

Countering the Silence:

A FAITH LEADER'S TOOLKIT FOR PREVENTING TEEN PREGNANCY



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AN OPEN LETTER TO FAITH LEADERS ON TEEN PREGNANCY

Dear Partners:

On a daily basis, leaders in our faith community come face to face with the challenge of trying to guide and protect our youth as they deal with sex and related issues. Our young people must learn to navigate peer pressure and other societal influences that too often lead to early sexual activity and result in too-early pregnancy and parenthood. Specifically within the Hispanic community, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy has found that 44% of Latinas get pregnant at least once before turning 20—a rate nearly twice the national average.ⁱ

As the leaders and shepherds of the Church, we are in a powerful position to intervene in the lives of young people and change the course of their paths. Although the conversation may be a sensitive and difficult one, we have a responsibility to educate, mentor, and guide our children so they develop healthy relationships, preserve their sexual purity, and prevent both unplanned pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

For us to stand by and do nothing would be unacceptable. Our silence can affect our youth's spiritual development, would compromise their educational and economic futures, and would challenge families as young people try to raise children that they are not prepared for. We must provide our youth the support they need as they go through these challenging stages of development.

Findings from The National Campaign indicate that 87% of teens are more likely to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they are able to have an open conversation about these topics with their parents,ⁱⁱ and 75% said they wanted church leaders to become more active in preventing teen pregnancy.ⁱⁱⁱ Parents and youth want the church to speak up, and they are ready to hear from us!

To support clergy in this effort, we have collaborated with The National Campaign to develop this educational toolkit geared toward leaders in the faith community. We want it to serve as a resource to educate clergy, to deepen their understanding of the issue, and to help facilitate open conversations about sexuality and teen pregnancy. We hope to provide Hispanic families with important teen pregnancy prevention information that will help increase the odds that their children will build and sustain healthy relationships, complete their education, and find success in the work place.

I'm excited to be able to present this resource to you. I hope it will encourage you to address the issue of teen sexuality and pregnancy in your churches and ministries, and that you will feel like you have the tools you need for powerful and productive discussions with both parents and youth. Together, let's activate our influence as faith leaders to make a difference in children's lives!

Many blessings,

The Reverend Luis Cortés, Jr.
President, Esperanza

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Funding for *Countering the Silence: A Faith Leader's Toolkit for Preventing Teen Pregnancy* was provided by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. The National Campaign has long sought to catalyze a national discussion on the role of personal responsibility in reducing teen and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults and to reach out to faith communities as partners in this work. They recognize the key role that faith and values play in teens' and adults' decisions about sex, love, and relationships.

The mission of The National Campaign is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families. Their specific strategy is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. They support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors.

If successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, and a stronger nation.

The following individuals at The National Campaign contributed insightful comments that strengthened this toolkit. These include Paula Parker-Sawyers, Ann Marie Benitez, Carlos Pinto, Bill Albert, and Chief Executive Officer Sarah Brown.

Esperanza's Mission

Esperanza is a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation dedicated to the establishment of Hispanic owned and operated institutions that lead to the familial, economic, and spiritual development of our communities.

National Programs serves underserved communities by strengthening local organizations and individuals engaged in community service. National Programs achieves this through organizational capacity building, resource development and distribution, and by driving these resources and knowledge base to partner organizations that have similar mission and commitment to the underserved.

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Introduction

What is a Toolkit?

A toolkit is a collection of related information, resources, and tools that guide users to develop a plan or organize efforts to accomplish a task. We hope this toolkit helps guide our Latino faith leaders in initiating a comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention effort in their churches and communities.

The difference between a toolkit and a traditional curriculum is the flexibility a toolkit provides. A toolkit allows users to select and customize the activities they like, in any order they wish, whereas a curriculum requires users to follow a specific order, page-by-page, from beginning to end. We have provided various tools, which can be used with the utmost flexibility. God has already provided us with different spheres of influences in which we can use distinct parts of the toolkit. Some churches may use the video to begin a discussion among staff; others might decide to use some of the sermon highlights and recommend the family Bible study to everyone in the church. It's also possible for churches to use the youth Bible studies as a series of studies during a season of Sunday school classes. Each tool can stand alone (or be grouped together) to serve a unique purpose and we encourage you to be as creative as possible when addressing teen pregnancy and related issues, remembering that approaching the issue comprehensively, from multiple directions will provide the best results.

What Tools are Included?

Esperanza has committed to offer faith leaders support by providing Christian resources to address teen pregnancy in our Latino communities.

This toolkit is designed to be used with all Christian congregations, whether or not teen pregnancy-related issues have ever been addressed. The design of the toolkit allows you to choose the resources that are best suited to your church's needs. You may decide to implement all of the tools provided, or just one or two.

Descriptions of all the tools included, their purpose and topic, and questions that are addressed within each tool can be found on the following page.

AT-A-GLANCE: THE FAITH LEADER'S TOOLKIT

FAITH LEADER TOOL	PURPOSE	TOPICS/QUESTIONS ADDRESSED
<p>Taking Action: Why Should Faith Leaders Become Involved in Teen Pregnancy Prevention? What Roles do Senior Pastors, Youth Leaders, and the Christian Faith Community Play?</p>	<p>To help faith leaders evaluate the quality and degree of one's engagement with subject matter related to teen pregnancy prevention.</p> <p>To identify and distinguish what role senior pastors, youth leaders, and the Christian faith community can play in preventing teen pregnancy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is your church community willing to address teen pregnancy and related topics? • Does your church community understand how teen pregnancy impacts the community at large? • What is the role of senior pastor? • What is the role of a youth leader? • What is the role of the Christian faith community?
<p>Video: Latino Teens Express Their Desire for the Church to Play a Role in Preventing Teen Pregnancy</p>	<p>To introduce the importance of addressing teen pregnancy prevention to senior pastors and youth leaders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why it is important to address teen pregnancy? • Teens want to hear from faith leaders.
<p>Engaging Your Faith Community</p>	<p>To help churches develop comprehensive, faith-based platforms from which faith leaders can begin engaging their community in teen pregnancy prevention-related topics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can teen pregnancy and related topics be addressed from a faith-based perspective?
<p>Attitudes and Actions Assessment</p>	<p>To come to a fuller understanding of the degree of involvement of the church regarding teen pregnancy prevention issues as well as the degree of comfort with the topic over all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a series of questions and numerically valued answers, a congregation can self-identify within one of four stages: Support, Connect, Inform, or Silence.
<p>Recommended Sermon Topics for Pastors/ Youth Leaders</p>	<p>To speak clearly about God's original design helps our Latino teens to understand, internalize, and apply spiritual values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex is a good gift originated from God. • What do we say beyond "no"? • Why is sex a taboo topic in the Church? • When is the right time to engage in sexual activity?

FAITH LEADER TOOL	PURPOSE	TOPICS/QUESTIONS ADDRESSED
Church Bible Study	To introduce God as the first One to speak about sex and procreation. This can be a study that is generated in mixed company, adults and teens, so that the message is applied evenly to all and a standard of sex is well outlined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the origins and purposes God has for sexuality. • Celebrate Latino values that affirm the biblical values of family, motherhood, and procreation.
Family Bible Study	To incite conversations between Latino parents and teens around the life of David—with its plans, visions, successes, and failures—and how it compares to their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone can make good and bad decisions. • Encourage families to engage together. • Look at David’s life and discuss decision making skills. • Applying their religious values.
Youth Bible Studies	To assist teens in clarifying their values amidst diverse cultures and influences. These materials contain 12 Bible studies and discussion resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an approach for healthy and responsible decision-making. • Establishing goals and career planning. • Identifying purpose. • Nurturing dreams, interests, and talents. • Funneling and controlling passions. • Determining when is the suitable time for a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship. • Understanding and learning from one’s history. • Caring for the body, mind, and spirit. • Learning to engage in honest dialogue and conversation. • Identifying positive role models. • Identifying the choices that may lead to and consequences of sexual activity. • Understanding safe sex and the risks of sexually transmitted infections. • Understanding God’s plan for sex.



Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

-Proverbs 22:6

Taking Action

Why Should Faith Leaders Become Involved in Teen Pregnancy Prevention?

The intrinsic goal of every pastor is to serve as a life transforming agent in the lives of their church members and community. Regardless of our faith specifics, we share in the desire to move people towards renewal via the power of the message of the Gospel and believe that such a message informs every dimension of existence. There is nothing more inspirational than to hear the testimonies of our congregations as we learn of how their perceptions, ideas, and values have been dramatically changed and reconciled with scripture.

The deep transformation of faith is not limited to the life changing event of a life gone bad, but it is also very evident in the shaping of character and building of values through discipleship in our churches. Naturally this assumes the development of our children. The proverb, “Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6) is foundational to how Latino faith leaders look at their roles as educators within our community. We are the catalyst to helping our congregations understand and practice what they believe.

If we believe that we play a crucial role in the spiritual development of our children in becoming conscientious believers and that through our truthful language we initiate transformation in the lives of

our people, then we should be concerned when our words and actions fail to help our children integrate their faith into the daily realities of their lives. Yet, this is exactly what we have done in the Church when we fail to help our congregations understand and engage in a healthy dialogue about teen sex and its possible consequences. The Church can provide educational resources, mitigate issues of shame and embarrassment, and prepare parents to be informed, confident, and caring. It is critical to accept that by keeping silent and remaining passive about the issues of teen dating, relationships, and sex, we are inadvertently sending our children into the future unprepared to face the personal challenges that await them. Current data beg us to boldly accept teen pregnancy’s pervasiveness and its impact on our Hispanic communities.

