



Fact Sheet

2005

Student Health Services Texas A&M University

Sexual Abstinence: It's not just for virgins

What is abstinence?

Abstinence is a choice that people can make at any time in their life. Sexual abstinence is not having sex, oral, anal, OR vaginal. People who choose to abstain either have never had sex, or had sex before and choose not to have sex at this time.

Why do people abstain?

- Religious reasons
- Personal values and morals
- Want to wait for the right person
- Want to finish school
- Too busy with job, school, sports
- Want to protect themselves from emotional hurt
- Want to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy

What about pressure?

Pressure can come from many different places and vary in intensity. This pressure may make it hard to stick to a decision to remain abstinent. If you succumb to pressures from others, then the choices you make will be to satisfy them, and not yourself.

Where does pressure come from?

Friends – It is easy for us to want to have sex to impress our friends. Hang out with people who will respect your decision, whether it is the same as theirs or not.

Media – In today's media, we are constantly being exposed to casual sex encounters without consequences. The media make it seem as though people are having sex all the time. Don't buy into it. They are just trying to sell their products, not help you make sound or wise health decisions.

Partner – Partners can also put pressure on you to have sex. You must make your decision and stick to it if you are to continue to abstain. Make sure your partner understands and respects your decision.

You – You can also put pressure on yourself to have sex. You might feel curious or left out. Having these feelings is normal and just because you have sexual feelings does not mean you have to act upon them.

What can you do to deal with pressure?

Be clear about your intentions – communicate well with your partner and your friends and let them know where you stand. If they truly care about you, they will understand and respect your decision.

Avoid the situation – avoid situations where you know it will be hard to keep your decision to abstain. Being under the influence of alcohol and drugs may make it harder to say no to sexual activity.

Draw the line – determine before the situation occurs how far you are willing to go. Abstinence can mean no sexual touching, some sexual touching, or any kind of touching up to oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse.

Remember the reasons why you chose to abstain – Reflect on why you made the decision to abstain in the first place and stick to it.

Being abstinent does not mean you can't be affectionate and intimate with someone you love.

Talking abstinence

- Don't wait until a romantic moment to discuss abstinence with your partner. Know ahead of time your decision and discuss it with your partner when sexual feelings are not in full force.
- Discuss the pressures you both feel you are under. If you are both under the same pressures, it may help you to abstain if you discuss it with each other.
- Share your goals with your partner and why you have chosen abstinence at this time in your life. You may discover an intimacy with your partner that you never felt before.

How to Say No

- Don't give mixed messages. If you say no, mean it.
- Explain why you want to wait. You're not ready to deal with birth control or take a chance on getting an STI (sexually transmitted infection) are just some reasons.
- Try other ways to show you care. There are many ways to express love without having sex. Be creative.
- Stand up to pressure.

Before you engage in sexual activity, Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you emotionally ready to handle a sexual relationship?
- Are you ready for the possible outcomes of a sexual relationship that might interfere with goals that you have for your life?
- Have you and your partner talked about the possible need for STI testing?
- Are you and your partner prepared to use a reliable method of birth control if you are not ready to be parents?
- Are you ready to take the chance on contracting a disease that could possibly be with you the rest of your life or even kill you?
- Are you prepared to use condoms consistently and correctly to reduce the risk of STI's?