

**“Abstinence Education Works: a Review of 15 Evaluations on the Effectiveness of  
Abstinence Programs”**

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## Summary

Abstinence education works. At least 15 scientific evaluations show that abstinence education programs are effective in changing teen behavior and attitude toward sexual activity.

Abstinence education programs teach with what parents want their teens taught regarding human sexuality. Abstinence programs also provide youths with valuable life and decision-making skills that lay the foundation for personal responsibility and a successful future.

## Introduction

Teen sexual activity remains a widespread problem confronting the nation. Some 2.6 million teenagers become sexually active each year, a rate of 7,000 teens per day.<sup>1</sup> Among high school students, nearly half report ever engaging in sexual activity and a third are currently active.<sup>2</sup>

Sexual activity during the teenage years poses serious health risks to youths and has long-term implications. Early sexual activity is associated with an increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), reduced psychological and emotional well-being, lower academic achievement, teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Many of these risks are absolutely preventable if teens abstain from sexual activity. In fact, abstinence is the surest and only way to eliminate any risk of STDs or out-of-wedlock childbearing.

Abstinence education “teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children” and stresses that there are social, psychological and health benefits to be gained from abstinence.<sup>3</sup> Abstinence programs also provide youths with valuable life and decision-making skills that lay the foundation for personal responsibility and developing healthy relationships and marriages later in life. The emphasis of these programs is on preparing young people for a successful future.

A number of scientific evaluations indicate that abstinence education for youth is effective in reducing early sexual activity. Studies also show that abstinent teens report, on average, better psychological well-being and higher academic achievement than those who are sexually active. Consequently, abstinence education programs are crucial to efforts aimed reducing out-of-wedlock childbearing and improving youth well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 3, based on data from National Survey of Family Growth.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005. Those who have engaged in sexual activity during the 3 months preceding the survey are considered “currently active.”

<sup>3</sup> Section 510 of Title V of the Social Security Act contains eight standards (“A-H” standards) by which all abstinence programs must abide, see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/fysb/content/abstinence/factsheet.htm> (March 13, 2007).

## **Abstinence Education Programs versus Comprehensive Sex Education Curricula**

Abstinence programs take a holistic approach to human sexuality. Abstinence curricula teach that: (1) human sexuality is primarily emotional and psychological, not physical, in nature; (2) in proper circumstances, sexual activity leads to long-term emotional bonding between two individuals, and (3) sexual happiness is inherently linked to intimacy, love and commitment – qualities found primarily within marriage.

A 2003 Zogby poll shows that the content and intent of abstinence education programs align closely with what parents want their teen taught in regard to sexuality.<sup>4</sup> For example:

- 79 percent of parents want young people taught that sex should be reserved for marriage or for an adult relationship leading to marriage.
- 91 percent of parents want young people taught that sex should be linked to love, intimacy, and commitment and that these qualities are most likely to occur in marriage.
- 79 percent of parents want teens taught that teen sexuality activity is likely to have psychological and physical effects.
- 93 percent of parents want teens taught that “the younger the age an individual begins sexual activity, the more likely he or she is to be infected by sexually transmitted disease, to have a sexually transmitted disease, to have an abortion, and to give birth out-of-wedlock.”

Comprehensive sex education (or “safe-sex”) programs, on the other hand, treat human sexuality as a matter of physical pleasure, the goal of which is to obtain it without becoming pregnant or infected with a disease. The substance of what parents want teens taught is largely, if not completely, absent from these programs.

Many comprehensive sex education programs masquerade around as “abstinence plus” programs. In reality, they have very little abstinence content. On average, less than 5 percent of comprehensive sex-ed curricula address abstinence, with zero reference to healthy relationship and marriage. A review of nine comprehensive sex-ed curricula found not one line in 942 pages of content that urged youth people to abstain from sexual activity through high school. Instead, these programs devoted, on average, more than a quarter of their page content to promoting contraceptive use.<sup>5</sup>

The actual content of most abstinence “abstinence plus” curricula does not hold up under close scrutiny. These programs view abstinence as marginally safer than safe sex. They neither encourage youths to delay sexual activity nor do they provide any clear sexual standards for youths. The overall message condones teen sex as long as contraception is used.

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<sup>4</sup> Robert E. Rector, Melissa G. Pardue, and Shannan Martin, “What Do Parents Want Taught in Sex Education Programs?” The Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder #1722*, January 28, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed review of abstinence education curricula versus comprehensive sex-ed curricula, see Shannan Martin, Robert Rector, and Melissa Pardue, *Comprehensive Sex Education vs. Authentic Abstinence: A Study of Competing Curricula* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2004).

