

Things To Think About

Loving relationships are often defined as “partnerships.” Why do you think that is so?



Do you think the personal skills (communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution) important to good friendships and general relationships are also important in loving relationships? Why or why not?



What do people mean when they say things like “Love is giving and receiving?”



What do you think is important in a loving relationship?

SEXUALITY

Adolescence is a time of sexual awakening. During your teen years, you will discover in yourself a whole new range of sexual interests, feelings, and urges due to the maturation of the sexual and reproductive systems in your body. You will become aware of your own sexual orientation which most psychologists agree has been set since the age of five or six, and you will experience sexual attraction based on that orientation. The issues of relationships and sexuality are very complex. They not only include your physical development, but your personal skills, cultural issues, and expectations as well. You will face important decisions about relationships and intimacy which will have a great impact on the rest of your life. You have to be prepared to make them!

Making the right decisions and choices may prevent you from getting hurt, engaging in unhealthy or destructive relationships, an unwanted pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. Many of you probably struggle with your own identity and expectations in regard to relationships and sexuality. Some of you might have made some poor choices. However, many skills to make good decisions which promote healthy relationships can be learned and will be addressed in the following section.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Knowledge about yourself and your personal skills in regard to relationships and love form the foundation to develop a healthy sexuality. Unfortunately, the term “sexuality” is often misunderstood as “sleeping with someone.” Like relationships in general, the issue of sexuality is not about having sex. Sexuality includes how we deal with our sexual feelings and the decisions and boundaries that we make. It involves respect, communication, and the many ways we can give and receive love. Sex is glorified through the media, through movies and television, and we encounter many messages about sex throughout the day whether we like it or not.

Following are some common myths and misconceptions about sex:

- ***Love equals sex.*** All too often people think that love and sex are interchangeable when they are really two vastly different notions. It is possible to have a healthy sexuality, love someone, and not sleep together. Contrary to popular belief, many teens are not sexually active.
- ***Everyone is having sex and it really isn't a big deal.*** A recent study shows that more and more teens decide to wait to have sex until they are older or get married. Sex is a complex and intimate step to take, one which requires not only physical maturity but emotional and mental maturity as well.

Sex is always a wonderful and pleasurable experience. The truth is that often, particularly if you are not ready, it is not and you will end up getting hurt. Making the right decisions about sex is more important than ever, not only to protect you from

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negative experience or unwanted pregnancy but also from potentially deadly sexually transmitted diseases.

- ***Having sex will help to keep someone in a relationship.*** The reality is that if a relationship is not working without sex, it won't work with it. Sex has so many complex implications that it can be disastrous for a relationship that isn't on solid ground.
- ***Some people can become closer and find love through sex.*** The act of sex itself will not provide anyone with the love they are looking for.
- ***People have to live up to their partner's expectations.*** Some people might believe that if their boyfriend or girlfriend is ready to have sex, they should be ready as well. The only expectation you have to live up to is your own!
- ***Kissing and fondling inevitably leads to sex.*** Sex is never inevitable. It is a choice. We all set our own boundaries as to how far we're willing to go and what we can handle emotionally. It is important that both partners respect those boundaries.



ACTIVITY

With these misconceptions in mind, think back to the personal skills discussed in the previous section. Utilize your values, communication techniques, and conflict resolution skills to work on the following exercises.

1. Austin and Julie have been going out for three months. One evening they are alone at home and start to kiss. Austin tells Julie how much he loves her and that he wants to have sex with her. Julie tells him that she likes him a lot, but she is not sure if she is ready to have sex. She feels that they haven't known each other long enough and thinks that she is too young to engage in a sexual relationship. Austin tells Julie that being in love means that two people sleep together, and if she really liked him as much as she said she did, she would sleep with him.

- What is Austin's misconception?

- What advice would you give to Julie?

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- What could Julie say to Austin?

JULIE:

AUSTIN:

JULIE:

AUSTIN:

It works the other way around, too!

2. Aaron could not believe that Jeanette would ask him out. He is the envy of every other boy in school! They are on their second date. Jeanette asked Aaron to sleep with her tonight, but he said “no.” She got angry and told him that everyone is having sex and it won’t be a big deal. If he wouldn’t have sex with her, someone else would. Now Aaron is afraid that Jeanette will never ask him out again. He thinks he might have made a mistake.

- What is Jeanette’s misconception? _____
- What advice would you give Aaron? _____
- Does it seem funny that a girl asks a boy to sleep with her? Why or why not?

- What could Aaron say to Jeanette?

Aaron:

Jeanette:

Aaron:

Jeanette:

3. Anthony and Brenda have been going out for four months. Although initially they had a good relationship, they’ve been fighting lately and spending less time together. Tonight they met at the park and Anthony told Brenda that he thinks they should break up. Brenda doesn’t want to lose him. Although they never slept together before, Brenda is debating whether or not to ask him to have sex with her. She figures that way she might not lose him and maybe they would feel close and love each other again.

- What is Brenda’s misconception? _____
- What advice would you give her? _____

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- How could Brenda let Anthony know how she feels by doing something other than by sleeping with him?

Brenda:

Anthony:

Brenda:

Anthony:

4. Zachary and Christine have been going out for two weeks. On Saturday, they drive to the beach and start to kiss and touch each other. When Christine tells Zachary to stop, Zach gets angry and tells Christine that she has led him on and that now she has to go through with it.

- What is Zachary's misconception? _____
- What advice would you give Christine? _____
- What could Christine say to Zach?

Christine:

Zach:

Christine:

Zach:

Remember that the decision whether or not to have sex is a very personal one and should not be based on circumstance. Only you can decide whether you are ready. **You can say no at any time! Nobody should be pressured into any kind of sexual relationship.**

ABSTINENCE

There are many different ways to show someone we like and love him or her. How would you show your affection for someone without having sex?

I would:

In most of the previous examples, the youth involved decided to say “no” to having sex. While it might not always be easy to say no and wait to have sex, it is the right decision for many of you! There are many health and personal reasons which make abstinence an important option.

Can you think of reasons to not engage in a sexual relationship at present?

