Sample Lesson

Love U2:
Baby Smarts –
Through the Eyes of the Child
By Marline Pearson

Grades 9-12
Length: 10 lessons

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The Dibble Institute
P.O. Box 7881
Berkeley, CA 94707-0881
(800) 695-7975
RelationshipSkills@dibbleinstitute.org
BABY SMARTS – FROM THE EYES OF THE CHILD

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PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS OF LOVE U2 SERIES

Love U2: Getting Smarter About Relationships, Sex, Babies, and Marriage is a new kind of curriculum for teens. It looks beyond the “dos and don’ts” of sex to the context of sexuality: namely, relationships. Its goal is to help young people acquire practical skills and useful knowledge for forming emotionally healthy, mutually respectful and ethically sound relationships. But Love U2 is about more than skills or facts. It helps teens craft a North Star—a vision of healthy relationships—that will guide their own behavior. Teens today live and breathe in a culture emphasizing casual sex and casual connections where no relationship can be trusted to last and where even the most important family bonds can’t be counted on. Indeed, for some teens, sex is seen simply as a transaction. Teens are short on positive models. They have few roadmaps that will lead them into healthy relationships and away from destructive ones. Love U2 aims at giving teens a positive, aspirational model for committed and healthy love relationships. This curriculum is about what teens can hope to achieve, not just what they must try to avoid.

Why This Curriculum Is Needed

This nation has been locked in an ideological battle over sex education: Should we teach abstinence until marriage or should we teach about safer sex, condoms, and many points in between? This discussion has divided us and shortchanged our teens. Love U2 breaks through this gridlock. It is unapologetically pro-abstinence but not for reasons that have to do with religion, ideology or politics. It is pro-abstinence because it is concerned about the emotional and social well-being of teens. Consider this thought experiment posed by Isabel Sawhill, president of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Let’s say we could somehow eliminate all of the health consequences of teen sex—STDs and pregnancy. Given that scenario, would you want a 15 or 16-year-old to be sexually active? Many people would answer no, and the reason is that there are other compelling emotional and social reasons for teens to abstain from sex. Sex is not just like eating pizza or driving to the movies. It’s not just about health and safety. We want more from it. Consider the rather consistent finding that the overwhelming majority of sexually active teens wish they’d waited. There are powerful emotional reasons to wait to have sex that have lots to do with the fact that early sexual involvement is not likely to deliver what teens, especially girls, want—namely, affection, connection, respect, or love. Then there are social reasons that have to do with the benefits and freedoms of abstinence for healthy relationship development. For teens, adding sex typically blurs or hinders genuine relationship development, or worse, glues teens (especially girls) to bad relationships. Importantly, there are ethical reasons for thinking about the context for sex that have to do with considering the needs of a child for two parents committed for the long haul to each other and the child. Sex can always create a child—a simple fact that’s often forgotten.

Teens are on a journey to learn about love, relationships, themselves, and their emerging sexuality. They are moving out of their families and building
friendships and romantic connections. As they jump into relationships, teens are in the throes of powerful feelings of attraction, rejection, and a myriad other emotions. Most teens want affection, respect, love, and connection. Yet, our young people get little guidance on navigating that world of teen relationships and the sexual culture. While we tell them what to say “no” to, we do too little to help teens build the healthy relationships to which they can say “yes.”

Sadly, the messages teens receive about sex, and the messages they don’t receive about developing positive relationships and why marriage matters if they plan to have children, set the stage for many to be snagged or derailed as young adults. Contemporary culture’s encouragement of sex without meaning, living together without commitment, and babies without marriage carry consequences that seriously disadvantage our young people, especially females. Troubled relationships and unplanned pregnancies can derail young adults in serious ways or cancel out their gains in education and, later, employment and parenting.

**Building Assets**

This curriculum is meant to contribute to the larger project of building assets for youth. Insights and skills for building successful relationships now and in their future are important assets for young people. It is part and parcel of the trajectory of student and life success, and is firmly rooted in a positive youth development approach. *Love U2* is meant to help young people craft a “North Star” for their relationship lives as well as build critical communication and other relationship skills and insights on relationship development. It engages teens in a deeper exploration of the emotional and social dimensions of sexuality and strongly encourages teens to postpone sexual involvement with positive reasons and skills. *Love U2* is also meant to inform young people of the findings of social science research on the link between child well-being and family structure. Although teens and young adults alike say they highly value life-long marriage as a personal goal, many are likely to fail, or afraid to try. Teens and young adults are woefully ignorant or misinformed about the basic research evidence on the importance of quality relationships and marriage. They know little about the economic, social, and personal benefits of marriage and what research has discovered about the patterns that erode vs. protect relationships and marriage. Young people have many misconceptions about cohabitation, the responsibilities of parenthood, and what it takes to raise children successfully.