Even more alarming, some comprehensive sex-ed curricula present written and visual materials that are sexually explicit and graphic.<sup>6</sup> For example, the curriculum *Be Proud! Be Responsible!* instructs teachers to:

Invite [students] to brainstorm ways to increase spontaneity and the likelihood that they'll use condoms.... Examples: ... Store condoms under mattress; Eroticize condom use with partners... Use condoms as method of foreplay... Think up a sexual fantasy using condoms....Act sexy/sensual when putting condoms us....Hide them on your body and ask your partner to finding it. Wrap them as a present and give to your partner before a romantic dinner. Tease each other manually while putting on the condom.<sup>7</sup>

### **Effective Abstinence Programs**

Opponents contend that abstinence education programs are ineffective, that they do not influence teen attitude or behavior toward sex. This claim is simply incorrect. Currently, there are at least 15 empirical evaluations that demonstrate the effectiveness of authentic abstinence programs.

The 15 evaluations are as follows (see Appendix A for an at-a-glance chart of the studies):

**Not Me, Not Now.** Not Me, Not Now is a community-wide abstinence intervention targeted to 9- to 14-year-olds in Monroe County, New York, which includes the city of Rochester. The Not Me, Not Now program devised a mass communications strategy to promote the abstinence message through paid TV and radio advertising, billboards, posters distributed in schools, educational materials for parents, an interactive Web site, and educational sessions in school and community settings. The program sought to communicate five themes: raising awareness of the problem of teen pregnancy, increasing an understanding of the negative consequences of teen pregnancy, developing resistance to peer pressure, promoting parent-child communication, and promoting abstinence among teens.

Not Me, Not Now was effective in reaching early teen listeners, with some 95 percent of the target audience within the county reporting that they had seen a Not Me, Not Now ad. During the intervention period, the program achieved a statistically significant positive shift in attitudes among pre-teens and early teens in the county. The sexual activity rate of 15-year-olds across the county (as reported in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey<sup>8</sup>) dropped by a statistically significant amount from 46.6 percent to 31.6 percent during the intervention period. Finally, the pregnancy rate for girls aged 15 through 17 in Monroe County fell by a statistically significant amount, from 63.4 pregnancies per 1,000 girls to 49.5 pregnancies per 1,000. The teen pregnancy rate fell

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Loretta Sweet Jemmott, John B. Jemmott, and Konstance A. McCaffree, *Be Proud! Be Responsible!* Select Media, Inc., New York, New York, 1996, pp. 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> L. Kahn *et al.*, "Youth Risk Behavior Survey – United States 1997," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports*, Vol. 47 (SS-3), 1998, pp. 1-89.

more rapidly in Monroe County than in comparison counties and in upstate New York in general, and the difference in the rate of decrease was statistically significant.<sup>9</sup>

**Operation Keepsake.** Operation Keepsake is an abstinence program for 12- and 13-year-old children in Cleveland, Ohio. Some 77 percent of the children in the program were black or Hispanic. An evaluation of the program in 2001, involving a sample of over 800 students, found that "Operation Keepsake had a clear and sustainable impact on...abstinence beliefs." The evaluation showed that the program reduced the rate of onset of sexual activity (loss of virginity) by roughly two-thirds relative to comparable students in control schools who did not participate in the program. In addition, the program reduced by about one-fifth the rate of current sexual activity among those with prior sexual experience.<sup>10</sup>

**Abstinence by Choice.** Abstinence by Choice operates in 20 schools in the Little Rock area of Arkansas. The program targets 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students and reaches about 4,000 youths each year. A recent evaluation, involving a sample of nearly 1,000 students, shows that the program has been highly effective in changing the attitudes that are directly linked to early sexual activity. Moreover, the program reduced the sexual activity rates of girls by approximately 40 percent (from 10.2 percent to 5.9 percent) and the rate for boys by approximately 30 percent (from 22.8 percent to 15.8 percent) when compared with similar students who had not been exposed to the program. (The sexual activity rate of students in the program was compared with the rate of sexual activity among control students in the same grade in the same schools prior to the commencement of the program.)<sup>11</sup>

