

# Healthy Gossip

A Teaching and Learning Curriculum

By Sokoya Finch & Rob Lombardo

# Healthy Gossip: A Teaching and Learning Curriculum

*Understanding the nature and spirit of our lives  
leads to understanding the difficulties we must  
overcome to survive and maintain them.*

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Novellas are picture stories about people and their lives. Novellas are teaching tools so the words coming out of the actor's mouths include some facts to learn.

The novellas in the "Healthy Gossip" series were developed to throw a new light on the very old problem of infant mortality. The idea is to be able to reach the young and the old. The novellas will lead to questions about cultural practices handed down for years within families. Questioning what your family has practiced is the toughest challenge, but perhaps these novellas can help.

These novellas are a *call to action*, in the sense of community action, and activity – your contribution to solving a community problem – and your own behavior and actions.

*These are not static facts, but learning in motion.*

These novellas are made to talk to you - to let you overhear our gossip – to let you gossip with us – to draw you in and provide comfort. No, gossip is not bad – not when it helps us have healthy babies – not when it protects newborns from an early and untimely death.

These novellas may help you smile, so smile if you'd like – giggle when it seems right – we all must look with some humor at the human condition.

## *Why Infant Mortality*

Infant mortality is a big problem in some communities and not so big in others. If something happens in one place and not another, there might be an *influence of local culture* or the absence or presence of something (?) in such large quantity as to shape community behavior.

As we observe the lives of people, we imitate the good and the bad. We form the boundaries of our own lives. Sometimes exploring places that we would not have otherwise gone gives us the confidence to try something new and overcome the fear of failure or worse, the fear of looking stupid!

These novellas are an invitation to *practice thoughts and behaviors* that may be difficult to talk about. Oftentimes the script written for the most skilled actor and actress gives us an opportunity to imitate the lives of others through their language and expression. By doing so, we experience a different look at life and perhaps different solutions.

**“Healthy Gossip”** is not a static collection of pictures and words. These every day dramas symbolize communication among friends and among parents and children.

We challenge you to become an actor in this drama. *We want you to express your own views*, to reach deep for the reasons and find the key that unlocks the unwilling, the disinterested and the disengaged women who are your sisters, your friends, your neighbors, your community.

This curriculum contains many suggestions for ways to use these novellas. Most basically, they are teaching tools, and *you are the teacher*. You will find ways to use these tools, but don’t just give these away without role-playing or some other special event that engages your students one-on-one or in a group. As you teach, seek something deep and meaningful.

## Getting Started – Using the Novellas

“Healthy Gossip” is a three part series with novellas that address prenatal care, douching and periodontal disease. The facts about each disease are interchangeable throughout the curriculum. These are some facts you should know and your students should know. At the end of the role playing session, there is a message to deliver.

### The Facts about Prenatal Care

**What is it?** Prenatal care is medical care received by the expectant mother during pregnancy. For some women who are very active, medical care should be regular between pregnancies as well. During prenatal visits, the examination of the mother may be accompanied by a sonogram, which uses sound waves to locate and evaluate the size and position of the baby inside the mother. Blood tests are usually done to evaluate things like anemia and diabetes, and the doctor will recommend diet, exercise or vitamin supplements.

**What happens if you don't get prenatal care?** Doctors and midwives are trained to examine pregnant women and notice problems that could get worse over time. Most women deliver healthy babies because they are visiting their doctor or midwife regularly, taking special vitamins and eating enough good food for two. If you are not eating well, and also smoking, using alcohol or taking drugs, or douching your baby will be born too early and may not survive. In really bad cases, the baby dies inside the momma. Even babies born too early can survive, but the child has many health problems later on.

**Where do you get prenatal care in Gadsden County?** Full Circle Women's Health 875-9660 and the Gadsden County Health Department 875-7200 extension 304 provide prenatal care.



## **The Facts about Douching**

***What is it?*** Douching is the washing of the vaginal canal with vinegar water or prepared solutions that you can buy over the counter at any drug store. Many mothers and grandmothers recommend douching, and the practice has been passed down from generation to generation.

