

Decide, Don't Slide!

The Low-Risk Approach to Relationships

Overview

This lesson introduces an important concept: *Decide, Don't Slide!*¹ Sliding (i.e. getting involved quickly and just letting things happen) is one way people end up in relationships that don't work out. Worse, sliding carries the risk of getting stuck in a place a person never planned to be in. And, all too often those slides can be accompanied by an STI, or an unplanned pregnancy. Indeed, sliding into romantic or sexual involvements carries risks not only for the partners themselves, but for a child as well.

The *Sliding vs. Deciding* concept is applied to forming healthy relationships and for sexual decision-making and planning. This approach may help participants navigate their first—or next—relationship more wisely. It can also help those currently in relationships move from a *sliding* to a *deciding* mode by gathering information, making decisions, and taking steps.

Participants will come to appreciate how important it is to decide and not slide when it comes to transitions that can be life-altering, like sex, pregnancy, having a child, living together, or getting married. A decision-making framework for relationship transitions will help identify what's needed to make good decisions. The workbook application on *Making Decisions* is particularly important for participants to complete and share with a trusted adult.

The *Success Sequence*, another important concept of *Love Notes* will be integrated into the *Sliding vs. Deciding* discussion. The sequence, or order in which one does some of life's big things, really matters. This requires planning and making clear decisions.

These two concepts are introduced here before the program directly addresses sexual decision-making, presents sexual health information, and engages participants in personal planning for one's choices.

Goals

- Analyze the risks associated with sliding.
- Learn a low-risk deciding approach to handling attractions and developing relationships.
- Review relationship concepts and skills from Lessons 1 through 7.
- Identify decisions important to make and to identify what one needs to find out or do in order to make those decisions.
- Become acquainted with the *Success Sequence*.

Lesson at a Glance

8.1 **The High Costs of Sliding** (15 minutes)

Activities: *High-Cost Slides*; Read aloud: *A Young Father's Story*

8.2 **The Low-Risk Deciding Approach** (10–15 minutes)

Activities: *Taking a Deciding Approach*; Video: *Relationship DUI: Decisions Under the Influence*

8.3 **Making Decisions** (15 minutes)

Activities: *Review 1-7*; Workbook: *Decide, Don't Slide!* and *Making Decisions*

8.4 **The Success Sequence** (8 minutes)

Activities: Read-aloud: *Four Young Parents*; music video *Runaway Love*

Trusted Adult Connection



Materials Checklist

Materials:

- Lesson 8 PowerPoint slideshow and all duplicate masters for activity cards are digital downloads that come with the curriculum. Easy-to-follow directions are found at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.
- Video Clip: *Relationship DUI: Decisions Under the Influence*, hyperlinked in the slides.
- Music video: *Runaway Love*, hyperlinked in the slides.
- Flip chart papers, markers

Resources:

- 8a. *A Young Father's Story* (pg. 187) (optional handout)
- 8b. *Ways of Knowing* (pg. 188)
- 8c. *High-Cost Slides* activity cards (class set): (**Locate colored activity cards in back of manual.**) Cut. Duplicate masters can be downloaded at DibbleInstitute.org/LN4.

Workbook Applications:

- *Sex and Sliding* (pg. 23)
- *Scale of Maturity* (pg. 24)
- *Becoming a Person of Character* (pg. 25)
- *Decide, Don't Slide!* (pg. 26)
- *Making Decisions* (pgs. 27–29)
- *Success Sequence* (pg. 30)



Preparation

- ✓ Read the lesson carefully to become familiar with the *Sliding vs. Deciding* and *Success Sequence* concepts. View slides with corresponding points and data charts.
- ✓ Read through and select the *High-Cost Slides* activity cards (Resource 8c) to be used. Colored card stock in back of manual. Cut.

- ✓ Practice the read-aloud, *A Young Father's Story* (Resource 8a, pg. 187).
- ✓ Preview the video clip, *Relationship DUI: Decisions Under the Influence*, which is embedded in PowerPoint slide.
- ✓ Duplicate *Ways of Knowing* (Resource 8b, pg. 188) for the *Trusted Adult Connection*.
- ✓ Read all workbook pages and applications on sliding and decision-making.
- ✓ Preview music video *Runaway Love*, by Ludacris and Mary J. Blige (hyperlinked in PowerPoint slide). A powerful message on *Sliding vs. Deciding*.

SECTION 8.1

The High Costs of Sliding

- Resource 8a: *A Young Father's Story* (pg. 187) (optional)
- Resource 8c: *High-Cost Slides* activity cards
- Workbook: *Sex and Sliding* (pg. 23)
- Glitter bottle from Lesson 4

15 minutes

(PP) This lesson begins with a basic question about why people end up in relationships that don't work or stuck in places they wish they weren't. Engage participants with the following hook question:

- ❖ *Do you know anyone who got involved with someone and then later regretted it? Or someone who stayed way too long in a bad relationship? Like, "What was I thinking? Why did I ever get involved with that person?"* (Pause for a show of hands.)
- ❖ (PP) *Why do you think this happens? Why do some people end up in relationships that don't work?* Pause briefly for responses. It's just a hook to engage.
- ❖ *Well, one reason is that some people slide into relationships, even sex, awfully fast these days.*
- ❖ *Getting involved quickly—we'll call it **sliding**—before you know a person very well is risky.*
- ❖ (PP) *Just like these girls jumping in before they know what's there.*
- ❖ (PP) *Remember the relationship pyramid from earlier in this program? Sex is a pretty shaky foundation to start a relationship on.*
- ❖ *Remember the love chemicals we learned about? It's hard to see clearly at first. Shake the glitter bottle.*
- ❖ *And, if alcohol or drugs are involved, your judgement is even more impaired.*