**Teen Aid and Sex Respect.** An evaluation of the Teen Aid and Sex Respect abstinence programs in three school districts in Utah showed that both programs were effective among the students who were at the greatest risk of initiating sexual activity. Approximately 7,000 high school and middle school students participated in the evaluation. To determine the effects of the programs, students in schools with the abstinence programs were compared with students in similar control schools within the same school district. Statistical adjustments were applied to further control for any initial differences between program participants and control students. The programs together were shown to reduce the rate of initiation of sexual activity among at-risk high school students by over a third when compared with a control group of similar students who

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Doniger, "Impact Evaluation of the 'Not Me, Not Now'," Abstinence-Oriented, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Communications Program, Monroe County, New York," *Journal of Health Communications*, Vol. 6 (2001), pp.45-60. Both the shifts in attitudes and the decline in sexual activity rate over the intervention period were statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level. The difference in the rate of decline in adolescent pregnancy in Monroe County, when compared to other geographic areas, was statistically significant at the 95 percent to 99 percent confidence levels.

<sup>10</sup> Elaine Borawski et al., Evaluation of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs Funded through the Wellness Block Grant (1999-2000), Center for Health Promotion Research, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Case Western Reserve University, School of Medicine, March 23, 2001. The program effects on sexual activity were significant at the 93 percent confidence level.

<sup>11</sup> Stan E. Weed, Title V Abstinence Education Programs: Phase I Interim Evaluation Report to Arkansas Department of Health, Institute for Research and Evaluation, October 15, 2001. The effects of the program in reducing the onset of sexual activity were statistically significant at the 98 percent confidence level. (Data on statistical significance are not currently included in the written report but were provided separately to the author by the evaluator, Dr. Stan Weed.)

were not exposed to the program.<sup>12</sup> Statistically significant changes in behavior were not found among junior high students.

When high school and junior high school students were examined together, Sex Respect was shown to reduce the rate of initiation of sexual activity among at-risk students by 25 percent when compared with a control group of similar students who were not exposed to the program. Teen Aid was found to reduce the initiation of sex activity by some 17 percent. A third non-abstinence program, Values and Choices, which offered non-directive or value-free instruction in sex education and decision-making, was found to have no impact on sexual behavior.

**Family Accountability Communicating Teen Sexuality (FACTS).** An evaluation performed for the national Title XX abstinence program examined the effectiveness of the Family Accountability Communicating Teen Sexuality abstinence program in reducing teen sexual activity. The evaluation assessed the FACTS program by comparing a sample of students who participated in the program with a group of comparable students in separate control schools who did not participate in the program. The experimental and control students together comprised a sample of 308 students. The evaluation found the FACTS program to be highly effective in delaying the onset of sexual activity. Students who participated in the program were 30 percent to 50 percent less likely to commence sexual activity than were those who did not participate.<sup>13</sup>

**Postponing Sexual Involvement (PSI).** Postponing Sexual Involvement was an abstinence program developed by Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, and provided to low-income 8th grade students. A study published in *Family Planning Perspectives*, based on a sample of 536 low-income students, showed that the PSI program was effective in altering sexual behavior.<sup>14</sup> A comparison of the program participants with a control population of comparable low-income minority students who did not participate showed that PSI reduced the rate of initiation of sexual activity during the 8th grade by some 60 percent for boys and over 95 percent for girls.<sup>15</sup> As the study explained:

The program had a pronounced effect on the behavior of both boys and girls who had not been sexually involved before the program.... By the end of eighth grade, boys who had not had the program were more than three times as likely to have begun having sex as were boys who had the program.... Girls who had not had the program were as much as 15 times more likely to have begun having sex as were girls who had had the program.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Stan E. Weed, *Predicting and Changing Teen Sexual Activity Rates: A Comparison of Three Title XX Programs*, report submitted to the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December 1992. The effects the programs on at-risk high school students were significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

<sup>13</sup> Stan E. Weed, *FACTS Project: Year End Evaluation Report, 1993-1994*, prepared for the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Programs.

<sup>14</sup> Marion Howard and Judith Blarney McCabe, "Helping Teenagers Postpone Sexual Involvement," *Family Planning Perspectives*, January/February 1990, pp. 21-26.

<sup>15</sup> These effects were statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

<sup>16</sup> Howard and McCabe, "Helping Teenagers Postpone Sexual Involvement," p. 24.