**Beyond the Health Paradigm**

Our curricula and most importantly our conversations with teens should not just be about avoiding STDs or pregnancy—we need to move out of the confines of a health paradigm. Sex has meaning—or, rather, sex should have meaning, even if there is no health risk. Our conversations need to turn more attention to building healthy relationships, about affirming the power and potential of sexual love in the right context, about the consequences for babies when they are unplanned and about unwed pregnancies. We should and can reach for higher ground in our discussions with teens. And, teens want us to do just that. The 2003 teen
survey conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is particularly revealing: two-thirds of teens say their own morals, values, and or religious beliefs—as well as concerns about their future—influence their decisions about sex far more than concerns about pregnancy or STDs. Perhaps one reason why teens are so bored with our conventional approaches is that they sense we have nothing of soulful substance to say beyond body parts and clinical risk reduction. We have little to say that truly inspires and helps teens reach for a “North Star” in their relationships and for thinking about them selves and their responsibilities in relationship to others—whether it be in a romantic relationship, their family, to a child that results from a sexual encounter, or in a future marriage. There are other instructive reminders of what we need to address from the Campaign’s surveys. Ninety-two percent of teens believe that it’s important for teens to be given a strong message from society that they shouldn’t have sex until they are at least out of high school. Eighty-four percent of teens believe that teen pregnancy prevention should teach young people to be married before they have a child. Unfortunately, most teen pregnancy prevention programs, while emphasizing the importance of waiting until you are older to have a child, do not generally build an awareness of why and how marriage matters to child well-being. Yet, research shows that merely waiting until you are twenty years or older to have an out-of-wedlock child does not appear to significantly increase the well-being of the mother or the child.

You will find some pages about health information inside Love U2, but more attention is given to themes exploring relationship development, the meaning of sexual love, and the disconnect between childbearing and marriage and its consequences for children. Love U2 does contain explicit information on STDs, pregnancy, contraceptives and condoms, but it is presented in the context of values and relationships. Importantly, this curriculum sketches out a larger context for thinking about these things. It’s not just about “me.” There’s a bigger picture here. It’s about relationships, values, and deeper meanings; it’s also about the needs of children, it’s about family and it’s about community.
ABOUT THE UNIT:
BABY SMARTS – FROM THE EYES OF THE CHILD

This unit explores many topics related to pregnancy, but takes a unique approach to pregnancy prevention. It begins with predictable topics—myths and facts about getting pregnant, the material realities of unplanned pregnancy on the girl and the guy—and expands into an exploration of the emotional and social consequences for both of their future lives. But then, these lessons take a radically new turn by engaging teens in thinking about the longer-term impacts not only on their lives and their future relationships, but on the life of the child. In essence, this approach attempts to “switch focus” by putting the child’s needs at center stage. Teens are challenged through numerous hands-on activities and stories to consider what a birth to young, unwed, and unprepared parents means to a child and that child’s future—in short, to see the consequences from the *eyes and heart of a child*.

A third of babies today are born outside of marriage (it rises to two-thirds for African-American children) and many of those children are not only born disadvantaged, but will carry those disadvantages throughout their childhood and on into adulthood. Not only is there less stigma for early and unwed childbearing, but many teens are generally clueless about how this disadvantages a child. From conversations with pregnant teens it almost seems as if they perceive themselves as taking the higher moral ground when they decide to “keep my baby” (which most do), while they perceive the adults as focused on lower order concerns such as financial resources, etc. Greater awareness of what babies need and desire may hold promise in motivating teens to avoid unwed childbearing as well as early sexual involvement.

Teens need opportunities to more deeply examine how unwed childbearing—such things as going it alone as a mother, father absence, and/or cohabitation—can impact child well-being. Thirty years of accumulated social science research on the link between family structure and child well-being needs tapping in helping teens see the connection.

Teens also need to learn more about what babies need developmentally in their early years. This unit addresses what early brain research has confirmed: how nurturing in the first few years of life is critical for physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. Indeed early experiences aren’t everything, but they can set a child off on a positive path or into a viciously negative path. In these lessons, teens will in essence get a crash course on the developmental needs of children in the first few years of life beginning with the pre-natal period and continuing with attachment, emotional attunement, early socialization and parenting practices. Exposure to these and to early brain research on how experiences shape the brain will be presented in an activity-based approach.