Consider the following:

- 44% of Latinas get pregnant at least once before turning 20—a rate nearly twice the national average.^{iv}
- Latinas have the highest teen birth rates of any group in the United States.^v
- Motherhood is one of the top reasons Latinas drop out of high school^{vi} and more than half (54%) of young Latina teen mothers (those who have a child before they turn 18) never get their high school diploma or GED.^{vii}
- Roughly one in four teen moms go on welfare within the first three years of having a baby.^{viii}

- Babies born to teens are more likely to be premature,^{ix} have health problems,^x suffer abuse,^{xi} and grow up poor.^{xii}
- Children of teen mothers are more likely to become teen parents themselves.^{xiii}
- 83% of Latino adults believe that more efforts to prevent teen pregnancy are needed in their community.^{xiv}

Teen pregnancy is 100% preventable. Fully 87% of teens said that it would be much easier to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open and honest conversations with their parents, according to a survey from The National Campaign.^{xv} Parents in turn can be more open and supportive if they are supported by the Church and encouraged to have these conversations with their children. Three in four teens want religious leaders and groups to do more to help prevent teen pregnancy^{xvi} and 49% of Latino teens say that parents *most* influence their decisions about sex.^{xvii}

The prophet Hosea expresses our condition, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). We know that God calls us to seek His strength and wisdom in order to comfort in anything that we face, for God is our Wonderful Counselor and Good Shepherd who can guide our communities beyond the valley of shadows and onto the still waters where we will find peace and prosper. It is indisputably possible to prevent teen pregnancy, and the Church can help our communities be emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually prepared to face these issues in their lives when we gain the ability to speak to the issue and empower our communities of faith to walk in the way they should go.

Defining the Church’s Values in the Midst of Clashing Cultures

Only a few Latino teens fit the stereotypical portrayal of Hispanic youth as apathetic to education and taking pride in having children as a teen. Studies show that the majority of Latino teens set college education and successful careers as their future

goal over having a family.^{xviii} They *know* that teen parenthood poses a challenge to a prosperous future.^{xix}

What is contributing to the conflict between Latino teens’ goals and their behavior? Navigating several cultures can play a major role in influencing the disconnect between behavior and values and attitudes about sex and childbearing. Latino teens have the complex task of navigating Latin and North American cultures and the current youth environment while also learning to follow their faith values. For example, the value *familismo*, which is defined as a central sense of duty to family, is traditionally an important and vital part of Hispanic culture.^{xx} However, *familismo* values can also influence the uneasiness some parents experience when considering whether it is appropriate to discuss relationships, love, sex, and teen pregnancy with their children.

For many parents who never experienced *la charla* (the talk) with their own caregivers and parents, initiating a conversation about relationships and sex can be intimidating and/or embarrassing. Additionally, contradicting expectations about gender and sexuality can lead to a double standard that creates unresolved tensions for Latino adolescents.

For young men, the traditional cultural value of *machismo* (pure maleness) may reinforce expectations that males must “take charge” and assert their manhood by acting out sexually. Conversely, female adolescents may find themselves grappling with pressures related to being a *señorita* (young lady), meaning the expectation that unmarried young women will behave accordingly by embodying dutiful submissiveness and virginal purity.^{xxi}

Sometimes, attempts to abide by these traditionally and culturally defined gender roles can provoke young Latinos to make decisions about sex and relationships without consulting and seeking support from their family and church community. This may lead teens to engage in risky sexual behavior.

Therefore, when the Church and parents fail to communicate with teens about sex and pregnancy

prevention-related topics, we create a spiritual and cultural void. This chasm allows other influences such as movies, soap operas, talk and reality shows, music videos, and sexually explicit songs to guide our teens' sexual conduct. These outside and often uncensored sources bombard our youth with conflicting messages about sex. In some cases, sex is portrayed as the culminating act of adoration and intimacy, yet in others, it's portrayed as casual and frivolous. Regardless of how popular culture portrays sex, the fact is that it often neglects to address the consequences: emotional conflict, unplanned pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

Teens *want* to hear from us,^{xxii} so now is the time for religious leaders and parents to break the silence and begin talking about issues related to pregnancy prevention with them. By confronting these issues, religious leaders and parents can help teens create order in an often chaotic, clashing, and confusing landscape of competing cultural values, and, more importantly, assist them in interpreting and deciding which values they adopt. Simply put, the more churches clearly address and reinforce issues related to teen pregnancy prevention, the more confident teens will be about their choices. Despite many of our teens being exposed to the right values, Latino faith leaders can help guide them and delineate the impact the values they ultimately adopt will have on their identity, character, and personal integrity.

Let's look at a hypothetical scenario:

Laura, 15, has just finished viewing an episode of a popular program where having sex seems to be the primary theme of the show. She then begins to watch a Spanish-language movie on Telemundo where the female main character, without much thought or hesitation, gives herself up to the man she loves. Although Laura is a third generation Latina that does not speak Spanish well, she strongly identifies with the young protagonist who hails from her mother's Latin American country of origin. As she's watching the movie, Laura begins to think: perhaps love overrides the value of delaying sexual activity until marriage. Towards the end of the movie the

protagonist reveals she is pregnant and that despite not being able to maintain a relationship with her lover, she decides to have the baby so that she will have permanent ties to him. Unbeknownst to Laura, she's just received mixed messages concerning marriage and the belief that love will overcome all obstacles, even the challenges of being a single parent.

Meanwhile, Laura's 17-year-old boyfriend José is looking at provocative pictures of Laura on his cell phone. José's parents see him from a distance. His father says to himself, "It's about time" and his mother thinks that Laura's parents should be monitoring her more closely. But, since José's parents follow the Latino tradition that boys and girls should receive different messages concerning sex, they believe that, should Laura get pregnant, she would be the one responsible for raising the baby.

Laura's intentions for sending José the provocative photos, however, have nothing to do with her wanting sex. She just wants to look like a fashion model and as attractive as Shakira in her latest music video. Yet, Laura regularly receives text messages on her cell phone from her non-Latina friends sharing details about their sexually intimate moments with their boyfriends.

Laura is surprised to learn that her friends' parents provided them with birth control. Although she values the beliefs of her own Latino parents, she begins to wonder if they are too strict and if their views on sex still apply to her as a third generation Hispanic. When she tries to approach her parents for guidance, all she gets from them are reprimands and restrictions.

Laura also attends a weekly youth group at her church, but they never talk about sex. As a result, the influence of the Church and her family, as it concerns sex, begins to grow very faint in light of increasing emotional and social pressures.

Laura and José both have Christian values concerning sex and marriage, but their spiritual

leaders and parents are not instructing them on “how” and “when” to apply them. So, on their own, they decide to create their own set of practices concerning sex driven in part by a variety of clashing cultural influences.

Laura and José decide to have sex, but they do not use contraception since they still cling to some of their parents’ Latino religious and cultural values. Unfortunately, their fear of violating their parents’ wishes and religious beliefs may lead them towards a path of early parenthood.

It is important for faith leaders to realize that the further away teens are from their Christian values and understanding of sexuality, the more difficult and confusing it is for them to understand and apply them. Our youth may possess many of the appropriate values, but they need faith leaders to help them put the pieces together in the right order.

Why It Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Responsible Fatherhood

Churches can help their communities reduce teen pregnancies by promoting responsible fatherhood.

Research shows that involved and committed fathers are important to the well-being of their children. Unfortunately, children born to teen parents are often denied a close connection with their father because the relationship between their parents frequently dissolves over time.

Below are some statistics worth highlighting:

- Eight of 10 teen fathers *do not* marry the mothers of their first children.^{xxiii}
- Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poorer than children with both parents at home.^{xxiv}
- Absent fathers pay less than \$800 annually for child support, often because they are quite poor themselves.^{xxv}

- Boys and girls without involved fathers are twice as likely to drop out of school,^{xxvi} twice as likely to abuse alcohol or drugs, twice as likely to end up in jail, and two to three times more likely to need help for emotional behavioral problems.^{xxvii}
- Teen girls who don’t have a father in their lives are two times more likely to initiate sexual activity early and are seven times more likely to get pregnant compared to girls with fathers who are present.^{xxviii}
- Also, teen girls who have a higher quality relationship with their fathers are less likely to initiate sexual activity compared to those who report a lower quality relationship with their fathers.^{xxix}
- Teen boys who live with both parents initiate sex at an older age compared to teen boys in other family situations.^{xxx}
- Over two decades of research confirms that parents—both fathers and mothers—are an important influence on whether or not their teenagers become pregnant or cause a pregnancy.^{xxxi}

There is growing attention to the responsibilities of boys and young men in preventing teen pregnancy. At last count, 40 states had programs in place to prevent unplanned or too-early fatherhood. This emphasis on primary prevention for boys and young men is a welcome trend. Still, too many young men are not waiting until they are ready—emotionally and financially—to become fathers.

