

PlayForward: Elm City Stories

Instruction Guide and User Manual

Introduction

Welcome to *PlayForward: Elm City Stories!* *PlayForward* is an evidence-based, engaging videogame that promotes positive health decision-making by providing teens with accurate information about a variety of age-appropriate health topics and helping teens build the skills necessary to make positive decisions. Designed for teens in middle and high school and providing up to 16 hours of gameplay, *PlayForward* was developed using a team of experts in the fields of health behavior change, adolescent development, and videogame design. Educators and adolescents themselves also played a key role in the development of this game.

Students playing this game do not need to have any background information about sex, drugs, or alcohol—rather, they will learn about all of these topics (and more) throughout the game.

The game can be played on the following platforms: iPads, Android devices, PCs, Apple computers. The game is available as an app.

This guide will include basic information about gameplay to introduce the game. For a more detailed guide through each scene of the game and suggested discussion points, please see the *Game Walk-Through and Player Companion Guide*.

PlayForward: Elm City Stories takes place in the fictional Elm City Middle and High School. In this world, the player develops an avatar. At the beginning of the game, the player fast forwards to the future and sees that because of some poor decisions during middle and high school, their avatar at the age of 30 is unhappy with their life. It is up to the player to help the character go back in time to make more positive decisions.

Objectives

Students will:

- Gain knowledge about a variety of health topics, including sex, drugs, and alcohol
- Recognize that each decision they make carries consequences
- Think critically about how their peers may try to influence their decisions
- Practice refusal skills in the face of temptation to engage in risky behaviors
- Develop more positive attitudes towards their sexual health
- Strengthen their sense of self-efficacy in making positive health decisions
- Identify risky situations and peers who may often engage in risky behaviors

Introduction for Students

Below is an introduction educators can read to their students about how to play the game:

Welcome to the Elm City! In this game, you will be guiding your avatar through middle and high school and helping them make some difficult decisions, which may be similar to the situations many of you may have encountered or may face in the future in the real world.

To begin, you will create your avatar by choosing the avatar's name, age, and gender. Then, you will peer into the future and see how poor decisions your avatar made in middle and high school made your avatar's life difficult when they are 30. It is up to you to go back in time and help them make better decisions for a brighter future!

To play the game, you will start with the first story called *Cheaters* that takes place in 7th grade. The game will open to a scene in which your avatar will need to make a decision—for Cheaters, it will be whether to tell the truth about helping your classmate copy your homework. To make the decision, you will need to use the three magnifying glasses (Know Sense, People Sense, and Priority Sense) in the lower right corner of the screen to find the key points—which are found in the objects in the scene. The key points give you clues as to which decision you should make for your avatar. Hover over the scene with each of the three glasses to find all the key points. You will need to first make the negative decision, see the consequences of that decision, pick up the key points from that negative outcome, and then go back and make the positive decision.

You will also be prompted during the game to play several mini-games: Me Power, Refusal Power, Know Sense, People Sense, and Priority Sense. You will need to earn at least two stars on each level to move forward in the game. If you don't earn enough stars, you will need to replay the mini-game level.

Each story requires you to make several decisions. Once you help your avatar choose all the positive decisions for each scene, you will successfully complete the story. To finish the game, you must complete 12 stories—2 in each grade level. Good luck!

Content

While *PlayForward: Elm City Stories* has a primary focus on prevention of sexual initiation and spread of HIV, the game addresses many other pertinent health-related concerns that teens face. The most prevalent topics include:

Alcohol

Drunk driving, Binge drinking, Alcohol poisoning, Making bad decisions under the influence, Dangers of combining drugs with alcohol, Myths about sobering up

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

HIV, Herpes, HIV stigma, No one can't tell if someone has an STI, How STIs are acquired, HIV testing, How STIs (including HIV) can be spread quickly to many other people, Curable vs. Treatable STIs, Behaviors that increase your chance of getting an STI, Ability of STIs and HIV to be asymptomatic

Drugs

Addiction, Marijuana, Inhalants, Smoking, Prescription medications (danger of using medications not prescribed to you, Danger of selling them to other teens), Drugs effect on making good judgments

Risky driving behavior

Drunk driving, Street racing, Driving while high

Role Models

Identifying positive role models and good sources of information about sex and other

risky behaviors, Acting as a role model for younger siblings, Utilizing parents as a resource to help a teen get out of risky situations (e.g. drive them home if everyone is drunk)