In addition teens will be engaged in an exploration of how and why a parent’s relationship really matters. Children with two parents, mature and committed to
each other and their child over the long haul, are advantaged in myriad ways. Lessons will build an understanding of how that parental partnership helps a child not only economically, but also emotionally and socially. Importantly, teens will see how that partnership, if it’s not destructive, helps parents in their nurturing tasks for the child. Go into any high school today and ask kids if teen pregnancy is a bad idea. Some will not think it’s a bad idea and the majority who do think it is will say it is a bad idea because the parent is too young, or may not finish school, or may not get good pre-natal care. Rarely will you hear a teen say it’s a bad idea because you’re not married.

There are important advantages that a quality and cooperative partnership offers a parent and a child. One goal of this unit is to address the growing disconnect between marriage and childbearing. This “disconnect” not only disadvantages children, but is leading to greater gender, racial and economic inequality. Not everyone has to get married, but teens need better information to inform their decisions.

The hope is that this information, conveyed through activities and structured discussions, will deepen teens’ reflections about how their decisions about sexual involvement relate to pregnancy, their decisions about such an event, the quality of a child’s life, and their own future relationships and chances for a successful marriage. Basic information on pregnancy and birth control is included, but within a values context that strongly discourages childbearing outside of marriage.

Topics Addressed in *Baby Smarts*

- Myths and facts about getting pregnant; why teens are unreliable users of birth control; how pregnancy affects a girl’s and boys life materially and emotionally; how their relationship now and in the future may be affected; how this may affect their future love life.
- Explore a girl’s motivation in “keeping her baby” and contrast her needs with a baby’s needs; explore the young father’s situation, examine child outcomes and risks to babies of young unwed mothers; build a foundation for understanding why a parent’s relationship matters for a baby—its existence, its stability and quality.
- Identify characteristics of good fathering and the unique contributions fathers can make; explore issues of father disengagement; examine the structural situations that favor quality fathering; build awareness of the connection between quality fathering and marriage.
- Learn about a child’s development needs in the first few years of life – the pre-natal period, attachment bond, emotional attunement, early socialization and effective discipline and parenting practices. Learn about findings from early brain research on the importance of early experiences. Learn about links between early experience and later child/adolescent behavior.
Engage teens in a deeper reflection about the most profound consequence of sexual involvement—pregnancy. Deeply explore the kinds of critical issues and questions that need to be asked about having a child, including the importance of assessing the couple’s relationship; the importance of communication and relationship skills if the couple is serious about moving towards marriage. Post-birth relationship realities—whatever the relationship status of the parents; do’s and don’ts advice for teen parents from young parents who’ve “been there.”
Using the Baby Smarts Unit

Baby Smarts – From the Eyes of a Child focuses on pregnancy and is one unit within the five unit series, Love U2: Getting Smarter About Relationships, Sex, Babies and Marriage. The entire Love U2 series is a comprehensive relationship education program. The research on program effectiveness is clearly pointing to the importance of programs that are deeper and of longer duration. In the best scenario, schools would offer all five units over a period of several years. But alas, many teachers and schools will not have the luxury of time to use Love U2 in its entirety. That is why the units are sold separately and suggestions are offered for a teacher’s particular focus and time constraints.

Ideally this pregnancy unit should be linked with the Becoming Sex Smart unit (before or after), although it can very well stand on its own. Baby Smarts in its entirety represents a unique approach to pregnancy prevention—one that puts considerations about the child at center stage. Some sexuality and pregnancy prevention educators may pull the core lessons of this unit (Lesson 1, 2, and 6) and link it with the Becoming Sex Smart unit. Others with more time may chose to add core lessons from the Increasing Your Relationship Smarts unit.

If you are working with pregnant and parenting teens you will find suggestions for topics and skill building at the end of the final Lesson 6. They relate to skills and insights in the Increasing Your Relationship Smarts, Communication Smarts for Improving All Relationships, and in the Marriage Smarts: Does It Really Matter? units.

