

—Chapter 4 from *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues* by T. Lickona

Talking With Kids About Sex, Love, and Character

I lost my virginity when I was 15. My boyfriend and I thought we loved each other. But once we began having sex, it completely destroyed any love we had. I felt he was no longer interested in spending time with me—he was interested in spending time with my body.

—A 22-year-old young woman

I wish someone had been preaching abstinence in my ear when I was in high school. That was when my sexual activity started. I don't even want to think about my college years. I wish I had saved this for my wife.

—a 26-year-old husband

Sandy, a bright and pretty girl, asked to see her 9th-grade health teacher, Mr. Bartlett, during lunch period. She explained that she had never had a boyfriend, so she was excited when a senior asked her out.

After they dated for several weeks, he asked her to have sex with him. She was reluctant, but he persisted. She was afraid of appearing immature and losing him, so she consented.

"Did it work?" Mr. Bartlett gently asked. "Did you keep him?"

Sandy replied: "For another week. We had sex again, and then he dropped me. He said I wasn't good enough. There was no spark."

She continued: "I know what you're going to say. I take your class. I know now that he didn't really love me. I feel so stupid."¹

Brian, a college senior, recounts his first sexual experience:

I first had intercourse with my girlfriend when we were 15. I'd been going with her for almost a year, and I loved her very much. She was friendly, outgoing, charismatic. We'd done everything but have intercourse, and then one night she asked if we could go all the way.

A few days later, we broke up. It was the most painful time of my life. I had opened myself up to her more than I had to anybody, even my parents. I was depressed, moody, and nervous. My friends dropped me because I was so bummed out. I felt like a failure. I dropped out of sports. My grades weren't terrific.

I didn't go out again until I got to college. I've had mostly one-night stands. I'm afraid of falling in love.²

As parents and educators, we worry about many areas of our children's decision-making—sex, drugs, drinking, drinking and driving—where the wrong choices can carry a high cost now and in their future. But we sense that they are most vulnerable, most at risk emotionally as well as physically, in the sexual area of their lives. The damage to our children's health, heart, and character from premature sexual involvement may go deeper, and last longer, than the effects of any other mistakes they might make. "I'm 42 years old," a high school teacher said to me after a workshop on this topic, "and I'm still dealing with emotional issues stemming from sexual relationships when I was young." Because sexual decisions have such important life consequences, a strong home-school partnership—committed to helping our children make wise choices—is nowhere more important than it is in this domain.

Sex, however, is delicate territory. Raise any sex-related issue—premarital sex, abortion, contraception, homosexuality, sex education in the schools—among ten adults and you're likely to get eleven opinions. Sex is the battleground for most of our country's culture wars.

But 30-plus years after the sexual revolution, there is an emerging consensus about some things. Sex is not a trivial matter. It's not a recreational sport. Sex has strong consequences, even if you rarely see them depicted on TV or in the movies. It can create a new life. It can wreck a life. It can express a beautiful love. It can be the furthest thing from love.

Sex is powerful. And because it's powerful, societies around the world and down through history have sought to surround it with prudent boundaries that channel its power toward constructive ends, ones that serve the individual good and the common good, ones that build healthy families and a strong society.

Despite the continuing battles about sex education, there's emerging common ground there, too. Sex is not for kids. Abstinence is the wisest choice for many reasons. More than a half-million unmarried teens get pregnant each year. Having a baby when you are an unmarried teenager is the surest route to poverty for you and your child. The U. S. has the highest teen abortion rate in the developed world. One in three sexually active singles gets an STD by age 24. Until the mid-1970s, there were only two common STDs—syphilis and gonorrhea; now there are more than 20. An estimated 70 million Americans have a sexually transmitted disease.

Condoms haven't solved these problems. Condom use over the past 20 years has increased most among teens, but teens show the greatest increase of STDs during that same period. Two decades of medical research³ on condoms, pregnancy, and STDs, including a 2001 National Institutes of Health report, have produced these findings:

- The typical first-year failure rate for adult couples using condoms to prevent pregnancy is 14%. The failure rate among teens is significantly higher because alcohol or drug use often reduces their ability to use condoms correctly or at all.
- Condoms reduce sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS by about 85% *if they are used 100% of the time*, leaving a 15% risk of HIV infection even with 100% use.

- Very few persons use condoms 100% of the time. Most people infected with an STD don't know it because they do not yet have any visible symptoms. Even among adults who knew their partner had HIV, for example, only 56% used condoms every time.
- Condoms do not prevent STD transmission caused by skin-to-skin contact with an infected part of the body not covered by the condom.
- Girls are more susceptible to STDs than boys because they have a larger surface (the lining of the vagina) vulnerable to infection than males. The risk of a girl contracting HIV/AIDS from a boy is eight times greater than the risk of a boy getting HIV from a girl. Women suffer more of the severe health complications of STDs, such as cervical cancer and infertility, than do men.
- Even with 100% condom use, there is no evidence of any risk reduction of human papilloma virus (HPV), the cause of virtually all cervical cancer.
- Even with 100% condom use, there remains a 50% risk of contracting chlamydia, the fastest growing cause of infertility.

For human beings, of course, sex is about much more than the body. It's the emotional and spiritual dimensions of sex that make it distinctively human. "Sex is essentially deep," observed the philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand. Our entire person, soul and body, is involved. That's why sex has uniquely powerful emotional and spiritual consequences. And there is no condom for the heart.

To educate adequately about human sexuality, both schools and parents must address the emotional hurts and regrets that commonly follow temporary sexual relationships. According to a 2000 survey conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 63% of teenage youth (72% of girls and 55% of boys) who have had sexual intercourse say they wish they had waited. Many adults express similar feelings. Wendy Shalit, in her book *A Return to Modesty*, cites a 1998 issue of *Glamour* magazine reporting that the women *most happy* with their sexual decisions were those like Nina, 30, who had had only one lover—her husband. She says she is grateful to have "experienced the thrill" of having only her spouse as her sexual partner. Women who were unhappy with their sexual decisions tended to make comments like those of Ellen, 29: "I wish I hadn't given so much of myself—I feel that some of my experiences thinned my soul, and such an effect takes time to undo." A 21-year-old woman from Canada wrote in to say that she had had 17 partners because she was "looking for comfort in my first year of college."⁴

A young married woman confided to her counselor: "I had a lot of partners before marriage. I know it's affected my ability to bond with my husband." Says Dr. John Diggs, a physician-abstinence educator who talks to students about human relationships: "You can have many friends, but it doesn't work to have many sexual partners."