Sex

Sexting, Waiting to have sex, Talking to partners about sex before engaging in it
Forms of protection (condoms against STIs and pregnancy but contraception only against pregnancy), Risks associated with sex (pregnancy, acquiring an STI, How sex could affect relationship with partner)

Managing Risky Situations

Detecting risky situations (figuring out warning signs when peers are up to no good, considering situations that may get a teen into trouble), Walking away from a risky situation (asking a friend to take a teen home, recognizing that the teen is not the only one who feels uncomfortable), Recognizing life-long consequences (like using drugs, Doing illegal activities, Posting inappropriate pictures online), Having difficult conversations (insisting on condom use, waiting to have sex)

Taking Responsibility

Telling the truth, Accepting and recognizing consequences even if it wasn't the teen's idea to do something and they just went along with it

How to Play

Creating an Avatar

In *PlayForward: Elm City Stories*, players create an Aspirational Avatar through whom they will travel through middle and high school. Players are able to customize their avatar, deciding the avatar's gender (male or female), age (11-14), skin tone, and their name. Based on the gender that teens choose to play as, their friends and significant others in the game will change in name and gender.

The Future

Once players have customized their avatar, they get to see their avatar's future. They see that their character's adult life is not as great as it could be, because of some unhealthy decisions they made while in middle and high school. The players are then tasked with going back in time to help the Aspirational Avatar make healthy decisions that will propel them towards a better future.

Stories

After players have seen the difficult future of their avatar, they begin the game. To complete the game, players will play through the twelve "Stories" that occur from 7th grade through 12th grade. In each story, players will need to make several decisions that will either positively or negatively affect their future. But before

the player can choose the positive decision, they must make the choice that would negatively impact their future and see the consequences of the choice. Throughout all of the scenes of the game, there are clues (called Key Points) hidden that will help the player's avatar make the positive decision. The players must find these Key Points using their three lenses: People Sense, Priority Sense, and Know Sense. They must also collect stars through playing the skills mini-games. Once the player has discovered all the Key Points and received enough stars on the mini-games, they can help their avatar make the decision for a better future. Each level may contain several of these decisions. Once the avatar has chosen the positive decision in all of the situations, they successfully complete the level and can move on to the next one.

Skills

Embedded within the Stories are 5 mini-games that help players build the skills to make healthy decisions when faced with difficult situations. The five mini-games each contain 9 levels, which allows players ample time to practice their skills in different situations. The five skills games are: Me Power, Refusal Power, People Sense, Priority Sense, and Know Sense. In the mini-games (except for Me Power), players no longer play for their avatar but rather help out another teen at Elm City High.

Mini-Games (Skills)

Me Power



Me Power helps players think about who they are, what they care about, and what they want their future to look like. This mini-game encourages students to think beyond school to imagine what kind of future they would like for themselves, so they can better recognize how poor health decisions in the stories can impact that future. Players choose pictures for each category and write down phrases that describe the images. There are no right or wrong answers.

Levels: Who I Am; Hobbies: Stuff; Career; My Home; People; My Health; Priorities; Dreams

Know Sense



In *Know Sense*, players must use their wits and knowledge to help a character from Elm City figure out the truth behind common health myths and misunderstandings while conversing with friends. This game is designed to help players build their knowledge about health-related topics and model how they could convey such information to their peers in a relevant way. Players help the character determine whether what their friends are saying is true, false, or just an opinion. The key to succeeding in this game is using correct facts about the topic to back up the character's judgment. If their friend doesn't believe them, the player engages in a battle called *It's On!* with one of their friends in which the player must debunk incorrect statements with witty remarks. The conversations in *Know Sense* include discussions on HIV, alcohol, and STDs.

Levels: Kayla is Pregnant!; The Drinking Game; Team High; Mad Meds; HIV? Not Me!; Take a Shot!; Will That Go Away?; HIV Rumor; Should I Do It?; STD Rumor

Refusal Power



In *Refusal Power*, players help a character at Elm City High resist peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors. This game asks teens to break down the process of peer pressure and refusal by asking 4 questions:

1. What is really going on in this situation?
2. What are the reasons I would not want to engage in this behavior?
3. How is my peer trying to pressure me?
4. What are some ways I can say no to my peer while still saving face?