The effects of the program lasted into the next school year even though no additional sessions were provided. By the end of the 9th grade, boys and girls who had participated in PSI were still some 35 percent less likely to have commenced sexual activity than were those who had not participated in the abstinence program.<sup>17</sup>

**Project Taking Charge.** Project Taking Charge is a six-week abstinence curriculum delivered in home economics classes during the school year. It was designed for use in low-income communities with high rates of teen pregnancy. The curriculum contains these elements: self-development; basic information about sexual biology (anatomy, physiology, and pregnancy); vocational goal-setting; family communication; and values instruction on the importance of delaying sexual activity until marriage. The effect of the program has been evaluated in two sites: Wilmington, Delaware, and West Point, Mississippi. The evaluation was based on a small sample of 91 adolescents. Control and experimental groups were created by randomly assigning classrooms to either receive or not receive the program. The students were assessed immediately before and after the program and through a six-month follow-up.

In the six-month follow-up, Project Taking Charge was shown to have had a statistically significant effect in increasing adolescents' knowledge of the problems associated with teen pregnancy, the problems of sexually transmitted diseases, and reproductive biology. The program was also shown to reduce the rate of onset of sexual activity by 50 percent relative to the students in the control group, although the authors urge caution in the interpretation of these numbers due to the small size of the evaluation sample.<sup>18</sup>

**Teen Aid Family Life Education Project.** The Teen Aid Family Life Education Project is a widely used abstinence education program for high school and junior high students. An evaluation of the effectiveness of Teen Aid, involving a sample of over 1,300 students, was performed in 21 schools in California, Idaho, Oregon, Mississippi, Utah, and Washington. The Teen Aid program was shown to have a statistically significant effect in reducing the rate of initiation of sexual activity (loss of virginity) among high-risk high school students, compared with similar students in control schools. Among at-risk high school students who participated in the program, the rate of initiation of sexual activity was cut by more than one-fourth, from 37 percent to 27 percent. A similar pattern of reduction was found among at-risk junior high school students, but the effects did not achieve statistical significance. The program did not have statistically significant effects among lower-risk students.<sup>19</sup>

**Stay SMART.** A Boys & Girls Club program, Stay SMART integrates abstinence education with youth substance use prevention. The program targets factors related problematic behavior

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<sup>17</sup> These effects were statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen R. Jorgensen, Vicki Potts, and Brian Camp, "Project Taking Charge: Six-Month Follow-Up of a Pregnancy Prevention Program for Early Adolescents," *Family Relations*, October 1993, pp. 401-406. The effects of the program in reducing the rate of onset of sexual activity were statistically significant at the 94.9 percent confidence level. The effects of the program on specific areas of knowledge were significant at the 95 percent confidence level and above.

<sup>19</sup> Stan E. Weed, Jerry Prigmore, and Raja Tanas, *The Teen Aid Family Life Education Project: Fifth Year Evaluation Report*, Institute for Research and Evaluation, 1992. The effects of the program on the sexual activity of high-risk high school students were statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.

and emphasizes the development of general life skills. Stay SMART teaches youths to postpone sexual activity, focusing on both sexually experienced adolescents and those who are virgins.

A study published in *Family Relations* evaluated Stay SMART's impact among 350 thirteen-year-old Boys & Girls Club participants. The study measured sexual attitude and behavior of youths who participated in Stay SMART and compared their outcomes to youths who did not participate in the program. Follow-up evaluations were conducted 3, 15 and 27 months after the program. The analysis controlled for demographic and baseline characteristics so as to test for the program's independent effect on behavior and attitude changes. The study found that two years after the program, youths who participated in the stand-alone Stay SMART program exhibited reduced levels of sexual activity – both in recency and frequency – compared to non-participants.<sup>20</sup> Among youths who were virgins prior to Stay SMART, the study did not find a program effect that was statistically significant.

**Best Friends.** The Best Friends program began in 1987 and currently operates in more than 100 schools across the United States. The Best Friend curriculum consists of a character-building program for girls in the fifth or sixth grade and offers at least 110 hours of instruction, mentoring and group activities. Discussion topics include friendship, love and dating, self-respect, decision-making, alcohol and drug abuse, physical fitness and nutrition, and AIDS/STDs. The curriculum's predominant theme is encouraging youths to abstain from high-risk behavior and sexual activity.

