

Some Final Thoughts...



“Personal Responsibility is born from the marriage of straight talk and self respect and nurtured in an environment of honest conversations.”

—Paula Parker Sawyers

Now that you have read the thoughts of some extraordinary people, I want to offer a few final ideas for readers to ponder. Specifically, how do you, dear reader, answer the question our essayists have wrestled with: “What is personal responsibility as it relates to pregnancy planning and prevention?”

For me, the answer can be found in a tool seldom used these days...straight talk; honest conversation with no apology. One example of sexual straight talk that I remember very clearly is the evolution in the conversations many parents had with their children about body parts. What started as a chat largely dominated with imaginary names for male and female reproductive organs progressed into talks that generally used anatomically correct words to describe body parts. Straight talk. The simple point here is that straight talk, honest conversations, and a strong sense of self-respect can help children move gracefully from adolescence to adulthood with fewer unexpected detours from their life’s plan, like an unplanned pregnancy.

Parents need more straight talk. Unfortunately, it is still the case that parents too often seem to fear their own children’s opinions and questions about sex and related issues. As a result, we

parents often fail to answer even the most basic question inquisitive children have: “How did I get here?” And so begins a game of cat and mouse that often sends an unknowing, inexperienced, scared, and unsure child into the world. Given our lack of candor as parents, should we be surprised that too many youth are willing to cling to anyone and anything just trying to make sense of the confused world in which they live. Should we be surprised that fully half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned?

Young adults need more straight talk as well. Too often young adults use the term personal responsibility as a license to do what they want when they want. The consequences of the decisions they make about sex are too often ignored, denied, or not even considered. For young adults, straight talk from doctors should be prescribed, from faith leaders anticipated, and from parents expected — all in an effort to help young adults better understand the transformation from being a carefree dependent to being a self-respecting, responsible adult.

Public policy should be imbued with straight talk. With respect to teen and unplanned pregnancy, personal responsibility is the foundation upon which public policy is developed to serve all citizens. The challenge is not to define personal responsibility but to demonstrate through responsible policies a belief in the individual’s ability and right of self determination along with a strong emphasis on the reality that actions have consequences.

The complicated intersection of personal responsibility, pregnancy planning, and family formation has been well explored in this volume. Of course, conversations about these issues are taking place everyday and will long be debated. That is good. Dialogue often brings forth a greater understanding of mutual problems while also

revealing the difficult solutions that may need to be addressed. We hope that communities will use these essays to discuss, debate, and find solutions to the nation's stubbornly high rates of teen and unplanned pregnancy.

Visit our website at <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/responsibility/> to learn more about teen and unplanned pregnancy, post a blog and tell us what your community is doing, and use our discussion guides to begin a little straight talk and honest conversations in your home, your place of worship, and your community.

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