As part of each level, players must first help the character identify how their friend is trying to pressure them. Then, they must consider themes that would help them to say no. Finally, the players choose a clever way for the character to say no to their friend. Some of situations players encounter in this level include: saying no to drinking and driving, refusing to send a sexy picture, and denying offers to play a drinking game at a party.

Levels: Higher Learning; Going Upstairs; Drink & Drive; Lesson in Drinking; Oral Sex; Hooking Up; Sexting; Fight or Flight; Drug Deal; Drinking Game

People Sense

Within *People Sense*, players help a character at Elm City decide which of their peers to keep close as a best friend or good friend and who they should stay clear of. The rainbow visual keeps close friends nearer to the character and friends the player is not so sure of farther away. Each level has two steps:

Step 1. Players decide who to keep close and who to send along to the “Bad News” category. To figure out how close each of the peers should be to the character, the player looks at the peer’s profile on the right hand side. In the profile are clues that any teen may be able to use in real life to deduce someone’s character, such as their social media profiles, what they say in class, what they do around school, and who they hang out with. Using the profile of each student, the player categorizes each peer into one of the following categories: “bad news”, “not sure”, “seems ok”, “good friend”, and “best friend”.



Step 2. After all the peers have been sorted, players decide whether to accept or reject invitations by their peers (see above picture). The goal of this step is to gain as many friendship points without getting any strikes. A player receives a strike when they accept a risky invitation and get in trouble. If the player receives 3 strikes, the level is over. How many friendship points each invitation is worth is determined based on how close the friend is to the character. For example, saying yes to a best friend would give the player 9 points while saying yes to a peer who “seems okay” would net only 5

points. However, if the player refuses an invitation with a close friend, they lose more points than they would if they refuse an invitation by a peer who is not as close. Thus, the decisions made in step 1 determine the success of completing step 2. Not only do players need to decide who is sending the invitation and what the situation is, but they must also consider who else is going to determine if the event may become dangerous.

Levels: New School, New Friends; Up To No Good; Part of the Team; Good Friends, Bad Friends; The New Boyfriend; Just a Basketball Player?; The Bully; Getting Healthy; People Change; Summer Job

Priority Sense



The goal of *Priority Sense* is to help a character at Elm City achieve their goals. This mini-game teaches players how to balance the consequences of different decisions. In each level, the character

determines which two of the following priorities they want to focus on: health, money, school, friends, happiness, or family and how much they want to increase their points in those priorities. To increase points in a priority, players select a card from the category's pile (to the left, we see a card that would increase Jessica's happiness by 15 points). But before choosing a card, players look at the consequences and decide if the benefits are worth the risks. If the consequences are not worth the benefits, players can discard the card and choose another one. But if the players decide to take the risk, they spin a wheel to see if they will face any consequences (e.g. losing points in another category) or if they will get away without any negative impacts. Players must increase the points in their priority goals without letting any priority drop to zero. The opportunity cards show that even seemingly positive opportunities, such as running every morning, can have negative consequences, like affecting a teen's grades. Examples of some of the character's goals include: maintaining good grades while staying in shape for the track team; and, balancing time with family and friends.

Levels: College Dreams; BFFs; Balancing Act; Race to Success; Big Brother; Money Problems; A Better Place; Miss Popularity; Football vs. Friends; Healthy Excitement

Storylines

7th Grade: Cheaters



Opening Scene: Your character is in English class when your classmate (Tatiana/Javier) asks to copy their vocabulary homework. Last night, Tatiana/Javier learned that their older sister, who is in eleventh grade, is pregnant, which caused a huge family fight and kept your classmate from finishing their schoolwork. You allow her to copy, but the teacher, Mr. Walker, suspects something is

amiss and confronts you. Do you lie or ask to talk to him after class and confess?