The good news is that sexual activity among teenage boys is declining; in fact, less than half of all teen boys report that they have ever had sex.^{xxxii} More teen boys are also using condoms when they have sex, and almost one in four sexually active teen boys report that they used dual methods the last time they had sex (they used a condom and their partner used a hormonal method).^{xxxiii}

When it comes to marriage, divorce, and non-marital childbearing, teen boys tend to have slightly more traditional attitudes compared to teen girls—only about half of teen boys approve of non-marital

childbearing compared to almost two-thirds of girls,^{xxxiv} close to three-quarters of teen boys think that getting married is better than staying single compared to about half of teen girls; about four in 10 teen boys approve of divorce as a solution to marriage problems while close to half of girls agree.^{xxxv}

Clearly, there is more that Church leaders can do to ensure teen boys and young men receive and understand messages promoting the decision to postpone becoming fathers until they are ready to have a lasting—ideally married—relationship with the mother of their children and are able meet the financial and emotional responsibilities of being a father to their children. This can be accomplished by having churches explore ways to support existing efforts being made by teen pregnancy prevention organizations and by having advocates reach out to boys and young men participating in “male involvement programs.” Furthermore, we must also recognize and stress the important role that fathers can play in helping their own sons and daughters avoid becoming teen parents.

A Great Window of Opportunity

Our teens deserve Christian leaders to help keep their religious and cultural identities intact as they navigate adolescence.

The absence of a Hispanic spiritual leader’s voice can significantly affect the decisions Latino teens make about sex. *Why?* Latino culture places an emphasis on the group over the individual. Many Latinos learn best through personal contacts in their community. Many times, the Hispanic Church or ministry is the first place a Latino goes to inquire about resources or information.^{xxxvi}

This presents the Church with a unique opportunity. Three in four teens said they wanted faith leaders and religious groups to become more active in preventing teen pregnancy, according to a National Campaign survey.^{xxxvii} This means that our teens acknowledge that teen pregnancy can be addressed with a spiritual

solution and are inviting faith leaders to get involved. In a time when Christians have great concern over the decline of religious and family values, our Hispanic youth have taken an appropriate biblical response: “If any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him” (James 1:5) and are seeking value-centered guidance.

Why Should Senior Pastors Become Involved in Teen Pregnancy Prevention?

Senior pastors may be tempted to pass the responsibility for preventing teen pregnancy on to youth leader(s) in the church. However, when the senior pastor addresses teen sex and pregnancy, it sends a message to the congregation that says: *This is important.* Moreover, 83% of Latino adults believe that more efforts to prevent teen pregnancy are needed in their community.^{xxxviii} And Latinas have the highest teen birth rates of any group in the United States.^{xxxix}

Encouraging discussion of teen pregnancy in Hispanic churches requires consistent leadership from the senior pastor. This is not a weekend warrior topic; it takes time to explain, unfold, and process. Latino teens should get the message that the entire Church cares and is willing to disciple them as they make decisions related to sex, love, and relationships.

The Senior Pastor’s Role in Preventing Teen Pregnancy

In addition to a more open attitude and dialogue regarding teen sexual behavior and pregnancy prevention, other actions a senior pastor could employ are:

- **Set a positive tone.** “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word” (Isaiah 50:4). Latino teens need pastors to encourage them to walk along the right path and reinforce the belief

that they can succeed. Keep reminding them that teen pregnancy is 100% preventable.

- **Model the acceptance of talking about sex and spirituality from the pulpit.** Reluctance to talk about sex in the Church sets the tone for how sex is approached in the home; this can create a roadblock in talking about teen pregnancy prevention. Eighty-seven percent of teens say it would be much easier to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open and honest conversations with their parents.^{xl} The senior pastor can break the ice and encourage parents and teens to engage in conversations on spiritual values, dating, relationships, and sex.
- **Create and promote the overall vision for teen pregnancy prevention in the church.** The senior pastor sets the biblical standard for the entire congregation to follow. This ensures that each teacher or helper in the congregation presents a consistent set of values to the teens in the church. While they cannot attend every meeting, senior pastors should stop in for the first youth Bible study on delaying sexual activity until marriage and preventing teen pregnancy. The senior pastor can lead the opening prayer and congratulate the young people for addressing the issue. This is an opportunity for senior pastors to let youth know that they are available to talk with them or their families. Senior pastors do not have to remain for the entire meeting, but their presence will communicate that the entire church values their efforts.
- **Create an opportunity to engage the entire congregation.** Teens need to see the congregation working as a team and there are several ways to accomplish this goal. The senior pastor can contact the intercessory team to pray for this issue. Men's and women's groups can have a training night to help fathers and mothers talk to their teens about God's design for sex. The youth pastor can work directly with teens using the teen pregnancy prevention Bible studies in this toolkit. Men's and women's groups can have meetings to learn how to help teens enhance and develop their self-esteem.

- **Offer confidential counseling opportunities for youth and their families.** Counseling sessions should not be used as sermon illustrations; teens will inform their peers if their stories are exposed. When approaching an intercessory team for help, do not give personal names or details of any teen.
- **Prepare church leaders to responsibly and respectfully create an environment of trust.** Sex is a very sensitive topic and it is the senior pastor's responsibility to ensure that the youth pastor and other volunteers involved in the ministry approach this with reverence, self-discipline, and total transparency. For many Hispanic families it will seem very threatening to have their daughters speak to men outside of the family about sex and related issues. This reality has to be addressed and the senior pastor should set a tone that ensures mature, faithful leadership is handling these issues with great care.

Why Should Youth Leaders Become Involved in Teen Pregnancy Prevention?

Youth leaders, more than anyone else in the congregation, have an opportunity to directly influence teens. The senior pastor's role consists of laying out the vision of God's design for sex. The role of the youth leader is to: 1) reinforce spiritual values and assist youth in making these values meaningful in their everyday lives; 2) make themselves available to youth about this specific topic; and 3) develop creative ways to address topics having to do with delaying teen sex, pregnancy, and parenthood.

The Youth Leader's Role in Preventing Teen Pregnancy

Specific steps youth leaders could take to address the issue of teen pregnancy prevention include but are not limited to the following:

- Provide opportunities and a comfortable environment for teens to confidentially ask

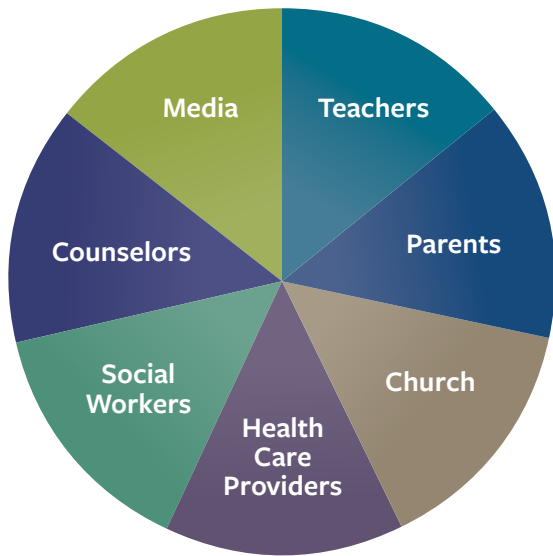
questions, learn, and talk about sexuality. Familiarize yourself with data on Latina teen pregnancy rates and related information and remain aware of current conditions affecting your community. Some things to consider:

- » 44% of Latinas get pregnant at least once before turning 20—a rate nearly twice the national average.^{xii}
- » Latinas have the highest teen birth rates of any group in the United States.^{xiii}
- » Motherhood is one of the top reasons Latina teens drop out of high school^{xiii} and more than half (54%) of young Latina teen mothers (those who have a child before they turn 18) never get their high school diploma or GED.^{xiv}
- » Roughly one in four teen moms go on welfare within the first three years of having a baby.^{xiv}
- » Babies born to teens are more likely to be premature,^{xvi} have health problems,^{xvii} suffer abuse,^{xviii} and grow up poor.^{xix}
- » Children of teen mothers are more likely to become teen parents themselves.¹
- Identify culturally-appropriate, age-appropriate, and accurate information about healthy sexuality, the Church's stance on teen contraceptive use, and community resources that may provide additional reproductive health information.
- Offer young people support and guidance to explore and develop their own values and attitudes on issues related to sex and help them develop the skills they need to make good decisions about sex, including setting limits and resisting social, media, peer, and partner pressure.
- Encourage young people to involve their parents and other family members in their decisions about relationships and sexuality.
- Encourage parents/guardians and other adults to participate in faith-based sexuality education workshops.
- Stay familiar with emerging issues, technology trends, and the present-day challenges adolescents often face, including the responsible use of cell phones, social networking sites, and the Internet.

The Faith Community's Role in Preventing Teen Pregnancy

Congregations that foster healthy decisions about sex, pregnancy, and values will actively:

- Provide a safe environment where sexuality, intimacy, and relationships can be discussed openly and honestly with trained youth leaders. Training should include adolescent development and be based on the theological perspective of the Church. These sessions may also include a list of all the neighboring community's reproductive health resources.
- Implement policies to protect young people from abuse, harassment, exploitation, and violence, both within the congregation and in the community.
- Acknowledge the diversity of experiences among the adolescents in their congregations: those who are heterosexual and those who are questioning their sexual identity, those who are abstinent and those who have had sexual relationships, and those who have experienced physical and sexual abuse.
- Model healthy and positive attitudes towards relationships and human sexuality.
- Take responsibility for the spiritual and sexual development of every young male and female in their congregation.
- Contribute to the character development of its youth and assist with the nurturing of a strong sense of self-esteem, religious awareness, and core values.
- Encourage parents and their children to engage in healthy and open dialogues on sex and issues related to teen pregnancy prevention. The Church stands ready to support parents with resources, education, and intervention efforts to aid in facilitating the conversations.



