

What Does It Mean to Be Healthy?

Sandy Rice, MEd

ABSTRACT. This is a training activity to address the learning domains of knowledge and attitudes that can be used with a wide range of groups. The purpose is to encourage participants to view health in the larger context of overall well-being, at how sexual health fits into that, and at ways an individual can take care of their health. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Training activity, sexual health

AUDIENCE

This activity is part of a training series called *Woman to Woman: Inside and Out* that was developed for use by female inmate peer health educators incarcerated in Texas Department of Criminal Justice facilities. The training is based on several learning theories, primarily Radical and Popular Education. While the activities were designed with this specific population in mind, they are appropriate for many groups, including professionals and community members, adults and youth, inmates and free-world participants, etc.

Sandy Rice, MEd, is affiliated with the Center for Health Training, 1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 410E, Austin, TX 78741 (E-mail: srice@jba-cht.com).

Since 1987, Ms. Rice has been a trainer, training manager and project director for CHT, designing and conducting training events and manuals on topics including: cultural competence, nonprofit management, individual and organizational change, customer service, board development, conflict management, and team building.

American Journal of Sexuality Education, Vol. 1(2) 2006
Available online at <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/AJSE>

© 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.

doi:10.1300/J455v01n02_07

PURPOSE

Participants have the opportunity to look at health in the larger context of overall health and well-being, at how sexual health fits into that, and at how an individual can take care of health.

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

Time required: One hour

MATERIALS

- *Sexual Health Worksheets*
- Newsprint
- Markers (enough so each participant can have one)
- Masking tape

WHEN TO USE

Anytime in a session, after an icebreaker or other warm-up activity.

In this activity participants can . . .

- Share their ideas about what health is, and how to enhance health
- Discuss and define sexual health
- Explore ways to nurture sexual health . . . intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, socially and physically

PREPARATION

1. On one sheet of newsprint, draw a pinwheel with five spokes. Write one of these words in the space between each of the spokes: Physical, Emotional, Spiritual, Intellectual, Social. Write each of those same five words on an individual sheet of newsprint. Post these five sheets around the room.
2. On another sheet of newsprint, write:
Sexual health—"integration of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being in ways that are enriching and that enhance personality, communication, and love." The World Health Organization

Set this newsprint aside until called for in the activity.

INSTRUCTIONS**Part I**

1. Ask the group: "How many of you think you're pretty healthy?" Ask for a show of hands. Ask: "How can you tell?" Take a few responses. Tell the group: "We're going to take a look at health in a larger context than we sometimes do. We often think of health as physical fitness, but there's more to it than that."

2. Show them the pinwheel newsprint. Name each of the five components. As you name them, ask participants to briefly define or explain each. For example: Physical = referring to the body, Emotional = having to do with feelings, Spiritual = relating to beliefs or faith, Intellectual = referring to the mind or thoughts, Social = relationships with others.

3. Hand out markers, one to each participant. Point out the five sheets of newsprint posted around the room. Tell them that you're going to give them about five minutes to write down *their* thoughts on the newsprints about each of these components. What does "health" mean for each of these five components? For example, what does it mean to be spiritually healthy? Tell them there are no right or wrong answers, but that this is a chance to share their ideas about these and to see what others think.

4. Give them 5-10 minutes to complete this. Then ask everyone to take their seats. Ask for volunteers to read the answers to each of the five sheets. Discuss briefly. Ask: "What surprised you about some of the answers?" "Were there some answers that were very different from yours?" "How does this activity affect how you think about health?"

5. Tell the group that now they're going to get to share some ideas about what an individual can do in each of these five areas to improve their health. Break the group up into five smaller groups. Give each group one of the five sheets of newsprint, plus a blank sheet. (Alternatively, you can leave the five sheets posted and assign each group to go to one of the posted sheets and post a blank sheet next to each written-on sheet.) Give each group a marker and ask one person in each group to be the recorder. Tell them they have 5-10 minutes to complete this. While they're working, circulate and answer any questions.

6. Tell them their task is to list all the ways they can think of for how someone can increase their health in this area, i.e., what can a person do to enhance their health in this area?

7. After 5-10 minutes, ask them to stop. Ask the groups to choose 3 great ideas their group had about how to improve health in that area. Ask them to report on just these 3. Leave the sheets posted and plan to allow a little time at the end of the session so that everyone can get up and look at all of the answers.

Part II

Note to educator: Most groups do not come up with many ideas that have to do with sexual health, for example, getting tested for STIs or using condoms or having an honest discussion with a partner about risks.