***What does it do?*** Douching is advertised as a “freshening” of the vaginal canal with a scented product that smells good. Some advertising claims that douching cleans and refreshes. There are some cultural beliefs that douching can even cure yeast infections. This sounds healthy, but in fact douching is bad for your body. Douching washes away natural healthy bacteria that prevent vaginal infections. Vaginal infection is a leading cause of infant death, low birth weight babies and pre-mature deliveries.

***What happens if you stop douching?*** Nothing bad. Your body will eventually replace the natural bacteria, and you will have fewer infections.

***What about yeast infections?*** If you have a persistent yeast infection, go see your doctor.



## **The Facts about Periodontal Disease**

(perry-o-don-tal)

***What is it?*** Periodontal disease is an infection of the gums and mouth.

***What does it do?*** Infections in the gums and mouth can travel in the blood stream to a baby growing in the mother. Severe gum disease also results in toothache and loss of teeth that prevent a mother from eating correctly during pregnancy.

***Where does it come from?*** Plaque is the primary cause of gum disease. This is the hardened, crusty coating around a tooth that causes the gum to bleed. Plaque growth can actually increase during puberty, so it could be the worst during a woman's first pregnancy.

***What can be done about it?*** Brushing and flossing every day is the best prevention for periodontal disease. Once a woman has periodontal disease, a specially trained dentist, a periodontist, must treat it. It is also helpful that you get a dental screening once a year.



# Curriculum for Facilitators

## *First step: How this Curriculum Works*

Throughout the curriculum, there are instructions to facilitators and there are statements we would like the facilitator to read to their group of trainees.

Words that you see in this type are instructions to you - the facilitator. There are lots of instructions, so just get familiar with the novella and the things you are supposed to do.

Words in this type are things you read to your group or examples to share. There are lots of these in the suggestions, but eventually, you will find your own examples to use instead.

## *Second step: Understanding your role as a facilitator/teacher.*

### *What is a facilitator?*

The facilitator is a leader and a teacher— but, in a passive role. The facilitator must be confident and encouraging, non judgmental or blasé. You will lead by your action and your reaction to your students – always leading, not pushing, toward the goal of participation and understanding.

This is *not a lecture* series! The novellas are scripts to be played out by you and your students – the actors!

The novella permits and encourages an awakening and sorting of emotions as well as facts. To get your audience tuned into this, check out the four objectives on page 11.

After these four objectives, we added four “Want You Tos” that begin an emphasis on special experiences you hope the students’ witness when they role-play the novellas. All of this is covered in the section called *Getting Started*. Remember to come back to these four special experiences to remind yourself and your students why you are going through this. The next few pages cover the qualities of effective facilitators – that’s *YOU*.

## *Qualities of Effective Facilitators*

Anyone can be a facilitator who is willing to be flexible and not bound by, or a slave to, their natural social style. These are a few top qualities of facilitators:

Know your strengths and weaknesses – self knowledge – and know how you impact others.  
Be concerned with quality.  
Be organized.  
Listen with understanding, not judgment.  
Encourage open communication  
Maintain focus on the issues  
Remain neutral on issues  
Observe nonverbal messages.  
Use questioning skills as opposed to telling.  
Know how & when to ask questions.  
Avoid the temptation of providing all answers to the participants.  
Know your material before presenting it.  
Be okay with not knowing all of answers to their questions, but know how to get the answers.  
Be observant and listen for opportunities of learning.  
Praise those who normally don't speak out when they do participate verbally.  
Set up your environment by posing problems and questions, suggesting tools, and thinking through other means to stir the mind and body to learn.  
Learn empathy...the ability to see the situation as the other sees it.  
Bring humor in when the climate gets tense (this is a judgment call).  
Be open to self-growth and be flexible about your learning and how to do things.  
Listen and summarize what you have heard from a non-judgmental place.  
Use the out-going participants in your group to get the discussion rolling and then shift and make room for the quiet ones.  
Pace the discussion and change the level of the discussion at the appropriate time i.e. from brainstorming to action planning to decision to evaluation.  
Steer the group in a positive direction; help it pull out of a problem or salvage whatever degree of agreement there may be so that the meeting can end on a positive note with a sense of direction.

