

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Developmental Perspective

Although by this stage of development adolescents are generally gaining self-confidence and beginning to establish themselves as individuals within a group, they do express their individuality—through clothing or hairstyles, for example. As they look in the mirror they no longer see children, but question who they will be as adults. And although they can think more abstractly, they still tend to see themselves as either all positive or all negative, not as persons with positive and negative traits.

Objective

- ▷ To distinguish between all-or-nothing self-rating and rating one's individual traits

Materials

- ▷ A mirror (several may be needed if the group is large)
- ▷ Paper and pencil for each student

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson by passing the mirror around and asking students to look briefly at themselves. (If it seems too threatening for students to do this in a large group, hold up the mirror and ask them to imagine they are looking at themselves.)
2. Ask each student to take out paper and pencil and quickly write four positive things he or she saw when looking in the mirror.
3. Ask students to think about all aspects of themselves, not just appearance. Once again, ask each one to identify four positive assets (good skater, good listener, good leader, and the like).
4. Pass the mirror again (or have students imagine this), but this time have them identify up to four things they didn't like when they looked in the mirror. Then have each one list deficits unrelated to appearance (not good in sports, does poorly in math, and the like).
5. When students have finished writing, ask each one to turn the paper over, draw a big circle, and mark several pluses (+) and minuses (−) inside the circle.
6. Ask students to write some of the traits they previously identified next to the pluses and minuses in their circles.

7. Discuss the fact that people tend to rate themselves in an all-or-nothing way, when in reality everyone is a human being with lots of pluses and minuses. People can work to improve some of their minuses, but even if they never did so, they would still be good people. Emphasize the importance of not rating oneself as good or bad based on a single trait.
8. Discuss the Content and Personalization Questions.

Discussion

CONTENT QUESTIONS

1. Which were harder to identify, the positive or the negative traits?
2. What does it say about you if you have negative traits?
3. Do you think it is possible for anyone to have all positive traits?
All negative traits?

PERSONALIZATION QUESTIONS

1. Which positive trait are you the most proud of?
2. Which negative trait would you most like to change? Do you think it is possible to do this, and if so, how?
3. Can you think of a time when you rated yourself as a good or a bad person on the basis of one aspect of yourself? For example, have you ever thought of yourself as a bad person if you performed horribly in a basketball game or on an exam? Are you, in fact, a bad person? (Invite sharing.)
4. What were the negative implications for you when you rated yourself negatively on the basis of one or a few negative qualities?
5. What message do you need to give yourself about who you are—a person with positive and negative traits?

Follow-up Activity

Have students write “I Accept Myself as a Person Who . . .” stories, incorporating the traits they identified in the activity as well as other aspects of themselves.

It's a Dilemma

Developmental Perspective

Because adolescents don't always carefully evaluate consequences before they take action, they find themselves facing dilemmas that may have practical as well as moral implications. Understanding more about possible dilemmas or difficult decisions may help them learn to think ahead regarding outcomes.

Objectives

- ▷ To learn more about difficult decisions
- ▷ To identify factors to consider in making difficult decisions

Materials

- ▷ Paper and pencil for each student
- ▷ A copy of the *It's a Dilemma–Story* (Handout 10) for each student

Procedure

1. Introduce the lesson by asking each student to think about the two most difficult decisions he or she has ever made and list them on a sheet of paper. Then, have students describe what it was about the decisions that made them difficult. Invite students to share this information with partners. In the total group, discuss in general which types of decisions are most difficult and what factors contribute to the difficulty (for example, decisions that have major implications for the future, decisions involving moral dilemmas or practical problems, decisions that affect others, decisions that have significant financial impact, and the like).
2. Distribute the *It's a Dilemma–Story* (Handout 10) to each student, explaining that it is a true story about a high school senior. Ask students to read the story and respond to the questions at the end.
3. Discuss the Content and Personalization Questions.

Discussion

CONTENT QUESTIONS

1. What makes a decision difficult?
2. What things do you need to consider in order to make a difficult decision?

PERSONALIZATION QUESTIONS

1. If you have had a difficult decision to make, have you been pleased with the outcome?
2. If you have made a difficult decision, how did you do it? What factors did you consider?
3. When you have difficult decisions to make, do you make them by yourself, or do you consult others? If you consult others, who do you turn to (for example, parents, teachers, friends, counselors)?
4. If you have had a difficult decision to make, did it involve a moral issue or was it more of a practical decision?

Follow-up Activity

Ask each student to interview an adult, a peer, and an older student about a difficult decision each has made, how the person made it, whether he or she consulted others, and whether he or she is happy with the outcome. The interviewer should use this information to write several “I learned” statements about making difficult decisions.

It's a Dilemma

STORY-PAGE 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

Instructions: Read this true story, and respond to the questions at the end.

Jason and I had been going out for over a year. As soon as we started to be sexually active I went on the pill. Then we started having major fights and kept breaking up all the time. I didn't want to have anything to do with him sexually, so I stopped taking the pill. Well, we got back together, and it didn't take long before I was pregnant. I finally got up the nerve to tell my parents, and before I really had a chance to think about how I was feeling or what I wanted to do, my mom took me for an abortion. Everything just seemed like such a blur, but I got through it and just started getting on with my life. I knew it was the best thing to do since I had just turned 18, but I tried not to think about it.

After the abortion, things were on again, off again with Jason. Sometimes I just didn't even want to see him because he could be so mean and treat me like dirt. I don't know why I put up with it, but I guess I still thought I loved him. We broke up again and I started going out with one of his friends, but then Jason started calling me and we gradually began spending more and more time together. I wasn't on the pill, and I got pregnant again.

Up until this point I had tried to put the first abortion out of my mind, but then everything started to hit me. I didn't know what to do. The relationship with Jason wasn't good. He was pretty heavy into drugs, had dropped out of school, and related to me only when he felt like it. Most of the time I was really mad at him, so I knew marriage was out of the question. Also, I had no idea what kind of father he'd be. The second option was another abortion, and I just didn't think I could do that again. So for me there were two alternatives: keep the baby or give it up for adoption.

It's a Dilemma

STORY-PAGE 2

There were days when I just tried to pretend this wasn't happening, but I knew sooner or later I would have to face reality. I felt like my mom, dad, and stepmother wanted me to have the baby and give it up for adoption or have another abortion. They kept pointing out to me how this would interfere with my plans to go to college because I'd have the extra responsibility if I kept the baby, and I'd have to get a job to support us. They were afraid the baby might have problems because Jason had been so heavy into drugs. They also were concerned that he would make my life even more miserable if there was a baby involved. I struggled with what they were saying to me. I didn't want to go through a second abortion. I also didn't think I could give the baby up for adoption. I had been adopted, and even though I think my life has been a whole lot better because I wasn't raised by a young mother who had no money or education, there was something about doing that to someone else that just bothered me. I didn't ever think much about my biological parents, but I didn't want my baby to have to wonder why I gave it up and what I was like. I just didn't know what to do.

My parents kept telling me to think this through carefully. I was only 18, and I would have this responsibility for the rest of my life. They didn't think I realized the significance of that, and maybe I didn't. I felt trapped. Regardless of the choice I made, I would always live with the consequences.

—Mia, Age 18

Is this an example of a moral decision, a practical decision, or both? _____

What kind of impact will Mia's decision have on her future? _____

What things do you think Mia should take into consideration in making her decision?

If you are a young woman, what would you do in this situation? _____

If you were Jason and Mia were your girlfriend, what would you do? _____
