

big decisions

Challenging Questions Some Examples

Welcome to our list of ten sample questions and answers that come up often in *Big Decisions* facilitations. These questions are not specifically prompted by the lessons, but facilitators across Texas report these to be common questions from students.

This resource is primarily meant for facilitators of *Big Decisions* who have completed the certification training to refresh how best to respond to challenging questions. It can also be useful to school administration, parents and caregivers to understand how questions are fielded in the classroom to preserve a fact-based, values neutral approach that preserves the role of families and communities in helping young people to shape values related to decision making on relationships and sex.

Each question example explains what type of question it is and how a facilitator might respond. These examples might change pending the availability of certain resources, like school nurses and counselors, or where the question arises in the course of *Big Decisions*. For example, the answer referencing the “CLEAR no” would only be appropriate after the students complete that lesson.

We hope you find this resource valuable. If you have any further questions, please reach out to bigdecisionsinfo@hf-tx.org. We’d be happy to help!

- **Can a person get pregnant the first time they have sex?**
 - This is a *Request for Information* question.
 - It’s best to answer using facts that are straightforward.
 - You might respond:
 - “A person can get sex the first time they’re having vaginal sex, or anytime they are having vaginal sex. It is always best to be prepared to prevent pregnancy using a contraceptive method if a person is trying to avoid pregnancy, or to abstain altogether.”

- **How do I know when I’m ready to date?**
 - This is a *Permission Seeking* question.
 - It’s best to avoid giving your approval or disapproval about what they’re asking, and instead direct them to general guidance or a trusted adult.
 - You might respond:
 - “This is a common question, and something a lot of people your age are curious about. What do you all think makes a person ready to date?”

- **My friend is in an abusive relationship – what should I do?**
 - This is a *Request for Information* question.
 - Respond directly to the question they are asking and provide resources.
 - You might respond:
 - “It can be very hard for a person to see their friend experiencing abuse and not know what to do. I’m grateful that this person asked this question. It’s best to involve a

trusted adult, like your parents or a school counselor, when a young person sees a friend experiencing abuse. Trying to solve it alone might lead to unintended negative consequences. I'm happy to talk about this one-on-one with whoever asked the question."

- **If I get an STI, do I have to tell my parents?**

- This is could be a *Request for Information* or a *Permission Seeking* question.
 - Provide accurate information about what they must tell their parents and offer advice on how they might choose what to share.
- You might respond:
 - "Young people are able to get tested for STIs without letting their parents know. If they seek STI treatment under their parents' insurance, it will probably show up on the bill. There are teen-friendly doctors who can help to navigate this. It can be embarrassing to talk about this with parents and caregivers, but I do recommend you talk with them if possible. Otherwise, consider talking more about this with the school nurse."

- **When did you first have sex?**

- This is a *Personal* question.
 - It is never appropriate to answer personal questions in the classroom. Refer to the group agreements and draw boundaries as needed.
- You might respond:
 - "Many young people ask this type of question to get a sense about what might be right for them in their own lives. What I do or what anyone else does is not necessarily going to be right for someone else. That's why we agreed to avoid sharing personal stories. I'm curious to know, though, what do you all think a person needs in order to know if they're ready to have sex?"

- **Where is the g-spot?**

- This is a *Shock* question, and hidden within it is a *Request for Information*.
 - Remain calm, clarify terms, and answer the factual part of the question as best you can. Be sure to answer in a way that sets a boundary but still keeps the door open for more questions.
- You might respond:
 - "This is a common question. The g-spot is something that comes up a lot in sex ed because it is mentioned a lot in pop culture. It is a place in a person's genitals that is supposed to cause a lot of pleasure. Unfortunately, there isn't much evidence that this really exists, or if it does, that it's the same for everyone. I'm afraid that I can't speak more on this – it gets into sexual technique, which isn't part of the *Big Decisions* curriculum."

- **Does gonorrhea hurt?**

- This is a *Request for Information* question.
 - Provide the information they seek with a brief, age-appropriate answer. Remind them of the main STI message: get tested!
- You might respond:
 - "Gonorrhea is a common STI, and the most common symptom is actually no symptom at all. While it is possible for gonorrhea to cause some pain or burning, the only way to be

sure if a person has it is to get tested. If a someone is concerned about a pain they're experiencing, it's best to talk to a doctor or health professional about this."

- **Should I have pubic hair by now?**

- This is an *Am I Normal?* question.
 - Remind the students that there isn't any "normal" in the real world, and assure them that feeling awkward or different is common.
- You might respond:
 - "I often get this question, actually. Many young people are nervous about growing pubic hair. Some people grow it early, some grow it late, some have a lot, some have very little at all. The most important thing to know is that there is not right time or amount of pubic hair – when your body is ready to grow it, it will grow it. Always remember that every body is different."

- **How do I tell my boyfriend I don't want to have sex?**

- This is a *Request for Information* question
 - Respond as you usually would: simple and straightforward. Notice as well the opportunity to provide a reminder of important *Big Decisions* lessons.
- You might respond:
 - "It can be hard to draw boundaries with people that you're dating. I'm glad this question came up, because it's an important topic. Can someone remind me what the CLEAR "no" is, and how it could be used in this situation?"

- **Should I get the HPV vaccine?**

- This is a *Request for Information* question that looks a lot like an *Am I Normal?* or *Permission Seeking* question.
 - Be careful about being prescriptive. Remind the students of factual information, and direct them back to trusted adults.
- You might respond:
 - "The HPV vaccine is proven to be highly effective at preventing many kinds of cancer. I can't say if it's right for you, but I do recommend talking to trusted adults and perhaps your doctor about it. It is a lifesaving vaccine, but that does not mean it is right for everyone."