Although the emotional fallout from uncommitted sex is only recently getting attention, we've known about it for a long time. At a 1999 "Beyond Relativism" conference at George Washington University, Dr. Armand Nicholi, clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, commented:

Not long after the sexual revolution was underway [in the late 60s], clinicians—even orthodox Freudians—observed that the new sexual freedom was creating a psychological disaster. We began to study Harvard students who complained of emptiness and despondency.

There was a gap between their social conscience and the morality of their personal lives. The new sexual permissiveness was leading to empty relationships and feelings of self-contempt. Many of these students were preoccupied with the passing of time and with death. They yearned for meaning, for a moral framework. When some of them moved away from moral relativism to a system of clear values—typically embracing a drug-free lifestyle and strict sexual code—they reported that their relationships with the opposite sex improved, as did their relations with peers in general, their relationship with their parents, and their academic performance.

Dr. Carson Daly says that when she was a college English professor, many students—usually young women but sometimes guys—would come to see her, ostensibly about a paper they'd written for her course. Once into the conversation, they would tell her about problems they were having in a relationship. Sex was almost always involved. She says:

I don't think I ever met a student who was sorry he or she had postponed sexual activity, but I certainly met many who deeply regretted their sexual involvements. Time and time again, I have seen the long-term emotional and spiritual desolation that results from uncommitted sex.

No one prepares young people for these effects: the lowered self-esteem; the despairing sense of having been used; the self-contempt for being a user; the unease about having to lie about or at least conceal one's activities from family members and others; the difficulty of breaking the cycle of compulsive sexual behavior; and the self-hatred of seeking, after each break-up, someone else to seduce in order to revive one's fading self-image.

"No one tells young people," Dr. Daly says, "that it sometimes takes years to recover from the effects of these sexual experiences—if one ever fully recovers."

Finally, there is a growing recognition on the part of schools and society that sexual behavior, while a matter of personal values, is nevertheless subject to ethical evaluation because it affects the welfare of self and others. Ethical sexuality, acting with respect for oneself and others, is part of good character. Sex education must therefore be character education. It must, in the words of Boston educator Dr. Kevin Ryan, teach students "to see sexuality as an area of their lives that calls for the presence of virtues." Our children should realize, Ryan points out, that learning to bring self-discipline to their sexuality is a means of developing their character—and a means of preparing themselves for a deep, loving relationship as an adult.

A SEXUALLY TOXIC ENVIRONMENT

For both schools and families, the task of teaching sexual wisdom is made much more difficult by the fact that young people today are growing up in a world that pushes sex at them

constantly. A mother of an 8th-grader picked up a copy of *Teen People* magazine for the first time and was "amazed . . . it was page after page of young teens dressed in very provocative ways and in very provocative poses."⁵

The sexualizing of the young and the way it warps their development are evident all around us. A colleague who directs a character education center recounted a conversation with a 13-year-old boy who "spoke enthusiastically about all the pornography he watches with his friends. All kinds of sex—oral sex, anal sex, you name it. He says older kids rent these videos from the adult section of the video stores and then pass them around to the junior high kids. He said he and his friends also play 'Truth or Dare,' in which they perform sexual acts on each other."

A 6th-grade girl in a nearby small town told her school counselor she had sex with her boyfriend in 5th-grade and didn't understand why she was upset afterwards. Through tears she asked the counselor, "Why didn't someone tell me not to do this?"

A 3rd-grade girl in another small community asked her student teacher if she had watched *Beverly Hills 90210* the night before. When the student teacher said no, this 8-year-old said, "Oh, you missed a good one, because Dylan is smoking pot now, and Brandon and Kelly had sex." *Beverly Hills 90210* was the favorite show of most of these 3rd-graders.

The educator James Coughlin sums up this scene: "We socialize kids to have sex. No culture in human history has ever done this to its children."

WHAT KIDS NEED TO AVOID PREMATURE SEX

In this kind of hostile moral environment, how can we safeguard our children and teach them sexual self-control? How can we help them make sexual decisions that will strengthen their character, increase their chances of a happy life, and build a healthy society?

First of all, we need to have confidence that both schools and families can make a positive difference. Studies, for example, consistently show that parents can have a major impact on their children's decision to delay sex, especially when parents send a clear message about where they stand.⁶ Other research shows that a well-designed school curriculum, one that takes a clear stand on abstinence and teaches definite behavioral norms (e.g., "If you're not ready to be a parent, you're not ready for sex"), can succeed in fostering sexual restraint.⁷

In order for young people to wait, they need three things: (1) internally held convictions about why it makes sense to save sexual intimacy for a truly committed relationship; (2) strengths of character—such as good judgment, self-control, modesty, genuine respect for self and others, and the courage to resist pressure and temptation; and (3) support systems for living out this commitment—including, ideally, support from their families, faith communities, schools, and at least one good friend who has made the same decision.

MAKE IT CLEAR THAT EVERYBODY IS *NOT* DOING IT

For starters, teachers and parents can point out to kids that growing numbers of young people are waiting.

A December 2002 *Newsweek* cover story titled "The New Virginity" reported the Centers for Disease Control's latest data: High school students who have *not* had sexual intercourse are now in a majority (52%) for the first time in 25 years. Moreover, only one of three students say they are "currently sexually active."⁸ Most of this change is accounted for by an increase in the virginity rate—up more than 10% in the 1990s—among high school boys.⁹

Similar trends are showing up at the college level. On UCLA's annual *American Freshman* survey, the percentage of entering college students agreeing with the statement, "If two people really like each other, it's all right for them to have sex even if they've known each other only a very short time," dropped from 51% in 1990 to 41% by the end of the decade.

HELP KIDS UNDERSTAND WHY SOME YOUNG PEOPLE GET SEXUALLY INVOLVED

Despite these positive trends, plenty of young people are still having sex. Kids are less likely to be pulled in that direction themselves if they have psychological insight into the reasons why some of their peers get sexually involved. Knowledge is power. As parents and educators, we can help young people step back from the scene, get outside themselves, and understand the many factors, internal and external, that can lead to sexual involvement.

1. *No good reason not to.* If you cannot give yourself good reasons for not having sex, chances are high that sooner or later you'll engage in this behavior. "I got sexually involved," says a college senior, "because I couldn't answer the question, 'Why *shouldn't* I have sex?' I gave in because I figured that since I didn't have a solid answer, I must be wrong. I also read all this stuff that claimed that virginity is unnatural, abnormal, and 'repressed.'"