Each lesson in this unit is loaded with activities, stories, and information—more than can probably be done in a one-hour session (depending on how much discussion is generated in your groups and how deeply you want to cover these topics). There is a game Building Baby’s Brain included in Lesson 4. Another game on parenting and a capstone story for a role-play, Three Cognitive Babes, is found in Lesson 5. We encourage you to look over the lessons in order to plan your time and perhaps pick and choose what’s best for your group. Please note that the stories utilized from The Art of Loving Well anthology are integrally woven into these lessons as read-alouds, not optional to lessons. We have found that stories bring concepts alive, touch the emotions, and engage teens. Stories can slow teens down to reflect upon important issues and give them the time they need to reflect and discuss sensitive issues through the “safety” of the experiences of the characters. This anthology is part of the accessory package for this unit for the teacher to use for read-alouds. For your information this anthology is the centerpiece of the Loving Well Project, an independent literature-based character education program pioneered by Boston University and used in language arts and sexuality classes from the 8th to 12th grades. It has been field-tested with 10,000 students in three states and outside evaluation has confirmed its

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significant impact in delaying the onset of sexual activity. All of its stories are rich. If you would like to have a set of the anthologies for your students, or coordinate an inter-disciplinary initiative with the language arts instructors at your school, contact Loving Well directly for information on purchasing student books and/or possibilities for funding the purchase of student book sets with grant money (nmclaren@bu.edu).

Included as an accessory, is a video on early experiences and brain development. Note, also that a couple of videos are recommended within the lessons with order information. Be sure to order in advance if you opt to include one. A couple of commercial videos you may want to consider as supplements are Down In the Delta and Antwone Fisher. They contain several themes relating to this unit. Assigning film reviews as extra-credit or using film as a focus for a teen retreats or sessions is often a good way to extend and deepen discussion.

We encourage you to send any number of handouts home to be discussed with parents or guardians. Requiring that teens return with a parent/guardian signature for points better ensures it happens and may help to facilitate discussion on these very important issues at home. Research underscores that, contrary to conventional wisdom, parents are an important influence on their teen children. Parents may welcome these handouts as conversation starters with their teen.

You may find that some of these lessons, because of the activities and games lend themselves well to service learning. One pilot successfully engaged 11th and 12th graders in service learning by having them “teach” chosen lessons to 8th graders.

It’s highly recommended that you get a boom box and play music at times to engage your students. You might consider playing music at the start or finish of certain activities. Music engages the emotions and can put the brain in an active-alert mode. Consider asking students on a rotating basis to bring in music that relates to the themes at hand.

We hope you’ll find the lessons easy to use with clear instructions for how to set up and teach the lessons and carry out the activities. Although no training is necessary, the author is available to do so if requested. This curriculum draws on some of the latest research. Sources and websites are noted. For your convenience, a couple of resource articles are found in the appendix. Finally, the counseling, social work, and nursing staff at your school or in your community may find value in some of the lessons that offer talking points and activities that could be adapted to individual and small group work. You may contact the author through the publisher. We welcome your comments and suggestions.
LESSON 2
UNPLANNED PREGNANCY FROM THE EYES OF A CHILD

OVERVIEW

The goal of the next few lessons is to help teens bring into focus the consequences of teen pregnancy from a child’s eyes and heart. Often our prevention efforts center on appealing to teens’ self-interest—how a pregnancy can “mess up” their life and future. Ignoring the typical warnings of how it will compromise their life and freedom, many teens, in deciding to keep their baby rather than “give it away,” often see their choice as one of taking the higher moral ground. Some surveys of pregnant teen girls reveal they are much more motivated by arguments that center on the well-being of the baby—no matter what their ultimate choice may be. This lesson will address a critical topic often ignored in discussions with teens. That is, how a parent’s relationship—its quality, existence, and stability—affect a child. The lesson that follows will explore fatherhood, while Lessons 4 and 5 will focus on early childhood development needs.

The activities in this lesson aim to build an awareness of how and why creating a solid partnership, that is, a marriage, before undertaking childrearing matters to a child’s well-being. A child with two parents in a stable and quality union benefits in many ways—economically, emotionally and socially. Explorations such as this are of vital importance given the number of babies today born outside of marriage, many of who begin and then continue their lives disadvantaged. Included in this curriculum are useful background resources summarizing some of the major social science findings on the effect of parental relationships on child outcomes. A short list of books on this subject will also be provided at the end.

Goals

- Bring into focus a baby’s needs in discussions of teen pregnancy.
- Explore motivations for teens keeping their babies.
- Gain awareness of child outcomes and risks to babies of young unmarried parents.
- Build a foundation for understanding why a parent’s relationship matters for a baby.

Lesson-at-a-Glance

Fact Check and Discussion.

“What a Baby Wants” Activity.

Story: “Welcome,” from Art of Loving Well.
Motivation for Keeping a Baby Activity.