1. If your group does identify some sexual health ideas, congratulate them for thinking holistically. If none of the lists contain any ideas about sexual health, point this out. Ask: "Why not? Why don't we think about sexual health when we talk about health?" In either case, tell them that most groups do *not* think of ideas about sexual health. Point out that our society or culture tends to be very uncomfortable talking about sexual health. Say: "We make lots of jokes about sex, and there's lots of sex on TV and the movies, but that's not the same thing. We tend, as a culture, to separate sexual health from our health in general, and that's unfortunate."

2. Tell the group that they're now going to get a chance to look at some ways to improve sexual health. First, ask: "What is sexual health?" Take a few responses. Ask: "Is it just about protecting ourselves and our partners from STIs and unintended pregnancies or is it more than that?"

3. Show the newsprint that reads: Sexual health—"integration of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being in ways that are enriching and that enhance personality, communication, and love." The World Health Organization

Read the definition aloud. Ask: "What do you think about that definition? What does it mean to you?" Point out that this definition is inclusive, just like our earlier work on health was; that it's not just about "parts," it's also about ourselves as whole people.

4. Break the group up into pairs or small groups no larger than 3-4. Give each group a Sexual Health worksheet and tell them they have 10 minutes to answer the questions under each of the five sections. While they are working, circulate and answer questions as needed. After about 10 minutes, ask the groups to stop working.

Alternative: Instead of assigning all five sections to all groups, break the group up into five small groups and assign each group just one section. Have them report back on their answers before you lead a full-group discussion with the questions above.

5. Lead a full-group discussion by asking the following questions: “Which of these five areas of sexual health do you think is easiest to practice healthy behaviors? Why?” “Which is hardest? Why?” “What are some ways you can support each other to be healthy in all five areas?”

6. Ask the participants to get up and look at the answers their peers wrote for the first part of this activity. Challenge them to choose one idea that they would like to try to improve or enhance their health.

7. End the activity by having participants write down the one idea they plan to use to enhance their health.

Educator Tip

For the first part of this activity, if some of your audience cannot write, or cannot write in English, instead of having them move around as individuals, have them pair up, or even get into groups of three to write their ideas on newsprint. If you don't have time to do this entire activity, you can do part one in one session and then spend a few minutes at the beginning of the next session reminding everyone of what you discussed before going on to part two. Post the five newsprints for the second session as visual reminders. Each should take approximately 30 minutes.

COMMENTARY

This activity is part of a training manual—*Woman to Woman: Inside and Out*—provided to female inmate peer health educators at the Gatesville Unit, Texas Department of Criminal Justice (funded by grant number FPTPA060022-25, from the Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health, Public Health Region VI; available for purchase at www.centerforhealthtraining.org). The educators report great success in using this activity with other inmates since it eases the way to talking openly about sexuality, a topic most of the women are not accustomed to discussing. Since the majority of female inmates have experienced some form of intimate partner violence, often

including sexual violence, this activity is a gentle way to begin a healthy and supportive dialogue about self-care and appreciation of sexuality.

Sexual Health Worksheet

(Handout to accompany "What Does It Mean to Be Healthy?" activity, S. Rice, 2005)

To experience *physical* sexual health, some things a person might do include:

- Have regular physical check-ups, including testicular and prostate exams for men, and pap tests for women.
- Perform breast self-exams—men, too!
- Use birth control if pregnancy is not desired at the time.
- Use condoms and/or dental dams to protect against sexually transmitted infections.

What might stop someone from doing these things?

What could help someone to do these things?

To experience *emotional* sexual health, some things a person might do include:

- Avoid participating in sexual activities or relationships that are uncomfortable.
- Be assertive about sexual relationships and activities.
- Be honest with yourself about sexual feelings, and accept them.

What might stop someone from doing these things?

What could help someone to do these things?

To experience *intellectual* sexual health, some things a person might do include:

- Stay informed about health risks and healthy behaviors.
- Learn about your family medical history.
- Learn about health risks specific to your family and genetic/ethnic/racial groups.

What might stop someone from doing these things?

What could help someone to do these things?

To experience *social* sexual health, some things a person might do include:

- Talk honestly and openly with their partner about how they feel about various sexual practices.
- Talk honestly and openly with their partner about avoiding STIs and unintended pregnancy.
- Seek support from friends and family to be in healthy relationships.
- Provide support to friends and family for them to be in healthy relationships.

What might stop someone from doing these things?

What could help someone to do these things?

To experience *spiritual* sexual health, some things a person might do include:

- Integrate sexuality and spirituality to enhance and deepen a relationship.
- Avoid sexual practices that conflict with personal values, beliefs and ethics.
- Recognize and appreciate that sexuality and sexual feelings are a healthy, normal part of life and not something to feel guilty about.

What might stop someone from doing these things?

What could help someone to do these things?