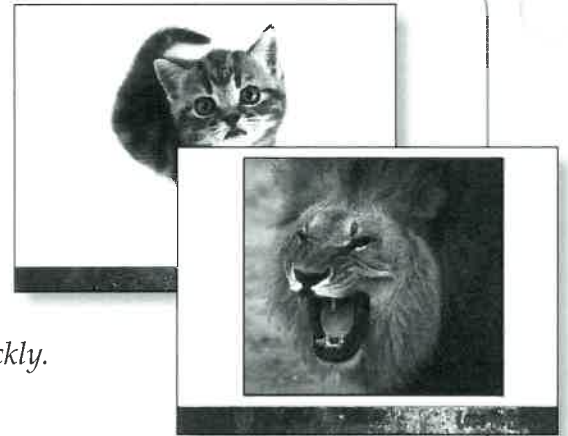
Lesson 8
Decide, Don't Slide!

Why do people end up in relationships that don't work?



Jumping in before you know what's there

- ❖ *When you slide and get involved with someone quickly, it can be like that kitty who seems so perfect at first, (PP) then grows into a roaring lion. (PP)*

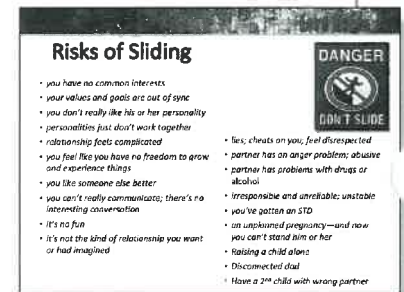


Let's do a brainstorm:

- ❖ *Imagine you're attracted to someone and get involved quickly.*
- ❖ *What are some of the things you might discover about this person after a while that you may **not have expected**? About the relationship? About your feelings.*

Listen to what they say. Then put up the slide.

- ❖ **(PP)** *Let's see if there are more on this list. Focus first on the risks on the left side. These aren't good, but not life-changing. You could just break it off.*
- ❖ *Now focus on the risks on the right-hand side. These are more serious consequences. Just think of contracting a lifelong STD or creating a child with someone you can't stand. Or worse, someone that could bring your child heartache or even harm.*
- ❖ *The deeper you get into a relationship, and sexual involvement, the greater the risks and consequences.*



Let's look at some risks (many will likely have been mentioned):

- Find you have no common interests
- Find values and goals are out of sync
- Discover you don't really like his/her personality
- The relationship feels complicated
- Discover you like someone else better
- There's no interesting conversations
- It's no fun
- It's not the relationship you had imagined
- Arguing all the time; unable to talk honestly
- Lies, cheats on you, you feel disrespected
- Discover problems (drug, alcohol, crime)
- Partner is abusive
- Contract an STD or HIV
- Get/make someone pregnant
- Sidelined/disconnected as a father
- Raising child alone; partner irresponsible
- Have a second child with the wrong person
- Child hurt by partner

Activity: High-Cost Slides

Have participants get into small groups. Announce you have cards that describe some very high-cost slides. State that they will have an opportunity to brainstorm how the person could have done things differently. (PP)

Pass out *High-Cost Slides* activity cards (Resource 8c), one to each group.


1. Read the scenario and then read what happened.
2. Your task is to turn back the clock and identify decisions, steps, and actions this person could have done differently to avoid what happened. In other words, this is a do-over chance.
3. Take three minutes, then volunteers will read their scenario and share their thoughts on what they could have done differently. Anyone can add additional ideas to any group's do-over.

Instructor note: Try to underscore and weave into the discussion the benefits—including physical and emotional safety—of slowing down—and pacing their involvements. Challenge them to think of some of the benefits of holding off on sexual involvement. As we know, sex happens pretty quickly these days for a lot of people. Might people be better able to choose good partners if they slowed things down?

(PP) Display PowerPoint, *Sliding—A Risky Approach*.

- ❖ So here's a diagram of the Sliding approach to relationships.
- ❖ Basically, a person **slides** in, and then learns more about the other person. OMG!! What might they discover?
- ❖ It's a risky way to go.

ACTIVITY: Turn the Clock Back on High-Cost Slides...



- Read card.
- What could the person have done differently?
- Identify decisions, steps, and actions to avoid the high-cost consequence.

Attraction	Slide in	Then, learn more about each other . . . OMG!	Risks & Consequences
Exciting	Rapid romantic or sexual involvement	Not compatible Different values Personalities don't mix Worse, discover problem behaviors Can't communicate Not on the same page	More complicated than you thought—not the kind of relationship you want Cheated on, lied to, used Controlled, abused STD/Pregnancy Raising a child alone Well, not disconnected dad Child hurt

Display the tattoo slides. *Here is food for thought:*

- ❖ *A person can slide and then decide she or he doesn't want to be in the relationship and break up. (PP)*
- ❖ *(PP) But, if you slide into a sexual relationship that results in a pregnancy, while you can decide not to be with that partner, your child can't. He or she will be your child's parent for life.*
- ❖ *Having a baby when you are...*
 - *not done with school,*
 - *not on track with education and employment, and*
 - *not with a partner committed to you and to raising a child together*

... carries some serious consequences for yourself and a child.
- ❖ *To be sure, there are young parents who step up and do a good job raising their child. And, later in the program we'll be talking about steps young parents can take to provide brighter futures for their children.*
- ❖ *But, the fact is that today, many children are born to unmarried parents who are not committed to each other and to raising a child together.*
- ❖ *Taking things slow, making clear decisions, deciding when and under what conditions to start a family, is a safer and smarter way to go.*
- ❖ *Unplanned pregnancy is something you have some control over. We'll be talking more about the kind of planning for choices that puts you in charge.*



Food for Thought: Ask participants to open up workbook to pg. 23, *Sex and Sliding*, and to read it silently.

