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Deciding To Wait

Guidelines for Teens

Becoming a teenager is an exciting time. There seem to be endless possibilities and changes in the way you look and feel. You will be making new friends and may want to start dating. Dating can be many things. You may become good friends with your date, or enjoy spending time with them. As you become closer, you may want to be more than friends. You may want to have a more physical relationship. Do you know how you feel about kissing or touching? How about sex? Do you know what you would say if your date wanted to have sex?

New Feelings

During a date, you may find that you become physically attracted to a person. These new feelings are normal, and they may excite and confuse you. If you decide to become physically involved with your partner, he or she may ask you to have sex. At that moment, you may be tempted to give in to your feelings right away. But this is one of the most important decisions you will ever make, so take your time and think about it. Before you make a quick decision, stop and ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I feel pressure to have sex?
- Am I okay having sex with this person and dealing with the consequences?
- Am I ready to have sex?

Just because you are dating someone who wants to have sex, doesn't mean that you have to want sex too. Before you act on your feelings, remember that when you choose to have intercourse with someone, you are making a choice that could affect the rest of your life.

Pressure to Have Sex

It may seem in today's world that EVERYBODY is having sex. Sex seems to be the subject discussed in movies, songs, and on television. Your friends may be talking about sex and it may seem as though you are the only person not having sex. **But no matter what you have heard, most teenagers are not having sexual intercourse.** Many teenagers talk about sex, but no everyone is actually having sex. Most teenagers are very curious about sex and want to talk about it, but are unsure how to actually discuss this topic. They may feel pressure to appear "experienced" and to avoid being "dumb". They feel that they may be accepted by others if they talk about sex. This can also be a way of attracting attention because they feel lonely.

Know What the Risks Are

Sexual intercourse is a risky activity. It does increase your chances of contracting diseases. Then there is the question of your family and how they would feel if you had a sexually transmitted disease or if you became pregnant. Would the person you are having intercourse with help you raise a child? Are you willing to get married at your age? These are just a few of the questions you should ask yourself before you have sexual intercourse. Be sure you have all the facts BEFORE you make a decision.

The medical and physical reasons why you should not have sexual intercourse at a young age are:

- An unwanted pregnancy
- Getting sexually transmitted infections of diseases (STI's or STD's) like gonorrhea, syphilis, Chlamydia, herpes or genital warts, human papilloma virus.
- Contracting the HIV virus that causes AIDS

There are also emotional risks to having sexual intercourse, such as:

- Regretting your decision later, especially when you meet someone you would like to develop a meaningful relationship with
- Feeling guilty and scared

- Deceptive relationships, based on sex, not true friendship
- Loss of self-esteem, feeling bad about yourself for giving into pressure
- Exploitation by people who do not have your best interest at heart
- Emotional disorders that can affect future relationships

Make Your Own Decision

Once you start dating, it is important to know what you want from a relationship. In order to avoid making a bad decision because of pressure, think about what you want and what you are comfortable with BEFORE you start a relationship with someone. Talk to your parents and your date about your feelings and limits before you get too serious.

- Know your limits, and never let someone else talk you into doing something you do not want to do.
- Prepare yourself ahead of time for uncomfortable situations, mentally script out the reaction you WANT to have in a given situation and play that script out in your head over and over again.
- Be able to discuss your opinions and feelings about sex and why you have chosen to wait. If you can articulate a clear position, you will be able to make a good decision when the pressure is on.
- Refuse to let yourself down!

Stick By Your Decision

Saying NO to your date is not going to be easy, but it is better to say NO than to be pressured into doing something you do not want to do. You may feel like you do not want to tell someone you like to stop, but you must communicate with your date or you may regret what happens. Here are some examples of how to say NO kindly, but with meaning:

- Take a deep breath and say, "No, I don't want to have sex"
- If the question arises while you are kissing or fooling around, stop what you are doing and change the tone of the moment
- Explain why you choose abstinence and list your reasons
- Tell the other person how you feel about them and be honest. If you really love them, but you are not interested in sex, say so. Honesty is necessary for a good relationship.
- Draw the line firmly and if the other person does not appear to be getting it, leave.
- If the other person pulls the old "If you loved me you'd do it" line retort with "it you loved me you'd wait". Sex is not a test of your love or feelings for another person and saying "No!" to sex does not mean you have failed to show your love.

If you choose to wait to have intercourse, try to avoid situations where you will be forced into a decision. Try not to spend all of your time with someone you are dating, and avoid being alone with your date too often.

Acquaintance (date) rape is a serious problem for teenagers. This means a person threatens to hurt (assault) you if you do not have intercourse with them. No matter who threatens you, make sure you tell your parents, your health care provider, or your teachers if you think you have been assaulted or put in danger. Using alcohol or drugs can cause problems during a date. They affect your judgment, which may make it hard to stick to your decision NOT to have intercourse.

Young People Can Wait

If you wait until marriage to have sexual intercourse you will find that it is:

- Less risky to your health
- Easier to act responsibly and take precautions to avoid infections and pregnancy
- Easier to go on to develop meaningful relationships free from sexual obligation
- Easier to decide what YOU want to do with YOUR future
- A more satisfying relationship

Be patient. At some point, you will be ready for sexual intercourse. Talk to your parents about their values and remember that your health care provider can explain how intercourse affects your body. To avoid the risks, and to make intercourse really special in the future, it is a good idea to wait for now.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your health care provider. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.