

# Creating a Culture of Responsible and Safe Sex

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The obligation to help prevent unplanned pregnancy has meant different things throughout my life. As an adolescent, it was my job to inquire and listen rather than shy away from awkward puberty talks with Mom and Dad. I remember shedding tears the day my period arrived within days of my departure for a summer sleep-away camp. I was mortified but found comfort in my mother's kind words and pragmatic advice. Later that night, my parents commemorated the rite of passage with a family dinner and left the door wide open to talk about anything at any time. While I can't recall the intricate details of the sex talks that followed, I do know that whatever my parents said, they led me to believe that no matter what I made of myself, I would be okay and they'd love me along the way. Unquestionably, it was this foundation at home that enabled me to become a self-respecting and confident woman.

While these conversations with my parents nurtured my soul and sense of responsibility, I knew that many of my peers were not getting the same holistic or accurate information in their households, and narrow school health curriculums fell short too. In response, I assumed a volunteer, peer, sex-educator position with my local Planned Parenthood affiliate. As a member of Teen Talk,

I facilitated workshops for middle and high school youth to teach students how to respond to the pressure to have sex, and behave responsibly if they did engage in sexual activity.

Now at 27 and five years into a monogamous relationship, my role in creating a culture of responsible and safe sex has transitioned from working directly with youth to supporting the cause in other ways. It remains important that I remember to integrate all of the communication and decision-making principles that I taught others into my own relationship, and counsel my female and male friends alike, so that an unwanted pregnancy doesn't get in the way of our respective ambitions. I chose a partner that embraces a man's role in prevention and planning. When we first started dating, we refrained from sex until we were ready to seriously discuss the benefits and risks involved. More recently, our conversations revolve around plans for our future together — marriage, home-buying, careers — yet, we still behave in a way that allows us to be comfortable with the consequences of our choices. While neither of us is certain if our eventual union will include children, undoubtedly we agree that we are not ready for them now. Consequently, sex in our relationship is loving, consensual, and protected.

My current obligations also extend beyond the bedroom to the reproductive health community at large. As a young professional my financial means are limited, but I firmly believe that I should still contribute in some way to groups on the front lines of this work. Although it is often my time that is more abundant than money, I give what and when I can to help advocate for progressive laws, leaders, and nonprofits that promote comprehensive dialogue and responsible behavior everywhere.

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