- Recognize that the most effective interventions are comprehensive efforts.
- Congregations should develop and provide young people and parents with referrals or a list of secular and faith-based local, state, and national resources specializing in preventing teen pregnancy and the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

The following questions can guide you in creating a resource list that can be provided in your congregation:

- Who in your community provides counseling for people with state-issued/low-income health insurance?
- What high schools have a school group that deals with this issue?
- What community (recreation) centers in your area have youth activities? (Call your local Parks and Recreation Department)
- Assign a volunteer to compile information regarding specific resources available in your community and then create a resource form similar to the following template:

Community Resource Form

List of Groups and Agencies that Can Offer Additional Support and Information

Name	Address	Phone Number
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		

Counseling Support Services (Individual, Teen, and/or Family)

Name	Phone Number	Hours of Operation
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		
<hr/>		

Resources Available on the Internet

www.TheNationalCampaign.org | www.LoveIsRespect.org



Video: Latino Teens Express Their Desire for the Church to Play a Role in Preventing Teen Pregnancy

The video included in this toolkit is provided as a “conversation starter” for senior pastors, youth leaders, young people, and their parents. The video provides a foundation for initial conversations about pregnancy prevention and a way to gauge both the knowledge and attitudes within the congregation about this subject. The following information can be used to introduce the video and to discuss its content afterwards.

Purpose:

This video is a helpful way to introduce teen pregnancy and related topics within a church environment. It is aimed at senior pastors, youth leaders, and other faith leaders in the community (i.e. vestry).

Goal:

To engage the faith community and encourage church leaders to address teen pregnancy and related issues in their community and to provoke a conversation among church leaders if these topics are not being addressed.

Activity:

Plan a viewing of the video followed by a discussion. Afterwards, complete the Attitudes and Actions Assessment survey (page 22) and identify how your church is currently addressing teen pregnancy-related issues.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important to talk about teen sex and pregnancy prevention in the Church?
- Are there opportunities to address teen sex and pregnancy prevention?
- What are our young people asking of us as a church community?
- How do we move towards a trusting and open conversation with our youth and their parents?

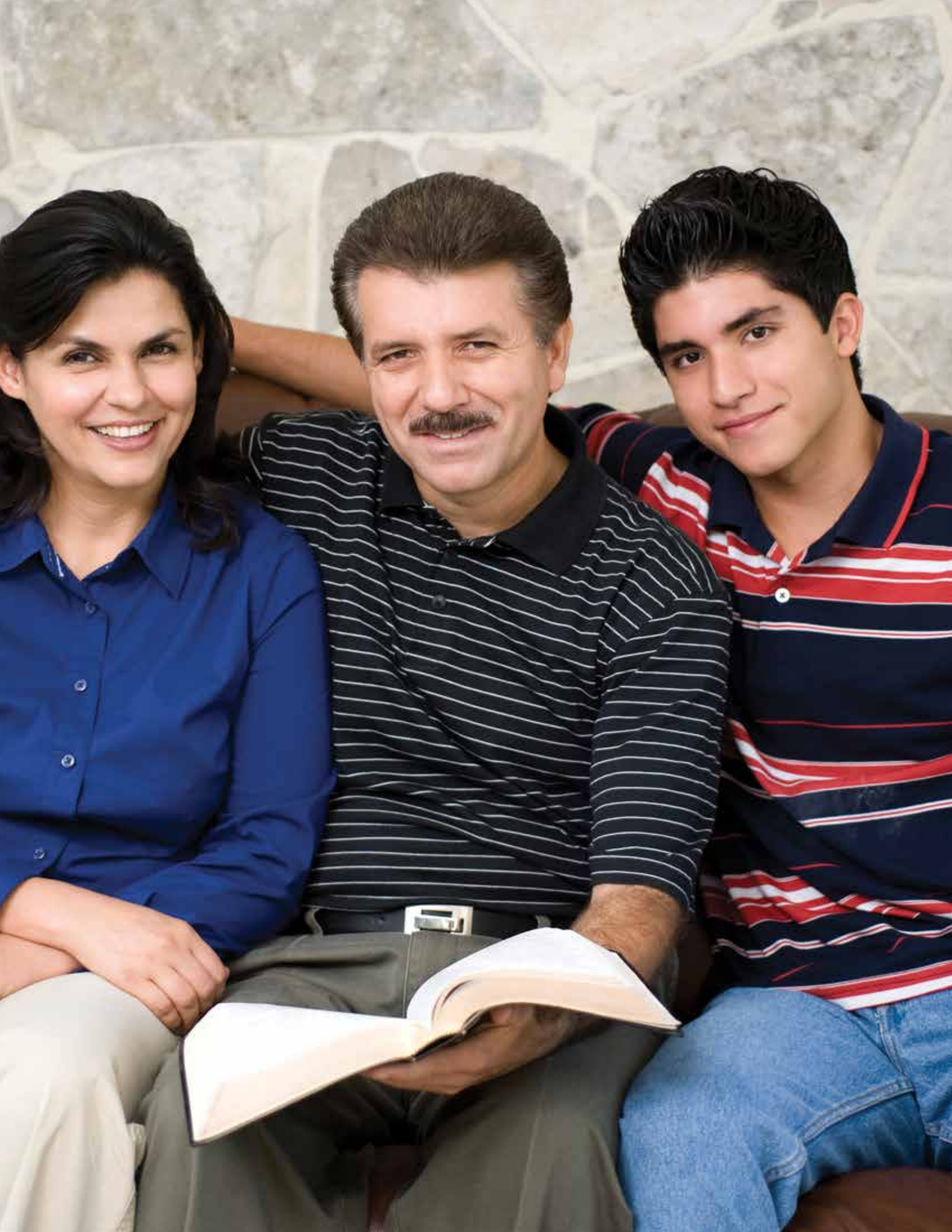


Engaging Your Faith Community

Will simply dedicating an entire sermon to teen pregnancy prevention or taking a few minutes to address teen pregnancy-related issues during a sermon suffice? Although this type of approach may result in raising awareness of these important issues on a very basic level, it falls well short of being the comprehensive engagement strategy needed to initiate transformative change within your congregation.

Below are several suggestions on how teen pregnancy and related topics can be addressed from a faith-based perspective without taking over your programming entirely. By being proactive and incorporating some of the suggestions below, churches can develop a comprehensive, faith-based platform from which faith leaders can begin engaging their community in teen pregnancy prevention-related topics:

- Address sex from the pulpit. Discuss its role, value, and the negative impact it can have—particularly on teens—if practiced outside of marriage.
- Conduct workshops that provide parents with tips and recommendations on how to best begin discussing sex and related issues with preteens and teens. Encourage parent-child dialogue by demonstrating open conversation techniques. The Church's role is to support and equip parents with information, but it is the parents' responsibility to be engaged in the development of their teen's life.
- Encourage teens to explore and examine their life goals and aspirations outside of romantic involvement.
- Affirm abstinence and address the stresses caused by outside influences such as peer pressure, youth culture, and popular media.
- Encourage youth groups to confront issues of self-esteem and assist them in improving their decision-making, learning, and coping skills.
- Coordinate and host youth activities that support positive messages (e.g., abstinence parties, youth social/fellowship activities, and educational forums). Educate young people about how to spread the messages they've learned.
- Create opportunities for involvement for the young people in your church. This will help them develop identities, strengthen their connection to the faith community, and foster ownership of core principles and values.
- Intentionally reach out to sexually active teens and engage them without condemnation, but in the spirit of grace and discipline. Adapt your messages to your audience. Today's youth are multicultural and, as such, a message specifically targeted to gender and/or cultural background may be more readily received.
- Disassociate sex from being an expression of early romance and connect it to long-term commitments in marriage, family planning, and romantic expression.
- Partner with other churches, faith-based organizations, and community agencies that are sympathetic to your church's values and goals.



Attitudes and Actions Assessment

Addressing teen pregnancy prevention effectively is a crucial and comprehensive undertaking. To get started, faith leaders must first evaluate and assess their own congregation's degree of church engagement and determine the level of comfort and familiarity members of the congregation have with preventing teen pregnancy and related topics such as relationships, sex at an early age, and contraception.

One way to determine the level of knowledge and comfort the congregation or a committee of the congregation has with all of the issues associated with teen pregnancy prevention is to request that the group take some time to complete the following short reflective survey.

There are eight statements that will help the congregation or committee assess the readiness of the church to address the issues associated with teen pregnancy prevention. Please take a moment to circle the answer that most closely describes your church's sentiments.

SURVEY

OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY...	NO / NEVER	RARELY	SOME-TIMES	OFTEN	YES / ALWAYS
Has publically stated that it has a biblical responsibility to address teen pregnancy prevention.	1	2	3	4	5
Addresses the congregation about preventing teen pregnancy and related issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Speaks openly to teens and parents about sex and related issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Encourages parents to speak with their children about preventing teen pregnancy and related issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Hosts youth- or teen-focused activities that address preventing teen pregnancy and related issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Partners with other agencies and organizations to address teen pregnancy prevention-related issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Provides teens and parents with tools, resources, and information regarding teen pregnancy prevention.	1	2	3	4	5
Equips young people to articulate a biblical view on teen pregnancy prevention.	1	2	3	4	5

Now, add up your score and record it here. This is your **Total Score:** _____

ANSWER KEY

When addressing teen pregnancy and related issues, most churches fall into one of the following four categories: support, connect, inform, or silence. Based on your total score, please identify the category your church is in and what it means for you and your congregation.