2. *Partner pressure.* Pressure from a partner—a boyfriend or girlfriend they wanted to keep—is, according to polls, the reason teens most often cite for their initial decision to have sex.¹⁰ The pressure doesn't necessarily come from the boy; increasingly, it comes from the girl—and boys aren't prepared to handle it. Says one 17-year-old girl: "Guys have trouble dealing with girls who come on to them. They don't want the word to get around school that they refused."

3. *Pleasure.* For some kids, the draw is mainly physical. Said an 8th-grade boy: "Sex is pleasurable. It has to happen sooner or later—why not now?"

4. *Desire to express love.* Many young people think sex is simply a natural way to express the love they feel for each other. Says one counselor: "In today's world, people tend to think you're not close to somebody unless you're having sex with them."

5. *Desire to be normal.* Says a health teacher at a private high school in Oregon: "In recent years, many kids have gotten it into their heads that they should have sexual intercourse

by the time they are 16. They think something is wrong with them if they haven't had this experience by this age."

6. Early dating. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* found that among those who did not begin single dating until they were 16 years old, only 16% of boys and 18% of girls had sexual intercourse by high school graduation. That percentage steadily rose as age of first dating dropped. Among those who began dating when they were 7th-graders, 71% of boys and 90% of girls had intercourse by the time they graduated from high school.

7. Steady dating. The same study found that steady dating, which typically increases the time a couple spends alone, heightened chances of sexual involvement. Among 9th-graders in steady relationships, for example, 70% of boys and 60% of girls said they had had sex.

8. Need for intimacy. Many young people, especially girls, turn to sex to try to meet their need for intimacy. Says John Diggs: "If Dad isn't there giving non-sexual attention, a girl will often go after sexual attention from boys." Marital conflict or break-up often aggravates this pattern. Said a high school sophomore, whose parents were divorcing and who had slept with 15 boys in the three months since Christmas: "There is so much pain when I go home. For a few minutes, when a guy holds me, it feels like love."

Some girls deliberately get pregnant because they want someone to love who will love them back. One abstinence education program found that teenage girls who were given a puppy were less likely to get pregnant.

9. Low self-worth. Says a girl who got pregnant at 15 and is now a single parent: "My brothers and their girlfriends said if you didn't do it, you were a nerd. I had always been sort of an outcast, and I didn't want to be called a nerd." Says another girl: "I've been sexually active since 4th-grade. I've done it with a lot of guys. It makes me feel wanted."

10. The search for identity. For some teens, experimenting sexually is part of breaking away and the search for identity. Says Cheryl Jones, a therapist who specializes in adolescent counseling: "I see girls who up until now have been the perfect kid: soccer team, pom-pom, straight As, followed all the rules. Then they turn 15 or 16, and something in the brain kicks in: 'I don't want to be just what my parents want me to be.' They know what they *don't* want to be any longer, but they don't know what *to* be—there's no sense of self on the inside—so they become the opposite, a kind of anti-personality. Their parents are in shock: 'Why is this happening?—this was such a compliant kid.'"

Becoming your own person as a teenager—what psychologists call the process of "individuation"—doesn't have to involve this kind of rebellion, but it may, especially if kids haven't been developing a sense of their own identity in constructive ways such as making decisions about how to use their time to pursue goals they choose and care about. Teenagers need to feel they are not simply extensions of their parents. Even in childhood, parents can help their children begin to define their own interests and sense of self.

11. A change in environment. For some young people, sexual activity starts when they enter a new environment such as college, where there is the potential to live much more freely

and a permissive peer culture that often includes dorms where sex is as common as a morning shower. A colleague comments: "When you're plucked out of the nest and dumped onto a college campus, the known world pretty much goes to pieces around you."

12. Parental permissiveness. For some teens, parental permissiveness while they're still at home sets the stage for sexual involvement. Fourteen-year-old Courtney complained that her parents "let me go over to my boyfriend's house when they know his parents aren't home. That is weird." She would pretend that she had her period, but her boyfriend became increasingly aggressive. Finally, after two and a half months, she says, "I just did it because he really kept bothering me about it."¹²

13. Parents' example. Says a high school boy who lives with his divorced father: "What's the big deal about sex? A lot of my dad's girlfriends spend the night."

14. Nothing better to do. In the South Bronx, New York, where the teen pregnancy rate is nearly twice the national norm, a community agency sponsored an essay contest for adolescents on the question, "How Can the Problem of Teenage Pregnancy Be Solved?" One of the winning essays argued that many teens have sex "because they are bored—they have nothing better to do." Says the principal of a rural high school in northern New York: "Many of our students have too much time on their hands between 3 and 6 pm, when parents often aren't home. That's when a lot of sexual activity starts." One pregnancy prevention program found that when teens learned life skills and got involved in meaningful community service, the pregnancy rate dropped.

15. The wrong kind of sex education. Sex education that doesn't send a clear abstinence message can be a green light for sexual activity. Says a high school boy in Los Angeles: "They pass out condoms, teach pregnancy-this and STD-that, but they don't teach us any rules."

16. Sexual abuse. One in four girls and one in six boys is sexually abused by age 18. Sexually abused youth, often because of their low self-worth, are more likely to become sexually active with peers or older partners. Says a high school counselor: "I'm working with a girl who was sexually abused by her father, then in high school turned to a boyfriend for 'love' and was soon pregnant." Says another counselor: "We have a girl who is six months pregnant and very distressed because she doesn't know who the father of the baby is—her boyfriend or her father."

17. Drugs and alcohol. Drugs and alcohol impair moral judgment and weaken inhibitions. Teens who say they have used drugs or been drunk in the past month, for example, are much more likely to have had sex than teens who have never been drunk or used drugs.¹³

18. A highly sexualized environment. Television, movies, popular songs, advertising, and the Internet all combine to create a sexually stimulating media culture whose unrelenting message is that sex is the center of the universe and that sex between people who aren't committed to each other almost never has negative consequences. Add to this, the sexualized peer environment created by young people themselves, including increasingly provocative dress and language on the part of both sexes.

When young people gain insight into all the influences that lead many of their peers to get sexually involved, they're better able to withstand those influences, make good decisions,

have a sympathetic understanding of those who may be making less healthy choices, and, with our encouragement, reach out when the opportunity presents itself to help a peer make a wiser choice.