Some of your reasons might include:

- Abstinence coincides with your personal values and beliefs.
- Abstinence is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. (No other method of birth control is infallible.)
- Abstinence greatly reduces serious health risks like STD’s and cervical cancer.
- Abstinence can show that you are a strong and mature person by not giving in to peer pressure. It can also show that you can exert control over your own impulses.
- Abstinence can help partners to develop a better friendship and evaluate their feelings for each other.

Abstinence might help prevent you from getting hurt emotionally. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have not compromised your values, that you’ve done nothing that you did not want to do.

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At any point in your life, your choice of whether or not to have sex should be a conscious and informed decision. It is important that you evaluate whether or not you are ready and are aware of possible consequences. You should know how to reduce risks of pregnancy and STD's. Having sex should never be circumstantial. Before engaging in any kind of sexual relationship, you should ask yourself:

- (1) Am I really ready? Is my partner ready?
- (2) How do I feel about my relationship with my partner? Do we agree on its terms?
- (3) Am I being influenced or pressured by a person or situation to make this decision?
- (4) Is there anything which might interfere with my ability to make a good decision?
- (5) Am I aware of the consequences of teen pregnancy ? Am I aware of the potential risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS?
- (6) Have I communicated clearly my feelings and concerns about having sex and the risks involved?
- (7) Am I knowledgeable about the various methods for preventing STD infection and pregnancy?
- (8) What other alternatives do I have?
- (9) What are my values around sexuality and how do they influence my decision-making?
- (10) Is this a good decision for me at this time?

Let's consider these questions in depth.

(1) *Am I ready?*

Only you can determine whether or not you are ready. There are many things to be considered. Evaluate your feelings and thoughts. Are you nervous, happy, scared? Have you thought about this clearly? Have you talked to someone you trust, someone who can share an informed opinion or offer wise advice? Do you think that you have sufficient knowledge about sexuality? Do you think you might still be too young? Do you feel pressured or guilty? You should not make **any** decision until you can answer these questions to your satisfaction..

(2) *How do I see the relationship with my boy/girlfriend? Do we agree on its terms?*

Evaluating the relationship you share with your boyfriend or girlfriend is an important part of your decision to refrain from any kind of sexual activity. Sometimes, particularly in the spirit of a moment, one might see his or her relationship differently from how it really is. It is helpful to know the following information about yourself, your boyfriend or girlfriend, and your relationship:

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My Boy/Girlfriend

Me

His/her values are: _____

My values are: _____

He/she feels _____
about me.

I feel _____
about him/her.

In the future, he/she would like to: _____

In the future, I would like to: _____

If he/she could change something in our
relationship, he/she would _____

If I could change something in our
relationship, I would _____

He/she expects our relationship to be _____

I expect our relationship to be _____

I would hurt him/her if _____

He/she would hurt me if _____

He/she would break up with me if _____

I would break up with him/her if _____

We

We have known each other for _____.

We spend _____ time together and usually _____.

We communicate best when _____.

We have difficulty talking when _____.

It is _____ to talk about expectations, boundaries and limits.

We _____ resolve conflicts by _____.

We _____ respect and trust each other.

Additions:

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(3) *Am I being influenced or pressured by a person or situation to make this decision?*

(4) *Is there anything that might interfere with my ability to make a good judgment?*

We talked previously about the possibility of personal feeling interfering with one's ability to make good decisions. What other circumstances might impair your decision making ability?

When we are under a lot of pressure or taken by surprise, we might not be able to make good decisions.

Consider the following:

Jonathon and Sheila have been going out for several months, but they rarely spend time alone together. Tonight they are at a party and have the opportunity to be alone. Jonathon asks Sheila to have sex with him, since this is one of the few opportunities they have for some privacy. Sheila is not sure what she wants to do. Jonathon pressures her to make a quick decision in order to take advantage of the opportunity.

Does Sheila have time to think about what she wants and to make a good decision?
Do they have time to talk about and obtain birth control or STD prevention?

The best way to handle situations like these is to delay a decision until you have had enough time to think about and evaluate all the factors involved.

How could Sheila tell Jonathon that she wants to delay the decision?

Sheila:

Jonathon:

Sheila:

Jonathon:

Sheila:

Jonathon:

Warning:

A major obstruction to good decision making is the use of alcohol or drugs. Under the influence of any substance, you cannot think clearly and are much more likely to engage in dangerous behaviors or make unwise decisions which you will regret later.

(5a) Am I aware of the consequences of teen pregnancy?

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Let's evaluate some of the facts associated with teenage pregnancy:

FACT: Most babies born to teenage mothers will grow up in poverty.

FACT: Many teenage mothers will drop out of high school

FACT: Teenage mothers will earn much less money throughout their lives than women who waited until their twenties to have children.

FACT: Babies born to teenage mothers are more likely to have low birth weight and birth defects.

FACT: Many fathers of children born to teenage mothers will not be involved in their upbringing.

FACT: The stress of being a teenage parent is enormous and many are not able to cope with it.

FACT: Many teenage parents do not have the parenting skills necessary to raise a child in a nurturing, loving, and consistent environment.

FACT: Many teenage parents are isolated from their peers.

Can you think about additional facts related to teenage pregnancy?


- **FACT:**

- **FACT:**

- **FACT:**

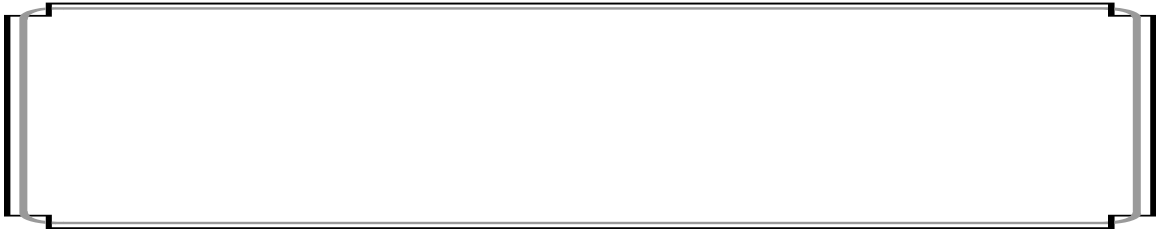
- **FACT:**

Imagine what your life would be like if you were pregnant or about become a father. How would your life change?