8-16 total score = SILENCE



A church community is at the SILENCE stage when teen pregnancy prevention is not discussed and the topic is completely avoided; lack of comfort with the topic leads to an intentional avoidance of all teen pregnancy-related issues. There could also be a fear of offending parishioners, or sometimes there is silence within the families of the church, and leaders do not want to override these familial norms. The scenario below is an example of how SILENCE expresses itself within our churches:

Rev. Serrano is teaching a youth Sunday school lesson on seeking God's help with making wise choices. Angie, a 16-year-old teen, shares that many of her friends in school are making the decision to have sex. Angie asks if the Bible has anything to say about sex and making wise decisions. Rev. Serrano explains to Angie that her question is not related to the lesson and that she should ask her parents any questions that she has about sex.

17-24 total score = INFORM



Your church community is at the INFORM stage when silence is no longer an option and the community decides that preventing teen pregnancy is a topic that must be addressed. Therefore, faith leaders begin to convey to parents the importance of discussing sex, relationships, and preventing teen pregnancy with their teens. Faith leaders also begin to deliver clear messages about the value of avoiding teen pregnancy to teens. Communicating with teens can include a variety of messages; some faith leaders may decide to focus solely on developing a strong biblically-based message that tells teens to delay having sex until they are married. Other faith leaders may decide to provide information on the risks of sexually transmitted infections and the use of contraception. At the INFORM stage, there is an awareness of the issue and the leaders of the church begin talking about teen pregnancy prevention. The scenario below is an example of how INFORM expresses itself within our churches:

A number of parents at Good Shepherd Church have expressed concerns to their pastor Rev. Reyes about two teens in the church who recently got pregnant. Parents are afraid that by not acknowledging the issue the church is sending the wrong message to teens. Rev. Reyes agrees and he encourages the parents to share with their children why God has established sex within the covenant of marriage. He also decides to deliver a sermon series that will address God's plan for sex.

25-32 total score = CONNECT



When a church is at the CONNECT stage, it conveys its position on preventing teen pregnancy and identifies opportunities for teens and parents to ask questions (e.g., “When do we have the sex talk with our son?” or “Should I tell my parents that I am sexually active?” or “If I am having sex should I use contraception?”). Parents are given support through church-led workshops that address their concerns and needs, including information on the full range of contraceptive options available within the community. Faith leaders can also decide to host a series of youth-targeted, biblically-based teen pregnancy prevention discussion groups. At this stage, parishioners become engaged. The scenario below is an example of how the CONNECT stage expresses itself within our churches:

During a teen activity night, the teens of John 3:16 Church begin to discuss the latest episode of MTV’s 16 and Pregnant. They ask their youth pastor Jorge if he has ever watched the show. He admits that he hasn’t and asks them to share more about the show’s storyline. Before they know it, a half hour has passed and the conversation has no end in sight.

Jorge realizes this television program might provide an excellent opportunity to explore the consequences of teen pregnancy. When he arrives home, he immediately Google’s MTV’s 16 and Pregnant and begins to plan some biblically-based group discussions that incorporate the series and provide the youth at his church with an opportunity to continue the conversation.

33-40 total score = SUPPORT

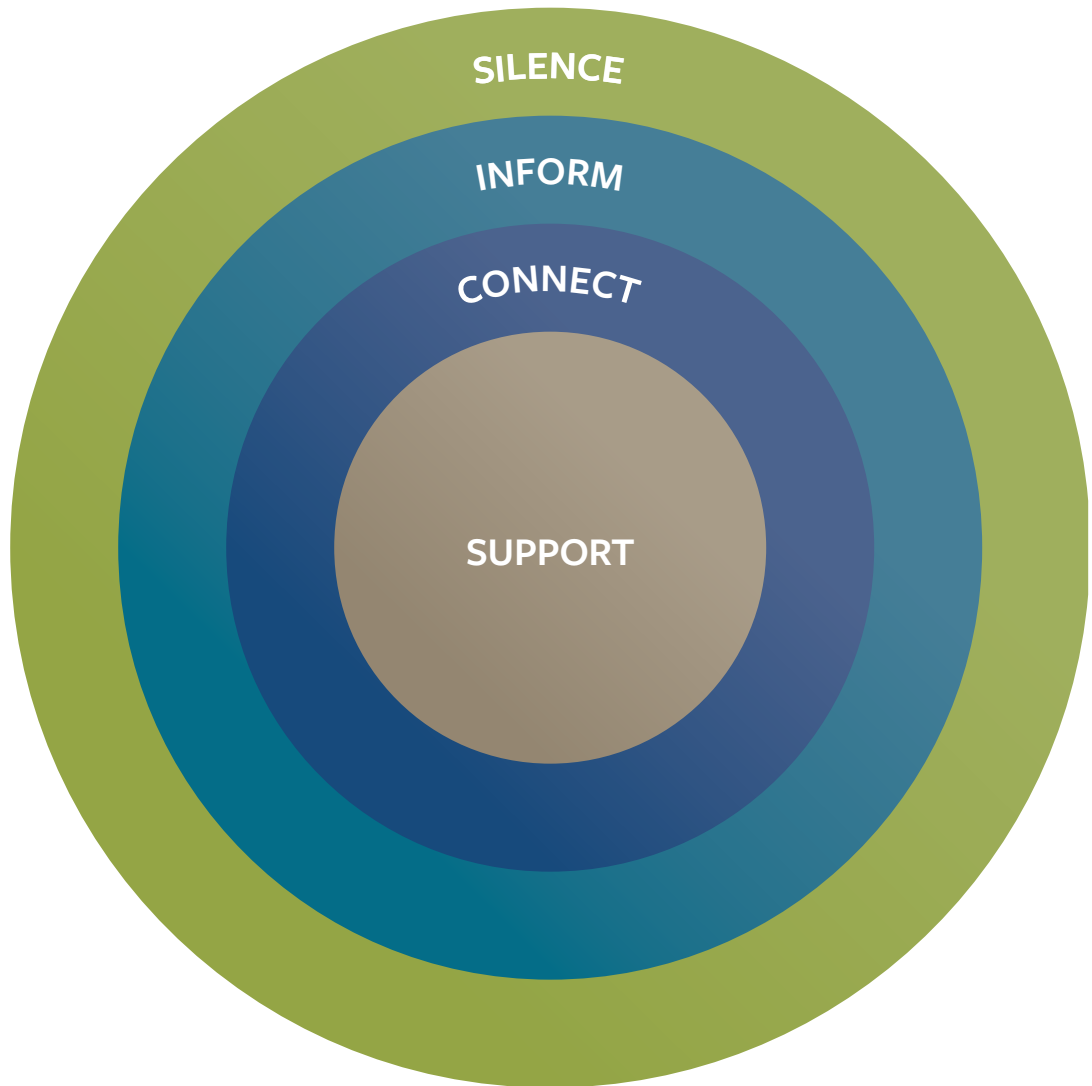


When a church is at the SUPPORT stage there is even more dialogue and activities supporting the community. Connecting on issues related to teen pregnancy prevention can provide a deeper understanding and awareness of the challenges and support mechanisms needed to prevent teen pregnancy. In response, faith leaders may explore developing on-going services and/or community collaborations that will support youth and families with teen pregnancy prevention-related issues. This may include informational sessions led by public health clinics to respond to questions parents have regarding contraception. The scenario below is an example of how the SUPPORT stage expresses itself within our churches:

Aida is a youth pastor at a large inner city church in a racially and ethnically diverse, working-class community. A local health care provider has asked Aida to help them develop a program encouraging parents to communicate with their children about sex and pregnancy prevention-related issues. Since Aida is not aware of any existing teen pregnancy prevention programs being implemented in the community, her church is interested in getting involved in efforts to reduce teen pregnancies; the health care provider wants to increase her level of community involvement. To meet both needs, Aida decides to make her pastor aware of the collaborative opportunity and persuade the church to participate.

Post- Assessment:

Once you've completed the assessment, we strongly encourage you to sit with the youth leadership and parents of your congregation to discuss and evaluate the collective results of the assessment and what actions should be undertaken by the full church.





Recommended Sermon Topics for Pastors/Youth Leaders

This section of the toolkit provides a series of ideas that can be used to develop a sermon or study focused on preventing teen pregnancy. These ideas are meant to inspire pastors and youth leaders on a variety of topics and themes that may help their congregations or young people develop a healthy perspective on sex as a Christian.

Setting the Foundation

- When speaking to teens it is not enough to reiterate our values, i.e. “Just say no to sex.” They need to know where our religious values originated and why these values are important. Proverbs encourages us to “seek understanding” (Proverbs 4:5-7).

When teens “understand” God’s plan for sex, they internalize it and take action. They apply these principles even when no one else is looking. Some Latino parents may figuratively wish to “lock” their daughters away in a secluded tower like Rapunzel, but their precious princess or prince cannot remain in the tower forever. Parents should set healthy boundaries, be clear about their personal and spiritual values, and be sure to provide clear guidance on such things as curfews and check-in times.

