

Abstinence Encyclopedia Article

Abstinence

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Abstinence

Webster's Dictionary defines abstinence as "voluntary refraining" from particular behaviors. Many sexuality educators argue that a key goal of adolescent sex education is helping to postpone sexual intercourse until the individuals involved are physically and emotionally ready for mature relationships including the associated consequences. Abstinence is among the topics most often covered in educating individuals, and families, along with sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. Found to be effective in encouraging the postponement of sexual intercourse are the development of strong interpersonal skills and self-esteem. Individuals are encouraged to accept responsibility for their bodies and actions, and they are urged to avoid situations that could lead to a lack of self-control, such as those involving drug or alcohol use. A peer group that shares and respects such values is also helpful. Commitment to abstinence, proponents argue, allows for peace of mind and freedom from worries about unwanted pregnancy, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, and the emotional stress of failed relationships.

Studies have found that 10% of American teenager girls become pregnant each year and more than 80% of those who give birth and keep their babies end up on welfare. Three million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases are documented annually in the teen population, and up to 29% of sexually active girls are diagnosed with chlamydial infections. However, studies have also shown that more than half of American teens refrain from sexual activity until they are at least 17. Moreover, by the time they reach the age of 20, 20% of boys and 24% of girls have not had sexual intercourse. The Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) cites a key goal of comprehensive sexuality education is to help teens postpone sexual activity until they are ready for mature relationships.