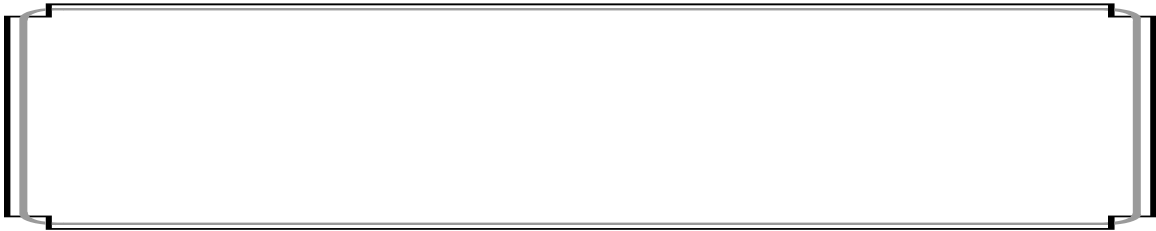


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What do you think your life and your child's life would be like?



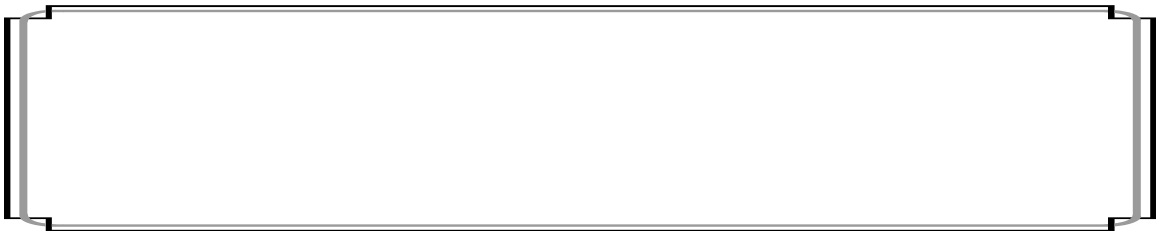
Are you emotionally/financially/socially equipped to be a good parent at this point in your life?



How would you support your child?



What impact would parenthood have on your future goals?




If you were a teen parent, what would your life look like a year from now? In five years? Ten?



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Imagine for a moment that you are a baby, ready to be born. Would you chose yourself as a parent?



Some youth have misconceptions about pregnancy and wrongfully view having a child as a possible solution to their problems.

Consider the following:

Emily, 17, is in a foster home. She is debating whether or not to try to get pregnant. Emily thinks that by having a child, she will become independent, have money, and be respected. What are Emily's misconceptions? Are these good reasons for having a child? What do you think?



The truth is: **none** of Emily's reasons are valid!! Most teenage mothers are not well respected by the community at large. Most teens are not ready nor equipped to be good, responsible parents. They ought to complete their education, obtain a stable living environment, and gain emotional maturity before having children. Emily may or may not qualify for financial assistance and even if she does qualify, it will be available to her only for a brief period of time. She would have to work very hard to support herself and her child for many years.

Paul is thinking about asking his girlfriend to have his baby. He thinks that it is cool to have a child and that he would be more respected by his peers. What are Paul's misconceptions? What do you think of his reason for wanting a child?



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None of Paul's reasons are valid, either. It is totally irresponsible to have a child because it is "cool". Having children is a big decision, one which everyone has to carefully consider and prepare for. NO child deserves to be born for the purpose of benefiting the image of one of his/her parents! Paul's friends will probably not respect him anymore if he acts so irresponsibly, and Paul will have to pay child support for many years -- something he hasn't thought of!

Andrea had a lot of tough experiences in her life. She thinks about getting pregnant so she'll have someone who will love her. She also has difficulty in school and thinks that if she got pregnant, she could drop out and would not have to worry about her education anymore. What are Andrea's misconceptions? Are these good reasons for having a child?



Bringing a child into the world will not solve personal or emotional problems. In fact, it can cause more confusion and add to present difficulties. Education will have to be an ongoing concern for Andrea because it will be very difficult to support both herself and her child on minimum wage employment.

Lately, **Lisa** and her boyfriend have been fighting constantly. Recently, her boyfriend told her that he is thinking about breaking up with her. Now she is thinking about getting pregnant in order to save their relationship. What is Lisa's misconception? Is this a good reason for having a child?



Having a baby will not save any relationship. Having a child can bring additional stressors to the relationship and create new conflicts.

Having a child is an enormous responsibility which influences the rest of a parent's life. Every child in this world deserves love, security, safety, and a good start. To bring up a child without those qualities or for selfish/wrong reasons is irresponsible and will hurt everyone involved.

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Can you think of additional invalid reasons and misconceptions regarding parenthood?



(5b) *Are we aware of the potential risks of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS?*

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's) are one of the risks you run when you have sex without the proper protection. There are a number of serious diseases that are spread by sexual contact - gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes, chlamydia, etc. Many of them can be quickly and efficiently cured by a doctor or clinician but become quite dangerous if they are not treated.

AIDS, which is a fatal, sexually transmitted disease, is discussed in the next section.

Here are some facts you should know about STD's:

- In America, more than 12 million people get an STD every year.
- One in eight teens will contract an STD every year.
- STD's (including the HIV virus which causes AIDS) can be spread through all manners of sexual contact. In terms of sexually transmitted diseases, sexual contact is described as any kind of intimate contact involving these four areas of the body: penis, vagina, mouth, or anus.
- You can be infected with an STD more than once and can even have more than one STD at the same time. Treatment for an STD does not make you immune from getting it again.
- You cannot develop immunity to any of these diseases, and there is no vaccine to prevent them. In the case of herpes, the disease is **permanent** and there is no cure.
- STD's cannot be contracted by sitting on toilet seats or touching door knobs. Most STD's need to occupy warm, moist places to survive, which is why they affect the areas they do and will not last long outside of/away from the human body.
- Statistically, the prime candidates for STD infection are between 15 and 24 years old and sexually active (often with more than one partner).
- STD's can affect men, women, and children. A pregnant woman can infect her baby.
- STD's can result in infertility or sterility if left untreated. It is important to get treatment even if the symptoms of the STD go away. The STD will remain

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transmissible and may continue to affect the body until it has been treated. **NO** STD will go away by itself.

