

ENCOURAGING ABSTINENCE

Tips for Parents

Do you want your child to wait until he or she is older to have sex? Many parents do. But how can you encourage your kids to wait? Should you tell them directly? How can you bring it up? These tips will help you get started.

1. Be honest about how you feel.

- ☀ It's ok to be direct about wanting them to wait. But let them know you trust them to make good choices.
- ☀ Be specific: Do you want them to wait for intercourse? Sexual touching? Kissing?
- ☀ Be prepared to answer other questions about sex and relationships.
- ☀ If you are uncomfortable talking about sex, let your child know. You can bet he or she is too.

2. Tell them why!

- ☀ Do you really want your kids to wait until they are older? Until they are in a committed relationship? Until they know how to practice safer sex?
- ☀ Say, "I'm worried about your health and your future. I want to make sure you are safe."
- ☀ By sharing your reasons, you will help them think through their own.

3. Look for teachable moments.

- ☀ For example, you can talk about reasons for waiting after you watch a TV program about HIV or teen pregnancy.
- ☀ Or you can bring up the subject of dating when you see two people holding hands in the park.

4. Openly discuss HIV, STIs, and pregnancy.

- ☀ Studies show that giving kids accurate information about birth control and safer sex does not increase sexual activity.
- ☀ In fact, for some young people, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy are strong reasons to wait.

5. Start talking early – even before they start dating.

- ☀ Help your child think through the decision to wait *before* he or she is in a serious relationship.
- ☀ Say, "I know you're not dating yet, but I want you to be prepared when you start."
- ☀ Talk again when he or she starts dating.

6. Let them know it's ok to have sexual feelings.

- ☀ Tell your kids that sexual feelings are natural – but they don't need to act on them!
- ☀ Teach them to show love and affection in other ways. For example, they can give gifts or spend special time together.
- ☀ If your teen does have sex, you can still encourage abstinence. (But make sure they have the facts about birth control and safer sex too!)
- ☀ Some young people decide to wait again after a sexual experience.

7. Teach them how to say no.

- ☀ Say, “What would you do if your date wanted to have sex and you didn’t?”
- ☀ Suggest that they talk about limits early on, before things heat up.

8. Give them tips for avoiding sexual pressure.

- ☀ Discuss times when it may be hard to say no, such as when they are alone with a date or if they are dating someone older.
- ☀ Suggest avoiding those situations by planning group activities or spending time in public places.
- ☀ Let them know that using alcohol or drugs may make it harder to say no.

9. Help them plan for the future.

- ☀ Ask your child, “What are your goals? Where do you want to be in one year? Five years?”
- ☀ Explain that the consequences of unprotected intercourse could get in the way of their plans.
- ☀ Let your child know that he or she is important – too important to risk an early pregnancy or an STI.

10. Trust them to make good decisions about sex.

- ☀ Kids are more likely to follow through on a decision to remain abstinent if it is what they want!
- ☀ Because young people sometimes have a hard time talking to their parents about sex, make sure they know who else they can talk with – another trusted adult, a doctor, or a counselor.

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**For more information about talking with your children
about sex and sexuality.**

**Together for Youth
233 Vold Drive
Waterloo, IA 50703
(319) 274-6768
www.togetherforyouth.NET**