TALK ABOUT WHAT COUNTS AS "SEX"

Given the fact that many young people are having oral and even anal sex and still think they're "virgins," we want to be sure to talk about what counts as "sex." Here, for example, are some things we can say about oral sex, reportedly on the rise:

1. Oral sex is definitely a sexual act. (That's why they call it oral sex.)
2. It's usually something boys ask girls to perform on them.
3. No boy who truly cares about or respects a girl would ever ask her to do this.
4. *All* of the sexually transmitted diseases can be passed on through oral sex. Doctors, for example, report seeing more and more teens with oral herpes.
5. If you engage in oral sex, especially if you're a girl, you are in danger of experiencing the same emotional hurts—low self-esteem, feeling used, feeling degraded—that can follow uncommitted sexual intercourse.
6. If you're a boy and are getting girls to do this, even if they seem willing, you are abusing the girl (would you want somebody doing this to your sister?) and abusing your own sexuality (is this something you want the person you may marry to know?).
7. If you engage in this behavior, you're not treating your body with reverence for the sacred gift that it is. (Even families without religious faith may find it helpful to use spiritual language.)

Most parents and educators will also want to give guidance about "how far is too far." Not everyone will agree on where to draw the line, but I think it's best to draw it conservatively—for example, at "brief hugs and light kissing." We can explain: "Sex is progressive. If you're strict with yourself, you won't find yourself struggling with the temptation to go a little bit farther the next time." A high school counselor put it this way: "If you don't want to drive over a cliff, don't pull up to the edge and race the engine."

TEACH KIDS NON-SEXUAL WAYS TO BE INTIMATE

Since many kids are looking for love when they get involved in sex, both parents and schools need to talk to them about what real intimacy is and how to achieve it.

True human intimacy means knowing another person—their thoughts, feelings, hopes, and dreams—and being known by them. We have to *learn* how to attain this kind of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intimacy. If we don't learn how, we'll be handicapped in our adult relationships—in our marriages and our relationships with our children. A colleague who does marriage counseling observes: "If sex is the only way you learn to be intimate as a teenager, that's all you'll have when you're married. In my practice, I see a lot of married couples who don't know how to talk to each other. They never learned how to be emotionally intimate."¹⁴

We can teach young people—and have them practice it at school and at home—the skills of intimacy, such as the art of asking questions that draw out the inside of another person and create meaningful and enjoyable conversation. Questions such as:

- *What's one good thing that happened today?*
- *What are two things you really enjoy doing? Why do you enjoy doing them?*
- *Who is someone you admire? Why?*
- *What makes you feel good about yourself?*
- *What is something other people can do to make you happy?*
- *What do you worry about?*
- *What's one of your greatest achievements in life so far?*
- *What is a way you've helped another person? A way another person has helped you?*
- *What's one way you've changed as a person?*
- *What was a setback or disappointment that was tough to deal with when it happened but helped you become a stronger or wiser person?*
- *How do you make decisions about important things?*
- *What is something you have strong beliefs about?*
- *What is something in your life that you're grateful for?*
- *What are two of your most important goals in life?*
- *What do you see as your purpose in life?*
- *If you died today, what are two things you'd like people to say about you?*
- *What is your concept of God, if you believe there is a God? When do you feel closest to God?*

OFFER A VISION

Young persons are thinking human beings, and they need a way to think about sex that will ground them and make their decisions solid. It's clearly not enough just to encourage them to "wait." They want to know what they're waiting *for*. To get to college? To turn a certain age? Until they feel "ready"? Or until they're in a mature, committed relationship where sex makes sense because it expresses and deepens that genuine commitment?

Historically, of course, we've called such a commitment marriage. Although marriage can be ended through divorce, it's the only commitment that has any legal power to bind one person to another. In any other commitment, however much people might feel they love each other, either can walk out the door at any minute with no obligations whatever to the other person. (Seven of eight cohabitating relationships, for example, break up.)

Although not everyone agrees that sex outside marriage is always wrong in an adult relationship, saving sex for the committed relationship of marriage is increasingly being presented to students as a decision that has many benefits—for them, the children they may bring into the world, and society as a whole. To be effective, however, a "wait for marriage" message can't be delivered in soapbox fashion with preachy moralizing. It has to be offered as a vision with persuasive power, expressed in rational terms that appeal to young people's intelligence.

Different teachers and parents will choose different ways of articulating this vision. Here is one approach:

A lot of people might tell you—the media certainly do—that sex is no big deal. But in fact it's a very big deal. Sex is so special it deserves a special home. It's most meaningful, most fulfilling, when it's part of something bigger—a continuing, loving relationship between two human beings. When you're married, your sexual intimacy expresses your total commitment to each other. You're saying with your body, "I give myself to you, completely." Not being totally committed changes the meaning of the sex act. Then it's not part of the complete giving of yourself. Even if you're engaged, you can always get disengaged. Half of the couples who are engaged have been engaged before.

From this perspective, you join your bodies when you join your lives. The ultimate intimacy belongs within the ultimate commitment. Marriage certainly isn't perfect, and marriages can and do fail. You have to work hard to make a marriage succeed. But marriage is the most serious, total, and public commitment between two people that any human society has ever been able to devise. It's within this committed relationship that sex is most likely to be loving, the dangers of disease and emotional hurt are minimized, and a family exists to parent a child if a pregnancy results from your sexual union.

Here's a second approach, a little more philosophical but one that adolescents can still get their minds around:

We're all made in such a way that certain choices or ways of acting "work" and make us happy, and others don't. There's a law that governs human nature and human relationships, just

as there's a law that governs physical nature. Toss a ball up, and it comes down. Treat people badly, and you lose their respect and eventually your self-respect. Actions have consequences.

What are the natural consequences of having sex? Bonding and babies. If you have sex with someone, you're very likely to create an attachment, a bond. If you have sex, you may also create a new human life, even if you're trying to avoid that. Both of these consequences—an emotional attachment and a new life—can be the source of great happiness in a relationship where two people have made a real commitment to stay together. But if that kind of secure commitment doesn't exist, then a child brought into the world won't have two parents to love and raise that child. And if a binding commitment doesn't exist, the emotional attachment created by sex will, in most cases, be broken—causing emotional pain.

