



THE NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD

**INFORMATION PACKAGE FOR GUIDANCE
COUNSELLORS ON ABSTINENCE**

September 10, 2009

Introduction

Young people today are faced with many social pressures relating to sexual activity. They may feel that they should engage in sexual acts to “be like their friends” or “to do what everyone is doing”.

Young adults may also feel that having sexual intercourse is the only way to show they really care about someone.

As will be illustrated in this information package, the majority of adolescents are not waiting to have intercourse and as a result, may encounter several consequences. It is imperative that Guidance Counsellors are equipped with the necessary tools to guide youth in making responsible sexual choices and empower them to abstain.

What is Abstinence?

Abstinence may be defined in two (2) ways:

1. Primary Abstinence is the act or practice of refraining from indulging in sex (having no sexual experience). Additionally, some persons view Primary Abstinence as a commitment to refrain from sexual intimacy until marriage, while others perceive Primary Abstinence as delaying sex until some future time.

Source: Family Health International, 2009

2. Secondary Abstinence or secondary virginity: refers to a situation wherein those persons who are sexually experienced, become sexually inactive for a period of time.

Source: Contraceptive Technology 19th Edition 2007

Current Sexual Activity

Background

When the topic of Reproductive Health or risky sexual behaviour is discussed, many of these issues relate to the 10-15 and 15-19 age groups. These groups of young people, due to varying factors, are at risk for contracting reproductive tract infections, becoming pregnant and acquiring multiple partners, which all play a role in negatively affecting the reproductive health of these young people.

According to the Youth Risk and Resiliency Survey (2007), data collected in 2005 have shown that in the age group 10-15, 12.8% of the adolescents reported having had sexual intercourse, with four times as many boys as girls having had done so.

In the same survey, nearly 60% of all respondents of the 15-19 age group stated they were sexually active, and of that percent, just under half were females and a little over two-thirds were males. The proportion who reported having more than five (5) sexual partners in their lifetime was greater in males (51%) compared with females at six (6) percent. This may put males at a higher risk for contracting reproductive tract infections and have other negative risks for their reproductive health.

Sex Debut

The ages of sex initiation differ for males and females with the average age for males being 13.3 years and for females being 15.3 years. This may be a finding with a cause for concern as it can be argued that the earlier one starts having sex, the greater the likelihood of that person sustaining sexual relations which predisposes him or her to risky sexual practices.

Sex and Growing up

As individuals go through the adolescent period, they find themselves becoming more aware of their sexuality. As a result, hormonal and physical changes, accompanied by the social happenings in their environment may cause them to question themselves or ask the following questions:

- “When should I start dating?”
- “When is it okay to kiss?”
- “How far is too far?”
- “When will I be ready to have sexual intercourse?”
- “Will having sex help my relationship?”

These are important questions which must be encouraged. Guidance Counsellors have a role as do parents and adult caregivers in supporting adolescents through this process.

Recent Statistics on Abstinence

As the data below illustrate, most young people are not abstaining from sexual intercourse which is a troubling finding. Table A illustrates Primary Abstinence, while Table B speaks to Secondary Abstinence.

Table A: Percentage of Young People Aged 15-19 who Have Never had Sexual Relations

Sex	Never Had Sexual Relations		
	Year 2004	Year 2008	Points Change
Male	27.6	33.8	6.2
Female	50.5	40.4	-10.1

Source: HIV/AIDS Knowledge Attitudes and Behaviour Survey, Jamaica (2008)
Sample Size: 1,800

Table A illustrates that for the comparative years 2004 and 2008, the percentage of males who were not sexually active increased by six (6) percent. However, the percentage of females who never had sexual relations decreased by ten (10) percent.

Table B: Respondents Ages 15-24 Not Sexually Active in the [12 Months Preceding Data Collection], by Gender

Sex	Not Sexually Active in the [12 Months Preceding Data Collection]	
	Number	Percent (%)
Male	447	38.0
Female	446	19.2

Source: HIV/AIDS Knowledge Attitudes and Behaviour Survey, Jamaica (2008)

According to the table above, for all persons surveyed, 38% of males were not sexually active in the 12 months preceding data collection. This compares to 19.2% of females who reported that they were not sexually active within the same 12 month period.

Sex and the Modern World

There are several myths about sex that young people are constantly bombarded with. At times, it is difficult to separate the truth from fiction. Below are some myths about sex that will help your discussions with youth and aid them in identifying some sexual myths.

