



THE FACTS BEHIND COHABITATION LESSON NOTES

Topic: Marriage and its alternatives

To the teacher: 'The Facts Behind Cohabitation' sheet will be useful for teaching about marriage and other relationships in PSHE, Religious Studies, or other courses – wherever actual facts about cohabitation are required.

The lesson plans outlined below are merely suggestions. Teachers know their own pupils and their own courses best. Teachers should consider the age, type, and number of pupils in the class when deciding how to discuss the information in the fact sheet and related issues. Some pupils might benefit from using a board or overhead projector to facilitate the discussion.

N.B. Care and sensitivity is needed. Good teachers may be able to let pupils talk about those that they know, but care is needed if children start talking about their own parents or family members. It is better to break this off by some such phrase as 'We don't want to judge individual cases of people who are not here to speak for themselves.' However, this need for sensitivity is not a reason for avoiding giving the facts about cohabitation. We do not refuse to deal with racism or smoking because the parents of some of our children might be racist or smokers. The main advantage of the fact sheet is just that: it deals with facts and not opinions.

Aims: To enable pupils: to declare what they know about cohabitation and where it might fit within the range of choices open to them; to examine the evidence available to them from the fact sheet; to evaluate their original ideas in the light of information received and to record whether and how their perceptions have been modified.

Lesson series: Ideally, the fact sheet would be part of a series of lessons. The first could be a general discussion, led by the teacher, about current views and practices relating to cohabitation. The second lesson could be a careful and thorough examination of the actual facts in the sheet. The third could be a follow-up lesson asking the pupils to outline some of the factors to be taken into account if they were to consider cohabitation in the future as an alternative or prelude to marriage. If the fact sheet is to be used for only one or two lessons, then the lesson plans below could be condensed. For example, Lesson one could be dealt with briefly by the teacher as an introduction.

Lesson one: Current views.

1. *Background:* Before distributing the fact sheet, provide a brief definition of cohabitation, or ask the pupils to define the term. Ask the pupils to consider what they know about marriage and cohabitation throughout the world and throughout history. Is it possible to imagine any society that does not have some laws about marriage, even if the details (e.g. the age at which people may marry) might differ? Are there any languages which do not have words for marriage? Is cohabitation common now in all societies throughout the world or just in some?
2. *Religious viewpoints:* Ask the pupils what the various religions teach about cohabitation and why. It will probably be possible to elicit from the pupils that the Christian denominations (Church of England, Methodist, Roman Catholic etc.), Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and the other world faiths all disapprove of sexual relationships outside marriage. Is this just prejudice or are there reasons, such as the welfare of the children and of the couple themselves? At this point, the teacher could introduce some of the points to be considered in more detail in the fact sheet (e.g. stability, health, effects on children, marriage as a social 'institution').
3. *Personal viewpoints:* Ask the pupils the following questions: Do you know any couples who cohabit? What reasons have they given for their decision? Do you agree with the reasons and would you be likely to include these ideas in your own approach to building relationships? Can you identify the advantages and disadvantages of this choice?

Lesson two: The core lesson about the fact sheet.

(In a course with plenty of time, this alone could take up two or more lessons.)

1. Depending upon pupils' ability, read the fact sheet aloud, assign pupils to read sections aloud, or have pupils read silently. Ensure that pupils understand the points made in the fact sheet by 'brainstorming' and listing the facts (e.g. how cohabitation differs from marriage in stability, wealth, health, and effects on children; and how marriage is a distinct legal and social 'institution') on a board or overhead. Within the discussion, encourage pupils to consider the following: how cohabitating might affect people at different stages of their lives; how cohabiting might affect short-term and long-term goals (including career, emotional, and moral goals); and how the human personality and spirit are affected by cohabitation. If time is short, the last page where 'Real Women and Men Speak' could be omitted, but this would be a pity and, if it is omitted, perhaps a future lesson could return to it as a kind of revision. Or it could be used as the basis of a writing assignment.
2. It is important for pupils to understand the need for the length of the 'references' section on the last page – that the facts in the sheet are based on serious research which is in the public domain and has been open to challenge.

Lesson three: Follow-up.

1. Start the lesson by reviewing the main facts or by addressing any points previously omitted.
2. Ask pupils to sum up some of the points against cohabitation from the sheet.
3. Is there anything to be said in favour of cohabitation? There is no need for commitment? It is easier to escape from it? Is cohabitation better for relationships where there is no love? Are such relationships fair?
4. Very carefully (see NB overleaf) ask the pupils what they think their parents would want them to do and why.
5. 'It's my life.' Ask pupils to discuss some of their other ambitions and how marriage or cohabitation would affect these.

Optional written assignments:

1. Write an essay identifying whether 'The Facts Behind Cohabitation' and classroom discussion have modified your personal beliefs in any way. Will any future decisions be informed ones rather than simply 'what I wanted to do at the time or was persuaded to do by others'?
2. Your best friend is away from home and writes to you saying that he, or she, is very much in love and is agonizing over whether to live with his/her girlfriend/boyfriend or to wait to be married. Write a letter giving your advice. Be sure to supply reasons for your ideas.
3. Choose one of the 'Real Women and Men' on page 4, and write how they came into their particular circumstances, and whether cohabiting is a good choice for them and their loved ones.

Other lessons:

Teachers might consider using 'The Facts Behind Cohabitation' in other subject lessons. For example, those reading *Romeo and Juliet* in national curriculum English studies could examine the relationship and marriage of the couple there. Is there great love? Why is the marriage so important to them? Facts about marriage and cohabitation might be included in English lessons on great love poems such as 'My love is like a red, red rose' by Robert Burns. The treatment of cohabitation in the media, (e.g. soaps) could be considered. Are the facts from the sheet brought out in the media treatment? Why, or why not? Pupils studying the animal kingdom might compare human coupling with animal coupling. What happens with animals? Do their sexual encounters occur within anything like a human marriage (consider birds and wild animals like foxes – domestic animals are in unusual and artificial circumstances)? Is it a special feature of human beings that the young take a long time to develop to maturity (18 years) compared with animals? Does this point to the need for a stable couple to look after the human young for many years? Does this have any bearing on whether to cohabit or not?