- Your risk of getting an STD increases with the number of sexual partners you have.
- A person who has been diagnosed with an STD must contact all his or her sexual partners so that they, too, can get the necessary medical treatment. Symptoms of STD's may not always be noticed.
- It is important that women have regular doctor's check-ups and pap smears in order to detect pre-cancerous conditions or possible STD's.
- In Massachusetts, minors may be examined and treated for an STD without parental consent.

Prevention of STD's:

There is only one sure way to protect yourself against the risk of infection, and that is to have no sexual contact. Abstinence is the surest, safest, and most effective method of prevention. However, if you do have sex, you must protect yourself. Here are some recommendations. These are not guaranteed methods of preventing STD's, but if you use them in combination, you will lower your risk of infection.

- A male should use a latex condom (a "rubber" or "skin") during sexual intercourse, oral sex, and other forms of foreplay. If you are allergic to latex, you can use a polyurethane (a type of plastic) condom.
- A female can use the vaginally – inserted female condom. OR insist that her male partner use a latex condom. The male and female condoms should **not** be used at the same time – they pull each other off.
- A dental dam (a square piece of latex used by dentists), or plastic food wrap should be used when performing oral sex on a female. Do not reuse these items.
- A male should urinate and wash his genitals with hot, soapy water immediately before and following sex.

Protect yourself! This is not the time to be shy. Young adults (under age 25) are quickly becoming the fastest growing at-risk age group, currently accounting for up to 50% of all new cases of HIV infection in the U.S. Talk beforehand with your partner about the type(s) of protection you will both use. If he or she refuses to use protection, then you refuse to have sex. Do not allow yourself to be used. The risk is too great.

What can someone say when his/her partner is unwilling to use condoms?

Here are some examples of possible responses:

<p>He Says: “You don’t trust me.”</p>	<p>You Can Say: “I trust you to use a condom.”</p>
<p>She says: “But I love you, we don’t have to use condoms.”</p>	<p>You Can Say: “I love you enough to use a condom.”</p>
<p>He Says: “Condoms aren’t romantic.”</p>	<p>You Can Say: “Worrying about AIDS isn’t romantic.”</p>
<p>She Says: “But we’ve never used a condom before.”</p>	<p>You Can Say: “I want to start using condoms now so we’ll be safer.”</p>
<p>He Says: “We’re not using condoms, that’s it.”</p>	<p>You Can Say: “Okay, you know how to play cards?”</p>

From “Condom Facts,” Harvard Community Health Plan Foundation, 1994.

The following chart presents some basic information about the more common sexually transmitted diseases. If you discover any of the listed symptoms, call your doctor or clinic.

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Disease:	How it is Spread	Symptoms in a Woman	Symptoms in a Man	Risks If Not Treated
Gonorrhea <i>Cause:</i> bacteria	Sexual contact.	Pus-like vaginal discharge, vaginal soreness, low abdominal pain, painful urination	Pus-like discharge from the penis.	Sterility, scar tissue. Women: Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (inflammation of the tubes), blindness in newborn.
Syphilis <i>Cause:</i> spirochete	Sexual contact congenital.	Rashes appearing almost anywhere on the body, including palms of hands and soles of feet. Chancre (lesion) on or in vagina, anus, or mouth. Loss of facial or scalp hair in patches.	Rashes or hair loss in the same pattern as in women. Chancre on or around penis.	Brain damage, paralysis, heart disease. A pregnant woman can pass syphilis to her baby causing a variety of birth defects including damage to skin, bone, eyes, liver, and teeth.
Herpes Simplex II <i>Cause:</i> virus	Direct contact with virus in blisters or with virus being shed and no blisters.	Painful, fluid-filled blister (or cluster of blisters) on, in, or around vagina. Often accompanied by swollen glands in groin area. Painful urination and fever.	Same as in women, only on or around penis.	Genital herpes is caused by a virus and cannot be cured. Eventually, the blisters and infection will get better. The infection will return. Flare-ups may be caused by stress and fatigue. Genital herpes may be passed from an infected pregnant woman to her newborn during birth, causing infant death or neurological damage.
Non-specific urethritis (called NGU, NSU) <i>Causes:</i> chlamydia, bacteria & others	Sexual contact.	Symptoms similar to those caused by gonorrhea.	Occasionally, heavy pus-like discharge. More frequently a mild watery discharge.	Women: Pelvic Inflammatory Disease. Male: Chronic urinary tract infection. Possible sterility in men and women.
Trichomonas Vaginalis (called Trich) <i>Causes:</i> protozoan	Sexual contact.	Heavy, frothy, often yellow, foul-smelling vaginal itching, often severe and continuous.	Most often none, occasionally mild discharge from the penis.	Skin irritation and gland infection. Cervical tissue may be damaged.
Monilial Vaginitis (yeast infection) <i>Cause:</i> fungal	Sexual contacts and non-sexual conditions, i.e. antibiotics, diabetes, pregnancy, birth control pills.	Women: cheesy discharge, itching, scratching.	Usually no symptoms.	Secondary bacterial infection from scratching. Infection of newborn in untreated mother.
Venereal Warts <i>Cause:</i> virus	Sexual contact, hands to sex organs.	Wart-like growths. Sometimes with itching and irritation.	Same.	The openings of the vagina, penis, and rectum may be blocked.
Pediculosis Pubic (crabs) <i>Cause:</i> louse	Sexual contact, occasionally from bedding and clothing.	Intense itching. Crabs and eggs attached to pubic hair.	Same.	Skin infection from scratching.

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Pelvic Inflammatory Disease (PID)

PID is the most common serious infection involving a woman's reproductive system (the fallopian tubes and/or ovaries). Some sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) cause the development of PID. If it is not treated quickly, PID can damage the reproductive system, limiting or ending a woman's ability to have children.

