

Deciding to Wait



Guidelines for Teens

Becoming a teen is exciting. Because you're becoming an adult, you'll experience new physical changes. It's a time when you'll try new things and make new friends. You also may think more about dating.

Dating can lead to sharing private thoughts, becoming very good friends, or just having fun with your new friend. Becoming close with someone may be confusing, and it could feel awkward at first. Don't worry, just be yourself.

As you get to know each other better, you may think about being more than just friends. You may get the urge to kiss and touch someone you're dating. But what happens if your date wants to have sex? Would you understand your feelings? How would you react?

Pressure to have sex

You hear about sex in songs, on television and in the movies. Some of your friends may talk about it, too. They may even tell you sex is fun or that "everyone is doing it."

No matter what you've heard, not everyone your age has had sexual intercourse. In fact, most young people your age choose not to have sexual intercourse.

Teenagers you know may talk a lot about having sex. There are several reasons for this. These young people may be curious about sex or may just want attention. Talking about sex also may mean that your friends feel lonely or that they simply want someone to care.

New feelings

During a date, you may find that you become physically attracted to a person. These new feelings may excite and confuse you. It's normal.

If you decide to kiss and hug 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 before you make a quick decision, stop and ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this person pressuring me to have sex?
- What will happen after I have sex with this person?
- Am I ready to have sex?

If somebody you're dating wants to have sex, it doesn't mean you have to want it, too. Before you act on your feelings, remember that you can be sexual with someone **without** actually having sexual intercourse.

Waiting to have sexual intercourse is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. Why not take your time and think it through?

What does it mean to be sexual?

When you are sexual, it can mean:

- Making up romantic and sexy stories
- Touching yourself in places that feel good
- Getting the urge to kiss and touch someone you like

Sexual intercourse is very different than these things. When you choose to have intercourse with someone, you are making a choice that could affect the rest of your life.

Your decision to have intercourse with your partner could lead to a pregnancy. Having intercourse also can lead to a sexually transmitted disease (STD), such as AIDS.

Know what the risks are

Did you know that having intercourse increases your risk of catching many diseases? Would your family and friends understand if you caught a sexually transmitted disease or if you became a parent? Would the person you're having intercourse with help you raise a child? Are you willing to get married at your age? If marriage isn't for you, could you raise a child on your own?

These are just a few of the questions you should ask yourself before you have sexual intercourse. Whether you have intercourse is up to you. But before you make a decision, make sure you know all the facts.

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

- Having an unwanted pregnancy
- Getting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) like gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes or genital warts
- Catching the HIV virus that causes AIDS

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

- Regretting it when you are older and after you've met someone you "truly love"
- Being hurt by a relationship that is based only on sex
- Feeling guilty and scared
- Getting a bad name or reputation

Some of your friends may decide that they want to have intercourse. That's their business. But don't let them force you into a decision. You know what's best for you.

What are your limits?

Once you start dating, it's important to know what you want from a relationship.

- Think about what you want from a relationship before you make a split-second decision during a date.
- Talk to your parents or 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 don't want to do.

Some boys think that girls should set the limits. Girls also may think that boys will know when to stop. A boy or a girl may try to pressure their date to have intercourse. You both need to understand that forcing someone to have intercourse is not right. If your partner really cares, he or she will respect your feelings and your choice not to have intercourse.

Stick by your decision

Saying NO isn't always easy. But it's better to say NO than to be pressured into doing something you'll regret later. Sometimes it's twice as hard to say STOP to someone you care about, because you don't want to hurt your date's feelings. But if neither one of you stops, you both may regret what can happen next.

You can say NO without hurting your date's feelings. For example, you might say:

- I like you a lot, but I'm just not ready to have sex.
- You're really fun to be with, and I wouldn't want to ruin our relationship with sex.
- You're a great person, but sex isn't how I prove I like someone.
- I'd like to wait until I'm married before I have sex.

If you choose to wait to have intercourse, try to avoid situations where you'll be forced into a decision. Try not to spend all of your time with someone you're dating, and avoid being alone with your date too often. It's also not a good idea for you and your friend to "make out together" if you don't really want intercourse. Be fair to your partner; don't be a "tease." It could give your date the wrong idea.

Acquaintance (date) rape is a serious problem for children and teens. This means a person threatens to hurt (assault) you if you don't have intercourse with them. **No matter who threatens you, make sure you tell your parents, your pediatrician, or your teachers if you think you've been assaulted or put in danger.**

Using alcohol or drugs also can cause problems during a date. Both of these affect your judgment, which may make it hard to stick to your decision **not** to have intercourse.

Don't pay attention to the sexual bragging and the dares of your friends or classmates. Decide for yourself. Being liked by your friends may seem more important than what you know is right. You may be tempted to keep up with the crowd, but usually these stories are just made up.

If you're having a hard time with your decision, talk to your parents, clergy or your pediatrician.

Young people can wait

People who wait until marriage to have sexual intercourse usually find out that it is:

- Less risky to health
- Easier to act responsibly and take precautions to avoid infections and pregnancy
- More special
- More satisfying
- More accepted by others

Be patient. At some point, you will be ready for sexual intercourse. Move at your own pace, not someone else's. Talk with your parents about their values. Your pediatrician can explain how intercourse affects your body, and why you should wait until you are older. To avoid the risks—and to make intercourse really special in the future—why not just wait for now?

Remember to ask your pediatrician if you have any questions about growing up. Your doctor is there to help. If you feel uncomfortable about discussing certain private things with your parents, you can always trust your pediatrician to help. Don't be afraid to ask.

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

From your doctor

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