Sexual continuum

Purpose
To provide a forum in which young people can discuss the pressures they may experience in their love/sexual encounters.

To provide the opportunity for young people to consider the complexity of sexual abuse in scenarios that are realistic and relevant to them.

Teaching notes
This activity is based on a continuum described by Liz Kelly in which she states that most women have experience of sexual violence. She proposes that their experiences exist along a continuum, from consent to pressure to coercion to force, rather than as discrete experiences which are either violent or non-violent. This activity should not be seen as a linear representation connecting different events or experiences, as sexual violence is a much more complex matter. The nature of the assault, the perceived threat, the relationship with the abuser, the frequency of the abuse, the impact on the woman at the time of the abuse and later, all contribute to the complexity of the matter.

Some forms of sexual violence are experienced more frequently than others and these are often seen by men as being harmless or having a bit of fun, and may be less likely to be described as crimes within the law. For example, flashing is often seen as relatively harmless, yet research suggests that women who are flashed at often fear for their lives, making the threat very real to them. Sexual compliance is included in this continuum, to indicate when one partner puts the other's sexual desires before their own and willingly engages in unplanned sex. Students could also be encouraged to write their own fictional scenarios, but be careful to point out that this is not a safe place for personal disclosure. Discuss where a safe place may be.

Procedure
1. Review the meaning of, and the laws about, consent (see Teacher reference sheet).
2. Divide the class into groups of five to six students.
3. Distribute a copy of the Sexual continuum cards to each group, explaining each heading; consent/ pressure/ coercion/ force. Explain that the task is to reach agreement within the groups as to which heading each scenario should be placed under.
4. Invite a spokesperson from each group to report back to the class.

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Discussion

• A class discussion could include the following questions:
• Did the group agree on the placement of the cards? If not, what disagreements did you have and why?
• How did you define or differentiate the different headings?
• Do you believe that there is an expectation that females must violently resist unplanned sex to be taken seriously?
• Do males experience unplanned sex? Do you think males experience the same sexual continuum?
• Which cards could have related to same-sex relationships? Can power still be an issue within same-sex relationships? Discuss.
• Some people in the scenarios clearly regretted what happened. Can you identify these scenarios and suggest what they could have done to ensure a healthier and happier outcome?
Sexual continuum: teacher’s reference sheet

Laws about Sex

Consent: The law states that any sexual touching without agreement (consent) is unlawful. Consent is saying yes to sex or sexual touching without being pressured or forced. Consent is saying yes when you are free to say no.

No-one can legally do anything sexual with a person who is under the age of 12.

The legal age of consent in Victoria is 16.

Aged 16 or 17 years? The person you have sex with must not be in a position of care, supervision or authority over you (even if you agree).

It is illegal to have sexual activity with any family member, including step brothers, step sisters and step parents.

So, what happens between 12 and 15?

If someone in this age group does have sex or engage in any sexual acts and it is consensual and there is no more than a two year age difference then you can use this as legal defense if the case is ever prosecuted.

If someone has sex with a person or touches them sexually when they are asleep, unconscious or so affected by alcohol or drugs that they are not able to agree, it is sexual assault.

Elements of a healthy relationship

Consent: saying yes to any sexual activity/touch without being pressured or forced.

Respect: Trust and closeness won’t happen without respect. Everyone deserves respect.

Mutuality: The relationship is meant to be good for both partners. Sexual activity should be pressure and guilt free, enjoyable and safe for both partners.

Communication: Both partners should feel free to express their opinions and feelings, even if the other disagrees.

Definitions

Rape is sexual penetration without consent. Sexual penetration means a penis into the vagina, anus or mouth. Rape also includes the insertion of an object or part of the body into the vagina, anus or mouth.

Sexual Assault is when someone behaves towards you in a sexual way that makes you feel uncomfortable, frightened or intimidated. This includes someone sexually touching you without your consent.

Sexual Harassment is other unwelcome sexual behaviour, which can be:

- verbal or written; comments, jokes, pressuring for sex
- visual; pornographic magazines or images on display
- physical; invading your space continually, ‘perving’.

Everyone has the right to say NO to any unplanned sexual behaviour.

Pressure: Being talked into doing something sexual you really don’t want to do. It is consistent and ongoing and can make you feel uncomfortable. Efforts that involve trying to get you to agree to what someone else wants.