Sex Talk Begins With God

- In Genesis you will find the origins of sex: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Genesis tells us that God is the one who made us male and female. Who would know more about sex than the One who designed it? The very first words he addressed to humanity contained instructions about sex and pregnancy:
 - » “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’ (Genesis 1:28).
 - » In plain language God says: Have plenty of sex to produce life, and take care of the earth. For many, this is a far cry from our understanding of God’s view on sexuality. We usually associate God with preventing us from having sex, yet Genesis never describes sex as a forbidden fruit.

Where Do We Get the Misconception that Sex is “Dirty”?

- In early Christianity, some erroneous Gnostic Christians taught that the physical world, which included the body, was created evil. Explore the

dualistic view of Gnostics and how that gave way to modern separation of secular and sacred.

- In Genesis, when God said “man should not be alone,” He wasn’t just saying that a human body needed another warm body by his/her side to provide company. *God created sex to be a wonderful union between two people in a covenant relationship before God.*
- This idea of relationship is not a manmade invention; it is a concept established by God.

If Sex is Not Evil and Procreation is a Blessing, Why Encourage Teens to Abstain from Sex?

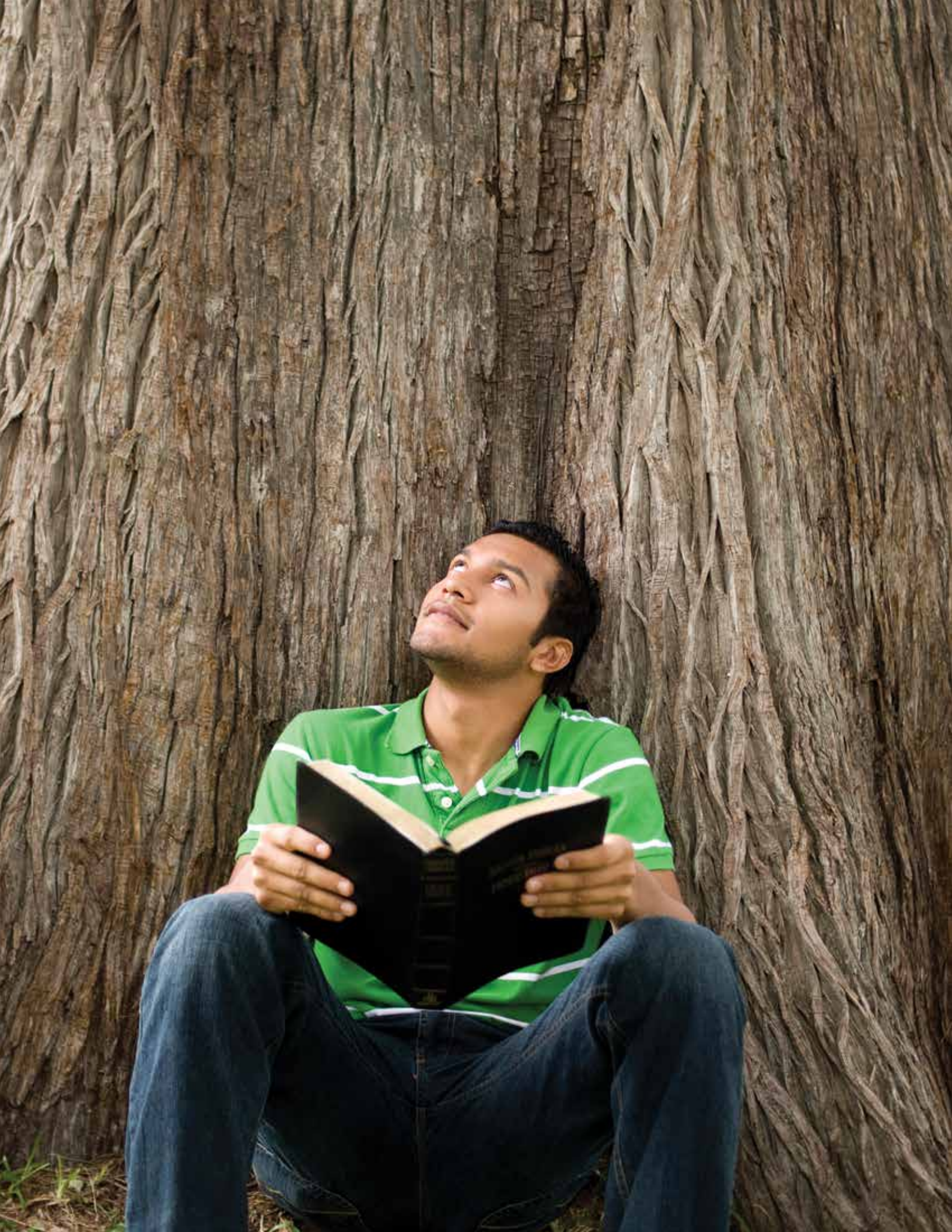
- The first five books of the Bible are called the Torah which means law and instruction. Genesis, the first book of the Torah, serves as an instruction manual for sex. “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:21-25). In this passage, God teaches us *when* to engage in sexual activity.
- Before becoming one flesh, we must *leave* our parent’s home. The idea is *not* that husband and wife will abandon responsibilities to their parents. Instead, the scripture shows that a married person’s primary obligations shift in marriage. Prior to marriage, a man and a woman are to be most concerned and involved with their parents. However, once married, a spouse’s needs become the most important concern. So strong is the marriage bond that it shifts the ties between parents and children. As such, a spouse needs to be prepared for a lifelong covenant in which a host of intimacies—financial, emotional, spiritual, and sexual—are shared.
- Engaging teens of faith on this topic helps them to pause and get in sync with God’s plans for sexuality in their lives. Young Christians should wait until they become financially, emotionally, and spiritually prepared to have a sexual relationship. This involves waiting to have sex beyond the teen years. Genesis tells us that this relationship belongs in the context of marriage:

the man leaves his home to become one flesh with his wife and not his girlfriend. Jesus also affirms this in Mathew 19:3-6.

- » 44% of Latinas get pregnant at least once before turning 20—a rate nearly twice the national average.^{li}
- » Latinas have the highest teen birth rate of any group in the United States.^{lii}
- » Motherhood is one of the top reasons Latina teens drop out of high school^{liiii} and more than half (54%) of young Latina teen mothers (those who have a child before they turn 18) do not get their high school diploma or GED by age 22.^{liv}
- » 80% of all teen mothers continue to live at home one year after giving birth.^{lv}
- » 87% of teens said that it would be much easier to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open and honest conversations with their parents about those topics.^{lvi}

Setting the Standard

Can Latino teens respond to the high standards set by the Bible? In their book, *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion Against Low Expectations*, the authors Alex and Brett Harris, argue that teens can take responsibility for their sexual and ethical behavior.^{lvii} Low expectations for teens can turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy.^{lviii} Timothy 4:12 demonstrates that young people can set high standards for themselves and succeed in applying them: “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Surrounded by the support of parents, spiritual leaders, and the Word of God, our Latino teens can live up to the standard set by the Bible.



Bible Studies to Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Overview

The healthiest and most effective way to approach teen pregnancy is through comprehensive engagement—an engagement that comes from several directions.

The following section is a series of interactive Bible studies that are intended to encourage approaching the issue from several directions—as a church, as a family, as well as in youth groups. We recognize that young people often receive conflicting messages from television, from teachers, from friends, from magazines, etc. We also recognize that the Church can create a healthy environment that fosters respect, trust, honor, and honesty, which will guide adolescents safely through their learning process.

This toolkit provides one Bible study for the church to do collectively, one Bible study that can be done as a family unit, and one set of Bible studies for groups—such as a youth group. We encourage parents and church leaders to share the information they learn and to “check in” with youth leadership and young people directly throughout the process. Individual comfort with the subjects being discussed will vary, however, we do encourage everyone to step a bit beyond their level of comfort in order to change current trends.

Here are a few ways we can support a young person as they discuss this topic:

- Read through the Bible studies along with the young people to familiarize yourself with the topics covered. Make sure the teens in the youth group are aware that you are reading along, too.
- Ask the teen for their thoughts on the study: How did it go? What did he/she hear? Were there any surprises?
- Think about how you were supported when you were a curious young person.
- Connect with church leaders to discuss what they are doing to learn about the issue and support your church’s vision to decrease teen pregnancy in your community.

The Bible studies are formatted consistently for easier review and planning. The format is as follows:

Title:

A short, relevant title is provided.

Key Objective:

This section provides a brief description that identifies the theme to be explored.

Bible Says:

This section provides a primary Bible text in order to give a starting foundation. In some cases, additional references are listed.

Prayer:

This section provides a suggested opening prayer for your reflection.

Things to Ponder and Share:

This section provides ideas and questions to reflect on and then discuss in a group.

Connecting Activity:

This section provides activities in an effort to connect to the community and to culture.

Act:

This section provides questions, ideas, and/or activities to encourage participants to apply concepts discussed in a practical way.

CHURCH BIBLE STUDY

Title:

What Does the Bible Really Say about Sex?

Key Objective:

Introduce God as the first One to speak about sex and procreation.

