

### Fundamentals of Abstinence & Birth Control Core Concepts

Sexual abstinence is a decision to refrain from some or all sexual activity for a variety of reasons at any time in a person’s life. Birth control, when used correctly, prevents pregnancy. People use birth control methods for a variety of reasons.

#### RATIONALE

*How do we teach, and why do we teach that way?*

- Teaching about abstinence should be combined with teaching about other methods of birth control. This keeps our lessons inclusive and sex positive.
- When teaching about birth control, it is more important to emphasize key concepts than to expect youth to memorize details about different methods.
- Learning about birth control is important for all students, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, or whether they are sexually active.
- Strong evidence suggests that comprehensive sex education helps young people to delay sex, have supportive relationships, and when they become sexually active helps them prevent STI transmission and unintended pregnancies.

#### TALKING POINTS

*What do we say?*

- Abstinence is a spectrum, and people define it in many ways.
- Abstaining from vaginal, anal and oral sex is the only 100% effective way to prevent unintended pregnancy or STI transmission.
- Birth control is very effective at preventing pregnancy.
- There are different types of birth control, including barrier methods, hormonal methods, and behavioral methods. Birth control can be used by all people for various reasons, such as protecting against unintended pregnancy, regulating a menstrual cycle, alleviating symptoms of pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), and more.
- Minors have a constitutional right to privacy that includes the right to obtain contraceptives.
- The best method of birth control is the one a person will use consistently and correctly, and that fits that person’s values, budget, and preferences.
- There are birth control methods available for trans men who are engaging in sexual activity that could result in a pregnancy.
- Many teens use birth control successfully.

#### KNOW THE FACTS

**FACT:** Abstinence is not just for teens. It is a complex and empowered decision a person can make at any point in their life.

**FACT:** Birth control is safe and effective to use. Over the counter options, prescription medications and procedures go through a rigorous review process.

**FACT:** The Emergency Contraception pill prevents pregnancy from occurring by delaying ovulation. It is not an “abortion pill” and won’t impact an already established pregnancy.

#### COMMON QUESTIONS STUDENTS HAVE ABOUT ABSTINENCE AND BIRTH CONTROL

**What is the best birth control method?**

- It’s natural that we want the best option when it comes to our health and bodies. The best form of birth control for a person is one that fits their values and preference. Any form of birth control

works well if a person uses it consistently and correctly. For help deciding what method is best for you, try Planned Parenthood's [What is the right birth control for me?](https://www.plannedparenthood.org/online-tools/what-right-birth-control-me) quiz <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/online-tools/what-right-birth-control-me>.

**Does birth control really work? My sister got pregnant using the pill.**

- Other than abstinence, no birth control method is 100% effective, which is true of any medicine. If a person is unable to use their method consistently and correctly (like forgetting to take the pill some days), it will be less effective. Even with perfect use, there is still a very small chance a pregnancy could occur. Some methods are more effective than others, and a person can increase effectiveness by doubling up on methods, like using a condom along with hormonal birth control. Birth control is not perfect, but when used consistently and correctly, it's very effective, and far more effective than using no method at all.

**What is the morning after pill?**

- There are different ways to prevent pregnancy using emergency contraception. Emergency contraception works by delaying ovulation, or if ovulation has occurred by preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg. The morning after pill is one type of emergency contraception. Emergency contraceptive pills can be used to prevent unintended pregnancy for up to 3-5 days after unprotected sex. Another method is the hormonal or copper IUD which works by preventing the sperm from fertilizing the egg. The sooner someone accesses Emergency Contraception, the better it works, and the longer someone waits the less effective it becomes. Emergency contraception is very safe and will not harm an established pregnancy. It's important to know some Emergency Contraception methods are less effective for people above a certain weight.

**To learn more, take the**

**[Spark\\*ED Teaching Abstinence and Birth Control self-paced course](#)**