A 2005 study, published in *Adolescent & Family Health*, evaluated the District of Columbia's Best Friends program. It found that sixth- through eighth-grade girls who participated in Best Friends were (1) six-and-a-half times more likely to remain sexually abstinent, (b) nearly two times more likely to abstain from drinking alcohol, (c) eight times more likely to abstain from drug use, and (d) over two times more likely to refrain from smoking, compared to similar students in the District of Columbia who did not participate in the program.<sup>21</sup>

The evaluation also found a significant decrease in the incidence of four high-risk behaviors among Best Friends girls compared to their peers who did not participate in the program. Specifically, Best Friends girls had (a) a 80 percent reduction in the likelihood that they would have sex, (b) a 52 percent reduction in the likelihood that they would smoke, (c) a 90 percent reduction in the likelihood that they would use drugs, and (c) a 60 percent reduction in the likelihood that they would drink alcohol.<sup>22</sup>

**Heritage Keepers.** Heritage Keepers is a primary prevention abstinence program for middle school and high school students. The program focuses on the causal mechanisms that affect teen

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<sup>20</sup> Tena St. Pierre *et al.*, "A 27-month Evaluation of a Sexual Activity Prevention Program in Boys & Girls Clubs Across the Nation," *Family Relations*, Vol. 44 (January 1995), pp.69-77. The findings were statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level

<sup>21</sup> Robert Lerner, "Can Abstinence Work? An Analysis of the Best Friends Program," *Adolescent & Family Health*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (April 2005), pp. 185-192. The effects of the program on sexual initiation, drug use, smoking and drinking were statistically significant at the 99.9 percent confidence level and above.

<sup>22</sup> Calculations for Table 2 provided by the author, see endnote viii in Melissa G. Pardue, "The Effectiveness of Abstinence Education Programs in Reducing Sexual Activity Among Youth," Heritage Foundation, *WebMemo* No. 738, May 5, 2005.

sexual behavior. Heritage Keepers offers an interactive three-year, two-level curriculum. It operates in South Carolina schools that are representative of the state's school system.

To assess Heritage Keepers' effectiveness, the evaluators compared virgin students who attended schools that faithfully implemented the program to students in demographically and geographically comparable schools that did not have abstinence education. One year after the program, 14.5 percent of Heritage Keepers students had become sexually active compared to 26.5 percent of the comparison group students, or a 45 percent reduction in the rate of sexual initiation. Overall, Heritage Keepers students "were about one-half as likely" as comparison group students to initiate sex, after adjusting for pre-program differences between the two groups.<sup>23</sup> The study found similar results when subsets of only African American students, only Caucasian students, only boys and only girls were analyzed.

**For Keeps.** A 2005 study found that "an abstinence-until-marriage program can affect short-term sexual behavior among adolescents."<sup>24</sup> The study evaluated the impact of For Keeps, a five-day curriculum that focuses on the benefits of abstinence and character development, on teens from seven middle schools. Future-planning oriented, For Keeps helps students understand how pregnancy and disease may impede their long-term goals and stresses the psycho-emotional and economic implication of early sexual activity. The curriculum is intended for students who have and have not become sexually active.

Based on information collected on some 2000 seventh and eighth graders, the study found that, five months after the program, For Keeps teens "reported significant increases in their HIV/STD knowledge, their personal beliefs about the importance of abstinence, and their intentions to remain abstinent in the near future" compared to students in the control group. The improved results applied to both sexually experienced students and those who had not become sexually active. Moreover, among sexually active teens, there was a reduction in "the amount of casual sex, as evidenced by fewer episodes of sex and fewer sexual partners reported in the 5-month period."<sup>25</sup>

**Virginity Pledge Programs.** Using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health ("Add Health"), a nationally representative sample of American youth, several studies have found that adolescent virginity pledging is effective in reducing sexual activity and STDs.

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<sup>23</sup> Stan E. Weed, Irene H. Ericksen, and Paul James Birch, "An Evaluation of the Heritage Keepers® Abstinence Education Program," November 2005, at <http://www.heritageservices.org/Stan%20Weed's%20HHS%20Conference%20article.pdf> (December 1, 2006). Program participants have 0.539 the odds of initiating sexual activity compared to students who did not participate in the program. The impact of the program on rate of sexual activity is statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level and above.

<sup>24</sup> Elaine Borawski *et al.*, "Effectiveness of Abstinence-only Intervention on Middle School Teens," *American Journal of Health Behavior*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (2005), pp. 423-434.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 429-431. The effects of the program on HIV/STD knowledge and belief in abstinence were statistically significant at the 99.9 percent confidence level and above; the program effect on abstinence until older and the intention to delay sexual activity by at a year were statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level and above. The effect on the intention to delay sexual activity in the near future (3 months) was statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level and above.