Important instructor note: The concept *Sliding vs. Deciding* is a safety strategy for navigating the terrain of attractions, relationships, and sex that is relevant to all teens. Regardless of identity or orientation, youth can be vulnerable to pregnancy involvement. Recent findings have shown that the pregnancy rate for LGB teens (both boys and girls) is actually higher than rates for heterosexual youth.² LGBTQ adults

typically use reproductive technologies or adoption if they have a child, but all teenage LGBTQ pregnancies result from heterosexual sex. Adolescence is a time of identity formation and exploration. Teens' decisions about sex and fertility are influenced by a host of environmental factors and relationships that may be protective or hostile. Youth who are members of sexual minority groups experience disproportionately high levels of hostile environmental factors.

Read-Aloud: *A Young Father's Story*

(PP) Read-aloud *A Young Father's Story* (Resource 8a, pg. 187). Before reading it aloud, point out that this short but powerful piece was written by a young father who describes the high costs for his daughter due to his sliding quickly into sexual involvement with a woman he didn't know very well. Offer copies to participants who ask for one (optional). After reading it, ask youth what they feel hurt or bothered him the most? Pause and listen to responses. End by asking how his life, and his daughter's life, would have been different had he not slid and had he been determined not to have a child until his life was more settled with education, employment, and a good marriage.

A Young Father's Slide



SECTION 8.2

The Low-Risk Deciding Approach

- Flip chart papers on walls
- Markers

10–15 minutes

Announce that they are now going to work on an alternative—the low-risk *Deciding* approach. After some initial brainstorming as a whole group, they will break into groups to do more tasks to elaborate on a deciding, low-risk approach.

- ❖ (PP) Notice the first column labeled “Attractions.” Let’s brainstorm.
- ❖ What things should you remember about the infatuation stage? What should a person remember when they are strongly attracted to someone? (Hopefully they’ll say the “love chemicals” are surging; the 3-6-9 month rule—no big decisions yet; do things and have fun; communicate your intention to take things slowly—i.e. sexual boundaries.)

Attraction	Learn More About Each Other...	Then, Decide...	Agree to a Plan
Initial First 3-6 Don't meet too much too soon	What is each person's interests? Find each other's interests? Do you have fun?	Do you want a relationship? To be a couple?	Discuss your values and interests
Remember the "love chemicals" surge 3 & 9 months	Do you enjoy each other's personality? Talk easily? Right habits?	Are your feelings for each other mutual? How do you know?	Discuss expectations for relationship
Clearly communicate your desire to take things more slowly, your boundaries on physical intimacy	Do your differences work together? How are you each getting friends, family?	How do you want to pace the relationship? Where do you live, you live?	Agree in a plan that respects your boundaries on your boundaries * Other ideas: How to help you enjoy your relationship without adding too * Do a plan to meet, progress and it is
	Discuss any unspoken behaviors? Is anyone married? Have you met?		Discuss each other's future goals Discuss your commitment to existing progress and respect with each other, employed and stressed

(PP) Have the groups go to the flip chart papers on the walls and write the heading “Learn More About Each Other.”

- ❖ Generate a list of all the things you should be finding out about each other to see if you fit or don't fit together. What questions should you be asking yourself to find out if this person is a good match for you? Allow 4 minutes.

See what the groups come up with before advancing the slide. Be sure to ask what kinds of **behaviors** reveal these things. Add, if necessary, the points below:

- ❖ Find out if your values are in sync. What interests do you each have? Any common interests?
- ❖ Go out and do fun things that will allow you to talk and get to know each other.
- ❖ Do you find this person interesting, and vice-versa? Are you picking up vibes that they find you interesting to talk to? For example, does he or she make eye contact? Is he or she on their phone all the time? Do they ask about you or just talk about themselves?
- ❖ Do your differences and individual strengths work well together and complement and balance each other?
- ❖ Do you have fun together? Do your personalities work well together?
- ❖ Can you talk easily about anything? Disagree safely and respectfully?
- ❖ Have you met each other's family? Friends? What might you learn from meeting each other's family and friends? What might that tell you?

- ❖ *Keep your eyes open to detect problem behaviors.*
- ❖ *A tip: Don't make watching movies and making out your primary way to be together. Lots of time alone just being physically affectionate will probably lead you to go further than you intend and not allow you to learn much about him/her.*
- ❖ *Tip: Regarding yourself: Don't disclose things that are too personal and sensitive right away. Build some trust and knowledge of each other first. Balance time together, time with friends, and time apart.*

Ask the group to look at the third column of the low-risk, deciding approach, "Then Decide."

