

# Choice, Abortion and the Law

## *Middle and High School Session*

### **Purpose**

This session is designed for middle and high school youth and can accommodate any size group. The session will explore with young people the following:

- The ability to choose
- Consequences of choice
- Number of choices prior to the choice to have an abortion or not to have an abortion
- Some traditional legal and moral prohibitions against abortion
- Some basic facts about fetal development

### **Materials Needed**

- Chairs or desks enough for only 2/3 of the participants
- Small snack bags of popcorn/candy enough for 1/2 of the participants
- Computer access to the Internet
- Bible
- Pens or pencils (one for each participant)
- Flip chart and flip chart paper
- Markers
- Prayer sheets of Psalm 139 (Handout #1)
- *Did You Know* fact sheet (Handout #2)
- *Did You Know* fact sheet cut into separate sections
- 8 large index cards (5 x 8), labeled **Choice** and **Consequences**, with one per card.

#### **Negative Choices**

- to drink and drive
- to have sex as a teen
- to have an abortion
- to try marijuana at a party

#### **Positive Choices**

- to volunteer at a soup kitchen
- to confront a friend with an eating disorder
- to not have oral sex with boy/girlfriend
- to take a mission trip to a developing nation

- A young person chosen beforehand to proclaim Jeremiah 1:4-10
- YouTube download
- Laptop
- DVD projection system and screen

## Resources

For further information refer to the USCCB website, “The Second Look Project”:  
<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/abortion/index.shtml#documents>

### Gathering and Welcome (10 Minutes)

As the young people arrive, the session leader invites the participants to choose a seat. Once all the available seats are taken, instruct participants without seats to arrange themselves comfortably on the floor.

*\*Note: the space for the meeting should be arranged in such a way that there are not enough seats for the participants. In a school classroom this arrangement may require a removal of desks in advance of the session. Those who arrive first will choose their seats; those who come later will have to sit on the floor.*

Once everyone has arrived the Leader should introduce the session in these or similar words:

*Today we are going to begin our time together with a video from YouTube. It's always fun to have popcorn or candy while you watch a movie, so I invite you to come up and choose a snack bag for yourself, beginning with the group in the chairs.*

Once all the snack bags are gone, apologize for not having enough, but move immediately to the showing of the clip from YouTube.

*\*Note: If the sessions are being held during the school day, prior permission may be needed to have food consumed during class.*

### 12-year-old speaks out on the issue of abortion (25 minutes)

Introduce the YouTube clip with these or similar words:

*Sometimes it is difficult to speak about the subject of abortion. It can be an emotionally charged subject. The video clip you are about to watch was written by the young girl who delivered it to her 7<sup>th</sup> grade debate class. Pay special attention to her comments concerning choice and fetal development. Afterward there will be time for reaction and discussion.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOR1wUqvJS4>

Play the YouTube video, making sure that it is loaded completely before playing it. After the clip is finished, tell the young people that they will have five minutes to discuss what they have just seen and heard with a partner. Ask the youth in the seats to choose a partner for the discussion. Assign the youth on the floor a person with whom they should discuss. The discussion should focus on the following:

- Are there choices that do not have consequences? Why or why not?

- Which part of Lia's talk surprised you the most? Disturbed you?
- Do you agree with her argument about the fetus being human? Why or why not?
- What makes someone human?

Call the group back together. Invite youth to share key insights from their small group discussions. At the conclusion, lead a discussion on the following questions:

- What did you think of the set-up and arrangement of today's session (class)?
- How did you feel about not having a choice about a seat, a snack or a discussion partner?
- What connections if any can you make between the set up for today's session and our topic?
- What, in your opinion, makes someone human?

### **Did you know that? (15 minutes)**

Prior to the session, cut Handout #2 into ten sections. Randomly pass out the ten statements and invite the youth to proclaim them aloud. Begin with these or similar words:

*Prior to the Roe vs. Wade court decision in January, 1973, all states in the United States had laws either prohibiting or strongly limiting access to abortion.*

1. *Doe vs. Bolton*, a second Supreme Court decision issued the same day as *Roe v. Wade* expanded abortion rights even further, striking down many states procedural requirements.
2. The effects of these two Supreme Court decisions were to basically deny any legal rights to pre-natal life.
3. The earliest the fetus is capable of independent life outside the womb is at 22 weeks.
4. Late term abortions after the 20<sup>th</sup> week of gestation or during the third trimester are post-viability abortions, e.g., the fetus is capable of independent life outside the womb.
5. During the first month of pregnancy the fetus' entire physical attributes are determined including gender, hair color and eye color.
6. The majority of women who have abortions are already mothers who have had one or more abortions. They make up over 60% of all abortions.
7. The right to an abortion in the United States, as it exists currently, requires no reason beyond the mother's desire for a termination.
8. One of the major disputes in the abortion debates deals with the fetus' ability to feel pain and when that actually becomes possible.
9. There are some legal situations when a pregnant woman is the victim of a homicide that the perpetrator is charged with the deaths of two individuals.