And here's a third approach that brings religion into the picture. If you have religious faith as a parent, you'll want to integrate that into the moral upbringing of your child. (Remember, research finds that faith-based beliefs help many youngsters avoid sex, drugs, and other harmful activity.) Even public school teachers can objectively describe religious world views—in the spirit of teaching *about* religion, something that the Supreme Court's 1963 decision (banning school prayer) actually urged schools to do as part of their responsibility to educate students about their cultural heritage. A teacher can introduce a religious vision of sexuality by saying, for example, "A public school can't constitutionally promote religion, but it has an obligation in fairness to include religious perspectives along with other views." For example:

Rabbinic teaching for at least 2,500 years has consistently opposed premarital sex. Judaism enshrines sexual intercourse as a sanctified element in the most intimate and meaningful relationship between two human beings: the sacred marriage bond.—*Rabbi Isaac Frank*

The promise of two people to belong always to each other makes it possible for lovemaking to mean total giving and total receiving. It's the totality of married life that makes sexual intercourse meaningful.—*Father Richard McCormick*

Islam views sexual love as a gift from God. It is a sign of God's love and mercy. It is permitted only to those couples who have joined themselves in a lawful marriage. —*Muzammil Siddiqi*

TALK ABOUT THE EMOTIONAL DANGERS

What are the specific emotional dangers of uncommitted sex that we should incorporate into our thinking as adults and help young people name and understand? Here are 10:

1. Worry about pregnancy and disease. For many young people who have become sexually active, the fear of pregnancy or getting a sexually transmitted disease is a major emotional stress.

Becky, 13, first had sex with her 15-year-old boyfriend. She knew her parents and other family members would be hurt if they found out. When she missed her period, she went into a panic. She even had thoughts of committing suicide. Finally, she confided in her grandmother, who took her to get a pregnancy test. To Becky's great relief, it was negative. With her grandmother's support, she decided she didn't want to go through that again and broke up with her boyfriend.

Says Russell Henke, health education coordinator in the Montgomery Public Schools: "I see kids going to the nurse in schools, crying a day after their first sexual experience, and wanting to be tested for AIDS. For some, it's enough to cause them to stay away from further sexual involvement."

2. *Regret and self-recrimination.* Both guys and girls can suffer sharp regret following a sexual relationship, but girls are usually more vulnerable. One abstinence speaker asks his teen audiences: "What happens when a girl has sex with a boy? She feels closer to him. You might think it would be the same with a boy. Not necessarily." A girl who sees sex as a way to "show you care" may feel cheated and used when the boy doesn't show a greater romantic interest after the sexual experience. Says a 15-year-old girl: "I didn't expect the guy to marry me, but I never expected him to avoid me in school."

However, guys who get emotionally as well as sexually involved with a girl can also suffer a lot of hurt when the relationship ends. Here's a guy with deep regrets:

A year ago I started dating a girl two years younger. We fell head over heels in love.

Our parents were friends and were overjoyed. They gave us complete freedom. When I would go to her house, her folks would go to bed early so we could be alone.

It was wonderful. We were alone together sometimes as often as six nights a week. We started necking a little, and then all the time. I started getting a little fresh, and she resisted, but she finally gave in for fear of losing me. One thing led to another, and before we knew it, we had gone too far.

We started feeling guilty about what we were doing, but we consoled ourselves that we were in love and that as soon as she was out of school, we'd be married—so what difference did it make? Then one night we had a terrible argument, and although it had nothing to do with sex, I know it would never have happened if we had been behaving ourselves.

Anyway, she hit me, and I hit her back. I have never forgiven myself for that. She went running home and told her mother EVERYTHING that happened between us. You can imagine what happened after that.

I was going to college at the time. I couldn't keep my mind on my studies. I just wanted to lie down and die. Finally, I knew I was flunking out, so I quit college and joined the Navy.

I saw her on the street just once before I left for basic training. She cried and told me she still felt the same about me and was sorry for what she had done, but it was too late then.

I'd give anything in the world if she had stuck by her guns and I hadn't been so persistent. Any girl who thinks she has to put out to keep a guy is crazy. I would have stayed with her if she had only let me hold her hand. But I was selfish.

Sometimes the regret goes in the other direction: One or the other person feels trapped after the relationship turns sexual. Says a 16-year-old girl: "I truly regret that my first time was with a guy that I didn't care that much about. I am still going out with him, which is getting to be a problem. Since that first night, he expects sex on every date. When I don't feel like it, we end up in a big argument. I'd like to end this relationship and date others, but after being so intimate, it's awfully tough."

3. Guilt. Guilt is a special form of regret—a strong sense of having done something morally wrong. Guilt can be destructive if you let it paralyze you and you think, "I'm a bad person." But it's a healthy, though painful, moral experience if you take it as a sign that your conscience is alive and working, and as a reason to avoid in the future the behavior that caused you to have a guilty conscience.

In his book for teenagers *Love, Dating, and Sex*, George Eager offers this advice to young men: "When the breakup comes [after a sexual relationship], it's usually a lot tougher on the girls than it is on the guys. It's not something you want on your conscience—that you caused a girl to have deep emotional problems."¹⁵

An article in the *New York Times* quoted a 16-year-old boy in California who said he stopped having sex with girls when he saw and felt guilty about the pain he was causing: "You see them crying and confused. They say they love you, but you don't love them."

Guilt after sex may stem from one's religious convictions. Lucian Shulte is a Roman Catholic. His parents taught him the importance of chastity, and he had always planned to wait until he was married to have sex. But then one warm summer night, he found himself with a girl who was very willing—and they had intercourse. It was over in a hurry and lacked any sense of intimacy. He says:

In the movies, when people have sex, it's always romantic. Physically, it felt good, but emotionally it felt really awkward. I was worried that our relationship was now going to be a lot more serious than it was before. It was like, "Now what is she going to expect from me?"

He felt guilty about what he had done. He also worried about pregnancy and disease. He promised himself never again. Now, as a college student, he's still faithful to that decision. "I'm looking forward to an intimate experience with my wife, someone I'll truly love and want to spend the rest of my life with. It sounds corny, but it's for real."¹⁶

Cited by the *Newsweek* article as an example of "renewed virginity," Lucian's story shows that regardless of past mistakes, you can start over. Some teens think, "It's too late for me—I'm already involved." That's not true. You can't change the past, but you can choose the future.

Many teens—more than 300,000 a year—turn to abortion when they find themselves facing a pregnancy, and that decision can also be a source of guilt. As both sides of the abortion debate now acknowledge, abortion ends a developing life (there's a beating heart at 18 days, measurable brain waves at 6 weeks). It carries medical risks for the mother (e.g., bleeding, infection, puncturing of the uterus, cervical injury, an increased risk of breast cancer, and even, in a small number of cases each year, death). Many women also experience emotional consequences after abortion, sometimes right away, sometimes years later. Here, for example, is the testimony of a young mother, now in her early 30s, concerning the abortion she had when she was in college:

It was my sophomore year. I came back from winter break sick as a dog. The doctor in the campus infirmary took a urine test and told me in a non-judgmental way that I was pregnant. "What would you like to do?" he asked. "I want to get rid of it," I said, without even blinking an eye.

