pet, a favorite person in my life, good things I have done, etc. (Also see point No. 7 for more ideas.)

Students can add to this list later on their own. This activity is a good reference for students to help develop a good self-image.

TEACHER SUGGESTION:

Tell students who may want to talk to you in private or to the school psychologist or social worker to feel free to talk to you after class.

HB: There are only a few mistakes in life that cannot be redone or repaired.

6. PB: I've never made anyone happy.

[HB: I do bring happiness to some people some of the time.

HB: I cannot be responsible for everyone else's happiness.

HB: Many people will choose to be unhappy no matter what I do.

HB: My joy in life should be based on deeper things than just the happiness of those around me.]

7. PB: I'm not worth anything.

[HB: I am unique. There never has been and never will be anyone exactly like me. I am one of a kind and valuable.

HB: My worth as a person does not depend on other people's opinions of me.

HB: When I feel worthless, I can do something worthwhile. Even if I don't feel worthy, I will have contributed something worthy.]

8. PB: I will never be important.

[HB: I have not yet discovered the important contribution I can make.

HB: If my life is important to me and to just a few others; that is important enough.]

Please look at this list on the board. Which of the poisonous beliefs have you tended to believe?

In your notebooks, copy down two or three of the poisonous beliefs you have been most likely to hold in the past.

For each one, also copy down one or more of the healthy beliefs you might use to replace the poisonous belief. Also write down a trustworthy source for each healthy belief. If you can't think of another trustworthy source, you may want to list me, your teacher, or this class as your trustworthy source.

If any of you has been poisoned by one or more of these poisonous beliefs, please consider replacing the poisonous belief with the healthy belief that this group has offered us. Negative beliefs like these have poisoned and destroyed many young peoples' dreams.

ASSIGNMENT

So, look at the healthy beliefs you have written in your notebook and circle one you will begin working on to believe more strongly. Also record your list of healthy beliefs in your Personal Journal.

Here is my next challenge:

Make a poster of the healthy belief you have just circled and hang it somewhere in your bedroom to remind you of who you are becoming.

 = 25 minutes



COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES ACTIVITY

15 MINUTES

They are listed here for you.

- It looks easy; it doesn't require much effort.
- It appears that it can achieve quick results.
- It seems to have no consequences for me.
- It is embraced without much thought.

Now that we have looked at some of what is going on under the surface of our lives – some of what's under the frosting of our cake – let's talk about how we make positive and healthy decisions.

Turn back in your notebooks to Lesson 3. You wrote down four characteristics of counterfeit freedom. When you find them, tell me what they are.

Let's see whether we can apply these characteristics to two life decisions. I want the following four groups [*designate four small groups*] to try to apply one characteristic each to the following question:

A friend wants you to try some cocaine with him at a party where others are getting high.

Group 1: Because this decision looks easy, you need to list as many reasons as you can that you should take time to think about the offer before responding.

Group 2: Because this offer appears to get you some things you want quickly, list some results it might also get you that you don't want.

Group 3: Discuss what consequences, good or bad, might come with this offer.

Group 4: Because this kind of offer is often embraced without much thought, list some of the reasons it is so immediately appealing and an equal number of reasons it is dangerous.

I want groups 5 through 8 to try to apply one characteristic each to the following scenario:

You have been dating your boyfriend or girlfriend for several weeks and enjoy his or her affection. Now the two of you have the sudden opportunity to have a whole evening together in a flat with no one else present.

Group 5: Because this decision looks easy, list as many reasons as you can that you should take time to think about the offer before responding.

Group 6: Because this opportunity appears to get you some things you want quickly, list some results it might also get you that you don't want.

Group 7: Discuss what consequences, good or bad, might come with this opportunity.

Group 8: Because this opportunity is often embraced without much thought, list some of the reasons it is so immediately appealing and an equal number of reasons that it is dangerous.

Group 9: *[If you have a ninth or tenth group, duplicate an assignment from a previous group.]*

 = 40 minutes

ENDING THE LESSON



PERSONAL JOURNAL WRITING ACTIVITY

5 MINUTES

Open your Personal Journals again. We are each going to write three possible futures.

Title the first one "My Dream Future".

You have one minute to list at least six things you would like to experience in your dream future. Start now.

[After one minute:]

Title your second future, "My Nightmare Future".

Again, you have one minute to list at least six things you hope you never experience in your future. Start now.

[After one minute:]

Title your third future, "My Realistic, Preferred Future".

Now you have three minutes to list at least six things you hope to experience in your preferred future – and at least one temptation you must resist in order to experience your preferred future.

In this lesson, we've considered poisonous beliefs and good decisions. Next time, we'll complete this unit on Life Skills by examining healthy boundaries.

ANNOUNCE:
PLEASE BRING YOUR PERSONAL
JOURNALS TO OUR NEXT SESSION.

Before dismissing your students,
remember to dictate the Parent-Teacher
questions to them.

 = 45 minutes

RESOURCES

GOING DEEPER

[Before the lesson begins, write out the following seven Bible passages on the board or reproduce them on enough sheets of paper for each student to have a copy.]

1. Psalm 139:13-16
2. Psalm 139:1-4
3. Romans 8:37-39
4. 2 Timothy 2:13
5. Jeremiah 29:11-13
6. Zephaniah 3:17
7. Isaiah 62:3-5]

MATCH “ANTIDOTE” VERSES TO POISONOUS BELIEFS ACTIVITY

In this lesson, we looked at a list of eight poisonous beliefs. One of the most powerful ways to overcome poisonous beliefs is to understand and know that the God who made you does not view you in this way.

I have written on the board (or duplicated on a piece of paper for each of you) a list of seven passages of Scripture that speak of how God views you and feels about you.

I want you to take a few minutes to match these up as “antidotes” – or biblically healthy beliefs – to each one of the poisonous beliefs. Because there are more poisonous beliefs listed than passages, you will need to use some of the passages to counter more than one belief. In fact, you may find that some of the passages address more than one of the beliefs. When you finish your private lists, we will talk about them.

FOCUS POINT

Be sure to leave time for discussion at the end of the learning activity so your students can discuss the connection between the learning activity and the lesson. Listen to see whether they seemed to understand the key points listed. If you sense that one or more of these points may have been lost, be sure to guide the discussion to make sure they get these main ideas.

1. All of the poisonous beliefs are contrary to the teachings of the Bible.
2. The Bible can be a great source for transforming unhealthy beliefs and attitudes.

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

For Family Discussion:

1. Share with your adolescent some of the goals you have for yourself.
2. Share with your adolescent some of the hopes and dreams you have for his or her life.