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## ***Facilitator Skills and Competencies***

To the facilitator, being proactive means taking responsibility for planning and conducting your group meetings. Determine the amount of pre-work, including, reading and review, that is necessary and do it. Experiment. Plan your agenda with some unusual activities to spur creativity. Flexibility is important. Know your facilitation techniques and have backup plans.

What are the skills and competencies of facilitator? The competencies required of a facilitator to ensure an effective learning environment include:

### ***Instructional***

The key for effective delivery of the material is: questioning, supporting, leading and pacing, providing explanation and additional resources. As a facilitator you are responsible for the establishment and maintenance of learning, effective group dynamics and giving individual feedback.

### ***Managerial***

Keeping to the task, agenda, timetable, procedural rules, decision-making norms and tracking participation are very important in meeting your goals. Always keep your planned end results in mind. For instance, in order for peers to understand the message of “pre-natal care” in the context of their culture, you must weave the facts together with your basic knowledge and understanding of the community.

### ***Social***

Creating a friendly social environment that promotes a climate for learning is one of the necessary components to get people feeling okay with sharing and talking. The facilitator must also understand the underlying issues that people may bring to the meeting, keep those issues “in-check”, and stay on course as those issues are incorporated into your session.

## ***Facilitation Strategies and Tips***

Here are some practical tips that will aide you in being the best facilitator you can be:

- Participate before you facilitate.
- Be an advocate for the mission which is to lower the infant mortality rate, reduce the number of low birth weight babies, and provide support where its necessary to women to have healthy babies.
- Learn the materials.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Keep tuned in to your peers. This includes their body language, and the things they are not saying. Also, know how to include them in the discussions and engage them in the process.
- Be creative and innovative in the use of materials and resources within your groups.

## **Group interaction and role-play.**

Mostly, you are going to be using the novellas while training a group. Novellas can also be used one-on-one, but the group dynamics are an important element of the training. The group could be made up of anyone, but most likely high-risk women or a peer support group, a group at a local church or high school (authorities permitting).

### ***What is role-playing?***

Role-playing is acting out the parts of a story. These novellas have 2 or 3 actors and actresses. Each plays a role – the daughter, the friend, the grandmother, the boyfriend, the girl friend. Each novella is different and each role is different. Sometimes you're sharing your own experiences, or gossiping about someone else, or sometimes you are confronting your own boyfriend.

Role-playing is meant to put you in the shoes of the person in the story. You got some problems and you're trying to find your way out. There is emotion and there are feelings being expressed. The result of the role-play is to get a better understanding of what it's like to do something, without necessarily having to do it. Just practice for real life.

### ***Forming your Group***

**Facilitators - Start with introductions of your group. First, introduce yourself and explain the role of the facilitator. You can read this if you like.**

I will be your facilitator for this session. The facilitator is a leader and a teacher– but, in a passive role. I will be encouraging you to participate and observe the activities of the group. Later, I will ask you some questions and we can talk about what we have learned.

**Ask the group to introduce themselves and tell something about themselves.**

**After the introduction, you may want to do an icebreaker to allow room for group members to become comfortable with the environment, with each other and with you.**

*Objectives* for role-playing: These are the four special experiences that can be gained from role-playing.

1. Each member of the group participates in the role-play at least once.
2. Each participant reads the novella script at least once during role-play.
3. Each member of the group relates their own experiences.
4. Each member understands the message - "get prenatal care."

**F**acilitator starts working on these objectives by saying - "Okay, now we are going to try acting out a few stories that have to do with how we treat ourselves and our pregnancies. There are three stories: one about prenatal care, one about douching and one about periodontal care - your teeth and mouth."

