



SEXUAL RISK AVOIDANCE



A Program of Women's Care Medical Center



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Introduction

Place a basket on the floor. Mark the floor with 5 strips of tape labeled 1-5, 1 being the closest to the basket and 5 being the furthest from the basket. Call on 2 volunteers.

Choose your mark on the floor to throw from. You each will be given 3 balls to try and ring the basket. The number you are standing on represents the number of points you may earn. The closer you are to the basket, the fewer points you earn, however, you have a greater chance of earning points. On the other hand, the further away you are, you risk missing, but should you ring the basket, you may get more points to win the game. Choose your numbered mark.

Have each player throw 3 balls. Award points accordingly. Congratulate and give winner a candy prize.

Did the risk pay off? Sometimes in life, risks do pay off. For example, it's a risk to start your own company, but the payoff may be a multi-million-dollar business. At other times in life, it's best to play it safe, guaranteeing an outcome of success. The key is knowing when to take risks and when not to.

Over the next two days, we're going to play a game and see if it's worth the risks involved. We'll let you decide. This game we're going to play is the game of sex. Now, in this game of sex, let's make a few general assumptions. By spinning the wheel, you have willingly chose to play the game. In doing so, you take the risk associated with it. Let's get started. Who wants to be my first volunteer?

Have volunteer spin the wheel. The wheel is divided into 12 sections. Behind each section of the wheel is a risk involved in sexual activity. The sections are divided into 3 categories and relate to the percentage of exposure when a young person is sexually active. The three categories are STDs, Pregnancy, and Mental Health Risks and are divided accordingly:

- 50% of the wheel (6 sections) are related to STDs
 - (According to the [CDC](#), half of all sexually active young people will contract an STD by the age 25)
- 25% of the wheel (3 sections) are related to pregnancy and your three options; abortion, adoption and parenting.
 - (According to the [CDC](#), 1 in 4 adolescent girls will become pregnant by the age of 20)
- 25% of the wheel (3 sections) are related to mental health risks associated with early sexual activity
 - (According to the [National Institute of Health](#), cross-sectional research has found that adolescents who have engaged in sexual intercourse are more likely than adolescents who have not to be depressed and to have attempted suicide, as well as have [long-term consequences](#) on their mental health.)

Taking the Risk

STD Risk Category

*The first time a student lands on an STD, the following statement should be made.

STDs can affect anyone who is sexually active no matter their gender or sexual preference. It's also important to know that STDs spread through vaginal, anal and oral sex as well as genital touching. For pregnant women, STDs are especially dangerous because they can spread to their baby during childbirth.

Periodically throughout the STDs, let students know we provide STD testing. We provide free and confidential STD testing at our office. If you've been sexually active, even just once, you can make an appointment with us to get tested at no cost to you.

State Requirement

Alabama Course of Study: Health Education, "Optimal Health for Life", Grades 9-12 Overview, Anchor Standard 5, Section 5.4 b., page 36, 2019

Chlamydia

* (At mention of the first bacterial STD, define what bacterial STDs are.)

Before we continue, you need to know that bacterial STDs can be cured. In most cases you get a prescription for an antibiotic, and this resolves the issue. But this also means you have to get tested to see if you have the infection in the first place.

Looks like you got chlamydia. That makes sense considering that chlamydia is the most common bacterial* STD and it infects sexually active teens more than anyone else.

The problem with Chlamydia is that most people don't know they have it. It usually has little to no symptoms and if symptoms do occur, they may not appear for several weeks after having sex. You may be thinking, what's the big deal with this STD if there are not any symptoms? I'm glad you asked. If Chlamydia is left untreated, it can cause permanent damage to a woman's reproductive system, making it difficult or impossible to get pregnant later in life. If a woman does get pregnant, she has an increased chance of having an ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy is a pregnancy outside the uterus. The uterus is the proper place for a pregnancy to develop. Ectopic pregnancies cannot survive and can be life-threatening to the mother. Men, on the other hand, rarely have health problems from chlamydia, but untreated chlamydia may increase your chances of getting HIV. Is that really worth the risk?

Chlamydia is common among both women and men and sexually active young people under the age of 25 are at a higher risk of getting chlamydia. This is why it's so important to get tested and to continue to get tested if you choose to be sexually active. The right treatment can cure chlamydia when taken properly. Although the medicine may stop the infection, it will not undo any permanent damage caused by the disease.