- ❖ *Do you think that after learning more about each other, you would be in a better place to make some decisions? What decisions would a person now be in a better place to make? Give time to have them reflect and then listen to their responses.*

Add and elaborate as needed:

- ❖ *Are the feelings mutual? Actions speak louder than words. How do I know? What behaviors tell you?*
- ❖ *Do I want a relationship? Do I want to be exclusive—not go out with anyone else? Am I ready to change my Facebook status to "in a relationship" to let people know I'm in a relationship?*
 - *A warning: Be smart about what you post online. Nothing you post is guaranteed to stay private. In fact, assume it will not. Be aware of the risks of sexting and what you post on Snapchat.*

Have the participants notice the heading on the final column, "Agree to a Plan." Ask the groups to brainstorm on flip chart paper the kinds of agreements and plans partners should have. Allow a few minutes. Ask for their ideas. Add, if needed:

- ❖ *Discuss your relationship expectations. What sorts of expectations should be talked about?*
- ❖ *How do you want to pace things, i.e. how fast or how deeply do you want to get involved? Do you both agree on the pace (timing)?*

- ❖ *Be clear on your sexual boundaries. Discuss them and make a plan. Setting limits before getting caught up in the heat of the moment can help you think clearly about your values beforehand and not have your behaviors driven by hormones or pressure from a partner.*
- ❖ *Values and intentions are never enough. Do you both agree to an effective plan regarding physical affection? This involves agreed-upon rules for touch (what's okay and what is not) and how much time to spend alone making out, if your intention is to wait on sex or pace things slowly.*
- ❖ *If you decide to become sexually involved, how will you make sure it's a decision and not a slide? What agreements and plans for reducing risks of STIs and pregnancy will you insist on having in place with your partner?*

Instructor note: Much more on sexual decision-making and planning will be addressed in later lessons.

- ❖ *Have you talked about why it is important for you to avoid an unplanned pregnancy?*

Ask participants these questions to conclude this section:

- ❖ *How can this approach still be romantic, fun, and spontaneous?*
- ❖ *How might these discussions impact their relationship?*
- ❖ *How will these plans protect the future of each person?*

Media Opportunity

(PP) *Relationship DUI: Decisions Under the Influence* is an engaging, animated lecture doodle that connects earlier themes, such as the love chemicals with sliding. It may be especially relevant for older youth who may, in the future, contemplate moving in with a partner. Indeed, the two most common slides today are sex and living together. This video clip is embedded in the PowerPoint slide. Discuss the group's reactions and questions after viewing.

DUI (Decisions Under the Influence)



www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwll1vhehmr0

Concluding points:

- ❖ *Taking the time to get to know yourself and someone else can help you make wiser relationship choices. Sliding can clearly lock you down into choices that you later regret.*
- ❖ *Many young adults today, in the U.S., move in with their partner. Next to sex, it's the most common slide.*
 - *There is no evidence that it helps in choosing a good marriage partner. In fact, it can keep people longer in relationships that should end; or, sometimes individuals end up marrying or having an unplanned pregnancy with someone they never would have if they had not been living together.*
 - *Many couples, if not the majority, move in together for reasons ranging from "why not; I like you" to "convenient" to "save money" to "test the waters to see if I do want to commit."*
 - *The easy exit they imagined earlier with living together is actually not always so easy. Many find it a lot harder to break up. Their lives get intertwined.*
 - *If a couple is older and on the same page about a commitment to a future together (i.e. like engaged), living together is less risky.³*
- ❖ *Now let's move into some real decision-making for real life.*

SECTION 8.3

Making Decisions

In this section, participants will briefly review the tools they've acquired so far. Then they will apply what they have learned to decision-making for their own lives. They will build their critical thinking skills in identifying what information they need to make their decisions.

- Workbook: *Scale of Maturity* (pg. 24)
- Workbook: *Becoming a Person of Character* (pg. 25)
- Workbook: *Decide, Don't Slide!* (pg. 26)
- Workbook: *Making Decisions* (pgs. 27-29)

15 minutes

Conduct a brief review while advancing the slides. (PP)

- ❖ *We have learned a lot in Love Notes about ourselves and the ways to really get to know someone and learn about healthy relationships.*
- ❖ *I am going to click through eight slides to quickly review the key concepts of Love Notes that can help a person make smart relationship decisions and not slide.*
- ❖ *The more you know yourself and about a potential partner, the more information you have to help you decide whether or not you want to enter into a relationship with them.*
- ❖ (PP) *You've learned about personality style. Do your styles work together? Do you appreciate each other's differences?*
- ❖ (PP) *The more aware you are of your own baggage and the more you learn about your partner's family and friends, the better able you will be to avoid people who could repeat the negative things you do not want to repeat from family or past relationships.*
- ❖ (PP) *You are more likely to **Slide** when you are under the influence of love chemicals. You are in a better place to **Decide** whether or not to enter a relationship with someone you like when the love chemicals have settled down a bit.*
- ❖ (PP) *Have you identified what's important to you in a partner? And what you would want that person to notice and appreciate about you?*
- ❖ (PP) *Have you answered the important Seven Questions (in the workbook) based on the 7 Principles of Smart Relationships? The 7 Principles of Smart Relationships give you valuable information to **Decide** about a potential relationship.*

Ways of Knowing

- Learn about your own personality style

Ways of Knowing

- Have you met each other's friends and family?
- Are you aware of your own baggage and that of your partner?

Ways of Knowing

Have you given it time to see more clearly?

Caution!
3-6-9 months

What do you want in a partner?

- And, what do you want a partner to notice & appreciate about you?

Followed the 7 Principles?

- Are you a good match? Compatible?
- Share values? Respect each other's?
- Can you communicate? Talk freely? Disagree?
- Do you genuinely like partner's personality and character? Or are you secretly trying to do a make-over?
- Do you feel you are liked for who you really are? Or are you trying to be who he or she wants you to be?
- Are you both up front or pressuring, using or playing games?
- Does your partner respect your standards? Treat you well? And, vice-versa?