Any of the following can be symptoms of PID (the first three are especially important):

- Abdominal pain or tenderness
- Increased menstrual cramps
- Pain in lower back
- Change in menstrual cycle (period)
- Bleeding much greater than usual during menstruation
- Vaginal bleeding at times other than menstruation.
- Nausea, loss of appetite, and vomiting
- Vaginal discharge
- Burning during urination
- Chills
- Fever

If you think you might have PID, call your doctor or go to a clinic or hospital emergency room. Don't wait! Tell the doctor what your symptoms are and what you think you might have.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B, inflammation of the liver, is highly contagious virus, more prevalent than HIV, that is transmitted through exchange of bodily fluids, (including saliva), sexual activity, sharing dirty needles, razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, and unclean tools for body piercing or tattooing. It can cause serious liver damage, and potentially death, if not treated properly.

According to statistics from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there are an estimated 1.25 million Americans currently chronically infected with the disease, resulting in 6,000 deaths per year from liver disease, including liver cancer.

As of October 1999, the CDC reports that **the three major groups at risk for contracting Hepatitis B are:**

- Sexually active heterosexuals.
- Men who have sex with men.
- Injection drug users.

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Hepatitis B

Common symptoms are:

- Rashes.
- Jaundice
- Fatigue.
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Bodily and/or abdominal aches
- Loss of appetite.

Less common symptoms include:

- Dark urine
- Light-colored stools.
- Jaundice.
- Generalized itching.
- Altered mental state, stupor, or coma.

However, a large number of people are infected with the disease have no symptoms at all, and are unaware of their ability to transmit it to others.

Prevention

This disease is prevented in two ways:

Hepatitis B is prevented through consistent use of latex condoms and dental dams when engaging in sexual activity, and by refusing to share needles. In addition, choose not to share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, or unclean tools for tattooing and body piercing. Even kissing can place you at risk of contracting this highly contagious disease.

There is a vaccine for Hepatitis B. It is given in a series of three shots. It is effective in both preventing you from contracting the disease, as well as helping you manage with the disease should you be living with it. If you are among one or more of the high-risk groups listed above, plan to take action immediately to protect yourself from this disease.

Treatment

After exposure to the virus, the vaccine, along with shots of immune globulin, work to strengthen your immune system and fight off the disease. Effective treatment also includes a lot of rest, a good diet, no use of alcohol or other drugs, and appropriate medical supervision of your progress.

With the right interventions, the disease may become suppressed enough that you can resume full functioning. However, Hepatitis B is considered a chronic disease that can recur. If left unmanaged or untreated, serious liver damage could result in the need for a liver transplant, or even death.

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Resources -- Sexually Transmitted Diseases

If you have questions or need help, call or visit any one of the following information centers or clinics. Assistance will be given free and anonymously. (You won't have to give your name.)

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Public Health
Division of STD's
(617) 983-6940

National STD Hotline
1-800-227-8922

Free clinics are located in the following cities:

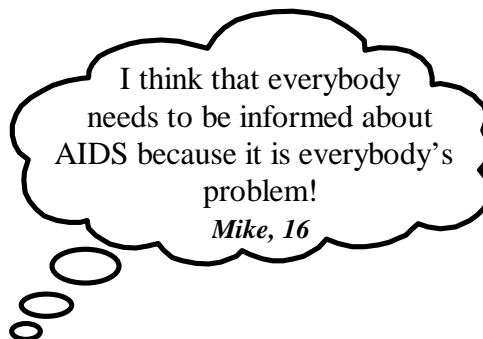
Boston	Beth Israel Hospital	(617) 667-8000
	Boston Medical Center	
	Harrison Avenue Campus	(617) 534-4701
	Newton Campus	(617) 638-6370
	Brigham & Women's Hospital	(617) 724-1368
	Mass General Hospital	(617) 726-2171
	New England Medical Center	(617) 636-5000
Haverhill	Hale Hospital	(978) 374-2000
Beverly	Beverly Hospital	(508) 922-3000
Fitchburg	Burbank Hospital	(978) 343-5000
Fall River	St. Anne's Hospital	(508) 674-5741
New Bedford	St. Luke's Hospital	(508) 997-1515
Barnstable	Barnstable County Health Dept.	(508) 790-6265
Brockton	Brockton Hospital	(508) 941-7000
Cambridge	Cambridge City Hospital	(617) 498-1000
Lynn	Health Quarters	(617) 595-5463
Newton	Newton - Wellesley Hospital	(617) 243-6000
Pittsfield	Berkshire Medical Center	(413) 447-2000
Springfield	Bay State Medical Center	(413) 784-0000
Waltham	Deaconess/Waltham Hospital	(617) 647-6000
Framingham	Metro West Medical Center	(508) 879-7111
Falmouth	Falmouth Hospital	(508) 548-5300
Methuen	Holy Family Hospital	(978) 687-0151

HIV/AIDS

Talking about HIV/AIDS might be scary for many of you. Nobody really wants to think about being sick or dying. However, it is important to talk and to learn about HIV and AIDS in order to stay healthy.

Fact: More than 80 percent of all AIDS cases occur among individuals under 29 years of age.

Since the incubation period between infection with HIV and the onset of AIDS averages ten years, many 20-29 with AIDS were probably infected as teenagers. Knowing about the virus, the disease, and the ways it is spread will help you prevent infection. If you utilize your knowledge about HIV/AIDS in addition to the personal skills (decision making and communication skills) we talked about earlier, you will be able to protect yourself. So, let's take a closer look at the basic facts of HIV/AIDS.

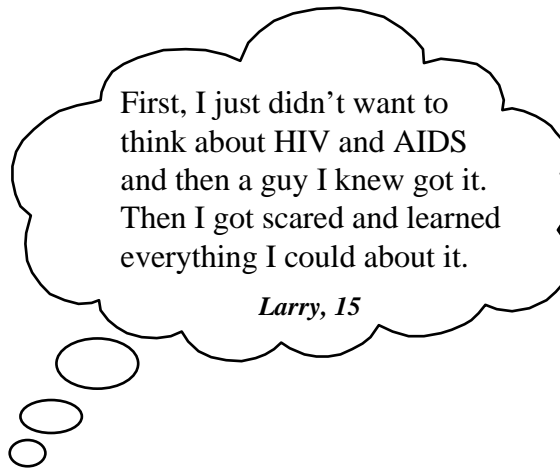


Basic Facts About HIV/AIDS

- AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by a virus called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus).
- This virus weakens the body's immune system, destroying its ability to fight infection.
- The virus allows other infections (such as pneumonia or cancer) to attack the body.
- AIDS damages the brain and the nervous system.
- The HIV/AIDS virus is present in blood, semen, and vaginal secretions of anyone who has been infected.
- You cannot tell by anyone's appearance whether or not they have HIV or AIDS. Many people who are infected look and feel fine.
- The disease incubation period (the span of time before it becomes an active disease) can take from several months to more than ten years.