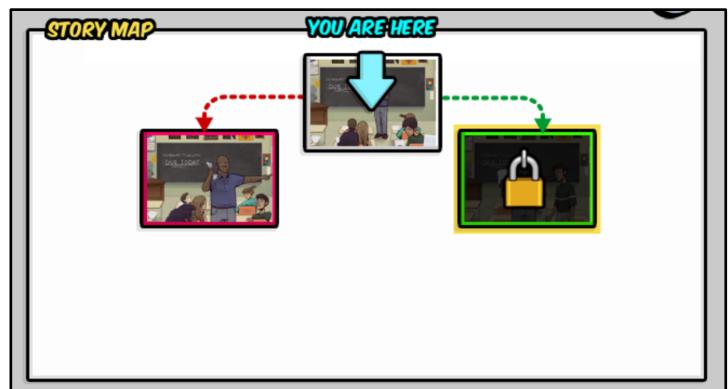
- If you don't tell the truth, Mr. Walker sends you the principal's office and you get in even more trouble.
- If you do tell the truth, Mr. Walker takes it easy on you and your friend because he appreciates your honesty.

Discussion Questions

What would you do in this situation?

Who are the important role models in your life that encourage you to make good choices?

Like Tatiana/Javier, many teens deal with stress. What are some common stressors that teens your age deal with? What are some healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with stress?



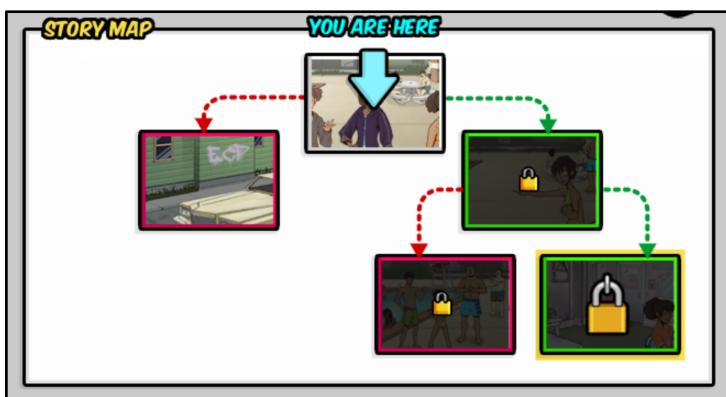
7th Grade: Poolside



Opening Scene: On a hot day you spend the afternoon at the pool with your friend, Michelle/Michael and your sister, Karina. You are getting bored and two teens you don't know very well (Jahira and Trinity/Trey and Louis) invite you to leave the pool with them. Do you stay at the pool or go with them?

- If you decide to go with them, you end up at Mr. Walker's house, where Jahira and Trinity/Trey and Louis are vandalizing it. They run away before the police arrive and you, your friend, and your sister get in trouble!

- If you stay at the pool, you and your friend see a couple making out in the pool. Your friend is grossed out and tells you they are spreading STIs. Do you call out the couple or go home to get more information?
- If you call them out, everyone laughs at you when you realize that STIs can't be spread in the pool.
- If you go home, you go online and find out that STIs can't be spread in a pool. You're glad you didn't yell at the couple!



Discussion Questions

What could have tipped you off that Jahira and Trinity/Trey and Louis were up to no good?

How might you be responsible to your family? Are there people who depend on you? How might you set a good or bad example for them?

8th Grade: Kissing



Opening Scene: Your friend, Taylor/Lamar is having a birthday party while their parents are out of the house. At the party, some kids are playing a kissing game called Seven Minutes in Heaven. Do you go down to the basement with Trey/Trinity, who you know has been drinking? Or do you stay upstairs?

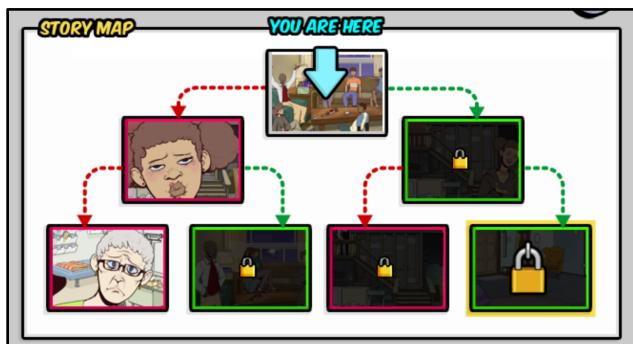
- If you go along with the game, you notice that Trey/Trinity has a suspicious bump on their lip. Do you still kiss them?
- If you kiss them, you find a bump on your lip and the nurse tells you that you got herpes!

Discussion Questions

Who can you ask about kissing and sexual health? Can you trust them to have the correct information and to keep the things you tell them to themselves?