7 Principles of Smart Relationships

- ❖ (PP) *If you have answered these questions, you will be better able to **Decide** if it's a healthy relationship. Have you answered the three basic questions about healthy relationships?*
- ❖ (PP) *Have you thought about your expectations? Have you talked about them?*
- ❖ (PP) *If there are red flags, you can **avoid sliding** into a relationship and **Decide** to stay away from that person. Are there red flags indicating disrespect or controlling behavior? Is there abuse of any kind, such as verbal put-downs or slapping?*

Workbook: Scale of Maturity and Character

Announce that they have two additional questionnaires in their workbook that they can fill out on their own. These will offer useful assessments for themselves personally and offer a way to assess another person. (PP)

State that maturity and character are not things a person is born with. People have to work to develop maturity and character by their actions, choices, words, and deeds. The instructions are clear in the workbook on pgs. 24 and 25.


Making Decisions

Now participants will have the opportunity to apply what they have learned to their own lives. Ask the group to locate in their workbook *Decide, Don't Slide!* (pg. 26) and *Making Decisions* (pgs. 27–29). Introduce with these points:

- ❖ (PP) *There are many things one can make decisions about rather than just letting it happen. Even the smallest, from "Do I want to kiss you or be kissed?" to "Do I want to be a couple?" all the way to "Do I want to have sex, have a child, marry you?" are all things we can make decisions about.*

Is it a Healthy Relationship? 3 Questions


1. Is it Controlling or Equal/Supportive?
2. Is it Conditional or Unconditional?
3. Is it mutual?



Three Sides of Love


Are there any red flags?

- Is it safe?
- Is it respectful?




Have you considered maturity level and character?

- A person works to develop these through his or her own efforts, actions, and choices.



Decisions You Can Make...

Workbook p. 27



- ❖ *If you are in a relationship right now, this workbook application can assist you in identifying decisions you may want to make and what you may need in order to make that decision. For example, what do you need to find out? What do you need to do? What does your partner need to do? What can help you make a decision?*
- ❖ *If you are not in a relationship at this time, this exercise will help you identify what you'd like to make decisions about when you do think of starting your first, or next, relationship and what information would help you make that decision.*

Ask youth to first read pg. 26 in their workbook before starting in on the exercise.

Then, on pg. 27 they will see a list of items. Point out that some may apply to them now and others may apply in the future. Ask them to check four or five that they feel are important for them to make a decision about, versus just sliding.

They can be decisions they'd like to make now, or they can be decisions they would definitely want to make in the future—things they would not want to just slide into. Give them a couple of minutes to look over the list.

(PP) Then ask them to narrow it down to two and transfer those to the next two pages. Point out that there is a list of possible things that might help them make a good decision. They should check as many as they think would help them make that decision. To model it, you may want to pick one decision and ask the group to check all the items that would help in making that decision and discuss.

Which items on the list in your workbook would help you make this decision?



SECTION 8.4

The Success Sequence

- Resource 8b: *Ways of Knowing* (pg. 188)
- Workbook: *Success Sequence* (pg. 30)

8 minutes

- ❖ Remember when you did the personal vision exercise in the beginning of Love Notes, thinking about how you'd like your life to be?
- ❖ While there are no guarantees in life, doing some of life's most important things in a certain order can really make a difference in how your life plays out... even reducing the chances of living in poverty.

(PP) Explain the slide as follows:

- ❖ Do babies drive cars? Of course not. Babies learn to walk. Then they learn to ride a bike. Then they learn to drive.
- ❖ Well, it's the same thing with life. Doing some of life's biggest things in order can really make a difference.
- ❖ (PP) Today, many births occur to teens and young adults who have not previously decided they are committed to a future together and to starting a family.³
 - The pregnancy may have been unintended and the parents may not have finished their education nor obtained full-time employment.
 - The majority of these relationships fall apart.⁴
- ❖ It's tough to raise a child when you haven't finished your schooling or secured a full-time job and when you don't have a solidly committed partner and healthy relationship. It contributes to many challenges for parents and children.⁵
- ❖ Having a child is one of the biggest life-changing events. If having a family is part of your vision for the future, then making a clear decision and having clear intentions about when you are ready to do that, and under what circumstances, is very important.

Doing some things in a particular order can really make a difference!



Not having a child until some things are in place can make a world of difference.

(PP) Present the Success Sequence:

❖ *If having a family and children some day are a part of your vision, this sequence **really** matters in terms of increasing your ability to reach your goals.*

1. **Education:** Finish high school and get as much college education or training as possible.
2. **Work:** Have full-time employment by mid-20's (or be pursuing further education or training).
3. **Marriage:** Be married before having a child.*

*Marriage is a legal and social commitment between two people, regardless of gender, identity, or orientation.

Young people who follow this sequence, or who are on track, are likely to live in middle to upper income levels by their mid-30's.⁷

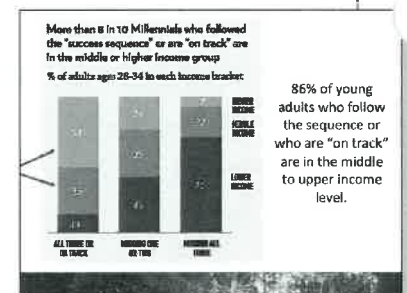
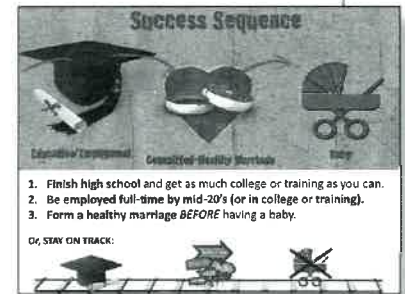
❖ **(PP)** *This is real—not opinion nor values. It is born out of research. Take a look at this slide analyzing those between age 28–34 who followed the Success Sequence or who were “on track” and those who did not.*