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- HIV/AIDS is not a gay disease. It affects people regardless of color, age, and sexual orientation. AIDS is a serious problem for all people of all ethnic groups. The disease has affected more than 10,000,000 people worldwide, most of them heterosexual.
- At this time, AIDS is a fatal disease. There is no known cure or vaccine. Many new drugs called protease inhibitors (a mixture of anti-virus drugs, a.k.a. the “drug cocktail”) do an excellent job of suppressing the virus and slowing its ability to break down the immune system. However, these drugs do not work for all people. A sizeable number of people have found the sheer number of pills, plus the mandatory schedule for taking them, to be an extremely difficult regimen to follow. There are also a number of people who have found the drug cocktail to have little to no effect on the disease’s impact to their body. **Keep In Mind:** Even if you can tolerate the mixture of drugs and suppress the presence of HIV in the blood, you can still pass the virus on to your sexual partner(s). As of this writing, a carrier of the virus cannot be cured of the disease.



Stages of HIV/AIDS Infection

1. HIV infected. The virus is present in the bloodstream but does not show up in tests for up to six months. It **CAN BE TRANSMITTED** at this stage!
2. HIV positive or Seropositive: The antibodies to the virus are detectable by a blood test.
3. Symptomatic (formerly called AIDS Related Complex or ARC): The immune system weakens, allowing opportunistic diseases or infections to take hold.

Full-blown AIDS: A total or near-total immune system shutdown occurs which leaves the person susceptible to any disease or infection.

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Although the span of time between HIV infection and full-blown AIDS has increased dramatically in the last decade for gay men, this period is significantly shorter for populations affected later in the epidemic (IV-drug users, women, and people of color).

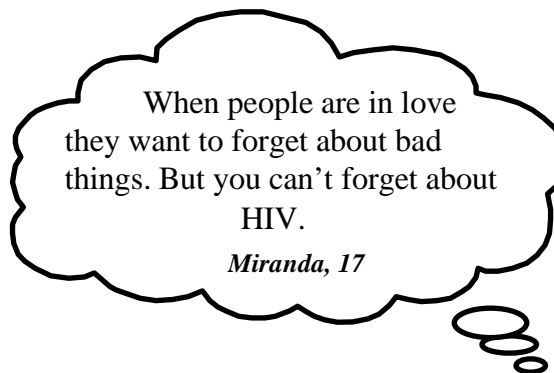
What Are The Symptoms?

Many of the early symptoms of AIDS or AIDS-related illnesses are very similar to the symptoms of common minor illnesses, like a cold or the flu. AIDS and AIDS-related illnesses, however, are much more severe and last much longer.

Symptoms include:

- Feeling very tired every day for at least one month
- Losing your appetite and losing weight for no reason
- Swollen glands (lymph nodes) in your neck, under your ears, in your armpits, and in the groin area which last for at least one month.
- Fevers above 100 degrees, night sweats, and chills which last from several days to several weeks
- Diarrhea that lasts for more than two weeks
- Thrush, a thick white coating in the mouth (not just the tongue) which lasts for weeks.
- A dry cough (not from smoking) that lasts for more than two weeks and shortness of breath.
- Weakness in your arm and leg on one side of your body; coordination problems
- Constant headache, changes in memory or vision
- Easy bruising, purple bumps or blotches on the skin, or unexplained bleeding from any part of the body.

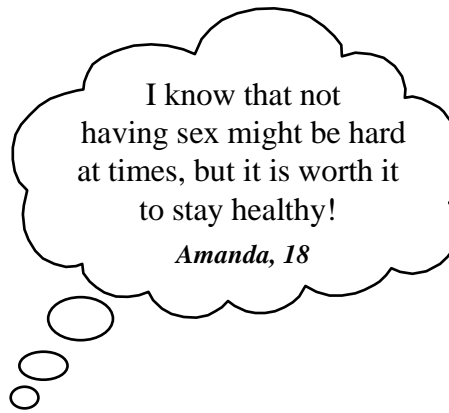
If you think you have any of these symptoms, call your doctor or clinic for an appointment.



How Is HIV/AIDS Spread?

There are three ways the virus is spread:

- Having sex of any kind with a person who is infected with the virus. Any exchange of blood, semen, or vaginal discharge can spread the virus. Using condoms and dental dams significantly decrease the chance of infection, but it cannot entirely eliminate the risk of spreading the disease.
- Sharing needles, syringes, cookers, or cotton balls for drug injections.
- HIV-infected mothers can pass the virus on to their babies during pregnancy or birth. The risk to the unborn child can be significantly decreased if the pregnant mother uses AZT, an anti-virus drug.



How To Protect Yourself Against HIV/AIDS

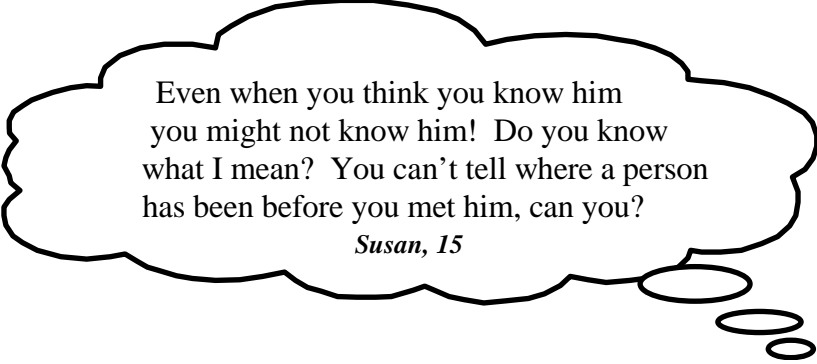
Use your communication skills, decision making skills, and values to say **NO** to sex and drugs. Abstinence is the only 100% effective way to protect yourself from getting HIV/AIDS.