Test Your Baby Smarts Quiz.

Material Checklist
The anthology, Art of Loving Well, and the story, “Welcome,” found on page 66. Two sheets of blank 8 ½ x 11 paper for each participant for activities in section two and four below. Either make an overhead transparency or duplicate copies of “Baby Smarts” Quiz (Resource 2a). Plenty of colored markers and pencils or pens.

1. Fact Check & Discussion

Begin with a quick query. Ask the group to guess what percent of babies are born outside of marriage today. After hearing their response tell them the correct answer is 33%. (You may want to point out that it is 68% in the African-American community.) Explain that, while it is true that overall teen pregnancy rates have gone down, what’s going up is the rate of unmarried births. The rate of unwed teen and young adult women giving birth has been going up steadily. In the early 1960’s about five percent of all babies were born outside of marriage; today it’s a third. Currently, about 468,000 babies are born annually to unmarried mothers under the age of 20. This is much, much higher than it is in any European country. In an earlier era, young couples were more likely to get married if they got pregnant. Explain that we had an expression then called “shot-gun marriage.” Continue by explaining that out of wedlock childbearing just a generation ago was a big scandal. Most teens either got married quickly, moved away to special homes during their pregnancies to keep it secret, and then adopted out their babies. Today it’s very different.

• Activity: Group Brainstorm

  ▪ Ask the group to take a moment to think about their opinion regarding the following question: Is it better for a pregnant teen to adopt out her baby or keep it? After giving a moment to reflect ask those who say yes to gather together and those who say no to also gather in a small group. Give each group a couple of minutes to identify the biggest reasons for their position. Listen non-judgmentally as each group reports out. Then, emphasize that either way we can see from their responses that there are a lot of big issues at stake for both the parents-to-be and the child. (Teacher’s Note: Don’t linger too long in this discussion. It’s simply a tool to peak interest and to continue the theme. In fact, if you need to conserve time,

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2 The total teen birth rate dropped 22% between 1991-2000, according to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. This is believed to be due to an increase in abstinence as well as getting high risk girls to use more reliable forms of contraception such as Depo-Provera and Norplant.


4 National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy.
forego separating the class into groups and just give one minute reflection time followed by soliciting reasons from the larger group.)

Discussion

- Point out that most everyone would agree it’s better not to have the problem of getting pregnant as a teen in the first place and then having to decide what to do. Then, ask the group if they would agree or disagree that being too young and the risk of not completing school are the two greatest reasons why teen childbearing is a bad idea. Teacher’s Note: Queries with teens, in fact, indicate that these are the two reasons most often cited.

- Next, inform them that the largest age group having babies outside of marriage is 20-24 year-old women. Furthermore, three-fifths of all teens giving birth are 18 or 19-years-old. Curiously enough, the data show that the babies of older single females, on average—we always say “on average” because there are plenty of exceptions to the average—don’t do much better on social, economic and emotional measures than the babies of younger teen parents. In other words, they run the risk of just as many problems as the babies of young teens. That seems to poke holes into the argument that the only problem is that the parents are too young. What’s clear is that the problems associated with teen childbearing are not just issues of age. Something else is going on and we’re going to explore what that might be.

2. What A Baby Wants

- Activity: Writing a Family Ad

Pass out sheets of blank paper and colored markers and ask participants to write boldly the following heading: “Wanted: A Family.” Announce that this is an activity to get the students thinking from a child’s perspective. Ask them to work in pairs and produce an ad for a newspaper placed by an unborn child looking for a family. They should be thinking about what a baby or growing child needs and desires. Remember, babies don’t get to choose their families, but if they could what kind of a home would they desire? Write these directions on board:

  - What requirements and characteristics would make one ready to be a good mother or father?
  - What qualities and conditions contribute to a healthy family life that would enhance the nurturing of this child?
  - Think of as these qualities in as many areas as you can—economic, social, emotional, and physical.
  - Remember to do this exercise purely from the eyes and heart of a child.