"When we play these roles I've got some "want you tos" that I'd like you to be thinking about - (**read these to your group**)

1. Read the words in the little boxes and go through the motions of the dialogue just like this is happening to you. This is the best way for you to really experience what these women are going through.
2. Get some attitude going. Act out the parts and experience the feelings and thoughts of the different actors. When the novellas were first made, the actors tried to find the attitude and emotions of two people solving problems.
3. Apply the experience of the role-play to your own feelings and thoughts. This is not a game after all, but a practice session for what may come in real life.
4. Feel confident that the novella emphasizes the right things to do for your family, your friends, and your baby.

**Then the facilitator says** - "We are going to use the prenatal care (or douching or periodontal disease) novella today, and each of us will take a turn in being the different actresses (or actors) in this story.

This will be fun and educational, so get loose and work with it.

After we all get a chance to be the "actress," I would like to talk to you about your reactions and feelings."

**Maybe another ice breaker is needed to relax everyone**

**Facilitator reads:** Can anyone share with the group any acting experience they have had in the past? You know, school plays? Anything?

**If one member has any acting experience, ask them to describe the emotional level an actor needs to be believable in order to relate to this exercise.**

**If no one volunteers, take the lead back and say:**

Okay, you've seen lots of soaps and movies where the actors are just full of emotion – acting out – carrying on, CRYING, SOBBING, YOU KNOW. That's what we want to do. We want to feel the emotion of the words and the feelings that go along with the life of these women. We all know what it feels like to get emotional about a problem, situation, or a man! We have been there and done that! So we just reproduced those same emotions, energy and feelings as we go through the exercise.

**Talk to the group about the novella and the concepts of role-playing. Use the four concepts described above to define the experience and what you hope the group will learn from this experience.**

Facilitators: If no one volunteers, your next step is to recruit volunteers from the group to perform the roles.

As you begin the role-plays, focus your thoughts on the important points you are going to make when the acting is underway, and then again during the *Closing Steps*!

Deleted: on the

You are going to deliver the important facts about infant mortality and emphasize the message. You will start this process after the second group role play and conclude during the *Closing Steps* (more details on these later):

We have been repeating these ideas for emphasis. Help your students feel comfortable with sharing these concepts -

A summary of their role-play experience in their own words;

Deleted: role play

Reactions to the information they have learned;

Ideas to what they would do differently,

Conclusions about things they would do next;

Strategies for how they would go about changing behaviors.

*Now you are ready to **START!***

A. Recruit two volunteer "actors" from the group to be the first to perform the scene from the novella.

B. Give each actor/actress one of the sheet Novellas. We are talking about prenatal in this session, but you could pick one of the other novellas -douching or periodontal disease - and do the same thing. You should only be able to get through one novella per training session.

Get everyone to laugh and  
have fun.

Read these instructions to the actors:

1. Okay, everyone, read through the whole script so you know where this is going and what you will say (the rest of the group can do this too.)
2. Now, place yourself in the role of these two women. Remember role-playing is simply putting yourself, your emotions, energy, and feelings into the character you are acting.
3. Try to achieve an emotional state that reflects the seriousness and humor of the moment (i.e. get jiggy with it!).

Read or explain to the rest of the group:

4. Watch the emotions at play in this scene.
5. Search your own issues, myths and barriers.
6. Be prepared to participate in discussion at the end of the scene. You can do this by thinking about a similar situation you were in, or a friend or family member and be willing to share this experience. Think about how you relate to the situation and the way the problem was solved.

## ***ROLE PLAY IS NOW IN PROGRESS***

Facilitator, after the first group is finished, recruit a second group of actors: "Okay, that was great - who will be next?" Start another two or three actors in the role-play.

After the second group, stop the action and ask the group:

Okay, you get the idea of what's happening here? Let's discuss the scenes being acted out, and what we have learned.

**Suggested questions to ask the group:**

- What do you think was being said here? (A summary of their experience in their own words)
- Have you had a similar experience? (What is their reactions to the information)
- Is there another way you would have handled the problem? How?
- Would you want a friend or family member to help you in the way described in this novella? (Conclusions about things they would do next for family or friends)
- How would you help others to have healthy babies? (Strategies for how they would go about changing their own behaviors or the behaviors of others.)
- What are some of the barriers and issues women you know faced in having a healthy baby?