Gonorrhea

This common bacterial STD is another silent one, since most people have no symptoms. No symptoms means it could go undetected. If you do have symptoms, we're talking a greenish, yellowish discharge oozing from your genitals or a painful, burning sensation when you pee. That doesn't sound fun to deal with. This infection is most common among 15–24 year-olds. It can infect genitals, rectum, and throat

depending on how it was contracted. Can you imagine having an STD in your throat? Definitely not the worth the risk in my opinion.

Undetected and untreated gonorrhea can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, also known as PID, in women. PID can cause complications with future pregnancies, possible infertility, as well as long-term pelvic/abdominal pain. For men, gonorrhea can cause a painful condition in the tubes attached to the testicles. Yikes! Sometimes, untreated gonorrhea can spread to your blood or joints, a condition that is life-threatening. Untreated gonorrhea may also increase your chances of getting HIV.

Since gonorrhea often goes undetected, it's important to get tested. There is medicine available to treat gonorrhea, however, gonorrhea is becoming more difficult to treat due to the increase of drug-resistant strains. Worth the risk? You decide.

Syphilis

Yikes, this STD gets you in the short and long term. Syphilis has multiple stages of development. Each stage can have different signs and symptoms.

Let's look at the first stage of syphilis. The symptom to watch for is a single sore or multiple sores. The sore is the location where syphilis entered your body. This could be in your genital area, on your lips, or even in your mouth. It's important to note that since condoms do not cover the entire genital area, syphilis can spread even during protected sex. The problem with these sores is that they're often painless. That may sound like a good thing, but then if they're painless, you may not notice you have one. If you don't notice it, you may not get treated, which allows the infection to move to the next stage. A sore will usually only last 3 to 6 weeks and then heals on its own. However, the STD does not.

In the secondary stage, the sores may return, along with skin rashes. The rash can be on the palms of your hands or the bottoms of your feet, but can be so faint, you may not notice it. You do not want to ignore the early symptoms of syphilis. Untreated syphilis that develops into the last stage can affect many different organ systems, causing long-term damage to your eyesight, hearing, and healthy brain function. In other words, if this STD goes untreated, you could be left blind, deaf and with dementia.

Get tested. Get treatment. This is one STD definitely not worth the risk if left untreated.

Genital Herpes

* (At mention of the first viral STD, define what viral STDs are.)

Before we continue, you need to know that viral STDs cannot be cured. Once you get them, it's yours for the rest of your life. Depending on the type of STD, there may be medication to help control symptoms or outbreaks, but it can never be cured.

Genital Herpes, this one definitely isn't good. For one, it's a viral STD, so I hope you're ready for a lifelong commitment, because you're not getting rid of this one. This viral STD will be yours for the rest of your life. On the bright side, you can get prescription medication to reduce the effects of the outbreaks of blisters on your genitals.

It's important to note that genital herpes is different than oral herpes. Oral herpes can result in a single cold sore or fever blister on or around the mouth. Oral herpes is spread through non-sexual contact and most people get it during childhood. This is not the type of herpes we're talking about today.

We're discussing the type of herpes that spreads sexually. This mean you can spread genital herpes to the mouth from oral sex. Like this. ([Show "It's Herpes" video](#)) Like this girl, genital herpes on the mouth usually appears as a cluster of blisters around the mouth rather than a single cold sore and can be quite painful.

One more thing to be aware of, the oral type that you may have gotten as a child, can spread to the genital area, which may result in genital herpes, if you have oral sex with an active sore.

I'm telling you, this STD is no joke.

Herpes sores usually appear as blisters on or around the genitals, rectum or mouth, depending on your exposure from genital fluids or skin to skin contact. These blisters can break open and leave painful sores that may take a week or more to heal. You can also experience flu-like symptoms during an outbreak.

You should know that genital herpes can spread even when you do not have a visible sore or outbreak. That also means you can contract it from your partner without knowing they have it. You can also pass herpes to your unborn child before birth or

during delivery which can lead to a deadly infection to your baby called neonatal herpes.

It's also much more common to contract HIV when you have genital herpes. I don't know about you, but an STD for life that causes painful blisters and an increased chance of getting HIV . . .is it really worth the risk?

[Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#)

Of the STDs that happen the most, this is top of the list. In 2018 there were 43 million infections of HPV and most of those were teens and young adults in their early 20s.

This type of virus is not only spread sexually, but also through close skin-to-skin touching during sex, which means condoms don't stop the spread.

It has many varieties and the most dangerous of those cause genital warts and cancer. HPV can cause cervical cancer, including other types of genital cancer, as well as rectum cancer and cancer in the throat, depending on how you contracted it. HPV can also cause warts on the genitals and in the throat, if gotten through oral sex.