If you should have sex, play it safe (or **safer** -- there is no such thing as safe sex). You should discuss the danger of AIDS with your partner. Talk about what you are feeling; get to know one another. You'll feel less nervous and more in control. Talk about what protection you'll use. Remember the responsibility is not hers or his; it's yours!

- Use latex or polyurethane condoms, for men or women. They will greatly lower your risk of becoming infected with the AIDS virus. (Sheepskin condoms won't work. They cannot prevent the virus from spreading).
- Male and female condoms must not be used at the same time; they pull each other off.

Drinking alcohol and using drugs can make you do things you'll be sorry about later. They also weaken your immune system making you more vulnerable to HIV infection.

Don't share any needles or syringes. Any infected blood, even a drop left in the needle, could enter your bloodstream and, as a result, infect you with the virus.

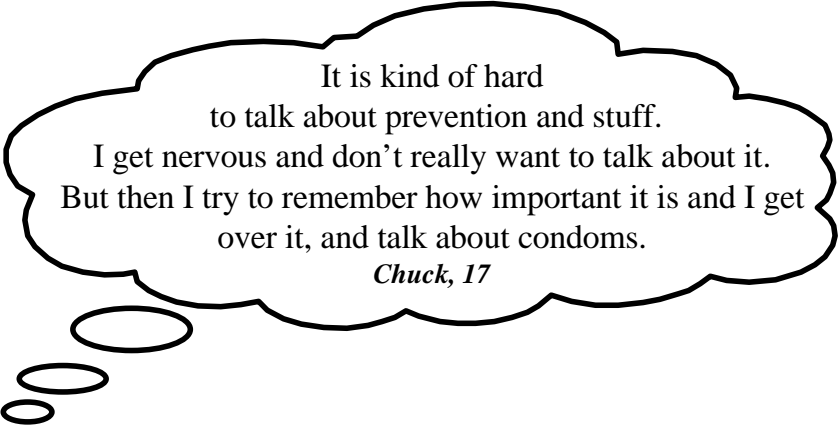


Even when you think you know him
you might not know him! Do you know
what I mean? You can't tell where a person
has been before you met him, can you?

Susan, 15

Gays & Lesbian Youth and HIV/AIDS

For sexual-minority youth, HIV infection is compounded by additional issues not faced by their heterosexual peers. The need to hide their orientation, the lack of positive adult role models, the low self-esteem that tends to be more severe for sexual minority youth than for their heterosexual peers, and the belief that disclosure of their orientation could lead to abandonment, abuse, and/or eviction from their homes, schools, and/or churches can all lead to sexual acting-out as a way of feeling good, needed, or loved.



It is kind of hard
to talk about prevention and stuff.
I get nervous and don't really want to talk about it.
But then I try to remember how important it is and I get
over it, and talk about condoms.

Chuck, 17

HIV Testing

The way to determine whether or not someone is HIV positive or negative is through a blood test. The blood test can be administered at clinics, through doctors' offices, or at anonymous test sites. The results usually take 2 weeks. The test determines whether or not HIV antibodies are found in the blood tested. If there are antibodies present, the test is positive and the virus can be spread. However, because it can take the body up to six months (and in very rare exceptions, up to a year) to make the antibodies, the test is only accurate if administered 6 months after a possible exposure to HIV. For more information, refer to the list of Resources at the end of the section.

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True or False

Take a few minutes to answer “True” or “False” to the following statements, using what you know and what you have learned about HIV and AIDS.

1. ___ Most people who are infected with the AIDS virus look and feel fine.
2. ___ You can get AIDS from even one sexual experience.
3. ___ If you donate blood, you might get AIDS.
4. ___ If you have sex using contraceptive foam, jelly, or cream **without** a condom (rubber), you will **not** be protected against the AIDS virus.
5. ___ Babies can be born with the virus if the mother is infected.
6. ___ The only way to know if a person is infected with HIV is through a blood test.
7. ___ You’ll be safe from the AIDS virus if you only have sex with someone of the opposite sex.
8. ___ Working or going to school with someone who has AIDS is dangerous because you might catch the virus from him/her.
9. ___ A negative result on an HIV antibody test proves that you do not have the virus and you never will.
10. ___ You cannot get infected with the AIDS virus through swimming pools, showers, or bathrooms shared with people who have AIDS.
11. ___ Using the male and female condom at the same time increases the effectiveness of both.

Independent Living Skills Module II

Answers:

1. **True.** Many people infected with the HIV virus do not look or feel sick. The symptoms of AIDS do not appear immediately after a person becomes infected. In fact, the incubation period may range from a few months to over ten years. So the symptoms may not show up for quite a while. You can't tell by looking at someone whether or not he/she has been infected with the HIV virus.
2. **True.** If you have sex with an infected person even once without protection, you can get AIDS.
3. **False.** You cannot get AIDS by donating blood. New, sterilized equipment is used for every donor each time he or she gives blood.
4. **True.** Using a spermicide (foam, jelly, or cream) without a condom will not prevent infection. Only latex or polyurethane male and female condoms (not sheepskin) should be used to prevent infection. It was previously thought that contraceptive foams, jellies, and creams provided additional benefits in killing the virus. However, recent studies have not supported this belief. **The most current and thorough bodies of research have shown that the active ingredient in these products, nonoxynol-9, either has no effect on the virus or actually increases the risk of transmission.**
5. **True.** The virus can be passed from the mother to her baby during pregnancy or at birth.
6. **True.** The HIV antibody blood test is the only way to determine if a person is carrying the virus.
7. **False.** You can become infected by having sex with anyone (male or female) who carries the HIV virus **and** by sharing drug needles.
8. **False.** There is no evidence that the virus is spread through casual, social contact. Therefore, you can ride the bus with, shake hands with, talk to, eat with, and work with a person who has HIV or AIDS and not be at any risk.
9. **False.** No medical test can prove that you will **never** get HIV/AIDS, since it is mostly up to your behavior, awareness, and precaution. Also, the antibody test will not always detect the virus for up to six months following infection.
10. **True.** The HIV/AIDS virus must live within human cells and cannot survive long outside the body. There is no evidence that HIV is carried in tears or saliva, or that it could "contaminate" air, surfaces, or water.
11. **False.** The male and female condoms should not be used at the same time- they pull each other off.