Bible Says:

Genesis 1:26-31: Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Additional References: Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-8; 2 Corinthians 10:5

Prayer:

Blessed Lord and Creator, we thank You for Your holy word that serves as our foundation. Provide for us wisdom and discernment as we explore Your gifts in us, as Your children. Open us up to Your will as expressed in Your Word and shape our hearts to more closely understand Your intent for us. Guard

our hearts and minds against selfish thoughts and encourage us to honor our neighbors. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. How do you think God views sex?
2. What were the very first words God spoke to humans? Does it surprise you to see God engaging in sex talk and instruction? Why do you think God mentions this in the beginning of the Bible?
3. What does God do before instructing humans to have sex and fill the earth (verse 28)?
4. Look at Genesis 1:31. How does God feel about everything He created, including sex?
5. After reading Genesis 1, explain why it’s important for the Church to speak about teens having sex.
6. God does not prevent us from having sex, but He does place sexual activity in its proper context. Read Mathew 19:3-8. How does Jesus confirm that sex belongs in marriage? What are the challenges to listening to God’s plan for sexual activity?
7. Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” What does this verse instruct you to do before engaging in a sexual relationship?
8. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul admonishes the Church to tear down strongholds which he defines as, “anything that opposes itself to the knowledge of God.” Examine the list you made of people’s perspectives on teens having sex. How do they compare with the instructions for sex and procreation that our Creator has given us?

Connecting Activity:

Encourage parents in the congregation to host their own family Bible study. Help prepare them by downloading and making copies of *10 Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy*. This publication is available at:

http://www.TheNationalCampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/10Tips_final.pdf.

Act:

Have the group write down and discuss hardships teens are facing. Invite a man and woman in their twenties who is on the path to success to speak to the group. Have them share why they chose to delay sex and how it helped them attend college or begin their career.

FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Title:

Celebrating and Envisioning a Future

Key Objective:

Incite conversations between Latino parents and teens around the life of David—with its plans, visions, successes, and failures—and how it compares to their own.

Bible Says:

1 Samuel 16:1-13: ¹The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.” ²But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.” The Lord said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.” ⁴Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?” ⁵Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.” ⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” ⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The Lord has not chosen this one either.” ⁹Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the Lord chosen this one.” ¹⁰Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The Lord has not chosen these.” ¹¹So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.” Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.” ¹²So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was

glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.” ¹³So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Prayer:

Gracious Lord, You declare in scripture that You have a plan for us, plans to support us not to harm us, plans to give us hope and future. So, on these words, we establish our vision for tomorrow and pray for courage to trust in You through this journey. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

More than three-quarters of Latino teens believe that planning for the future is important.^{lix} Eight in 10 Latino teens also believe that becoming a teen parent would either delay or prevent them from reaching their goals for the future.^{lx} However, teen pregnancy continues to be closely linked to a number of important social issues, including poverty, low self-esteem, educational attainment, poor health, and career advancement.^{lxi}

As a religious value, delaying sexual activity until marriage has more weight when teens can see the road ahead of them. As people of faith we believe in God’s purpose and plan for all of humanity—youth included.

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

A Study on the Life of David

David was the second king of the United Kingdom of Israel according to the Hebrew Bible and, according to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, an ancestor of Jesus Christ through both Joseph and Mary. He is depicted as a righteous king, though not without faults, as well as an acclaimed warrior, musician, and poet, traditionally credited with

composing many of the psalms contained in the Book of Psalms.

His life is conventionally dated from c. 1040–970 BC, his reign over Judah c. 1010–1003 BC, and his reign over the United Kingdom of Israel c. 1003–970 BC. The Books of Samuel, 1 Kings, and 1 Chronicles are the primary sources of information on David, although the Tel Dan stele records the existence in the mid-9th century of a Judean royal dynasty called the “House of David.” David’s life is very important to Jewish and Christian culture. In Judaism, David, or *David HaMelekh*, is the King of Israel, and the Jewish people. Jewish tradition maintains that the Messiah will be a direct descendant of David.

David was anointed by the prophet Samuel at the behest of God. As a young man, David knew that he had been set aside for God’s purpose and to be King of Israel, a calling that served to inspire him. Yet, David knew that the timing of when this would occur was not up to him; it was up to God. Even when David, as a young warrior, grew in stature and fame in comparison to Saul the King, David knew not to be disloyal to Saul. In fact, King Saul actively sought to kill David because of his anointment (1 Samuel 18) and yet David held back because he knew clearly that he had to wait and receive the kingdom from God in God’s timing not his own.

David’s ability to understand that God had a purpose and time for him set David apart. For years David developed as a leader, a man of God, and a King while growing in character, patience, and strength. When David became King he propelled the Kingdom of Israel into an unforeseen period of blessings and growth.

The story doesn’t end there...

2 Samuel 11:1-5

¹In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. ²One evening David got up from his bed

and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”⁴Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

In sharp contrast to his earlier years, David in his later years appears to be less patient and conscientious. In a moment of weakness he sees Bathsheba bathing and he lusts for her; they have sex and she gets pregnant. In his desire to hide his sin he commits murder as he has Bathsheba’s husband, who serves him as a general in his Army, killed in battle.

His lust and selfish desires spiral David into a series of circumstances that are harmful to him, his children, and his kingdom.

More Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Read 1 Samuel 16. How did God choose David? What was God’s long term plan for David?
2. What do you think God’s plans for you are (as a parent and as a teenager)?
3. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” How does it feel to know that God has great future plans for you?
4. David understood that while God had plans for him, there was a period of preparation before he could assume his role. How does this apply to you in school? In your career? In your faith walk? In your romantic relationships?
5. David’s weakest moment is captured in 2 Samuel 11 when his lust and physical sexual desire draws him to Bathsheba. If David would have stopped to think of what God expected of him at that time what do you think would have been some of the reasons David should have stopped himself?

6. If you are physically drawn to someone, how do you prepare yourself to say “no” to them and yourself? What are the reasons why we should not engage in sex outside of marriage? Why?
7. Some teens believe that they are *spiritually* strong enough to resist sexual temptations. What can David’s narrative teach us about resisting sexual temptation?
8. Do girls and boys have the same responsibility to delay sex and avoid pregnancy until marriage? What does David’s situation teach us?
9. David’s son Solomon chose a beautiful young woman with dark tanned skin as his future bride (Song of Songs 1:5-6). She falls desperately and passionately in love with him, but warns her maidens “not to awaken love until its ready” (2:7). List some situations that may possibly lead to having sex in your teen years. How can you avoid those situations? What boundaries can you place in your love relationships? Can you think of some trustworthy Christian teens and adults who can help keep you accountable?
10. As we look at David’s successes and his failures, what do we learn from them? What strengths did David have that helped him to succeed and what were his weaknesses that led him to failure? How do you see these values in you?
11. David’s failure sparked a series of negative ramifications in his life, family, and kingdom. When a teen is pregnant there are some negative consequences that result from it; name some of those consequences.

Act:

Develop a family covenant that defines:

- Our family values.
- Each family member’s goals.
- Ways of supporting one another.
- How often to review the covenant.

Connecting Activity:

Questions to discuss as a family:

- What makes it easy or difficult to talk to one another?
- How can we help one another reach our goals?
- What is worth waiting for?

TWELVE YOUTH BIBLE STUDIES ON PREVENTING TEEN PREGNANCY

The following section provides faith leaders with a series of 12 interactive Bible studies (in no particular order) that are youth-oriented and practical.

Our aim is to inspire a conversation—not a lecture—with Latino teens about the purpose, meaning, and potential of teen life by presenting biblically guided principles and facilitating discussions that can encourage and challenge Latino youth to learn and act in ways that will help them avoid teen pregnancy. It is important to note that these studies only contain talking points. We recommend faith leaders use these Bible studies critically when speaking to young people about sex and pregnancy (i.e. “How can this study be used with the teens in my church and/or neighborhood?”). A Bible study/discussion is used here as a way to provide hope, change, and transformation. The Bible studies presented here engage the mind and heart in a holistic, integrated, and contextually-sensitive manner.

It is highly recommended that the senior pastor participate as well; the pastor could provide a brief statement congratulating the youth for participating in the study and expressing their availability to talk with teens and parents in a confidential setting. The pastor’s presence will reassure teens that the church will support them and that the church is serious about making efforts to reduce teen pregnancy in their community.

In an effort to support healthy dialogue, we encourage faith leaders to maintain open and transparent communication with parents/guardians of the young people being served. The following is a sample letter that can be adapted to keep parents/guardians aware of topics that will be discussed.

PARENT CONSENT

for Son and/or Daughter's Participation in a Discussion on Teen Pregnancy Prevention

Dear Parents/Guardians:

More than four in 10 (44%) Latina teens get pregnant before the age of 20—a rate nearly twice the national average—and they didn't do it alone.

For this reason, _____
will be offering Bible study sessions on the benefits of delaying early parenthood starting on _____ and ending _____.

These studies will examine the book of Genesis and biblical characters like Joseph and Esther to discover God's plan for sex and procreation. Our discussions will remain within the scope of applying spiritual principles to equip teens with the biblical tools needed to delay early parenthood. We will be showing clips from reality television shows geared towards teens as a way to start discussions on the consequences and realities of having babies during your teen years.

Most teens (75%) think religious leaders and groups should be doing more to help prevent teen pregnancy. In addition, 87% of teens say that it would be much easier for them to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open and honest conversations about these topics with their parents. We encourage you to talk to your children as much as possible about this issue.

Please sign this form to give your child permission to attend these studies.

I _____, give permission
for my child _____
to participate in the teen pregnancy prevention Bible studies seminar.