The dangerous part about HPV is you can pass the infection to someone without knowing you even have it. And since cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV, if you decide to be sexually active, imagine the number of people you could infect. And it's so highly contagious, you can get it even if you've had sex with only one person. HPV is so common that almost every sexually active person will get HPV at some point.

The CDC recommends getting the HPV vaccine to help prevent the spread of this infection. There is no test to find out a person's "HPV status". And there's no approved HPV test to find HPV in the mouth or throat. So there's really no way of knowing if you're infected unless you get genital warts. Otherwise, you may not know until signs of cancer appear.

[HIV/AIDS](#)

HIV - The big one! Undoubtedly, you've heard of HIV. HIV is the STD that can eventually develop into AIDS. And people who get syphilis, gonorrhea, and herpes often also have HIV or are more likely to get HIV in the future.

This virus is unique in the way it directly attacks your immune system. Once it demolishes your immune system it then becomes Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and your body can't even fight off the common cold without serious health problems.

This is primarily a fluid transfer infection, but if there are open sores, like from herpes or syphilis, your risk of contracting significantly increases. Condoms are only 85% effective at stopping the transmission of HIV, because it can spread through open sores, sometimes not covered by condoms, still putting you at risk even during protected sex.

There are medications for those infected to help control the disease, but without a cure, people with HIV have it for life. Symptoms for this disease are similar to flu-like symptoms, however, some people have no symptoms at all in the early stages of HIV. The only way to know if you have it is to get tested.

Pregnancy Risk Category

*The first time a student lands on Pregnancy, the following statement should be made.

You took the risk, had sex, and now you've got to deal with a pregnancy. Statistically, every time you have sex, you put yourself at a 25% risk of a pregnancy, that's 1 in 4 of you in this classroom. Obviously, some sex couples may not experience this particular risk, but you'd be surprised the number of lesbians we've seen in our office who are pregnant.

So now that you're pregnant, you have three outcomes to choose from. Any guesses as to what 3 options you have? Abortion, Adoption or Parenting. It looks like you landed on the outcome to *[abort, place for adoption, parent]*.

Abortion

Abortion can seem like a logical option in an unplanned pregnancy, especially as a teenager, because it eliminates the problem of pregnancy. You can continue to pursue your personal life goals without the added burden of caring for a child. However, thinking you've avoided the risk from sexual activity, you may not realize the additional risks you've added.

Before we look at the risks involved in abortion, let's discuss what's legal or not legal within the state of Alabama. Abortion is no longer legal in all 50 states. Each state has its own abortion laws they are governed by. For the state of Alabama, abortion is illegal with the exception to save the pregnant person's life or if the fetus is not expected to survive the pregnancy. So is abortion an option for someone in Alabama who takes the risk, has sex, and ends up pregnant. Well, that depends.

You could travel to a state where abortion is legal. But majority of states near Alabama have total bans or restrictions on abortion. Just to travel to a state where abortion is legal will cost a lot of money, not to mention the cost to have the abortion. Abortion costs vary widely depending on the type of abortion, ranging anywhere from \$600 – over \$2,000. Depending on how far along the pregnant patient is will determine the type of abortion. Abortion can be divided into 2 categories, surgical abortions and medical abortions. Surgical abortions are necessary for pregnancies after 11 weeks and are performed at an abortion clinic or hospital. Surgical abortions cost much more than a medical abortion. Medical abortions should only be performed within the first 11 weeks, according to the FDA, and are often performed at home.

Both surgical and medical abortions are considered medical procedures. Like with any medical procedure, there are risks and side effects. It's important to know what those risks and side effects are so you can make an informed decision.

Surgical Abortions – Like most all surgeries, a surgical abortion is a pervasive procedure. Oftentimes, anesthesia is taken, medical instruments are used to open the cervix, and surgical tools are used to remove the pregnancy from the uterus. Because these types of abortions are surgical in nature, the cost is significantly higher. Some potential side effects to a surgical abortion include heavy bleeding, fever, cramps lasting more than 48 hours, pain that gets worse instead of better, foul-smelling discharge. Some of the more dangerous risks include infection, incomplete abortion (meaning parts of the fetus are left in the uterus, causing the need for a secondary procedure), damage to the cervix, perforation of the uterus (meaning a hole in the uterus), scar tissue on the uterine wall, both of which could effect future pregnancies. Abortion is also linked to an increased risk for mental health issues, as well as a risk in future wanted pregnancies.