Distribute Handout #2 and ask the participants to place a check next to any statement that was completely new to them. After they have finished invite them to compare their paper with someone sitting next to them. After a minute make the following comment in these or similar words.

*The controversy that continues about abortion in the United States often focuses on the right to choose and privacy rights. Simply stated, an individual has the right to choose what happens to his/her body and that right is private. The Church has consistently pointed out that there are many choices that precede the choice to have an abortion and that other issues outweigh choice. Is choice no matter the circumstances or consequences the ultimate value? What other values need to be in play when it comes to the life that exists in the womb? Can something that is legal in the eyes of the state, be immoral? What should we choose to do in those situations? Does the baby have a choice? Who represents the baby's choice?*

*In the case of the choice to have an abortion, the decision about the life and death of pre-natal life negates any possibility of choice for the life that is terminated. The person that would have been born never has any choice or for that matter chance at all.*

## **Choice and Consequences (25 Minutes)**

This activity is done in two rounds.

First round: Divide the group into 8 small groups; distribute the index cards labeled **Choice and Consequences**, one per group – negative or positive. Announce that each group must develop a list of at least five consequences for the choice on its card. Allow five minutes for this process, inviting groups to select one person to serve as recorder. Notes are to be taken on the back of the card.

For the second round, invite the groups to switch their card with another group, making sure that the second card is the opposite (either a positive or negative) depending on their previous card. Allow another five minutes as the second group examines and adds any consequences they think the other group missed.

Invite the groups to re-exchange cards, returning to each group its original card. Invite the groups to report their original list of consequences and any others the second group may have added. Invite a participant to record responses on the flip chart. Then conduct a large group discussion around the following questions:

- Does anyone have another consequence for any topic that they think the others may have missed?
- When people are faced with important or difficult choices do they generally pay enough attention to the consequences? Why or why not?
- What can often happen when people fail to or refuse to look at the consequences of their choices?
- Name some ways to prepare yourself to face and make difficult choices.
- Name some resources that might help you to prepare for making good moral choices?

Summarize the participant's discussion noting their response and reaffirming the consequences of choice in abortion, the value of human life, and the choice to speak for the child.

### **Sending Prayer (10 minutes)**

**The Word of God:** Jeremiah 1:4-10

**Fetal development week by week:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS1ti23SUSw>

**Response:** Psalm 139 (Handout #1)

**Handout #1: PSALM 139**  
**IN PRAISE OF GOD'S OMNISCIENCE**

- Female: God, you search me and know me.  
You know if I am standing or sitting.  
You perceive my thoughts from far away.
- Male: Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching;  
You are familiar with all my ways.  
Before a word is even on my tongue, O God,  
You know it completely.
- Female: Close behind and close in front you hem me in,  
shielding me with your hand.  
Such knowledge is beyond my understanding,  
too high beyond my reach.
- Male: Where could I go to escape your spirit?  
Where could I flee from your presence?  
If I climb to the heavens, you are there;  
there, too, if I sink to the nether world.  
If I flew to the point of sunrise-  
or far across the sea-  
your hand would still be guiding me,  
your right hand holding me.
- Female: I asked darkness to cover me  
and light to become night around me,  
that darkness would not be dark to you;  
night would shine as the day.  
You created my inmost being  
And knit me together in my mother's womb
- Male: For all these mysteries-  
for the wonders of myself,  
for the wonders of your works-  
I thank you.
- Female: You know me through and through  
from having watched my bones take shape  
when I was being formed in secret,  
woven together in the womb.  
You have seen my every action;  
all were recorded in your book-  
my days determined before the first one began.
- Male: God you thoughts are mysterious!  
How vast is their sum.  
I could no more count them,  
than I could count the sand!  
And even if I could,  
You would still be with me.
- Together: God search me and know my heart;  
Probe me and know my thoughts.  
Make sure I do not follow evil ways,  
and guide me in the way of life eternal.

## **Handout #2**

### ***Did You Know Fact Sheet***

1. Prior to the Roe vs. Wade court decision in January, 1973, all states in the United States had laws wither prohibiting or strongly limited access to abortion.
2. Doe vs. Bolton, a second Supreme Court decision issued the same day as Roe v. Wade expanded abortion rights even further striking down many states procedural requirements.
3. The effects of these two Supreme Court decisions were to basically deny any legal rights to pre-natal life.
4. The earliest the fetus is capable of independent life outside the womb is at 22 weeks.
5. Late term abortions after the 20<sup>th</sup> week of gestation or during the third trimester are post viability abortions...that is the fetus is capable of independent life outside the womb.
6. During the first month of pregnancy the fetus' entire physical attributes are determined including gender, hair color, and eye color.
7. The majority of women who have abortions are already mothers who have had one or more abortions. They make up over 60% of all abortions.
8. The right to an abortion in the United States, as it exists currently, requires no reason beyond the mother's desire for a termination.
9. One of the major disputes in the abortion debates deals with the fetus' ability to feel pain and when that actually becomes possible.
10. There are some legal situations when a pregnant woman and her unborn child is the victim of a homicide that the perpetrator is charged with the deaths of two individuals.