**Delayed sexual activity.** An article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* by Dr. Michael Resnick et al. shows that "abstinence pledge" programs are dramatically effective in reducing sexual activity among teenagers in grades 7 through 12.<sup>26</sup> Based on a large national sample of adolescents, the study concludes that "[a]dolescents who reported having taken a pledge to remain a virgin were at significantly lower risk of early age of sexual debut."<sup>27</sup>

In fact, the study found that participating in an abstinence program and taking a formal pledge of virginity were by far the most significant factors in a youth's delaying early sexual activity. The study compared students who had taken a formal pledge of virginity with students who had not taken a pledge but were otherwise identical in terms of race, income, school performance, degree of religiousness, and other social and demographic factors. Based on this analysis, the authors discovered that the level of sexual activity among students who had taken a formal pledge of virginity was one-fourth the level of that of their counterparts who had not taken a pledge. Overall, nearly 16 percent of girls and 10 percent of boys were found to have taken a virginity pledge.

Another evaluation of the virginity pledge movement found a similar association between pledging and delayed sexual activity. According to the authors of a 2001 study:

Adolescents who pledge, controlling for all of the usual characteristics of adolescents and their social contexts that are associated with the transition to sex, are much less likely than adolescents who do not pledge, to have intercourse. The delay effect is substantial and robust. Pledging delays intercourse for a long time.<sup>28</sup>

The study, based on a sample of more than 5,000 students, concludes that taking a virginity pledge reduces by one-third the probability that an adolescent will begin sexual activity compared with other adolescents of the same gender and age, after controlling for a host of other factors linked to sexual activity rates such as physical maturity, parental disapproval of sexual activity, school achievement, and race. When taking a virginity pledge is combined with strong parental disapproval of sexual activity, the probability of initiation of sexual activity is reduced by 75 percent or more.

**Reduction in STDs.** In addition to delaying sexual activity, virginity pledging is also associated with STD reduction. The effect of such a pledge during adolescence lasts into young adulthood. A 2005 study found that adolescents who pledged to maintain their virginity until marriage were significantly less likely to report an STD infection during their early twenties than non-pledgers

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Resnick, M.D. *et al.*, "Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health," *Journal of the American Association*, Vol. 278 (September 10, 1997). The effects of a virginity pledge in reducing sexual activity were statistically significant at the 99.9 percent confidence level.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.830.

<sup>28</sup> Peter S. Bearman and Hanna Bruckner, "Promising the Future: Virginity Pledges and First Intercourse," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (January 2001), pp. 861, 862. The effects of a virginity pledge were shown to be statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

who were of the same age, gender, race, family background and religiosity.<sup>29</sup> In general, pledgers reported about a 25 percent reduction in STDs compared to non-pledgers. Significantly, the study also found that virginity pledging was a stronger predictor of STD reduction than condom use on five different measures of STDs. That is, “the virginity pledge variable always outperformed all condom variables” in predicting STD reduction.

### **Conclusion**

Today’s young people face strong, often negative, peer pressure and must navigate a media and popular culture that endorses, even glamorizes, permissiveness and casual sex. Alarming, the government too supports such a message when it spends over a billion dollars each year promoting contraception and safe sex education. Government spends at least \$12 on these programs for every dollar it invests in abstinence education.

Though nearly 90 percent of parents want schools to teach youths to abstain from sexual activity until they are in a committed adult romantic relationship nearing marriage – the core message of abstinence education – these parental values are rarely communicated in the classroom. There, the prevailing mentality continues to be one of safe sex. Abstinence, in contrast, is mostly referred in passing, if any token references are made at all. Sadly, many students who need to learn about the benefits of abstinence during the teenage years never hear them, and many students who choose to remain abstain fail to receive adequate support from their schools and communities.

Teen sexual activity is costly, not just for teens but also for society. Teens who engage in sexual activity are at risk for host of negative outcomes including sexually transmitted diseases, emotional and psychological injuries, lower educational attainment, and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Genuine abstinence education, therefore, is crucial to the physical and psycho-emotional well-being of the nation’s youth. In addition to teaching the benefits of abstaining from sexual activity until marriage, abstinence programs focus on developing character traits that would prepare youths for a successful future.

As the above fifteen studies indicate, abstinence education works. Abstinence programs have been shown by scientific evaluations to be effective in reducing teen sexual activity and prompting positive attitude and behavior changes among youths.

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Rector and Kirk Johnson, “Adolescent Virginity Pledges, Condom Use and Sexually Transmitted Diseases among Young Adults,” paper presented at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual National Welfare Research and Evaluation Conference, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, June 14, 2005.