

So you have decided to wait to have sex. Or maybe you have been sexually active but have decided that you want to stop for now. While that decision can have a lot of benefits, in our sexually saturated society it may not be an easy one to stick to.

We all know that making a decision is one thing; actually carrying it out is another. So here are some suggestions to help you in this matter of choosing to be abstinent.

***Recognize the benefits of abstinence and that you have made a wise choice.***

People often make those who choose abstinence feel as if they are missing out on a major part of life. Recognize that what you “miss” is many potentially negative things

- You miss having to worry about an unplanned pregnancy
- You miss worry about an STI or HIV (even if you were careful the condom might burst)
- You miss feelings of guilt for having gone against standards you set for yourself

And there are things you gain

- Time to focus on priorities like your studies

- Time to get to know a partner well without feeling pressured to be sexually intimate
- The ability to walk away with fewer complications from a relationship that is not working

***Be clear about why you are choosing to be abstinent at this stage of your life.***

Are you choosing to wait until marriage for religious reasons? Are you waiting until you finish studies so there is zero risk of pregnancy while you are studying? Are you being abstinent until you are in the “right” relationship? Is it because of health concerns about STIs? Being clear about your reasons for choosing abstinence enables you to hold your position when others are choosing a different path. It also helps you to define when it is the right time for you to become sexually active and so makes it much easier to say no to offers that you would probably regret taking up.

***Be clear what you mean by being***

***abstinent.*** People nowadays have very different ideas about what constitutes sex. For some sex is defined only as penis in vagina. For others any activity involving the

genitals (e.g. oral sex, mutual masturbation) is seen as a type of sexual intercourse. So you need to know which ways are OK for you to share intimacy with a partner and which are not. You need to be clear about why you believe something is OK or not, so that you can express this clearly to a potential partner.

***Doing “everything but” makes it much harder to remain abstinent.*** It can be really hard to say no to “full sex”, when you have been intimate in very sexual ways. If you truly want to be abstinent then drawing your boundaries earlier rather than later is the most helpful thing to do.

***If you are becoming romantically involved with someone, talk about what your sexual boundaries are.***

It helps to “talk before you touch”. Because people see things differently it helps to be quite clear about what your standards are when it comes to physical intimacy.

***Don’t hang out with someone in the sort of privacy which is conducive to having intercourse.***

Most people are not going to have sex where someone else is likely to see them. Choosing to talk with a door open or sit on a verandah rather than staying behind closed doors is a common sense way to avoid sexual involvement. Also avoiding privacy may keep you from being a victim or perpetrator of acquaintance rape!

***Choose carefully what you watch.***

Watching X-rated movies may be the norm nowadays, but it does not help in the resolve to be abstinent. If your mind is saturated with explicit sexual images it will be much harder to avoid getting involved in the real thing. Also remember that the pornographic movies do not depict what a real sexual relationship is like – what happens on screen is grossly exaggerated.

***Don't be shy to say that you are being abstinent.*** When others know this they are likely to tease and test at first, but are then likely to accept your stance. Making your position known has the added benefit for some people that it helps them to stick to their commitment as they want there to be consistency between their public and private lives.

***It is a huge help if your friends have the same values.*** With friends who see things the same way you do, you are not always having to defend your point of view and feeling like the odd one out. Also you have the benefit of others who will encourage you to stick with your decision or to think through carefully your reasons for changing.

***Recognize that for most people abstinence is a temporary choice.***

The time will come when you do feel that it is the right time for a sexual relationship. Realizing that the opportunity to have sex won't "run away and leave you", can help you in your choice to wait for the right person and the right time. Most importantly, having sex then will be a choice you make for the right reasons for you, rather than one you may come to regret.

# ABSTINENCE: A REAL CHOICE FOR 2K YOUTH