What are some ways teens can avoid drinking at parties where there is alcohol?

- If you don't kiss them, you save yourself from herpes but you and your friends get busted by Taylor/Lamar's parent.
- If you refuse to play the game, Trey/Trinity suggests you get high using the chemicals they find in the basement. Do you go along with their idea?
- If you try inhaling, Trey/Trinity gets really sick AND you get busted at the party.
- If you leave the party, you and Trey/Trinity go to your house for them to sober up and you make a new friend (and avoid getting in trouble at the party)!



8th Grade: Pills

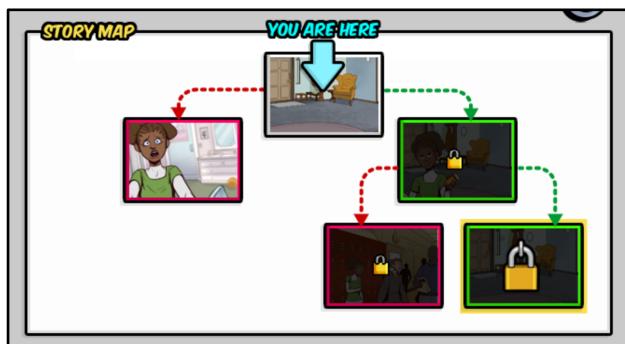


Opening Scene: When your friend Taylor/Lamar is over at your house, they see Gram's prescription pills and suggests you take some for fun. Do you try her pills?

- If you take them, you get a really bad reaction. You, Taylor/Lamar, and Karina get really scared and Gram feels really guilty.
- If you decide not to take them, Taylor/Lamar suggests you sell them at

school. Do you risk bringing them there to make some cash?

- If you do bring them, the schoolteachers find out and the police get involved, putting a note on your permanent record.
- If you don't bring them, you and Taylor/Lamar continue to play video games and avoid getting yourselves in trouble.

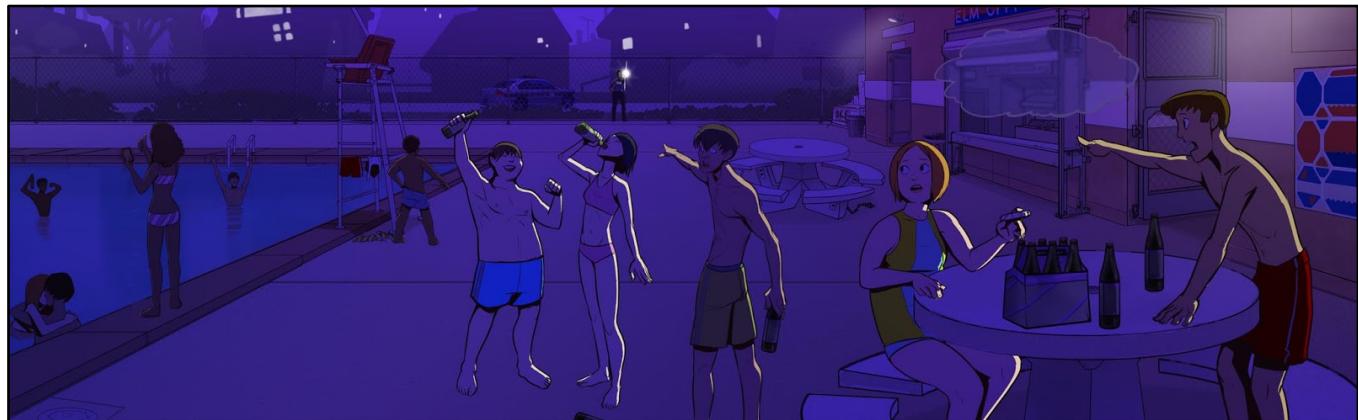


Discussion Questions

What are some reasons why you would want to avoid taking drugs without a doctor's prescription?

Your character goes along with their friend and got caught selling drugs at school. What might make it hard for you to make your own decision? What can you do to make it easier?

9th Grade: Misbehavin'



Opening Scene: One night, during the summer before 9th grade, your cousin Michelle/Michael calls you to invite you to a secret party at the public pool. Do you go along with them (and get a good reputation before high school) or ask them to come over instead?