Sex is Just Physical

Some people would like adolescents to believe that sexual intercourse is just a physical thing and that there is no harm in it being that way. This makes no room for mental and spiritual bonding.

Sex is Nobody Else's Business Except Yours

Stress to adolescents that if having sex is only their business, why are the consequences of risky sexual behaviour seen affecting so many people across the

world in the form of AIDS, abortion, rape and incest. What young people should remember is that having sexual intercourse with their current partners affects their next partner and this continues on, not just through reproductive tract infections, but through emotions as well.

Sleeping Around is fun

If sleeping around is so much fun, why do some people have so much guilt, doubt and fear about having engaged in such behaviour. It should be explained that brief moments of pleasure can also lead to many months or years of pain, shame and worry. Some people also spend a very long time trying to forgive themselves for being so careless with their bodies.

Source: Young Woman: A Christian Girl's Guide to Teenage Sexuality (1997)

Why Abstain?

As young people get older, their bodies change and they may find themselves more attracted to the opposite sex. However it is very important to control these urges. Also, complete sexual abstinence is the most effective means of protection against both pregnancy and HIV infection.

How do you Advise Young People how to Abstain?

To prevent negative outcomes from engaging in sexual activity it is best to have a plan of action!! So, what can you do as a Guidance Counsellor? You can encourage young adults to follow these steps in making decisions about sexual activity.

1. Be clear about why you want to wait

- List your reasons. Talk them over with someone who supports you.
- Check your list from time to time to remind yourself

2. Have a Plan

- Know what situations might make it hard to stick with your choice
- Decide ahead of time what you'll do to avoid or deal with them, such as leaving a scene when being pressured to have sex.

3. Be Impressed With Yourself

- It can be hard to go against the crowd and make your own choices.
- Give yourself credit. You deserve it.

4. Notice the pressures

- Pay special attention to messages in music, videos, and movies telling you to have sex.

5. Get Support

- Hang out with friends who know about and respect your decisions
- Avoid people who might pressure you
- If pressured, threaten to tell someone in authority (a relative, police)

6. Practise Communication Skills

- Learn to say “No!” emphatically or “No, no, no” repeatedly
- Give a reason such as “I’m not ready” or “I’ve decided to wait until I’ve achieved my academic goals”.
- Turn the tables: “You say that if I love you I would, but if you really love me, you wouldn’t insist”.

How can you Make Abstinence Attractive to Youth?

Virginity Pledge Programmes

In popular culture today, many young movie stars and musicians in the United States are promoting abstinence using purity rings. Wearing these rings in public is done to make others aware that the wearer is a follower of Primary Abstinence.

Knowing that Jamaican youth watch these international programmes and are susceptible to the influence of these stars, this may make them more receptive to a “virginity pledge programme” as these stars are also their age.

In the Journal of the American Medical Association, Dr. Michael Resnick and others submitted an article entitled "Protecting Adolescents From Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health" illustrating that "abstinence pledge" programmes are very successful in reducing sexual activity among teenagers in grades seven (7) through 12 in the United States.

It is important to note that there are indeed cultural differences between the United States and Jamaica. However, as Jamaicans can be, arguably, very “fashion forward”, this may be another trend youth may follow if it is promoted in a fun creative way.

An example of a pledge which can be used in such a programme would be “I, (Insert name here), have decided to abstain from sexual intercourse until I have committed myself to the union of marriage”.

Postponing Sexual Involvement Programmes (PSI’s)

The PSI program was developed by the Emory School of Medicine and the Grady Memorial Hospital Teen Services Programme in Atlanta, Georgia. The elements of this programme, so you know, can be altered to fit the cultural differences and can be promoted within the schools as an afterschool programme. This outreach educational program targets eighth graders and consists of:

1. Human sexuality
2. Skill Building

Human Sexuality

The human sexuality component gives youth basic facts about maintaining their reproductive health and includes decision making skills. Originally this programme

included knowledge of contraceptives and how to effectively use them. However that element can be forgone with the focus on Reproductive Health.

Skill Building

The skill building component equips youth with the skills to overcome social pressures and peer pressure. Through this initiative, emphasis is placed on why youth feel it is important to have intercourse and how they may resist such behaviour. Several sessions are headed by older teenagers who are trained through the programme to facilitate discussion on these issues, making it easier for participants to relate to leaders and feel more comfortable.