Medical Abortions – So let's look at medical abortions. This type of abortion is most common known as the Abortion Pill. It's called a pill, but it actually involves a series of 2 types of medications. The first medication is used to block progesterone which is

what feeds the pregnancy. This stops pregnancy development, so the fetus dies. The second medication induces contractions to empty the uterus. Because oftentimes this procedure is done at home, patients are instructed to sit on a toilet once the contractions begin and after the uterus is emptied, to flush the pregnancy down the toilet.

There have been recent advertisements that say the abortion pill is safer than Tylenol, like this video, ([Show Video](#)) This is misinformation and entirely false! Those who spew this misinformation try to argue that there were more deaths associated with the widely used pain reliever every year than reported with the abortion pill. They conveniently ignore the fact that Tylenol was being sold and used tens of thousands of more times a year than the abortion pill. The reality when considered in terms of death per dose, the abortion pill was considerably more dangerous and about 833 times more lethal. The danger of this type of misinformation concerning the abortion pill is that it's misleading for women who have the right to know what to expect with the risks and side effects of the abortion pill.

Charlotte Lozier Institute reports that the abortion pill has a complication rate four times that of surgical abortion. So, let's talk about these potential risks and side effects.

- Despite the fact that it is 4x riskier than surgical abortion, women are left alone to manage their own abortion.
- 8-10% of all medical abortions fail or considered incomplete, requiring a surgical abortion to complete the abortion.
- Strong abdominal cramping, heavy bleeding, nausea and vomiting are extremely common.
- Other risks include hemorrhaging (meaning bleeding is so bad it requires medical attention), infection, severe pain and cramping, fever, chills, headache, dizziness.
- The risk to emotional trauma also increases because most women are not expecting to see the results of their pregnancy and then are left to deal with disposing it.

I should warn also, although it is illegal in the state of Alabama to have the abortion pill mailed to your home, many websites offer such services. However, such companies are

not governed within the jurisdiction of the United States and are purchased from foreign internet sources and from other countries that do not have the same safeguards in place by our FDA to protect your health. In other words, you are putting yourself at even greater risk when you purchase the abortion pill online.

Should you take the risk, get pregnant and are considering abortion, our organization can provide a pre-abortion screening at no-cost, which includes a pregnancy test, ultrasound and STD testing. But before you are in that position to make a decision, you need to ask yourself, is it worth the risk?

Adoption

Let's talk about adoption. Adoption is the permanent and legal transfer of parental rights from a child's biological parents to adoptive parents. Adoption is complex and has its own lifelong impacts on everyone involved.

Some teens choose adoption for the following reasons:

- To continue their education and career goals after baby is born
- Not responsible for the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of a child
- Knowing your baby is with a loving and safe family
- Knowing that your baby's adoptive parents can provide many opportunities for your child

Unlike abortion which can be very costly, the adoption process is completely free to prospective birth mothers. In some cases, you can also get financial assistance throughout your pregnancy. In addition, with adoption, you avoid the physical risks and side effects associated with abortion, however, there is still a loss involved. As such, many birth parents who place their child for adoption experience some form of grief. To carry a child for 9 months and then give that child to another family to raise and care for is no easy thing.

There are other psychological effects to consider:

- A loss of identity
- Anger
- Denial
- Guilt and shame
- Loss of energy
- Trouble maintaining relationships
- Lack of concentration

- Fear of judgment
- Feelings of anxiety

Modern adoption has helped navigate some these common, emotional effects. With modern adoption, birth parents now have more rights than they did in the past. You can be in control of the whole process. As a birth parent, you can choose your own adoptive family. Maybe you want the dad to like sports so he can teach your son or daughter how to throw a ball. Or maybe you want them to live close by or the opposite, you'd prefer they live far away. You are in the driver's seat. You can also choose how much contact you want with the child. You can decide if you want frequent visits throughout the child's life, or just periodic updates on how the child is doing. You can be a little involved, a lot involved, or not involved at all. With modern adoption, the options are wide open.

This does not eliminate all emotional risks, but studies show it helps the grieving process knowing you play a role in the long-term welfare of your child.

In truth, when you are involved in a pregnancy as a teen, there are no easy options. If you're not ready to parent, adoption allows you the opportunity to continue working towards your personal life goals while avoiding the physical and emotional health risks involved with abortion. But adoption is not without its own risks and undoubtedly one of the hardest decisions to make. You've got to ask, is it worth the risk?

