



My Abstinence Toolbox

Place a **2** next to the skills/beliefs that you feel you definitely have.

Place a **1** next to the skills/beliefs that you are unsure about.

Place a **0** next to the skills/beliefs that are a challenge for you or that you disagree with.

_____ I am committed to not having sex right now.

_____ I am/would be able to talk to my partner about not having sex.

_____ I believe I have the ability to identify potential sexual situations.

_____ I have a positive vision for my future.

_____ I know about the possible consequences of sexual activity (unplanned pregnancy, STDs, emotional concerns, and/or impact on my relationship or my self-esteem).

_____ I believe that negative consequences could happen to *me* if I have sex.

_____ I am assertive; I can tell people how I feel or what I need.

_____ I have self-control; I can avoid behaviors if I make the decision to do so.

_____ I have good self-esteem; I will not be swayed by attention or affection.

Scoring Key: 0-6 points - Sorry, you need to add some skills to your tool box in order for abstinence to work for you.

7-12 points - You have enough skills in your tool box to practice abstinence, but you might need to strengthen some skills in order to make abstinence work for you all the time.

13-18 points - Congratulations! You have all the skills necessary to successfully practice abstinence. Funding provided in part by: Federal Title X; Maine DHHS Community Services Block Grant; Maine DHHS General funds.

TEACHING GUIDE

for Supporting Abstinence Decisions by Teens

1. I am committed to not having sex right now.

Discussion: This is the most important component of practicing abstinence, but without other skills, it may not work for you. I am pleased that you have this commitment, but let's take a look at the other skills needed in order to be successful.

If the young person is not committed to abstinence, then it is likely that they will become sexually active in the future. In this case, be sure and provide them with information about birth control and STD prevention.

2. I am/would be able to talk to my partner about not having sex.

Discussion: It is important to talk with a boyfriend/girlfriend about sexual decisions. It is unfair to expect him/her to know what your limits are if you don't tell them because no one is ever able to read another person's mind. You also need to talk to him/her in order to find out how they feel about having sex. You should never assume you know where someone stands on this issue. If you think it is hard to talk with a partner about sex, think about how hard it will be to talk to them about a pregnancy. If you are worried that they won't want to date you if you won't have sex, then you need to think about whether or not you really want to date that person. Having sex to keep a partner is a very unhealthy reason to have sex in the first place.

Possible ways to begin the conversation include:

- We seem to be getting closer and I think it is important for you to know where I stand on having sex.
- We have never talked about sex, but we have been together for a while and I think we should now.
- I am feeling scared because I want to talk with you about sex but don't know how.
- I think it is time that we talk about sex. I don't know where you stand and I am not sure you know how I feel about it either.

If the young person is worried about this conversation, take a few minutes and role-play the situation using some of the suggestions above, or have them try and come up with words that feel more natural for them.

3. I believe I have the ability to identify potential sexual situations.

Discussion: Avoiding situations where sex could “just happen” is a very important part of staying abstinent. Situations that could lead to sex include spending too much time alone together and/or alcohol/drug use. Some options include: double-dating instead of going alone; only visiting together when other people are present (friends or family); or only spending time together in more public places like the movies, restaurants, outdoors, etc.

Remind the young person that it is best to plan ahead and to also develop a safety net. For example, the teen may have a “code word” that they use with a friend or a parent that lets them know they are in a tricky situation and need some help.

4. I have a positive vision for my future.

Discussion: This is the primary reason that teens give for postponing sex. These young people realize that their future could be affected in a bad way if they have sex. What are your plans for the future? How would an unplanned pregnancy, STD, or unhealthy relationship impact your future plans?

If the teen does not have a positive vision for their future, help them to create one for themselves. Find out what their interests are and get them connected with someone who can help them make their goals a reality.

5. I know about the possible consequences of sexual activity (unplanned pregnancy, STDs, emotional concerns, and/or impact on my relationship or my self-esteem).

Discussion: There are many negative consequences that can occur because of sex. Let's take a look at these together so that you are more aware of the risks.

- Emotional risks: Having sex before you are really ready can cause a lot of emotional issues in both boys and girls. You may begin to feel badly about yourself for making a choice that goes against what you believe is right. You may also begin to develop attitudes toward sex or guys/girls that are unhealthy based on your sexual choices. The emotional risks of sex are just as dangerous as the physical risks and are probably even more likely to happen.
- STD risks: *(use attached STD chart and provide education as needed)*

6. I believe that negative consequences couldn't happen to *me* if I have sex.

Discussion: I am going to challenge you and ask why you think these things couldn't happen to you if you had sex? What makes you any different than other young people?

If you are working with a young person who has "immortal thinking" it may also be helpful to ask them to name a young person who experienced a bad consequence from risky behavior (car accident, overdose, criminal activity, teen pregnancy, etc.). Ask them to identify things that made the young person more vulnerable to negative consequences than another person engaging in similar risky behavior...likely they will have to admit that these things could happen to anyone who engages in risky behavior.

7. I am assertive; I can tell people how I feel or what I need.

Discussion: There are many people who have assertiveness skills in some areas or situations, but not others. For example, you may feel confident in your ability to tell someone to leave your friend alone, but less comfortable telling them to leave you alone. Learning how to tell someone what you are feeling or what you need from them is a skill that can be learned.

Provide opportunities for the teen to role-play with you and together make up a couple of scenarios that might be relevant for them. Give them time to practice this skill and if possible, model assertiveness in your interactions with others when they are around, so that they can see it in action.

8. I have self-control; I can avoid behaviors if I make the decision to do so.

Discussion: It is tough to avoid things that can give you pleasure, such as eating too much ice cream simply because it is there and you can. Some people are born with more self-control than others. Are you the kind of person who could choose not to eat your favorite food, for whatever reason, and not eat it even if it is right in front of you? If so, then you have more self-control than most people and you are fortunate. A lot of people have the ability to avoid something if they choose to, as long as it isn't in their face. You may not realize it, but being intimate can feel really good to someone. Kissing and hugging may lead to sex if the person isn't prepared because it feels good and it requires self-control in order to stop.

If the young person identifies that they have limited or no self-control, reinforce the importance of identifying and avoiding potential sexual situations in order to stay abstinent.

9. I have good self-esteem; I will not be swayed by attention or affection.

Discussion: Self-esteem is a fancy word for how you feel about yourself. Many teens' self-esteem goes up and down on a regular basis, based on things that happen to them throughout the day or week. If being in this relationship makes you feel better about yourself, you might be more easily pressured into having sex, for fear of losing that relationship. Your self-esteem can be built by doing positive things for yourself, like doing homework and getting better grades, playing sports, learning an instrument or a new skill.

For teens who say they have low self-esteem, it will be important to help them learn ways of building it up. It is also important for them to understand that it is dangerous to base their self-worth on what someone else thinks of them; that self-esteem is something that comes from the inside, not from someone else.