Publications

There are several publications which focus on the areas of Abstinence as well as Sexual and Adolescent Reproductive Health listed in Tables C and D. Publications which have some focus on the topic of Abstinence are summarised below.

Jamaican Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, 2008

The Jamaican Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education are modelled after the landmark School Health Education Study (SHES) published in the United States during the late 1960s. In order to structure health knowledge, broad concepts as well as related sub-concepts, were identified and arranged in a hierarchy for students in Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Based on the focus of creating an organisational framework of the important knowledge and skills related to sexuality, Reproductive Health and family living, a task force organised information into key concepts, topics, subconcepts and age appropriate developmental messages. Abstinence is outlined under Sexual Behaviour, and is exemplified as the most effective method of preventing pregnancies and reproductive tract infections (p: 42-43).

Reproductive Health Survey: Final Report, 2002

The 2002 Reproductive Health Survey is the seventh in a series of periodic enquiries conducted by the National Family Planning Board. The scope of the survey, as in earlier studies, was designed to update measures of fertility and contraceptive use and other Reproductive Health issues among women aged 15-49 years, and men aged 15-24 years. As an indication of Primary Abstinence, the chapter on Current Sexual Activity outlines the percentage of those who never had sex.

Contraceptive Technology: Nineteenth Revised Edition (2007)

This book serves as a tool for selecting an effective family planning method and gives information on family planning practices. Examples of topics covered in this edition include, choosing a contraceptive, values in family planning, types of contraceptives (including methods for males), and also abstinence. The Contraceptive Technology also places special emphasis on providing readers with the education and counselling

tools to help women correctly use new important and effective options for birth control. The chapter on Abstinence, “Abstinence and the Range of Sexual Expression”, explains the concepts of Primary and Secondary Abstinence as well as alternative methods of sexual expression apart from sexual intercourse.

Young Man: A Christian Boy’s Guide to Teenage Sexuality/ Young Woman: A Christian Boy’s Guide to Teenage Sexuality

The books look at the concept of sexuality from a gender but Christian perspective. They explore the pervasiveness of sex in society and indeed to the world. Each chapter has a question and answer section and checklist that one can use to conduct a personal audit of his/her self. Where issues of sex are directly addressed, the books offer delaying intercourse as a viable option until one is ready to make a serious commitment to their partner, such as in the form of marriage.

Table C: Resources Housed in the NFPB Library With Information on Abstinence

Publication	Year	Author
Contraceptive Technology: Nineteenth Revised Edition	2007	Robert A. Hatcher, MD, MPH James Trussell, Phd Anita L. Nelson, MD Willard Cates Jr., MD, MPH Felecia Stewart, MD Deborah Kowal, MA, PA
Jamaican Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education	2008	The Jamaican Task Force Committee for Comprehensive Sexuality Education
Reproductive Health Survey: Final Report	2002	The National Family Planning Board
Young Man: A Christian Boy’s Guide to Teenage Sexuality	1997	Jonathan Gallagher Ana Gallagher
Young Woman: A Christian Boy’s Guide to Teenage Sexuality	1997	Jonathan Gallagher Ana Gallagher

Table D: Other Resources Housed in the NFPB Library With Information on Adolescent Reproductive Health

Publication	Year	Volume/Author
Reproductive Health Matters	2000-2006	8, 9, 12, 19, 23 and 25
Outlook	2002-2006	Volume 1-4
International Family Planning Perspective: Gender Based Violence and Reproductive Health	2004	Volume 30
Vital Facts for Boys: So You're a Teenager	1999	Dr. John. F. Knight
Vital Facts for Boys: So You're a Teenager	1999	Dr. John. F. Knight
Understanding the Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs of Adolescents with Disabilities: A Training Manual for Health Care Providers, and Counselors	2005	McCam Child Development Centre
The NFPB Annual Family Planning Statistical Reports	2004-2008	The National Family Planning Board
Reproductive Health Survey: Final Report	2002	The National Family Planning Board
Jamaican Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education	2008	The Jamaican Task Force Committee for Comprehensive Sexuality Education
Improving Reproductive Health in Developing Countries	1997	Population Reference Bureau
Selecting Reproductive Health Indicators: A Guide for District Managers	1997	World Health Organisation

Contact us

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