Coercion: Being put into a position of having to do something sexual that you don’t wish to do. Feeling as though you’re not able to say no, or, not being given the genuine opportunity to say no.

Force: Physical force is used to make you do something sexual against your wishes.


Sometimes it's like, if you say 'No' too many times, you're afraid they'll just go and find someone else.

It's not really pressure like they are pinning you down, or anything. It's more like you love them so much that you just want to do anything that will make them happy.
I really liked him for ages so, when he wanted to crash at my place, it was great. But then, it started to happen more and more and he'd just rock up at 3a.m. wanting somewhere to sleep, but always expecting sex as well. And he was really selfish in bed too; he'd just get his rocks off and then roll over and ignore me.

We started off being friends and we always used to playfully insult each other. The point when I realised that I had to get rid of him was when we were being really sexy together and he looked down at me and said something really awful...calling me a stupid slut...
I know in my friend’s situation, where she was completely pissed and went through with it all and had sex and the guy thought it was alright. She was almost completely passed out and was just not into it and he’s just thinking about himself... having a good time.

We were at a party and this guy was there with his girlfriend and he was sleazing on to everyone else in the room, right in front of her. And then he’d say ‘Let’s have sex’ so everyone could hear and she’d go off upstairs with him and have sex. I don’t like to judge people, but who wants to be with a guy who’s sleazing onto everyone else but still she gives in to his every sexual demand? It’s just not right. It made me wonder how much that actually goes on.
He knew I didn’t want to have sex because we had talked about it and I said I wanted to be a virgin until I got married. But, this particular night, I was really drunk and we were fooling around and I had never done anything like that before, but he had, and I didn’t really know what was going on. It definitely was not consensual, but I felt like I had to go along with it because I didn’t know what I was stopping. It was a really tricky situation.

I started seeing this guy and he knew I hadn’t had sex before and I wanted to wait and I wanted the first time to be special. In the end, he got me really drunk and I don’t know whether you’d classify it as rape but I can only just remember seeing him on top of me and then it was all over. And then, I realised he hadn’t used a condom and I hadn’t taken the pill that day and I was totally freaked out. I had to go and get emergency contraception very early the next morning. I’d never want anyone else to go through what I did, it was really awful.
It all started off really good. In the beginning, he was a really nice guy and he got on well with my mum, too. I didn’t even realise what was happening until way after I ended it with him. What made me realise that things had got really bad was when he called and said he didn’t want me to go to schoolies week ‘cos he didn’t want anyone else to see me in my bikini. Now, looking back on it, I can see how manipulative he was; always making sure he knew where I was and trying to control me so I would spend more time with him than my friends.

I was at this great party and my friend left me there. The guys were really nice, though I didn’t know them really well ‘cos they were friends of my friend, but they said I could crash there. One of the guys said I should sleep in his friend’s bed, where he was already asleep. Next thing I knew, he was in there with me, kissing me, and I was saying ‘Stop, your friend might wake up’. He was on me and started to take my jeans off, I could barely move. He got off me and I quickly pulled my jeans back up again. Then I realised he had stopped because he was stripping off. I got up and raced out of the room. I felt sick ‘cos I realised how close I had come to being raped.
Well, if you’re already half-naked but you don’t want to have sex and you’re like, ‘NO’, then he says ‘but you led me on’.

We were together for a few months and talked about having sex. We planned the first time to be when his parents were away one weekend, and it was pretty good. We always used condoms and I was on the pill, too. It got better after that though, when we were more relaxed and got to know a bit more about what we both liked!
He knew I didn’t want to have sex but he just dragged me into the bedroom and threw me down on the bed and said something like ‘You’ll remember this when you’re old.’ I think it was supposed to be some kind of demonstration of his masculinity and I was supposed to swoon at his naked body...like in the movies, I guess. I just wanted to be sick.

We met at a party and the attraction was like, instant. We snuck into one of the bedrooms and put a chair against the door. It was great sex and I was glad he was cool about using a condom.
We had been together for only a month, but we talked about doing it from the start. I bought the condoms and we both cracked up when I tried to put them on. I thought it had to be serious but it was more fun than I thought it would be.

It got serious really fast. I felt like I wanted to stop, so I pulled away. I said we needed to slow it down. So, we just talked for a little while, then went back to kissing.
Consent.

Coercion.