He quietly wrote down the phone number and address of the local Planned Parenthood. My boyfriend couldn't be bothered to make himself available. The "procedure" was surprisingly simple. There was strong cramping, but I could handle that. If someone had asked me right then how I felt about what I had just done, I would have said, "Wow, this is great! I have my health back, I have my life back!"

Go ahead, ask me now. I am, at this moment, crying.

How callous I was. Just a kid, really. Self-centered and shallow. There were, and are now, so many other alternatives.

I am humbled by my two amazing living children. Most of all, I am humbled by my friend, Amy. She felt so strongly for her miscarried unborn child that she gave the child a name and a funeral. I didn't give mine a second thought—until I grew up.¹⁷

Guys, too, can suffer from the emotional aftershocks of abortion. Bottom line: Abortion is not a quick fix. Our children deserve to know that.

4. *Loss of self-esteem and self-respect.* Contracting a sexually transmitted disease can have a dramatic effect on a person's self-esteem and sense of the future. Says a psychiatrist: "The herpes patients I see feel unclean. They fear that they will not find a partner who wants them."

John had not heard of human papilloma virus (HPV) before he had sex with his girlfriend. Soon after, he noticed some small bumps on his penis. His physician told him he had genital warts caused by HPV. The warts did not respond well to acid treatment, laser techniques, and excisional surgery. After protracted unsuccessful treatments, he began to worry if he would ever be able to marry because of the warts.¹⁸

Sometimes the loss of self-esteem after uncommitted sex leads the person into further casual sex, leading to further loss of self-esteem in an oppressive cycle from which it may be hard to break free. This pattern is described by a young woman who works as a college residence hall director at our college:

There are girls in our dorm who have had multiple pregnancies and multiple abortions. They tend to be filled with self-loathing. But because they have so little self-esteem, they will settle for any kind of attention from guys. So they keep going back to the same kind of destructive situations and relationships that got them into trouble in the first place.

On both sides of dehumanized sex, there is a loss of dignity and self-worth. A 20-year-old college guy confides: "You feel pretty crummy when you get drunk at a party and have sex with some girl, and then the next morning you can't even remember who she was."

A college student describes the loss of self-respect that followed his first sexual "conquest": "I finally got a girl into bed—actually it was in a car—when I was 17. I thought it was the hottest thing there was, but then she started saying she loved me and getting clingy. After four weeks of having sex as often as I wanted, I was tired of her. I finally dumped her, which made me feel even worse, because I could see that she was hurting. I felt pretty low."¹⁹

People aren't things. When we treat them as if they were, we not only hurt them; we lose respect for ourselves.

5. *The corruption of character and the debasement of sex.* When people treat others as sexual objects, they not only lose self-respect; they corrupt their character in the process.

Frequently, sex corrupts character by leading people into lying to get sex. Common lies: "I love you" and "I've never had an STD." In one study, three-fourths of men who knew they had a sexually transmitted disease said they had sex without telling their partners about their infection.

One young man comments on how promiscuous sexual activity undermined his self-control: "I began to notice that the more sex I had, the more I wanted. I had always heard that having sex was a way to get rid of sexual tension, but the opposite was true. Having sex increased my desire. It was like a drug. I couldn't stop myself, yet at the same time, I wasn't satisfied at all."²⁰

The Rhode Island Rape Crisis Center, in a 1988 survey of 1,700 students grades 6 to 9, asked, "Is it acceptable for a man to force sex on a woman if they've been dating for more than six months?" Sixty-five percent of the boys said yes. So did 49% of the girls.²¹

Sex that isn't tied to love and commitment undermines character by subverting self-respect, self-control, and responsibility. Unchecked by a moral code, sexual desires and impulses easily run amuck and lead to habits of exploiting others for one's selfish pleasure. In the process, sexual intercourse loses its special meaning and beauty. Instead of being a uniquely intimate expression of two people's love and commitment, sex is trivialized and degraded.

6. *Shaken trust.* Young people who feel used or betrayed after the break-up of a sexual relationship may experience difficulty with trusting in future relationships. They don't want to be burned again. This can happen to both sexes, but once again girls are especially vulnerable. They begin to see guys as interested in just one thing: sex.

Says one young woman: "Besides feeling cheap [after several sexual relationships], I began to wonder if there would ever be anyone who would love and accept me without demanding that I do something with my body." ²²

7. Rage over betrayal. Sometimes the emotional reaction to a ruptured sexual relationship is rage. Every so often, the media carry a story about a person who had this rage reaction. Read these accounts, and you'll find that sex was almost always involved in the broken relationship.

Our local paper carried a story about a 27-year-old guy named Scott who had been living for a year and a half with his girlfriend. They had made plans to marry, going so far as to put a down payment on a wedding gown and set the date. Then, with no warning or explanation, she moved out of their apartment.

Scott said, "I didn't know what to do, where to turn. I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep. I made excuses not to go to work because I couldn't hold my composure." When Scott found that his girlfriend was dating another guy, he lost it, went into a jealous rage, and stabbed her new boyfriend to death.

It's true that people often feel angry when somebody breaks up with them, even if sex hasn't been involved. But the sense of betrayal is usually much greater if sex has been part of the relationship.

8. Depression and suicide. In the past three decades, teen suicide in America has tripled. Given what we know about the emotional aftermath of broken sexual relationships, it is reasonable to think that the pain from such break-ups is a factor in the suicide deaths of some young people.

According to a 1991 study in the journal *Pediatrics*, the attempted suicide rate for sexually experienced girls between the ages of 12 and 16 is six times higher than it is for girls that age who are virgins.²³ Dr. Kirk Johnson reports 2003 data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health showing that boys between fourteen and seventeen who are sexually active are significantly more likely to feel depressed and attempt suicide than boys who are not sexually active.

9. Ruined relationships. Sex can turn a good relationship bad. Other dimensions of the relationship stop developing. Pretty soon negative emotions enter the picture. Eventually, they poison the relationship. Says a young man who identifies himself as a 22-year-old virgin: "I've seen too many of my friends break up after their relationships turned physical."