Tell the pairs they will have about five minutes to finish. After five minutes, ask each group to share their ad. Have a value-free and supportive discussion of their ideas. Then, ask them to consider the ways in which a quality marriage might help achieve the qualities and characteristics they have just described in
their ads. In what ways would a good marriage help one as a parent? You might prompt them by asking them to consider the economic benefits of marriage. Point out that while it’s true that money doesn’t buy love, it does buy other things that can help a child. What are they? Add, if necessary that two married people are more likely to be financially independent and to have their own apartment or house. They are more likely to have health insurance. It is also more likely because there are two parents that one of them can stay home for at least some time with the baby. Other benefits might include less stress as one parent can hand off the baby to the other and in general receive support from the other. A parent who feels loved and supported may be in a better place emotionally to give to a child than a scared or isolated parent going it alone with very little security on any front. Also, a married couple may receive support from two extended families. Teacher’s Note: Point out to teens that rotten, destructive marriages do not help children. A reasonably good, loving, and cooperative marriage is the reference here. Move on to the next step in the sequence.

3. Story, Welcome, from Art of Loving Well

This story takes about 18 minutes to read aloud, but it is really well worth the time. Stories engage the emotions and the story’s characters give teens a safe space within which to address very sensitive or personal issues that they may otherwise hesitate to talk about. Before reading aloud, always practice reading aloud. The instructor may discover there are sentences that can be omitted to save time. An alternative to save time is to assign the story as homework before you teach this lesson since it is central to the activity that follows. A simple trick to ensure that students actually do the reading is to pass out a 3 x 5 cards beforehand with a couple of simple questions from the story to be collected for points. Two possible questions might be these: “Who is Sharon?” and “What’s going on with her?” Also, “What news does Tina learn about her parents during this trip?”

• Activity: Read Aloud Welcome

Announce that you are going to read a story aloud. Before the read-aloud, give the following introduction:

This story is about fifteen year-old Tina, an African-American girl. She and her mother are going to visit relatives. On the long drive there, Tina and her mom discuss Sharon, Tina’s white girlfriend. During the trip, Tina also learns some distressing news about her own parents.

After reading the story point out the two major themes. One theme is Tina’s feelings about her parent’s splitting up. Ask the group to describe what they think are her feelings about this. Ask students to recall passages that reveal her feelings. Hold only a brief discussion now—divorce is a topic that will be addressed in Lesson 4. A second theme, which will be the focus of the next activity, is Sharon, her pregnant friend.

- Ask what they learn about her situation (age, etc.).
• What is her family life like?

4. Motivation for Keeping a Baby 15 minutes
Point out that Sharon’s situation reflects that of many young pregnant teens. She is a teen with a troubled home life, without much support, and with an ex-boyfriend/father-to-be that she wants no part of. Nonetheless, Sharon is going to keep her baby.

• Activity: Drawing of Sharon and the “Keeping my Baby” Question
At this point pass out blank 8 1/2 x 11-inch sheets of paper and colored markers and ask participants to write “What’s in it for Sharon?” at the top. Working in pairs, ask the participants to think about why Sharon is choosing to keep her baby. Write the following on the board:

- Why might having a baby seem positive from Sharon’s eyes, or from any teen’s eyes for that matter?
- How does it satisfy some of her needs?
- What does it give her? What does she gain?

Instruct them to draw pictures to represent their ideas. What icons, symbols, or metaphors would represent these? They are to focus on Sharon and what she gets out of it. They may also use words. Teacher’s Note: Using illustrations may seem strange, but students typically enjoy this and become very engaged. Give about five minutes for completion and then ask each group or individual to hold up and interpret its illustration to the class. Tape up in classroom. Be sure to add these points:

While pregnant she may receive a lot of attention and pampering: For example, people may look after her and make sure she’s eating right.

Babies are cute and cuddly—she has something to love and who will love and respond back to her—at least until the baby can talk back.

A new parent with a baby gets a lot of attention from others—everyone “oohs and ahs” over a newborn.

Being a parent can make you feel competent and give you some direction in life—especially if your life is going nowhere and you have school problems.

She may hope that her boyfriend will stick around because of the baby and they’ll have a relationship.

1. She may harbor the thought that she’ll do for this child what wasn’t done for her, especially if she feels that she herself was neglected or abandoned as a child.
Contrasts Between Baby’s Needs and Teen’s Needs

After discussing their pictures ask the group to notice the contrasts between their earlier ads on what a baby needs and desires and what Sharon needs or desires. It should be pretty clear that they are not in sync. Point out that Sharon, as many pregnant teens, may be thinking more of her own needs in making a decision about what to do and is probably unaware of the baby’s needs. Think about it. When are teens engaged in a discussion of what little babies and growing children need? (Teacher’s Note: Lessons 4 and 5 will address that.) For now, try to connect to earlier points about what a having parents in a cooperative marriage might mean to a child.