If you're ever in a pregnant situation and trying to choose between adoption, abortion or parenting, our organization can be a resource of information for you, at no cost, to help you make the best choice for you.

Parenting

So, you got pregnant and decide to parent. All parents must navigate challenges in raising a child, but if you're a teenage parent, you have extra challenges to navigate, such as trying to finish school while looking after a baby. Let's just take a look at some of the challenges involved should you have sex, get pregnant, and decide to parent.

Teen mothers face many physical, psychological, social and even spiritual challenges.

- Inability to planning and decision making
As a teenager, you're still learning how to plan and make decisions. Most of your planning consists of plans for the weekend, or decision making on how to

win Friday night's football game. Some of you may be thinking about where you want to go to college or work when you graduate. The point is, you're still learning how to make good decisions. But now that you're a teenage parent, you've got to plan and make decisions that not only impact you, but you've got another life that's impacted, a baby.

- Lack of parenting skills

Let's face it, all new parents have skills they must develop and learn in preparing for parenthood, but at the age of 15 you are at a disadvantage in having a solid set of parenting skills. On a positive note, our organization can offer you parenting classes at no cost to assist you.

- Higher risk during pregnancy and birth

Don't get me wrong, it is possible for teens who become pregnant to experience a healthy pregnancy, however, studies show being pregnant as a teenager puts you at higher risk for having a baby born too early, with a low birth weight and in some cases, even fetal death.

- Mental health problems (depression, anxiety, shock, low self efficacy, isolation)

Teen moms are twice as likely to experience postpartum depression as their adult counterparts.

This increase in depression can lead to difficulty bonding with your child, overwhelming fatigue, anxiety, panic attacks, isolation, and thoughts of harming yourself or your baby.

- Increased burden of responsibility

Most teen moms have a difficult time meeting the needs of a child, keeping up with housekeeping, going to school and being present with friends. It can be done, but it's not easy to raise a child while maintaining good interaction with friends, continuing your education or being employed. Which leads to next challenge.

- Disruption of education and employment

Only about 50% of teen mothers receive a high school diploma by 22 years of age. Teenage childbearing is also associated with a significant reduction in annual wages and income. Which then leads to the next challenge.

- Financial problems
Teenage mothers are more likely to live in poverty and depend on public assistance.
- Social stigma
Sadly, teen moms not only have to contend with all these other challenges of raising a child, they are routinely faced with a social stigma and false perception by culture of being troubled, dependent, irresponsible, promiscuous, or incompetent parents.
- Family conflicts
Parenting a child as a teen not only affects you, but it changes your whole family dynamic. Your mom or dad are now impacted by your choices and they too must make adjustments in their life to accommodate a baby.

Let's just clarify. Having a baby as a teenager isn't the worse thing that can happen. Should you take a risk in the game of sex and end up pregnant, you can raise a child successfully and even complete your education and in some cases, doing so will even set you up for greater success in your life because of the challenges you overcame, but it has its risks and difficulties that one must consider and decide, is it worth the risk?

If you're pregnant and are thinking of parenting, our organization has resources available to you at no cost. We offer free parenting classes to equip you with parenting skills. Upon graduation of the classes, you can earn a brand new car seat and a complete layette set for your baby. Like I said, it may not be easy to raise a child as a teenager, but there are resources available to assist you.

Alright guys, don't think you're off the hook just because we're talking about the risk for teen moms. Let's look at what parenting looks like for teen dads. In many cases, you deal with some similar things.

- Such as decision making at your age. Teen males are just now starting to develop higher levels of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In normal development, your decisions are typically applied to education, extracurricular activities, and social life, definitely not parenting decisions.
- Family conflict is not just something teen mothers have to deal with. Guys, your parents may not be ready to become grandparents either. Many teen dads have

the desire to help care for the mother and his baby, but he's limited by his own lack of independence while living under his parent's supervision.

- If you're planning to be an involved father, you may also experience an increased burden of responsibility. The responsibilities of parenting should come before hanging out with the guys on Friday night. If it doesn't, this can be a major friction point with the teen mom.
- You've now got to make some major life decisions. Do you forgo higher education and get a job to help support your child? Depending on your involvement in your child's life can seriously impact your choices on education and occupation.