- If you go, you discover the party is getting crazy. The police come and you get busted.
- If you decide not to sneak out, your cousin tries to sneak into your room with a joint

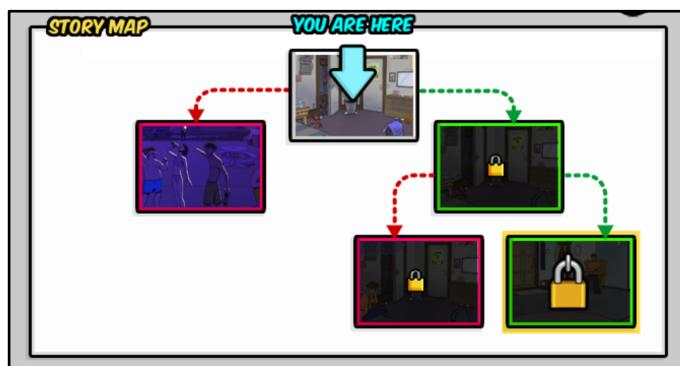
instead. Do you let your cousin in through the window, or make them go in the front door and not bring the joint?

- If you let your cousin in through the window, you both smoke the joint, feel sick, and get in trouble with your mom.
- If you make your cousin come in through the front door, your mom lets you guys hang out and you order pizza!

Discussion Questions

Someone at the party was taking pictures and posting them online. What are the risks of putting something online? How can you protect yourself from those risks?

Your character ate all of Gram's cookies after smoking marijuana. How would smoking weed affect your life? Why might be affected by your decision?



9th Grade: New Years



Opening Scene: On New Year's Eve, mom and Gram go out, leaving you and Michelle/Michael home alone.

Michelle/Michael think you should throw a big party because you deserve to celebrate too. It would be fun to have a party and Michelle/Michael might be mad if you say no, but Karina is there too and it something goes wrong you will be to blame. Do you invite everyone, or just a few of your close friends?

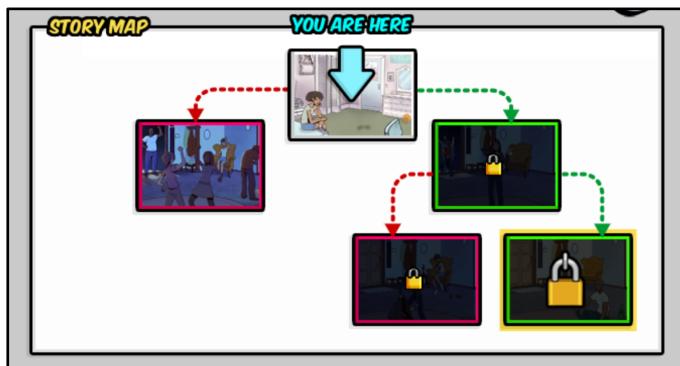
- If you throw a big party, the party gets loud and out of control. Your mom hears about it, and you get in trouble.

- If you invite just a few people, your friends bring extra people. Do you let the kids in or ask for help in getting rid of them?
 - If you let the kids in, the party gets crazy and many kids are doing dangerous things. Mom and Gram come home to find the mess and you get in trouble.
 - If you ask for help, you are able to keep the party in control with just a few friends. Mom and Gram were happy to see you all celebrating in a responsible way!

Discussion Questions

What are the risks involved in throwing a party while your parents are out? What could you do in this situation instead? How would you convince Michelle/Michael?

Your character found out their true friend when they showed respect by not doing risky things and helping to clean up when you all got busted. Who are your true friends? How do you know?



10th Grade: Serious



Opening Scene: In tenth grade, you start getting more serious with your significant other. One night, they sneak up the fire escape and into your bedroom and want to go "all the way". You don't want to mess things up in the relationship, but you know there are lots of risks involved in having sex, especially when you are young. Do you have sex or tell your significant other that you want to wait?

- If you decide to have sex, you encounter another decision. Do you stop to talk about

using a condom or do you not worry about it?

