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Say 'No' and be firm about it

IT'S very easy to say "Abstain from sex" or "Just say No". But how do you abstain from sex and how do you say "No" in the face of those whom you love and look up to? This is what the National Population and Family Development Board's (LPP-KN) "I'm In Control" programme tries to address.

"I'm In Control" teaches youth about sexuality, consequences and responsibilities, and gives them the skills to be in control of their lives.

The module teaches students how to avoid risky situations. For instance: "Your date suggests you both go to a secluded spot, what do you do?"

In this instance, one can either refuse, or suggest going to a more populated spot.

In a high-pressure situation where a student might be persuaded to consent to sex even though he or she does not really want to, delaying techniques are taught.

Verbal techniques include saying, "I'm not feeling well" and "Did you watch *Akademi Fantasia* last night?", while physical techniques include "get up and eat something", "look around and pretend to look for something", or ending the situation immediately with "I have to go — I just remembered something!".

If in a romantic relationship, a student could say, "I don't want to have sex, but I still want to go out with you."

However, the module reminds students that delaying tactics are

not a solution; sooner or later, the student has to say "No" and be firm about it.

Throughout the module, the stress is always on the consequences of having sex (particularly unprotected sex) such as unwanted pregnancy, sexually-transmitted diseases, and HIV infection, as well as the responsibilities.

Much like rehearsing emergency driving situations in one's mind in order to be a good defensive driver, every unit in the module has role-playing and situational problems that the students have to analyse and manoeuvre through.

The module explains the issues of underage sex (illegal) and sex outside of marriage within the religious or cultural sense (prohibited).

Instead of treating sexual intercourse as if it existed in a vacuum, in this module, sexual relations is only one of the components of sexuality. It acknowledges that young people have friends and romantic relationships, and teaches them how to have a healthy and happy relationship which doesn't have to be bound by sex.

The module also puts the students into hypothetical situations like finding out that they are pregnant or they are HIV-positive, and making them think through what their risks are, and how their lives will change as a result of this. It also talks about pregnancy, abortion, baby dumping, rape, and sexually-transmitted diseases, so that students know what these things are

and how it can affect their lives.

It recognises that the people who might pressure a youth into having sex are not bad people, but friends. So, students are taught how to respond to peer pressure.

For instance, in the discussion "Is it macho...?", the students role-play through a dialogue between three friends, two of whom are trying to convince the third that abstinence is not macho. But the third youth stands firm by his conviction that he is not ready to have sex, and that sex is not the way to prove you're a man, nor that you love someone.

The module also stresses that abstinence is the greatest test of true love, debunking the oft-used phrase "But if you love me, you'll have sex with me."