Let's just address the obvious here. Should she decide to parent, her body, her choice, some guys think they have the choice to simply walk away from all responsibility, but what you don't have a choice in is child support. When court ordered, you're required to pay and the courts can take it out of your paycheck, your retirement, your unemployment check, even your tax returns. If you earn \$30k a year and pay child support for one child for 17 years, it could cost you over \$500K. Let's just say you have 6 kids; you may be paying more than \$1.1 million by the time they're 18. Is sex at your age really worth the risk of a pregnancy and the responsibilities that go with parenting? Think about it.

Mental Health Risk Category

*The first time a student lands on an emotional risk, the following statement should be made.

Unlike unplanned pregnancy, which predominantly affects straight or heterosexual couples, mental health risks can impact anyone no matter their gender or sexual orientation. As a matter of fact, according to the [CDC](#), teens that identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual experience mental health problems at a rate twice as high as heterosexual youth and are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide. Add to the emotional risks associated with early sexual activity, and you put yourself at an even greater risk.

Increased Depression & Anxiety

(Play "I'm Fine - Teen Depression PSA" Video)

Teenagers today are dealing with an increase in depression and anxiety more than any previous generation. Mental health is one of the biggest struggles of your time. More teens are on antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications than ever before as you cope with everyday life.

Let's face it, this time in your life, as teenagers, is one of the most difficult to navigate. You've got pressure from parents, teachers, friends, dating partners, and our culture, as a whole, to be something. Not to mention, your own internal struggles of am I good enough or do I measure up? Sometimes those external pressures conflict with your own internal struggles and how you're feeling in the moment, leaving you feeling depressed and anxious. These feelings can often lead you to take actions that relieve that anxiousness and make you feel better. Or least what you think will make you feel better. . . sex.

Unfortunately for you, there's a direct link between sexual activity and the increase of depression and anxiety. This [link](#) is supported by clinical experience. Doctor Meg Meeker writes, "Teenage sexual activity routinely leads to emotional turmoil and psychological distress.... [Sexual permissiveness leads] to empty relationships, to feelings of self-contempt and worthlessness. All, of course, precursors to depression."

And here's the trap, depressed girls are [more likely](#) to engage in sexually risky behavior, which then leads to greater depression. Do you see the vicious cycle. Add to that, in that brief moment of pleasure, our emotions deceive us because we want to feel wanted, loved or valuable. It's often the letdown after the act that will spin you into a depressive tailspin.

Sex is meant to build up a healthy loving relationship, but it doesn't serve the same purpose with hook-ups or high school dating. Instead, it can produce feelings of regret or worry, which actually increases your anxiousness, especially with you have to contend with the thought of contracting an STD or getting pregnant.

Sex, for now, is just not emotionally beneficial for teens. Not while you're still trying to navigate the everyday struggles of these teenage years.

Decreased Self-Worth & Self-Esteem

The fact is, most teens are trying to figure out who they are, who they want to be, and how they feel about themselves. Each of you has a unique personality, but so often, demands placed on you and who you ought to be can leave you feeling insecure because it doesn't always match with who you really are. Our culture does not make this process easy, because it sends messages that indicate you should not be happy with the way you are. Our society is always playing on your insecurities as they try to sell you something that will make a better you. More make-up, better clothes, better body, nicer things, better athlete, etc. They say you're never enough just the way you are.

Self-doubt, low self-expectations, feeling purposelessness...all real scenarios for each of you in different ways. This can often produce a desire to find approval and acceptance in destructive ways. Some people choose careless sex to feel accepted or loved. Some people give in to the peer pressure and have sex, so they don't feel left out. Some people pursue sex because they don't feel successful anywhere else in life. All this stems from their perceptions of self-worth and self-esteem. But sex doesn't give us the satisfaction we think it will in building our self-confidence. It actually does the opposite.

When sex doesn't produce this internal confidence, we begin to tear ourselves down. We become more sexually active and jump from relationship to relationship trying to build ourselves up. This is a perpetual loop of self-destruction. Like someone seeking pleasure through drugs and alcohol, it can become addictive and abusive. Abusive to others we love and definitely abusive to ourselves. In the end, what we thought would increase our feelings of self-worth actually serves to tear us down even more. What drives you to have sex in the first place can end up making you feel used, abused, and unwanted. Add on an STD or unwanted pregnancy, and your self-worth plummets even more.

Sex can benefit a strong loving bond in a committed relationship, but it will never be the glue that keeps us together. And it is definitely not an avenue for personal reassurance of your worth and value as a unique, one-of-a-kind, individual. That comes from having confidence in your own gifts and talents just as you are.