Exercises

Utilize what you have learned in the previous sections to complete the following exercise.

Bethany and her friends are talking about sex and HIV. Her friends tell Bethany that they will postpone having sex because they are really scared of HIV/AIDS. Bethany tells them that she is not afraid of AIDS because it won't happen to her. What do you think?

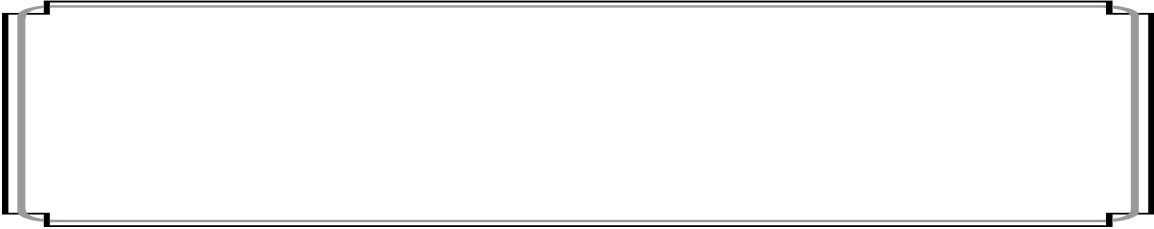
Ed and Marc are talking about HIV. Ed states that he would always use a latex condom if he decides to have sex. Marc says that Ed is silly because only gay men get AIDS. What do you think?

Pedro and Sabrina are discussing possible prevention methods, in case they decide to have sex. Sabrina takes birth control pills and Pedro believes that they won't need any other protection. Sabrina tells him that she is afraid of HIV and would like him to use a condom. Pedro tells her that he looks and feels just fine, so how could he possibly have HIV? What do you think?

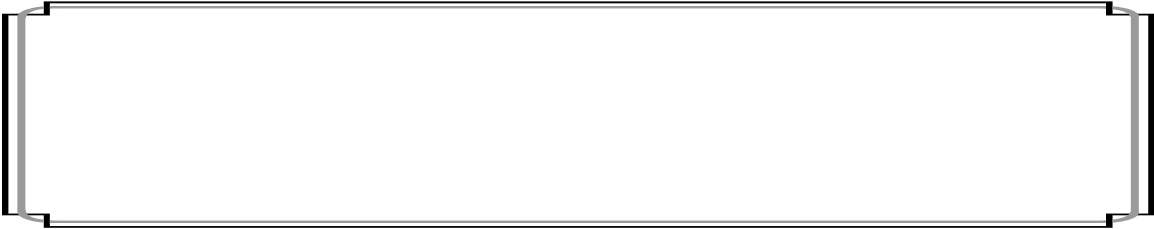
Imagine what your life would be like if you contracted HIV. How would your life change?

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What impact would the HIV virus have on your future goals?



How would you tell your family and friends?



HIV and AIDS are a serious business. Everybody is at risk and everybody has to take steps to protect himself/herself. For further information, refer to the resource listing on the next page.

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Resources

For further information about HIV and AIDS, contact the following agencies:

AIDS Action Committee Hotline

800-235-2331 Statewide

The Action Committee or the hotline can give information on where to find support groups.

Latino AIDS Hotline

800-637-3776

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

AIDS Bureau

617-727-0368

National AIDS Hotline TTY/TDD Services

800-243-7889

General information line, with information on test sites, care facilities, and support groups in your area.

Positive Directions

800-794-7337

Peer support line. Referrals for support groups.

Youth Only AIDS Line

800-788-1234

(6) *Have I communicated clearly my feelings and concerns about sex and the risks involved?*

Although it might not always be easy, communication about any kind of sexual activity is vital! If you do not communicate, you might get hurt, encounter misunderstandings and conflicts, and primarily, you will not be prepared. Communication is particularly important to determine boundaries and limits, as well as to discuss the possible risks and methods of birth control and STD protection.



ACTIVITY

Utilize your communication skills to complete the following exercise. What would you say in the following situations?

I think he wants to have sex with me but I am not ready

I Would Say: _____

I would like to talk to her about sex but that might ruin our relationship. How can I bring up that topic?

I Would Say: _____

I would like to ask him if he uses condoms, but I'm so embarrassed!

I Would Say: _____

I'm not ready to be a father. I want to talk to her about birth control and STD prevention but I don't know how.

I Would Say: _____

I am not sure whether or not to have sex. I am afraid of HIV and all the other STD's out there, but I don't know how to tell him. I don't want to hurt his feelings.

I Would Say: _____

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I have genital warts, an STD.
But I am not sure how to tell her.
If she finds out, she may not
want to go out with me anymore.

I Would Say: _____

Kissing and touching feels
good, but I don't want to
go all the way

I Would Say: _____

(7) Am I knowledgeable about the various methods for preventing STD infection and pregnancy?

To be able to reduce the risk of pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted diseases, you will have to be well informed about all options available to you. Abstinence is the **only** method of birth control and STD prevention which is 100% effective and free of side effects. However, several products are available which greatly reduce the risk of STD's and pregnancy. Everyone who is sexually active needs to protect him/herself!

Do not assume you can't get an STD or become pregnant because:

- Your boyfriend tells you he will be "careful".
- Your girlfriend tells you it is the time of the month when it is "safe".
- Your boyfriend tells you he has a low sperm count.
- You had sex before and nothing happened.
- Your boyfriend tells you he can't have children.
- Your girlfriend tells you she is sterile.
- Your boy/girlfriend tells you that you are the "first one".
- You are too young.

None of these excuses are valid. "Excuses" are not appropriate precautions against sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy.

NOTE:

If you should decide to engage in a sexual relationship at any time in your life, you need to be informed about the birth control and STD prevention options available to you. Talking about and planning for birth control & STD prevention options is **both** partners responsibility. Look at the following chart and evaluate the various options listed.