



American College of Pediatricians

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Patient Information Handout

How Far is Too Far?

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Do you hope to get married one day?

Do you hope to have children?

You have heard reasons to save sex for marriage: To avoid sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, Herpes, cancer-causing HPV, gonorrhea and Chlamydia, and to avoid pregnancy. You may have heard other reasons such as to avoid broken hearts and divorce which can lead to your children growing up in poverty and failing in school and even ending up in jail.¹

If you want the best for yourself, your future husband/wife, and your children, then you will decide to wait until after marriage for sex – but what counts as sex? You don't want to go “all the way” to sexual intercourse, but, short of that, how far is too far?

What do you expect from this relationship?

- Friends for a while
- Friends forever
- Potential spouse (maybe the one I will marry)
- Intended spouse/fiancé (definitely plan to get married)
- Acquaintance for a good time with no emotional commitment
- Unsure

The Greek language has four words for love²:

- sturge*, love of the familiar like your dog or chocolate or your family that grows with time
- phileo*, the love of friends with common shared interests
- agape*, self-giving love, *even if you get nothing in return*
- eros*, sexual, sensual love

The best basis for future strong marriage is friendship love and a willingness to sacrifice for each other.

The best, happiest, longest lasting marriages include all of these kinds of love in a proper progression. If your relationship jumps to sexual stimulation without a firm foundation of friendship love, your brain and heart find it difficult to go back. This is like having to lift a house without it collapsing to insert a missing foundation.

Intimacy with another person progresses in stages³, from a *glance* to *eye contact* to *speaking to each other* and possibly a *handshake*. This is the “getting to know you” phase as conversations and common activities are enjoyed. Good friendships continue at this level of intimacy for a long time. Affection and caring may be shown by *holding hands* or by *putting a hand on the other person's shoulder*. A *hand to the waist* is the maximum level of physical contact before crossing into an area of sexual arousal. Physical contact in healthy friendships does not need to go further, despite what you may read or see on television or in the movies.

It is best to save any acts of sexual arousal for marriage. Sex is glue that is intended to bind a man and a woman together in marriage. When sexual arousal starts, the brain produces hormones that make a person want to repeat the experience and that bind a woman emotionally to a man (even if the girl/woman knows that the boy/man is bad for her).

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If the couple breaks up, the temptation is to skip over the friendship-forming steps with the next girlfriend/boyfriend and go straight to the point of sexual stimulation that was met with the previous person⁴. Can this temptation be resisted? Yes, but it is more difficult than if there had been no previous sexual stimulation. For this reason, sexually stimulating acts, such as *open mouth kissing* and *touching private parts of another's body (this includes anything in the front between the shoulders and the knees as well as the buttocks)*, should be strictly reserved for marriage.



Friendship Gestures

- Seeing the person.
- Looking them in the eye.
- Talking with them.
- Shaking or holding hands.
- A hand on the shoulder.
- A hand on the waist.
- Quick kiss on the cheek.



Sexually-stimulating Actions

- A quick closed mouth kiss.
- Napping or lying together.
- Giving each other a back massage.



Danger: Too Far!

- Open mouth/deep kissing.
- Touching other parts of the body (between the shoulders and the knees).
- Touching private areas (breasts or genitals).
- Removing clothing.
- Intercourse (in any form).

Self-Control: Respect Yourself & Others

For Girls:

1. Avoid watching television, videos, or movies with sexual content. Avoid listening to music or radio with sexually suggestive talk.
2. Don't read books, magazines, or internet sites with descriptions of sex or sexually suggestive scenes.
3. Respect yourself. Don't give "come on" or "I'm available" messages to guys. That includes not only what you say and write, but your body language and how you dress. Guys are turned on visually. Cover your breasts and buttocks and navels completely. Don't wear clothes that are too tight, or ones that are revealing when you lean over.

For Guys:

1. Look girls in their eyes, not below the shoulders. This shows your respect for them.
2. Guard your eyes. Avoid looking at television, videos, movies, magazines, or advertisements with scantily dressed (or undressed) women, and Internet sites that feature them. If you see these images turn your head away and intentionally think of something far different.
3. Guard your ears. Don't listen to music or radio with a lot of sexually-suggestive talk.
4. When you find yourself thinking about sex, try to think of something else. Exercise or take a cold shower for distraction.

For Both:

1. Visit in public places.
2. Avoid empty homes and bedrooms.
3. Avoid talk of who is "sexy" or "hot."
4. Avoid staying out too late at night.

¹ Couples who live together have an 80% risk of splitting up or divorcing & those who have sex before marriage without living together also have a higher divorce rate than those who wait for marriage. Either way, their children grow up without both parents in the home, and those children have a much higher rate of being poor, dropping out of school, and going to prison.

² CS Lewis, who wrote the *Chronicles of Narnia*, wrote about this in his book *The Four Loves*.

³ The stages of intimacy information came from The Medical Institute.

⁴ From *Hooked on Sex*, by Joe S. McIlhaney and Freda McKissic Bush, 2008, Northfield Publishing, Chicago, IL 60610