❖ *Note that 86% of those who followed the Success Sequence or are on track are in the middle- to high-income bracket.*

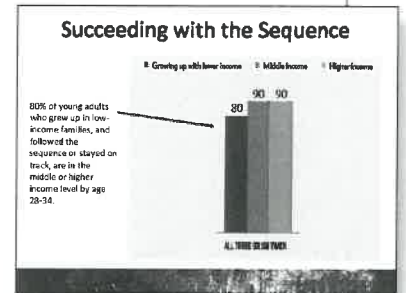
❖ *“On track” means education, work, not married, and no children. Not everyone desires marriage or children.*

(PP) Point out: It is clearly easier for those born with advantages to follow the sequence of finishing high school, going to college, finding a good job, and being married before having children. For example, a young person whose parents model a healthy relationship and have a college education and higher income, who lives in a safe neighborhood with good schools and is surrounded by a network of adults to help, is advantaged. This makes it easier for a young person to follow the sequence.

There are more hurdles for those without these advantages to follow the sequence or be “on track.”



- ❖ *But, whatever efforts it takes to finish high school, further your education or training, find employment, and be married to a supportive partner before having a child may be really, really worth it.*
- ❖ **(PP)** *Look at this chart. Even those born in low-income families who follow the sequence boost their odds of living in middle or upper income levels.*
 - *80% end up in the middle or higher income level by age 28-34.*
- ❖ *Now, money doesn't buy love, or a great family, or happiness, but it does buy things that really matter, like housing, childcare, healthcare, food, and many other things that help people.*



Here's an important point:

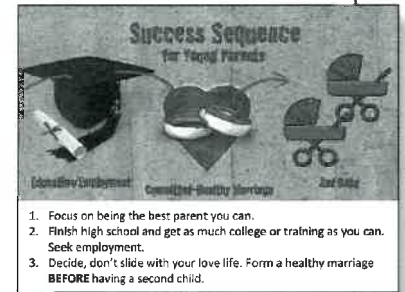
- ❖ *Yes, there may be hurdles for young people without advantages, for sure. But there is one critical part of the sequence or staying "on track" that everyone has some control over.**
- ❖ **(PP)** *Preventing an unplanned pregnancy before you are more settled with schooling and employment and are married is **something you have some control over.***
- ❖ *Deciding not to have sex now as a teen is the surest way to prevent a pregnancy before your life is more settled.*
- ❖ *The other way is to use contraceptives and condoms correctly and consistently if you are sexually active.*
- ❖ *And for those who do not envision marriage and children, a key part of success is avoiding an unplanned pregnancy while pursuing education, training, and employment. An unplanned pregnancy can make finishing school and going on to college to get a good job more difficult.*
- ❖ *There are young parents who haven't followed the sequence yet have succeeded with education and employment; but their lives have been far more challenging and difficult. It is more challenging and difficult with an unplanned pregnancy.*

*Sex is not a choice for everyone. Some have been coerced or trafficked. Reach out for support to a trusted adult.

And this brings us to the *Success Sequence* for young parents.

❖ (PP) For young parents, there is also a *Success Sequence*. It is very similar:

1. Focus on being the best parent you can.
2. Finish your education or training. Seek employment.
3. **DECIDE**, don't slide, with your love life. Establish a healthy marriage **before** having a second child.



Read-Aloud: *Four Young Parents*

Choose from the short stories below to read aloud. Introduce:

- ❖ *I want to read some stories to you. They involve young parents who either made clear decisions or who kept sliding. (PP)*
- ❖ *What these stories show is that life is not just fate or luck. One can keep sliding, or one can make decisions, plans, learn skills, and take steps. This increases the odds of success and puts more greens in your bowl.*

Read aloud Nicole's and Keisha's contrasting stories:

At 16, Nicole had a baby and dropped out of school. She went to live with her baby's father and his friends, but the situation was not that good for the baby. Things fell apart about nine months after the birth. He was cheating on her, and she tried to make him jealous by getting involved with someone else. Unexpectedly, she got pregnant with the new guy. She really loved the first father, but he was arrested and ended up in prison. Baby father number two, who she's separated from now, keeps hounding her—almost stalking her. She can't stand him, but the problem is her first child got attached to him when they were together. She's working a full-time job and going to school part-time. She has a hard time controlling her two kids because she's gone so much. She's worried about the behavior of her oldest one. In addition, she leaves the kids with people she doesn't know that well and wonders if she should trust them. She remembers too well how she was sexually molested when she was young by a baby-sitter, an older boy her mom hired from down the block. With welfare laws, she has to work, and yet she knows she has to go to school.

Without an education, she knows it'll be hard to get her head above water. She gets migraine headaches from all her worries; they land her in the hospital from time to time. She loves her second baby, but wishes she'd waited until things were more settled with her life before having a second child. She also feels stupid for falling for her baby's daddy's line that he didn't like condoms and telling her she could trust him.

Now consider another mother, Keisha, who also had a baby at 16 and went to live with her grandparents. She knew it was hard on them and appreciated their offer. She was determined to finish high school. She got her GED and then started at the two-year college. At the college, she met Anya, who didn't have a family that could help her; but Anya had found a place to live in with her baby through the YWCA. Anya was as determined as Keisha to better herself. The Y helped Anya find childcare for her baby so she could go to school part-time. Keisha is now paying her bills and building a good credit record. She is taking a parenting class and was able to get her child a scholarship at a good nursery school. In addition, as far as pregnancy is concerned, Keisha says she's not going there until she has a man she wants to marry. She has a good health care provider and is taking no chances. Besides, these days she has raised her standards. She is much pickier when it comes to guys and has promised herself to pace things more slowly next time.