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5. Test Your Baby Smarts – Quiz 10 minutes

Announce that you are giving a short “Baby Smarts” quiz to assess what they know about the babies/children of parents who go it alone. Teacher’s Note: This can be a sensitive topic for single parents and children from single parent families. You may find it helpful to read the author’s note and experience in pilots on this subject that follows this section before doing the quiz. This lesson and others are not meant to say everyone must get married, or to “push” marriage, but it is increasingly clear that young people are unaware the social science evidence that we now have on child outcomes and family structure. Our young people need this information to better inform their choices about such vital things as: whether or not to have sex now as a teen, what to do in the case of an unplanned pregnancy, and whether to live together or to marry down the line.

• Activity: Test Your Baby Smarts Quiz

Pass out “Test Your Baby Smarts” (Resource 2a) or put it up as an overhead transparency. Ask them as a group to vote true or false by a show of hands for each question. It can also be done individually first and then reviewed as a group. Below is the teacher’s key to aid as you review each statement with the group.

Teacher’s Key

Children of single parents are no more or less likely to drop out of school or do poorly in school than the children of two-parent families.

FALSE: On average, they are twice as likely to drop out and far more likely to do poorly in school than children in two-parent, married families.

2. Most of the unwed fathers of young pregnant females will stick around after the child is born.

TRUE AND FALSE: 20% of the fathers of teen mothers will marry them. And, it is true that a recent study found that over 60% of first time pregnant females were romantically involved with the father of the child and
strongly desired to marry. Many unwed fathers are involved in the beginning, but by the three-year mark most are out of the picture.\(^5\)

3. **Boys of single parents have about the same rate of committing crimes leading to incarceration as the general population.**

*FALSE:* On average they are two to three times as likely to commit crimes. Only a small proportion of the teens in the juvenile justice system are living with two married biological parents. Nationwide about 70% of inmates come from fatherless homes.

4. **Children of single parents are twice as likely to have children themselves as teens.**

*TRUE:* They are more than twice as likely. On average, 11% of teens with two parents have a child before the age of 20, whereas 27% of teens with one parent do. Teens living with their mother and a boyfriend or just with their father have much higher rates. Single-parent children are also more likely to be sexually active at an earlier age.

5. **Children in single parent families have about the same rates of emotional and behavioral problems such as depression, ADHD, impulsivity, and conduct disorders as kids in married or adoptive families.**

*FALSE:* Their rates are two to three times higher, on average. Twenty-five percent of kids of divorce remain troubled with serious long-term social, emotional and psychological problems. (10% of kids in two-parent homes do.)

6. **Kids in step-families have social, educational, and emotional profiles that look pretty much like those kids with two married biological parents.**

*FALSE:* Their outcomes look better than those kids with single mothers, but much worse than those in married or adoptive two-parent home. Boys raised in stepfamilies are three times as likely to have committed a crime that leads to incarceration by the time they reach their thirties.

7. **Children of single parents are less likely to be victims of child abuse since dads, who may be more strict or harsh, are gone from the house.**

*FALSE:* Children living with single mothers, mother’s boyfriend or stepfathers are more likely to become victims of physical or sexual abuse. Possible reasons: These kids may have more exposure to unrelated men—especially mom’s boyfriend—who *may* not possess strong protective bonds with the child or a clear role. One study found that boyfriends commit half of all reported child abuse by non-parents.\(^6\) Some studies


have found child abuse to be 20 to 30 times as high, on average, than for children living with two married biological or adoptive parents. A word of caution on single mothers and risk: Children face higher risks of abuse from single moms who are stressed and isolated. Teen mothers as a group have the highest rates of child abuse and parental neglect as compared to older parents.

8. **Children in single parent families are more likely to be poor.**

TRUE: On average, they are four and a half times more likely to be poor and to stay poor longer than kids in two parent families. An unwed teen mother who hasn’t finished high school is more than 10 times as likely to be poor.

FACT: The majority of unwed teen mothers receive less than $800 a year in child support. That’s about $16 a week. Many dads want to be involved and support their child, but they find that without an education and good job, they just don’t have the money.

9. **Most teen moms will finish high school.**

FALSE: Only one-third of teen moms get their high school diploma.

10. “You guess” question. **What are the median earnings of a two-adult household today in America?**

**ANSWER:** For a two-adult household the median earning is $56,000. For a one-adult household the median earning is $25,000. For a never-married single parent it is much less. About two-thirds of the children of never-married mothers live at or below the poverty level.

