

Effective Messages for Adolescents on Avoiding Unintended Pregnancies

To influence client behavior, the messages provided need to include information that addresses each of the following components: knowledge, skills, motivation, resources and support.

- The adolescent will need to **know**:
 - what options are available to avoid pregnancy - including, but not limited to: abstinence, contraception, ways to negotiate safer sex behavior
 - how an unintended pregnancy can be potentially harmful to the adolescent and her unborn baby
 - how an unintended pregnancy can result in psychological and financial burden to the adolescent and his/her family
 - what community support is available to her, her partner and the family if she becomes pregnant
 - where to obtain condoms and other forms of contraception

- **Skills** that include practice and/or role-play:
 - saying “no”
 - negotiating condom use
 - putting on and taking off a condom correctly

- **Motivation** messages that include consequences and advantages:
 - to not want to become pregnant
 - to use a condom every time for every sex act

- **Resources**:
 - sufficient supply of condoms
 - patient education materials discussing sex, sexual behavior, STIs

- **Support**:
 - peer support groups
 - support from counsellors and/or providers
 - family support if the adolescent is comfortable sharing their questions, behaviors

Tips for Providing Effective Messages to Adolescents on Avoiding Unintended Pregnancies

- Repeat messages and keep the adolescent engaged if there continues to be doubt or questions that lead you to believe that the client may be at risk for an unintended pregnancy.
- Use a harm reduction model if an adolescent refuses or is hesitant to protect themselves from an unintended pregnancy e.g. limited partners, alternate/variety of ways to show affection such as cuddling, kissing.
- Remember basic communication skills such as, active listening and redirecting. Most importantly, understand the adolescent's perspective regarding sex and sexual activity.
- Use a variety of ways to frame the message you want to convey to the adolescent. For example, a negative or consequence framing message might be "If you continue to be sexually active without using any form of contraception, you will become pregnant." You can also use another way to deliver the message by framing it in a more positive way such as "Since you have decided to use injectable contraception, you will be effectively preventing an unplanned pregnancy."
- You can use a variety of messages based on the adolescent, the relationship you have with that person and the specific situation. You must also have knowledge, skills, motivation, resources, and support to effectively deliver messages to adolescents.

Examples of Messages

"Learning and practicing different ways to show affection to your partner that does not involve sexual intercourse will help you maintain abstinence if that is what you and your partner decide to do and avoid unplanned pregnancy. "

"Talking to your boyfriend/partner/husband about planning for children and being open-minded about his reaction will allow both of you to share your feelings and come to a mutually agreeable decision about the best time to start a family."

"Talking to an adult or older sibling about the feelings you have for your boyfriend and desire to have sex before becoming sexually active is an excellent plan that will help you make the best and safest decision for you and your partner."

"Becoming pregnant as an adolescent can put you and your baby at risk for complications such as going into early labour and delivery before the baby is fully developed."

"Feeling pressured into having unprotected sex resulting in an unplanned pregnancy can lead to depression and anxiety for you and your partner."

"Becoming pregnant can get in the way of your education and your future plans."