Twenty-four-year old Sara shares her story:

With each date, my boyfriend's requests for sex became more convincing. After all, we did love each other. Within two months, I gave in. Over the next six months, sex became the center of our relationship. Like a cancer, it took over.

At the same time, new things entered our relationship—anger, impatience, jealousy, and selfishness. We just couldn't talk anymore. We grew very bored with each other. I desperately wanted a change.²⁴

10. *Negative effects on marriage.* Most teens say they dream of being happily married someday. As parents and teachers, we can help them orient toward this goal by asking: "If you have this dream, what sexual decisions at this point in your life will help you attain it? What problems might be caused by being sexually intimate before marriage?" Here are four such problems:

Comparisons. If you have had sex with someone other than your marriage partner, there will be the tendency, sometimes beyond your control, to compare your spouse with previous partners. This is especially true if your husband or wife doesn't please you sexually as much as a previous partner did. Says one young husband: "When I make love with my wife, I think, 'This girl could kiss better,' or 'This girl could do that better.' I can't get rid of the comparisons."

Flashbacks. Sexual flashbacks are involuntary mental images of previous partners. Says a 29-year-old husband: "I've been married to the most wonderful woman in the world for eight years, but I've never been alone in the bedroom with her. At the moment of intercourse, pictures of other women go through my head, and it's killing any intimacy."

Infidelity. Studies reported in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* find that persons who are sexually active before marriage are more likely to be unfaithful to their spouses after marriage. Susceptibility to sexual temptation after marriage is likely to be greater if you haven't practiced resisting temptation before marriage.

Infertility. One in five newly married American couples cannot conceive a baby. Infertility is a tremendous stress on a marriage. If it was caused by a sexually transmitted disease such as chlamydia, the stress is even greater. A 33-year-old wife writes: "Sometime during my wild college days, I picked up an infection that damaged the inside of my fallopian tubes and left me infertile. I am now married to a wonderful man who very much wants children, and the guilt I feel is overwhelming. We will look into adoption, but this whole ordeal has been terribly difficult."

A greater chance of divorce. Sex can also fool you into marrying the wrong person. Comment John and Kathy Colligan, experienced counselors of couples preparing for marriage: "We see many engaged couples who are living together. We find out by talking with them that they have little in common. They haven't discussed their values and goals. But the sexual attraction and involvement are very strong. When we suggest that they not live or sleep together, that they try to become friends and get to know each other to find out if they're really compatible, they often resist. We can see that this is a marriage likely to fail—and time after time, it does."

Seven different studies, summarized in David Myers's book *The Pursuit of Happiness*, all find that couples who lived together before their marriage are significantly more likely to divorce than couples who did not live together.²⁵ If you really want to get to know somebody and find out whether you want to spend your life with that person, sex can make that harder, not easier, to do.

DISCUSS THE REWARDS OF WAITING

We should also frame the wait in positive terms—by talking to young people about the benefits of saving sex for a truly committed relationship. Here are nine rewards of waiting:²⁶

1. Waiting will make your dating relationships better. You'll spend more time getting to know each other.
2. Waiting will help you find the right mate (someone who values you for the person you are).
3. Waiting will increase your self-respect.
4. Waiting will gain the respect of others.
5. Waiting teaches you to respect others (you'll never tempt or pressure anyone).
6. Waiting takes the pressure off you.
7. Waiting means a clear conscience (no guilt) and peace of mind (no conflicts, no regrets).
8. Waiting means a better sexual relationship in marriage (free of comparisons, free of sexual flashbacks, and based on trust). By waiting, you're being faithful to your spouse even before you meet him or her.
9. By practicing the virtues involved in waiting—such as faithfulness, good judgment, self-control, modesty, and genuine respect for self and others—you're developing the kind of character that will make you a good marriage partner and that will attract a person of character—the kind of person you'd like to marry and would like to be the father or mother of your children.²⁷

TALK ABOUT TOUGH ISSUES

Let me say a bit about three other sexual issues, ones that adults often find hard to address but that young people need guidance on especially in today's sexual culture.

Pornography. The Internet has made pornography more accessible to youth of all ages. According to one survey, kids under the age of 17 spend 65% more time on Internet pornography sites than they do on game sites.²⁸

We can say to young people: "Pornography debases sex. It violates the dignity of the human person and the dignity of the body. It treats people as sex objects. It also puts images in our minds that we may not be able to forget, even when we want to."

Pornography is also addictive. Like other addictions, it brings short-term pleasure but then starts to run your life. It will lower your self-respect.²⁹

Later on, the habit of pornography can cause marital problems. Wives whose husbands are involved with pornography often feel demeaned, betrayed, and isolated from their husbands—victims of a kind of spiritual adultery.

For males, the use of pornography is also usually accompanied by masturbation. These two habits then reinforce each other, making it harder to break either one.

Masturbation. "Expert" advice regarding masturbation has swung between extremes—from doctors in the 19th century attributing various diseases and even insanity to this habit, to recommendations by some 20th century sex educators encouraging the young to masturbate as a healthy way to "explore their sexuality" and as a safe alternative to intercourse. Many parents, however, without resorting to scare tactics, wish to gently but firmly help their children resist this temptation. For some parents, the reason may be religious—their belief that sex is meant by God to be relational, an expression of love between two persons. "The problem with masturbation," as one father explained to his 13-year-old son, "is that it's having sex with yourself." Apart from religion, there are also psychological considerations: Once it becomes a habit, masturbation is hard to stop and may lessen a young person's feelings of self-respect. Many teens use masturbation as a way to escape emotions of anxiety and depression, and end up feeling worse because the problem is still there. Carried into marriage, the habit of masturbation can weaken the attraction between husband and wife and cause problems in their sexual relationship.

Homosexuality. There is no scientific consensus about the factors influencing sexual orientation. Possible factors include genetic disposition, family relationships, peer relationships, and one's sexual experiences. Columbia University researchers William Byne and Bruce Parsons reviewed 135 studies on sexual orientation and concluded: "There is no evidence at present to substantiate a biological [genetic] theory, just as there is no evidence to support any single psychological explanation."³⁰

Some young people are unsure of their sexual orientation in their early teens. By adulthood, however, only about 2% of the population self-identify as homosexual.³¹

Several studies have found a significantly higher risk of attempted suicide among teens who identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual. For each year's delay in bisexual or homosexual self-identification, however, the odds of a suicide attempt diminish significantly.³² Higher rates of depression and other psychological problems have been found among adults who report "some homosexual experience in the past twelve months" even in a country such as the Netherlands, where social attitudes are more accepting of homosexual relationships and same-sex couples have the legal right to marry. In February, 2003, the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* reported a study of 103 pairs of twins, one of whom was homosexually

active and the other not; the twin who was homosexually active was over five times more likely to experience suicidal symptoms.