**Sources:** The Baby Smarts Quiz answers are drawn from some of the most respected and mainstream social science resources most frequently cited by both liberals and conservatives. They are:

- Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly (2002) *For Better or Worse: Divorce Reconsidered* (New York: W.W. Norton);

Other excellent sources are:


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8 Robert J. Lacey. Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Massachusetts-Amherst.
Author’s Note: Speaking to Children from Single-Parent Homes

Some teachers may feel that bringing up this data to students who live in single parent homes is harmful to their self-esteem. The author of this curriculum has found that, on the contrary in many pilots with teens, this information is empowering. Those who have experienced some of the outcomes listed in the key to the baby smarts quiz typically internalize them as their own personal problem—that is, they see themselves as just “screwed up.” In contrast, this lesson offers them the chance to develop a structural perspective for understanding their experiences as a window to their generation’s larger issues. It also keys them into the importance of building and nurturing healthy relationships for their own future lives and the lives of their future children.

True, there are kids who might be defensive at a suggestion that somehow they have problems because of disrupted parental unions. This can happen even with kids who were well-functioning before their parents split and then became snagged by drug abuse or began having serious emotional or behavioral problems occurring soon after their parents’ split-up: “I’m fine… my parents troubles didn’t bother me.” It is important to state up front that most kids of divorce end up fine—divorce is not like some terminable disease. Most families re-establish equilibrium within two years of the divorce. And most single parents do an absolutely admirable and heroic job.

There are other qualitative studies that explore the “inner world” of children of divorce (Judith Wallerstein’s book and forthcoming book by Elizabeth Marquardt). These works describe more subtle, but troubling realities. Nonetheless, the point of this lesson and others is not to look for pathology, assign blame, or to focus on the past and make kids feel bad. The goal is to build awareness that a quality relationship and commitment between parents is a real advantage to children. The research is abundantly clear on this. The goal is to inform young people so they can make better choices for their own lives.

Furthermore, we are lucky to live at a time when empirical research is discovering important insights about how to choose partners more wisely (we want to prevent bad marriages) and how to maintain a quality relationship or marriage. Most people want to stay in love. And most parents don’t wish a
world a single moms and disconnected dads for their children. These lessons are geared to helping kids do better and achieve what they want. Note that the *Marriage Smarts* unit presents some of the research we have on relationship and marriage success and failure in a teen-friendly activity-based approach.

It is also vitally important to be sure that the teens understand when we use statistics, what is meant when we say, for example, “kids from single parent families are *two to three times more likely than* kids in intact families to have such and such.” That is, it does not mean that all or a majority of the kids have a particular problem or behavior. So, for example, if 10% of the kids in two-parent families have a certain problem, and we say kids in single parent families are two to three times more likely to, then that means that 20% to 30% of the children in single-parent families are. Most do not. Most of the kids of divorce or parental separation go on to lead normal and productive lives. True, children of never-married mothers and those involved with a series cohabitating or married partners have worse outcomes. And, twenty-five percent of the children of divorce carry serious problems into adulthood. But, it’s not all or the majority. One legacy of divorce, recognized by all sides of the discussion, is the difficulty that these kids have as adults in achieving trust and intimacy and in building their own successful marriages. We will deal with this more in the lesson on divorce and/or troubled parental relationships in the marriage unit.

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**Resources to be found on the following pages:**

Resource 2a ...... “Test Your Baby Smarts.”
Resource 2a

TEST YOUR BABY SMARTS

Check the correct box:

TRUE  FALSE  1. Children of single parents are no more or less likely to drop out of school or do poorly in school.

TRUE  FALSE  2. Most of the unwed fathers of young pregnant females will stick around after the child is born.

TRUE  FALSE  3. Boys of single parents have about the same rate of committing crimes leading to incarceration.

TRUE  FALSE  4. Children of single parents are twice as likely to have children themselves as teens.

TRUE  FALSE  5. Children in single parent families have about the same rates of emotional and behavioral problems such as depression, ADHD, impulsivity, and conduct disorders as children in two parent families.

TRUE  FALSE  6. Kids in stepfamilies have social, educational, and emotional profiles that look pretty much like those kids with two married biological parents.

TRUE  FALSE  7. Children of single parents are less likely to be victims of child abuse since dads, that may be more strict or harsh, are gone from the house.

TRUE  FALSE  8. Children in single parent families are more likely to be poor than children in two parent families.

TRUE  FALSE  9. Most teen moms will get their high school diploma.

TRUE  FALSE  10. “You guess” question: What are the median earnings of a two-adult household today in the United States? For a household with a single parent?