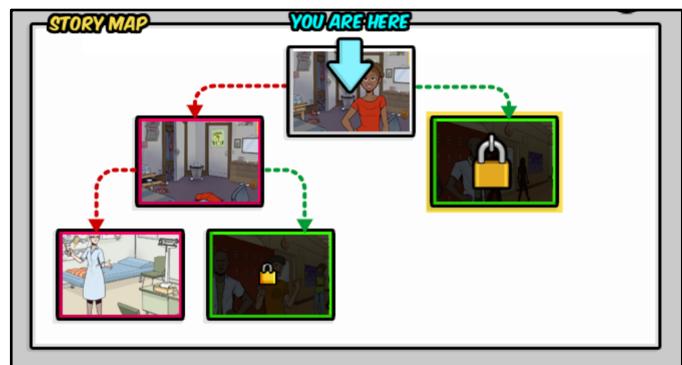
- If you don't use a condom, you get an STI from your significant other.
- If you use a condom, you protect yourself from an STI but things get awkward after you two have sex.
- If you wait to have sex, your significant other is upset at first, but eventually accepts your decision and later asks you to the Homecoming dance!

Discussion Questions

What are the risks involved having sex when you are young? Why might someone your age decide to have sex anyway?

What can you do to prepare you to say no when you are not ready?

How do you think teens your age can show respect for their boyfriends or girlfriends?



10th Grade: Racing



Opening Scene: One night, you are hanging out in a parking lot when one of your friends challenges another to a street race. You know it is dangerous and some other people seem uncomfortable too, but the crowd is excited for the race. Do you stick around to watch with everyone else or ask your significant other to walk you home?

- If you decide to watch the race, you see your friends get in a really bad accident and one of your friends loses their life.
- If you decide to walk away with your significant other, you end up at your house,

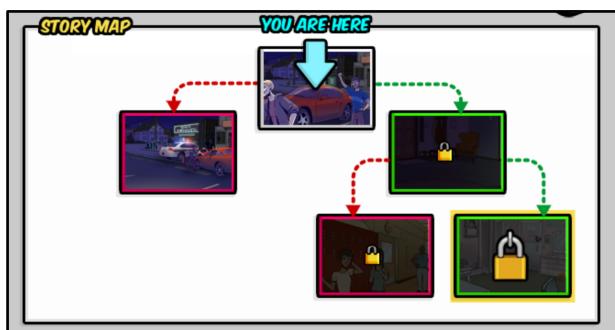
where the living room is empty and everyone in the house is asleep. Your significant other asks you to have sex in the living room. Do you use a condom or decide to not worry about it?

- If you don't use a condom, you and your significant other find out that you both are going to have a baby.
- If you use a condom, Gram finds the wrapper under the couch and has a heart-to-heart with you about waiting to have sex.

Discussion Questions

How could your life be affected if you decided to do something very risky like street racing? How long would it affect you? Who else would be affected?

Your character noticed that they weren't the only one who looked uncomfortable with the racing. Which of your friends would back you up to get out of a risky situation? Do you have friends who would pressure you to stay?



11th Grade: Scare

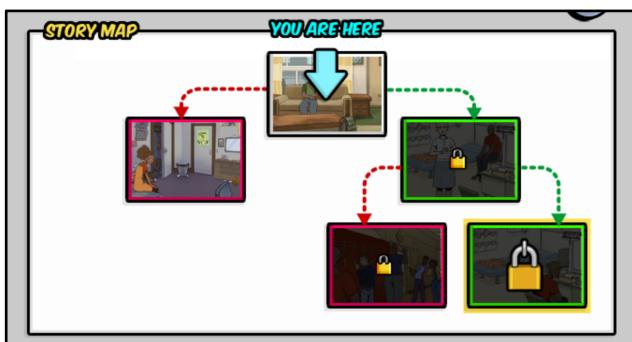


Opening Scene: In eleventh grade, your friend Taylor/Lamar worries that they may have gotten HIV by hooking up with someone rumored to have it. Do you decide to go with your friend to get more information from the school nurse, or do you tell them to not worry about it?

- If you tell your friend not to worry, you find out that you and your significant other could also be at risk of contracting HIV.
- If you go with your friend to the nurse, you both learn the importance of getting tested and asking everyone they have slept with to get tested. But your friend is scared to get

tested—do you let them deal with the situation alone or do you get an HIV test with them?

- If you let your friend deal with the situation alone, your friend doesn't know their status and their significant other breaks up with them.
- If you get an HIV test with your friend, you find out that you are okay but your friend does have HIV. Although the situation is unfortunate, by getting tested and knowing their status, your friend can take better care of themselves and the people around them.



Discussion Questions

How would your future change if you were infected with HIV or another STI?