If your child thinks he or she may have a homosexual orientation, above all you want to maintain a loving relationship. You can do this without necessarily approving homosexual activity. For example, parents whose moral or religious beliefs do not approve homosexual sex can stress the distinction between having an attraction to the same sex and acting on it sexually. If you do not have moral or religious objections to homosexual activity, you will still want to strongly encourage your child to practice abstinence to avoid the physical and psychological dangers of uncommitted sexual activity. The risks of homosexual activity are even greater than those of heterosexual activity. Homosexually active males have been found to be at greater risk for HIV, hepatitis, gonorrhea, anal cancer, and gastrointestinal infections. Homosexually active females (the great majority of whom, at some point, also have sex with men) have been found to be at greater risk for bacterial vaginosis, Hepatitis B and C, and having sex with men who are high-risk for HIV.³³ If your child experiences a homosexual attraction, it's wise to seek competent professional counseling from someone whose values and beliefs are consistent with your own. (A psychiatrist who is a helpful source of referrals in this area is Richard P. Fitzgibbons, M.D.; e-mail: R82488@aol.com.)

Finally, all parents and teachers, as a matter of moral principle, should teach young people to treat every person, regardless of sexual orientation, with love, justice, and respect.

ADOPT CREATIVE APPROACHES TO SCHOOL-BASED ABSTINENCE EDUCATION

Schools, for their part, must do all they can to support parents in helping young people make sexual decisions that are truly in their best interest. One of the most promising ways to do that is to recruit and train young people themselves as abstinence educators.

For example, more than 40 public school districts in the state of Indiana now participate in PEERS, a federally funded abstinence education project that is ten years old. High school juniors and seniors are trained as peer mentors and then go into junior high classrooms to talk to students about how to overcome pressure to have sex before marriage. Says Eve Jackson, who created the program: "We write the materials, but the students teach it. They make it a credible lifestyle, showing that cool and popular people have made this choice."

In the PEERS project, each grade learns a different concept related to sexuality. Sixth-graders are taught about the meaning of friendship and how to guard themselves against the messages expressed in song lyrics and television shows. Seventh-graders learn about the dangers of STDs and the emotional repercussions of premarital sex. Eighth-graders focus on the difference between love and infatuation, the responsibilities of parenthood, and why a father is so important in a child's life. For freshmen and sophomores, there's a class on how to recommit to chastity if you've made mistakes in the past. (For more information, including a video on PEERS, visit www.peersproject.org. Another resource with kids as spokespeople is the video

series, *Sex and Young America*, available online from the National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families (http://www.sexandyoungamerica.com/about_sya.html).

A. C. Green's Game Plan (<http://www.acgreen.com/store/gameplan.html>) is an abstinence curriculum that stresses what young people very much need if they are to remain abstinent in today's world: a practical plan for avoiding and handling pressures and temptations. In the curriculum guide for students, basketball superstar A. C. Green, who despite life in the NBA remained a virgin until his recent marriage, shares his five rules:

1. ***I control what I see and hear—I don't watch TV and movies that show people having sex.***
2. ***I stay away from pressure situations—I don't invite a woman to my house to hang out or watch a movie.***
3. ***I use the buddy system—I often bring a friend with me instead of being alone with a woman.***
4. ***I prepare myself in advance—I think ahead about the actions I will take in a situation.***
5. ***I have support from my friends—I hang out with friends who are also committed to abstinence.***³⁴

For teachers and parents of high school students, *Sex and Character* by Deborah Cole and Maureen Duran (www.amazon.com) is a highly readable resource that deals intelligently with sex, love, dating, and marriage. A small book for teens that presents the medical, moral, emotional, and spiritual reasons to save sex for marriage is *Sex, Love & You: Making the Right Decision* (Tom and Judy Lickona, with William Boudreau, M. D.; www.avemariapress.com). For a comprehensive directory of abstinence curricula, books, and speakers, contact the National Abstinence Clearinghouse (www.abstinence.net).

In teaching abstinence, one can't emphasize too strongly to young people that in the sexual area of their lives, as in any area of behavior, they have the power to make a fresh start. Says a 16-year-old girl: "I've had sex with a lot of guys, but I was always drunk so I didn't think it mattered. Now I realize that I gave each of those guys a part of myself. I don't want all that pain anymore. I'm going to make a new beginning and not have sex again until I'm married."³⁵

If we truly care about our children, of course, we will do everything we can in our classrooms and families to help them avoid the pain of premature sex in the first place. As we prepare to educate our young about this crucial area of our lives, we would do well to keep in mind the words of the essayist Lance Morrow: "You cannot light a candle in a high wind. What is needed for adolescent development to occur is shelter, safety. A context of abstinence is the beginning of such shelter."³⁶

Finally, if we want to call forth the best in our children, the case for waiting should go beyond appealing to their self-interest. We should also appeal to their sense of moral responsibility. We should ask them to consider, What kind of life do I want for a child that I might bring into the world? Do I want to give my child every chance to grow up healthy and happy with two committed parents? And how do I wish to affect the life of a person I am involved with? Do I want to have it on my conscience that I caused someone to get a sexually transmitted disease, lose the ability to have a baby, or suffer serious emotional problems?

In the current culture, sex may often seem like a casual thing. But sex is an act that is full of consequences. Sex is essentially deep. That's a very good reason to save it for marriage, the deepest and most loving commitment two people can make to each other.

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3 *Sex, Condoms, and STDs: What We Now Know*. (Austin: Medical Institute for Sexual Health, 2002), www.medinstitute.org.

4 Wendy Shalit, *A return to modesty: Rediscovering the lost virtue*. (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

5 Kim Painter, "The Sexual Revolution Hits Junior High," *USA Today* (March 15, 2002).

6 (to be completed)

7 For a review of some programs that promote abstinence see the *Sexual Health Update* newsletter, Spring 1998, of the Medical Institute of Sexual Health (www.medinstitute.org) and the research of Dr. Stan Weed, Institute for Research and Evaluation, Salt Lake City, UT (801-966-5644).

8 To access data on sexual activity among high school students, visit the Centers for Disease Control web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/2001/index.htm>

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- 31 Robert Michael et al., *Sex in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).
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