Here is a story of Jake, a young father:

Jake is a young guy who fathered a child at age 17. He wanted to step up and be a good father. But soon he was on the skids with his baby's mother. Their communication was awful—every disagreement ended up in a shouting match. In addition, she does everything she can to keep him from seeing his child. It doesn't matter that she hardly ever lets him see his child; the state still comes after him for child support.

He resents it because not only does she keep his child from him, but he knows she's spending the money for other stuff. Nonetheless, he is finally making some progress. He has a part-time job and is taking classes at the community college and making child support payments. He keeps trying to stay in touch with his child—despite how difficult the mother makes it. A year later, though, he gets another girl pregnant—a girl he is not even into. No way does he want to be with her. The state is soon coming after him for support payments for both children.

He doesn't have a great paying job—he's not even done with school. It's stressful, but he does the best he can. The problem now is that he's met a new girl who he really likes; she's someone he really can see staying with. It's more than her looks or her body; she's real.

She also has no children. He wonders if she'll even bother with him. He has support payments to two kids and he's been hauled into jail for not making them once. For the first time, he's been thinking, "If only... if only I could turn back the clock." These days he also thinks more and more about his two kids out there. What bothers him the most is that he's doing to them the same thing his dad did to him—even though he promised himself he would never do that to his own children.

Tabitha's Journey:

Tabitha had questions about herself as a teen. She was attracted to girls but didn't know what to make of it. Her family was quite conventional, as was the small town she came from. She never saw a gay couple in her town, and at school the kids used words like "lesbos" and "fags" in a way that told her it wasn't cool. She buried her confused feelings in lots of wild partying and alcohol. Problem is, she wound up pregnant with some guy she barely knew. After she had the baby, she was determined to clean up her act and start college to improve her life. She moved to a larger city, and at college she discovered a LGTBQ group. It helped her figure out a lot. Nowadays she's trying to be around people who are healthy and have goals. She's going to school, working, and being the best mother she can. She's not jumping into casual relationships like she used to. She's in no hurry and will take her time to find a good partner who is mature and emotionally balanced.

Ask participants for their reactions. Some prompts:

- ❖ *How might Jake's life have been different if he had followed the Success Sequence and really committed to planning and following through on taking responsibility to prevent getting someone pregnant? How might his children's lives have been different?*
- ❖ *Nicole is a hard worker, no doubt. What concepts in Love Notes would have helped her the most to avoid that second unplanned pregnancy?*
- ❖ *Tabitha's story points to a concept we began with: namely that healthy relationships begin with you taking your time, developing yourself, being true to yourself, and empowering yourself with healthy relationship skills. It also means finding wise and supportive people to be around.*

Concluding points:

- ❖ *Deciding to commit to finishing high school and obtaining as much college or other training will point you towards success. It will help you obtain better employment.*
- ❖ **(PP)** *Also, having a firm plan to avoid an unplanned pregnancy (1st or 2nd) until you are married—partnered in a healthy relationship—will make a big difference in reaching your goals.*

Trusted Adult Connection

Pass out *Ways of Knowing* (Resource 8b, pg. 188).

(PP) Ask teens to explain to their parent or trusted adult the idea of sliding versus deciding when it comes to relationships.

- ❖ *Ask your TA to read *Ways of Knowing*.*
- ❖ *After they have read *Ways of Knowing*, ask if they have a story to share with you of someone they knew who slid into a relationship and suffered a high-cost consequence.*
- ❖ *Bring back your signed copy.*

Music Opportunity: Runaway Love

(PP) A very powerful music video by Ludacris and Mary J. Blige showing how parents' unaddressed problems and poor partner choices can harm children. A most powerful message on sliding versus deciding with one's life—the importance of deciding to address issues such as substance abuse and the importance of taking a low-risk deciding approach with one's partner choices. Be sure to offer a trigger warning of strong scenes.

You can always stop sliding, and start deciding, no matter where your life is...

- You can become wiser and more picky in choosing a partner
- You can decide to end an unhealthy relationship.
- You can decide to avoid risky situations.
- You can decide to wait on sex and make a plan to help stick to your intentions.
- You can have a clear contraceptive and condom plan for avoiding STIs and pregnancy

If you slide, the result is a consequence.
If you decide, the result is a choice.

Trusted Adult Connection

- Explain sliding vs. deciding and risks of sliding to your TA (get involved quickly vs taking it slow, getting to know, then, decide)
- Ask your TA to read *Ways of Knowing*.
- Ask if they have a story to share with you about someone they knew who slid too fast into a relationship and suffered a high-cost consequence.
- Ask your TA what they think the person could have done differently.

**Music Video Opportunity****Run Away Love**

- Parents' poor love choices and unaddressed problems can hurt children
- Decide, don't slide



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISvMS6s41YY>

Notes

- ¹ Sliding versus deciding is a concept adapted for teens from the original work of Scott Stanley, Galena Kline Rhoades and Howard Markman. This concept has become important in scholarly discussions on cohabitation and the inertia effect. See Stanley, S.M., Rhoades, G.K., & Markman, H.J. (2006) Sliding vs Deciding: Inertia and the pre-marital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*. 55. 499-509. Also, see Within MY Reach, PREP for Individuals, Pearson, M.E., Stanley, S.M. & Rhoades, G.K. (WithinMyReach.com).
- ² Lindley, L. L., & Walsemann, K. M. (2015). Sexual Orientation and Risk of Pregnancy Among New York City High-School Students. *American Journal of Public Health*, 105(7), 1379–1386. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302553 (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4463368/). See also Centers for Disease Control, “Health Risks Among Sexual Minority Youth” <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/disparities/smy.htm>.
- ³ Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). The pre-engagement cohabitation effect: A replication and extension of previous findings. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23, 107-111. Also see blog that references 7 key research papers on cohabitation: http://slidingvsdeciding.blogspot.com/2018/03/citations-for-tests-of-inertia_26.html
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ The Millennial Success Sequence: Marriage, Kids and the Success Sequence Among Young Adults. Wang, W. & Wilcox, W. Bradford (2017) Institute for Families Studies.