What things do you need to think about before deciding whether to have sex? How could your decision affect your future?

11th Grade: Prom

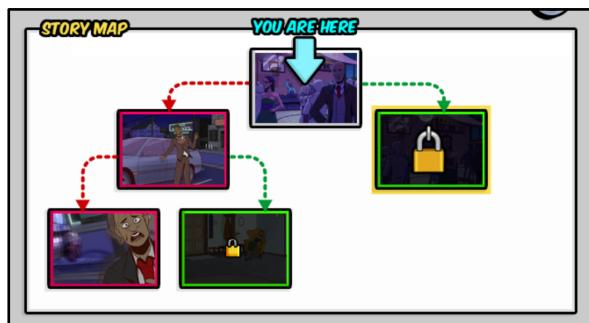


Opening Scene: At the end of eleventh grade, you and your date go to prom with your friend, Tatiana/Javier, whose date you don't know well. Prom is almost over, and Tatiana/Javier suggest that the four of you go to their house instead of staying for after-prom like you told your parents you would do. Do you go with them and risk getting in trouble with your parents for leaving prom, or do you stay at prom and risk Tatiana/Javier thinking you're lame?

- If you leave prom, your friend's date suggests they all go to another party across

town. Do you get in the car with them or call Mom for a ride?

- If you get in the car with your friend's date, you guys get in an accident because the driver was high. You and your friend both get hurt.
- If you call your Mom for a ride, your Mom is happy that you made the safer decision.
- If you stay at prom, you and your date both have a great time at the school's after-party!



Discussion Questions

What are the risks of going somewhere with someone you don't know?

Your character noticed that Tatiana's/Javier's date had something on their nose, which was a clue they had been using cocaine. What are other clues you can use to tell if someone has been using drugs or alcohol?

12th Grade: Confide



Opening Scene: Your mom noticed that things are getting pretty serious between you and your significant other. She wants to talk to you about the decision to have sex. You feel awkward but know that Mom has some important information for you. Should you talk to your Mom or avoid the awkward conversation?

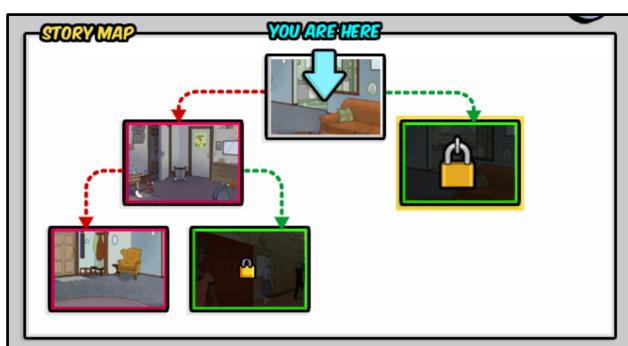
- If you don't talk to your Mom, you decide to have sex with your significant other but you realize you don't have any condoms. Do you have sex anyways, or decide not to have sex?

- If you have sex anyways, you have to tell your Mom that you and your significant other are going to have a baby.
- If you decide to not have sex, you both are frustrated in the moment but are glad you decided to not have sex.
- If you decide to talk to Mom, you and your Mom have a great conversation and she is really happy you decided to talk to her.

Discussion Questions

How could you start a conversation with your partner to let them know what your rules about sex are?

What would you say if your parents tried to talk to you about the decision to have sex? What would you like to ask them?



12th Grade: First Job



Opening Scene: In the summer after your senior year, you get a job working at the community pool to start saving up for college. But when you get your first paycheck, your coworker suggests you both go drinking at a bar. Do you save your money for school or spend your first paycheck at the bar?

- If you go out with your coworker, your coworker drinks and you guys get stuck because he can't drive you home. Do you go back to the bar or call Mom for a ride?

- If you decide to go back to the bar, you wake up the next morning and realize you made a lot of poor decisions the night before.
- If you call your Mom for a ride, she is upset that you went to the bar in the first place, but you make it home safely.
- If you go home, you buy a pizza for your family with some of your new money and find that your dad has come home from the military!

Discussion Questions

What would you say if someone tried to pressure you into riding with them when they were drinking?

Your character was able to get a summer job because they got a good recommendation from their teacher, Mr. Walker. Who could you ask for a recommendation?