Try to remember the responses because this will be part of the evaluation of the novellas.

Now, ask the remaining group members to pair up and each group go through the role-play. Each member should experience saying

the words, engaging in the interaction and reaching the emotional level of the women involved. Allow the groups to have the flexibility to add their own experiences to parts of the novella. Their experiences will bring a sense of reality to them. The reactions of the characters in the scripts may be different and/or unique, and that's okay.

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### *Transition to Closing Steps*

**F**acilitator: You are now getting close to the end of the training where your focus will be to make sure each of your students understands the message about prenatal care. The message is: to get every girl and women of child bearing age to accept and receive prenatal care (or stop douching or get periodontal care) no matter how pregnant they are or how many kids they have.

After your group has completed the role play, focus the next activity on the observations of the group members.

Start with open-ended activities, such as asking each member to express what they learned in their own words. If the actors performed their roles differently, like adding to the scripts, talk about the meaning of these differences.

Facilitator says:

Okay, now that everyone has had a chance acting out the different roles, I would like to start the next phase by asking each of you to describe this experience in your own words.

If you find that no one is willing to be the first to speak out, you may begin the discussion by pointing out interesting dynamics in



role-playing that you saw in one particular group. Followed by asking that particular group specific questions about what were they feeling as they role-played a specific role. To take the dialogue even further, ask if they know of anyone who was in a similar situation and how did they resolve the problem.

As the group begins to describe their experiences, try to get them to discuss these other three viewpoints:

1. Their personal (gut) reactions to the information.
2. Conclusions about things they would do next; ways they would like to change their own behavior; friends they would like to bring to the group or talk to.
3. How they would go about changing behaviors; ideas they would be willing to share.

Ask them:

"How will you deliver this message about prenatal care to your family members and friends?"

***The Message about Prenatal Care:  
Get every girl and woman to accept  
and receive prenatal care no matter  
how pregnant they are or how many  
kids they already have.***

Prepare your participants for what might happen if they do talk to someone about prenatal care. People put up shields for lots of reasons (scared, ashamed, despair) and are not easily reached.

## **F**acilitator says:

Now, this message is sometimes easier said than done. The people you talk to might be scared, ashamed or just overwhelmed.

When you talk to people about this, expect some resistance. You are probably going to dealing with:

Lack of knowledge – like “I never heard about it and don’t know what it is;”

Lack of trust – “There is nothing they can say will be good for me;”

Lack of education – “I don’t understand how you can make your baby sick before it’s born – this don’t make sense.”

**Facilitator:** *As the group continues talking, observe who is not participating, engage and encourage them to do so. Here are some ideas you can add at this point:*

- Women get pregnant for many reasons. Don’t pass judgment, just pass information.
- Friends always wonder how pushy to get, how persistent to be and if they are nagging. As a friend, be pushy and nag – this is very important – it’s a sign that you care about this person.
- Hiding a pregnancy will result in you and the baby getting sick.
- Don’t smoke or drink; don’t do drugs – you’re going to hurt that baby!

- Midwife or doctor – which one to recommend. Doesn't matter, just as long as your pregnant friend goes to someone. Midwives may be easier to talk to, and more acceptable.
- Talk to your mothers and grandmothers too. Your friend's mother may not know she is pregnant or may be too upset to help. Go talk to her and tell her to help get for her daughter by taking her to a midwife or doctor.
- Get ready for the: "I am not going to see no doctor! I don't want him or her to explain nothing to no one; I don't want a lecture and I don't want a bunch of things to do like take vitamin pills." How many times have you felt this way? You want understanding and sympathy, which you need to combine with reality – unhealthy mothers make unhealthy babies.

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## Ending the Session

Facilitator decides when the session is over. If more questions are raised, those that request more information should be encouraged to stay. You might want to figure out a closing statement like:

"You have been a wonderful group and I hope we get back together soon. I you take one thing home with you today, let it be the message "Get prenatal care." Help save a child's life.

**Ending Thought:** Remember "Healthy Gossip" is good. Keep it going.

Thank you for your participation.

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