Increased Suicidal Thoughts

This is a tough but necessary conversation to have. No one likes to think about self-harm and suicide, but it is happening at alarming rates amongst teens. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens and young adults. Given that 42% of high school students express deep sadness and hopelessness, it's no wonder over 20% of you have seriously considered suicide. This may even be higher depending on your sexual orientation.

Many of you may have never had suicidal thoughts. However, research shows that teens without suicide ideas can begin developing those thoughts after having engaged in risky sexual behavior, while many will struggle with ideas of self-harm well into their young adult years.

When it comes to mental health, the temporary pleasures that sex offers will not offer lasting positive effects. Once the thrill of the high is over, it's right back to reality. You may feel great in the intimacy of the moment, but then it is gone. Once that fleeting moment is over, you have nothing tangible to show for it, unless of course it leaves you infected with an STD or an unplanned pregnancy. With no lasting feelings of pleasure and oftentimes a series of bad relationships, it's easy to see why some teens consider self-harm and suicide as a possible escape.

If you have ever find yourself grappling with overwhelming sadness or hopelessness, please reach out to a friend or mentor. A teacher, counselor, pastor, anyone...just reach out. There are plenty of people that want to help you find a way out of those dark times in life. And no matter how hard you try...there is nothing that can numb the pain enough for you to be happy. Drugs, alcohol, and even sex become nothing but an escape from a harsh reality...until they don't work anymore. Don't choose something as permanent as suicide as a way to cope with temporary struggles. You can make it through this and there are people that want to help.

(End of Game)

These are just some of the risks involved in sexual activity. With pregnancy, you may be limited to 3 possible outcomes, but with STDs, we only covered the 6 most prevalent and dangerous. In actuality, there are over 25 STDs you must contend with should you take the risk and have sex.

Nonconsensual Sex

Remember when we started the game, I stated we were under the general assumption you willingly chose to play the game. In the reality of life, there are some who have not willingly chose to play but have been forced to play. This is called nonconsensual sex, which we commonly call rape, sexual assault or sexual abuse. In any of these situations, it's important to tell someone you trust and seek help. You may be afraid to tell someone, or you may have been threatened, but telling someone can be what protects you. If the person you tell doesn't believe you, tell someone else, a teacher, a counselor, a pastor, or even the police. Or you can tell me and we can get you in touch with Baldwin County's Sexual Assault Response Team. Secondly, it's important to ensure the well-being of your health by getting tested for an STD and for an unintended pregnancy. We can do that at our office confidentiality, in a judge-free, compassionate environment and at no cost to you. We care about you and we want you to get the help you need.

Legal Age of Consent

Now, it's important for me to address the legal age of consent. In other words, you may want to play the game and you may be willing to take the risk, but can you do so legally? Anyone under the age of 16 in the state of Alabama cannot legally consent to sexual activity. This also means if someone older than 16 has sex with someone younger than 16, they could be charged with statutory rape.

In Summary

We have one more game to play, but before we do, I'm sure there are some of you in here who may be thinking, "Alright, so there's risk involved in having sex. But who's to say I'll get an STD or get pregnant or have any negative emotional consequences. I could have sex and not suffer from any of these things." And you're right, maybe that's a possibility, but that's a pretty big maybe and lot to gamble on when the odds are not in your favor. Especially considering you have a 50% chance of contracting an STD by the age of 25, a 25% chance of getting pregnant by the age of 20, and a 40% chance of experiencing some form of mental health issue. Do the math, that adds up to 115% percent. At the beginning of class, I said that some risks are worth taking but sometimes it pays to play it safe. The key is knowing when to take the risk and when to play it safe. Based on our statistics, I'm thinking it's much safer not to play games with sex. Which leads me to our next game.

Playing It Safe

STD Risk Avoidance – The Benefits in Marriage

When you enter a long-term, committed relationship such as marriage without STDs involved, then you're offered 100% protection against STD infection.

This means that either you and your partner were both virgins, or if you had prior sexual activity, you have both been tested and cleared with a clean bill of health. The only exception is HPV since there's no test to find out your HPV status. So, your safest bet is no sex until a long-term, monogamous relationship. Once you choose monogamy, meaning only one sexual partner for life, then no STDs can present themselves. Phew, that's one less medical or health concern you have to worry about.

And the benefit of frequent sex in marriage is that it actually improves your immune system. Research has shown that healthy sex among married couples results in them taking fewer sick days. How about that?!!

Studies reveal that when you compare marriage to any other type of relationship status, single, dating, cohabitating, divorced, widowed, marriage, by far, has the lowest STD infection rate. And when infections were present within marriage, those married admitted to sexual partners other than their spouse. So if you want to avoid STD risks, wait until you're in a life-long, committed relationship.