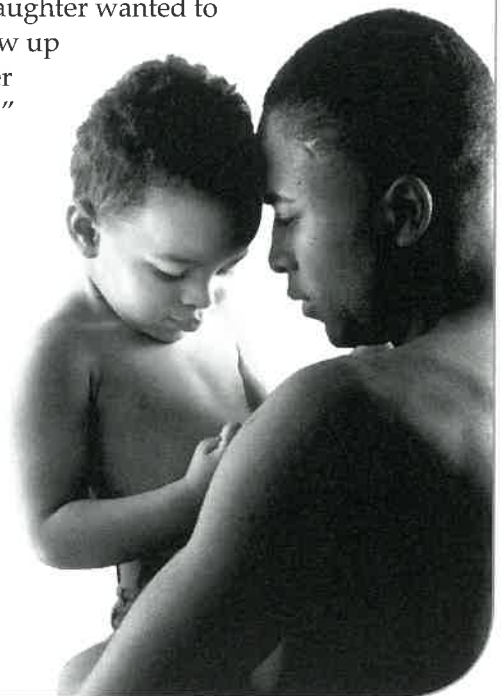
A Young Father's Story This short piece was written by a young father who describes the high costs of his sliding. After reading this, reflect upon the importance of knowing a person and making clear decisions rather than just sliding.

Being a young single father has been a hard thing. You may think it is easy, but it really is not as easy as you think it is. Even if you have that child only a few days a week, you have to pay child support so that your child can have food, clothes, and help with a place to live. My daughter lives with me mostly. I feed her and pay for all her school supplies, a roof over her head, and clothes to wear to school. I do this with no help at all from my ex. Some kids think it is a walk in the park and that it is not a big deal to do all that, but it's not as easy as kids today think it is. However, the material and financial part is by far not the hardest part.

I have to deal with my ex telling my five-year-old child that she will come and see her and then not show up. On top of all that, her mom will not even call to tell her that she is not coming to see her. The look in my daughter's eyes is extremely heartbreaking when she starts to cry and asks me, "Why did mommy not show up?" There is not a word that I can say to make it okay for her. Time after time, my little girl has to deal with it. I only wish that her mom would open her eyes and see that her daughter loves her and needs her because there are things that only her mom can do for her that her father is not able to do for her.

My ex can't even put her daughter's needs in front of her own. My little girl has asthma, and her mother won't even stop smoking around her when her own daughter asks her to stop. What makes it worse is she won't even stop when the court orders her to do so. With these kinds of things, it's hard to explain to my daughter what is really going on without hurting her feelings. I have an example of one situation. Last weekend my daughter's mother and I made plans for her to see her at 10:00 a.m. and she didn't show up. She was supposed to see her until 11:00, but at 10:30, she calls and tells me she thought it was 10:30 and that she would be late. This is not the first time; this happens every visit that she has with her. When she called this time, my daughter wanted to talk to her. She told her mom that she was sad that she didn't show up and asked her why she didn't show up. The only thing her mother could say to her was, "I don't know, but I'm sorry I was not there." My little one got off the phone, started to cry, and said that her mommy was sorry. What can you possibly say or what can you possibly do to make a child feel better? I wish I knew.

These are the things that I have to deal with for not only the next 18 years, but also every day of my life because I decided to have sex with this girl and get her pregnant. Now there is nothing that I can do to get her to leave me alone. She's there and there is not a single thing I can do to make her go away. I love my daughter to death and I would never give her back for the world, but I do wish I would have waited on sex, and waited to have her when I was married and with someone more responsible than my daughter's mother.





Ways of Knowing

Trusted Adult: Read through these points and ask your teen to explain the sliding vs. deciding concept. If you can, share a story of someone you knew in the past who *slid* too fast into a relationship and experienced negative consequences.

❖ Pay attention to the 7 Principles of Smart Relationships:

- Compatible? Common interests? Share core values? Have fun together?
- Can you communicate? Talk freely and fight fairly? Handle differences?
- Do you genuinely like your partner's personality and character?
- Do you feel you are appreciated for who you really are?
- Are you both up front or playing games?
- Does your partner show you respect? Treat you well and vice versa? Respect your standards?
- Do you appreciate each other's differences? Do your differences balance each other?

❖ Does your partner walk the talk?

- Is he/she responsible in other areas of life? Actions speak louder than words.
- How mature? Does he/she have a good conscience and good character? How does he or she treat others?

❖ Do you know much about each other's past?

- Have you met each other's family and friends?
- Have you shared past experiences? Past relationship experiences? (*Caution: Not immediately, but after some trust is built.*)
- Are you aware of your own baggage and that of your partner? Have you given it time for the love chemicals to settle?

❖ Is the relationship healthy? Does it feel...

- Conditional or unconditional?
- Controlling and disrespectful or equal and supportive?
- Mostly physical/materialistic/selfish or attraction on many levels and giving?
- Are there any red flags? Any problem behaviors that aren't being addressed?

Trusted Adult Signature _____