Pregnancy Risk Avoidance – The Benefits in Marriage

Most people who choose a lifelong commitment to marriage have agreed upon the idea of growing their family through childbirth. There are exceptions when a pregnancy is unplanned in marriage, but a married couple is much more equipped to handle a pregnancy than you are as a teenager. Let's just look at a few benefits to pregnancy within marriage.

- Health during the pregnancy – Studies show that married women seek earlier prenatal care and are prone to make healthier life decisions for their pregnancy, such as stopping smoking, drinking, and eating healthier. Early prenatal care results in a healthier pregnancy which results in a healthier baby.

- Wanted pregnancy – Married women are more welcoming of a pregnancy, even surprise pregnancies, largely due to her social and emotional support, primarily from the father of the baby, her husband. Married women report higher levels of pregnancy “wantedness” when compared to cohabitating or single pregnant women.
- Two income security – Most modern homes today are typically two-income families. In a marriage, the combined income provides better financial security and makes the couple less reliant upon outside assistance programs.
- Fatherly involvement – Dads play a critical role in raising children. Research shows that if the father is present and involved in the pregnancy and child rearing experience, meaning a two-parent home, then the pregnant mom gets more relaxing leisure time, experiences less stress, and has less chance of dealing with postpartum depression. Kids benefit too. For kids raised in a two-parent home, they experience less emotional struggles, perform better in school, and are less involved in dangerous risky behaviors like drugs and alcohol.
 - It is important to note that it’s not just any two-parent home that offers better outcomes for children. Studies emphasize that the marriage of the parents needs to be healthy and maintain a positive home environment. In these cases, the child always fares better than homes full of conflict or homes broken altogether.

Mental Health Risk Avoidance – The Benefits in Marriage

When two people choose to commit themselves to one other for the rest of their lives, they are agreeing to promote the health and well-being of their partner. This naturally leads to greater mental health in lifelong, committed relationships. And get this, the odds of divorce are lowest when one has zero or one premarital partner. Let’s just look at a few of the benefits to one’s mental health when they decide to wait on sex until they are married.

- When your emotional security is not based on sex, money or other temporary life circumstance, than greater is your relationship stability. In other words, a lifelong, committed relationship enhances your emotional security which increases your relationship stability.

- Being close to your partner can ease the pressures of stress and there is nothing more intimate than sex. Research shows that married couples experience less stress than cohabitating counterparts.
- Married young adults ages 22-26 report higher life satisfaction than those in other types of relationships or no relationship at all
- In a study by the National Institute of Health, social scientists have discovered that marriage offers better mental health over all ages.
- Mental health advantages increase as individuals move from less attachment to more attachment. The greatest attachment relationship is marriage, thereby, marriage has the most mental health benefits.
- Healthy romantic relationships in a lifelong commitment heightened feelings of self-worth.
- All of these studies show that individuals with more positive mental health are those who choose to marry, thus resulting in greater mental health. Meaning, depressed or unhappy individuals are usually not motivated to move into a lifelong, committed partnership, which validates that fact that involving sex in relationships that don't deserve it only makes matters worse when dealing with mental health issues.
- Overall, despite higher rates of divorce, marriage still proves to be the most emotionally, valuable and longest lasting monogamous relationship in America.

At the end of all benefits to marriage, state the following:

Just to recap, here are a list of evidence-based benefits of engaging in sex in marriage:

- It boost immunity
- Lowers blood pressure
- Creates better intimacy
- Relieves pain
- Decreases depression
- Relieves stress
- Improves fertility
- Makes for better sleep
- Increase cardiovascular health

- Makes you feel better about yourself
- Burns calories
- Relieves headaches
- Increases mental health
- Increases sexual desire
- Lowers risk of heart attack
- Reduces risk of both breast and prostate cancer
- Improves the marriage relationship
- Improves overall brain function
- Leads to longer life

Wow! Sex in marriage actually helps you live longer. You see, I'm not here to tell you not to have sex or that sex is bad. Just the opposite actually. Sex is amazing and has incredible benefits, when saved for the right time, in a lifelong, committed relationship.

If you're considering the quality of your relationship and sex, and you desire the best, all research indicates that sex within marriage provides just that. In addition, these studies validate that a person's feelings of love, intimacy, mental health, and physical health are better suited for lifelong committed relationship where sex offers the greatest benefits.

[Closing Comments](#)