Parent/ Guardians Signature

Date

BIBLE STUDY #1

Title:

Being True to My Purpose

Key Objective:

Establish one's self as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Bible Says:

1 Corinthians 6:12-20: ¹²“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Other biblical texts:

Matthew 5:14; Ephesians 2:19

Prayer:

Blessed God, we thank You for we know that You dwell in and among us. We thank You for making us in Your image. Today we pray that You will prepare our hearts and minds to understand Your purpose for our bodies and our lives. Continue to mold us into Your image and give us the courage necessary to accept Your thoughts, Your purpose, and Your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. What does it mean for a Christian to be a “temple of the Holy Spirit?”
2. If we are a “temple” how do we care for that temple?
3. What behaviors are associated with being a temple of God?
4. If we embrace this concept of being a “temple of the Holy Spirit” how does that make us different in the way we approach life?
5. How does someone honor God with their body?

Connecting Activity:

Discuss in a group what it means to be a “temple of Holy Spirit.” List examples of people you have seen in your church or community who seem to represent this (even though we know they are not perfect but they strive to be). Discuss what it means to be a hypocrite. Discuss the impact of a hypocritical lifestyle.

Act:

In a quiet place, reflect on your life and lifestyle. What areas of your life do you need to improve upon in order to better demonstrate that you are a “temple of the Holy Spirit?” Who in your church or youth group can help you to align your life to be a better reflection of what you believe?

BIBLE STUDY #2

Title:

It's the Little Things

Key Objective:

Understand that small things can still have big consequences.

Bible Says:

1 Corinthians 5:6: Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?

Matthew 13:31-32: ³¹The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³²Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.

Prayer:

Merciful God, we recognize the transformative power that You put into such small things. We welcome Your wisdom and guidance as we seek to discern the small things in our lives that can make big changes. Make our hearts and ears sensitive to Your word, make Yourself present in our conversations and guide our path, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. What are some of the little things that we do to call attention to ourselves or attract people and friends?
2. What are some of the little things that we can do for students that make a huge difference in the classroom and in school?
3. Describe some of the little things that start out innocently and can turn into big things?
4. Why do you think that the little things are so important and crucial? Can we afford to forget or neglect them?

Connecting Activity:

Interview a favorite family member and ask them to tell you step-by-step what is it that they do to prepare

a special dinner. Or interview a member of your community and ask them what it takes to organize a community-wide event. Take lots of notes and play close attention to details. What are the little things that can make or break the dinner or event?

Act:

Select an individual in history and highlight the little things that contributed to making them strong and successful.

Select another individual in history or popular culture and highlight the little things that contributed to their downfall or failure.

BIBLE STUDY #3

Title:

Not All Friends Are Worth Marrying

Key Objective:

Engage teens in an honest discussion on dating and limits.

Bible Says:

Proverbs 4:23: Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Prayer:

Loving God, You constantly show us the greatest love of all, a love that is perfect and divine and that freed us in order for us to serve You. We ask that, as we explore the matters of the heart, You reveal to us what might be in corners tucked away, that we might be free to love the way You have showed us to love. We thank You for Your faithful love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. What is the purpose of having a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend" in your life?
2. Discuss differences between discovering "friendships" and seeking a mate.
3. In light of your plans for your life, when do you plan to begin seeking a mate (dating)?
 - a. If your plans include seeking a mate later in life, what other goals do you have that come before dating?
 - b. In the meantime, what do you look for in dating if you are not seeking a mate?
 - c. Dating can be difficult; how will you protect yourself from getting hurt? (*Proverbs 4:23*)
 - d. What qualities do you look for in a mate?
4. Before you can give to others in a friendship or romantic relationship, you must be satisfied with who you are. How do you know you're truly happy with yourself?
5. How strong are your values? (*1 Corinthians 15:33*)
6. What role does sex have in dating? (*Matthew 19:5-6*)
 - a. Define sex...
7. What role does abstinence play?
 - a. Define abstinence...

Connecting Activity:

Have a conversation with your mother, father, or spiritual leader about the appropriate time to begin a romantic relationship.

Act:

Find a couple in your family or church who has been married for over 25 years and ask them to help you understand when it's a good time to have a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Read books with a Christian perspective on relationships. Below are a few suggested book titles:

- *When God Writes Your Love Story: The Ultimate Approach to Guy/Girl Relationship* by Eric Ludy and Leslie Ludy
- *When Dreams Come True: A Love Story Only God Could Write* by Eric Ludy and Leslie Ludy
- *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Josua Harris
- *Every Teenager's Little Black Book on Sex and Dating* by Blaine Bartel
- *Don't Date Naked* by Michael Smalley and Amy Smalley

Start a diary or journal of Bible verses that remind you of God's love and His plan for your life.

Start a blog about your thoughts on dating, waiting, and relationships.

Begin a movie club where you watch movies about young people facing and overcoming obstacles. What were the main character's priorities and how did they work to accomplish them? Below are a few movie title suggestions:

- *The Chronicles of Narnia*
- *The Lord of the Rings*
- *Akeelah and the Bee*
- *Remember the Titans*
- *Napoleon Dynamite*

BIBLE STUDY #4

Title:

So Much to Do! Is It the Right Time?

Key Objective:

Provide teens with some basic and practical activities that can help them postpone relationships that may take important time and attention away from success in school and plans for college.

Bible Says:

Ephesians 5:15-20: ¹⁵Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Lord of all things wonderful, thank You for Your powerful Word that speaks to our every situation. We ask that as we talk about how we use our time, that You remind us about Your time and what Your will is. Give us wisdom and courage to be honest and reveal to us Your preferences for we know Your thoughts for us are good in order to give us a future and a hope. In the name above all names, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. When we take dating out of the picture, what else is out there for you?
2. Review daily routines and evaluate how you're managing your time.
3. Make a list of friends and assess whether they support your desire to live a life that pleases God.
4. Identify community agencies, centers, or causes that you care about. Get involved by devoting some time as a volunteer.

5. Suggest to your spiritual leader a summer camp or retreat specifically tailored to exploring teen issues regarding sex and relationships.

Connecting Activity:

Find someone who volunteers and learn about what motivates them. How has volunteering shaped them and helped them be a better person?

Act:

Start a hobby, such as:

- Cooking; start with a special meal for your family.
- Playing a sport and working on improving your abilities.
- Writing a journal or starting a blog.
- Learning how to play a musical instrument.
- Exploring your artistic talents.

BIBLE STUDY #5

Title:

Clearing Your Mind and Taking Care of Your Body in a Way That Honors God

Key Objective:

Understand the power of the mind where we can harbor ideas, images, and concepts, which evoke feelings, sensations, emotions, and actions.

Bible Says:

Philippians 4:8-9: ⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ¹⁹Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Prayer:

Wonderful Counselor, we bless Your name in this hour and ask that You dwell in our conversation and study in a powerful way. May we be sensitive to Your plan and will for us and may we better understand the things we have control over, so that we can honor You in a more appropriate way, that You might be pleased and glorified through our thoughts, words, and deeds. We ask in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Share your definition of the mind and the sources of its varied thoughts.
2. Discuss what the Bible says about the mind, thoughts, and how temptation is produced.
3. Discuss how thoughts, feelings, choices, and character are connected.

4. Examine the thoughts, feelings, choices, and dispositions of a specific biblical character (e.g., David or Esther).
5. What does “bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit” mean?
6. What does it mean to take care of your body? How do you take care of your body if you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?

Connecting Activity:

Read a book about the lives of pioneers and/or a biblical character. How did pioneers and/or biblical characters care for their bodies and minds? Meditate on the possible teachings, lessons, and culturally-rich understandings derived from it.

Act:

With the consultation of a youth pastor, establish a group or club in your school or community where you will pledge to cultivate your minds and delay sexual activity until marriage. This can become an informal accountability group where members can encourage one another.

BIBLE STUDY #6

Title:

History is Your Story

Key Objective:

Expose teenagers to the contributions of women and men and the price they paid to get where they are now.

Bible Says:

Romans 12: 2, 9-18: ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. ⁹Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹²Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Colossians 4:5-6: ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Prayer:

Blessed and ever-loving God, we ask that Your spirit dwell among us as we seek to learn the way in which we should go. Open our hearts and minds to understand the walk of others and see how we may learn from their life choices. May we look at their stories with a spirit to learn and not to judge, and may You fill us with courage to understand what You ask from us. In Jesus' powerful name. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Who are some biblical characters you are familiar with? (e.g., Abigail, Anna, Deborah, Dorcas, Esther, Hagar, Hannah, Lydia, David, Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Peter, Paul)
2. Who are the women and men that you most admire, from the Bible? In your everyday life?
3. Compare and contrast the attributes of young men and young women.
4. Discuss the contributions of your mother/ father, aunt/uncle, and grandmother/ grandfather.
5. What does it take for a man or woman to achieve his/her goals?
6. How can your church, community, or family help you achieve your goals?

Connecting Activity:

Select a character from the Bible. Pay attention to his/ her role, qualities, and character. Prepare a fictional biography of this person where you place yourself in their shoes and write what you would have done if you were them.

Act:

Propose "a girls' day" or "guy's day" at your own church or school where you and your friends will present a two part project: 1) a presentation on a Bible character that underscores their particular struggles and challenges; and 2) a presentation on an influential individual in the community/political sphere who exemplifies respect, dignity, hard work, sacrifice, and postponing immediate gratification to reach life goals and dreams.

BIBLE STUDY #7

Title:

Where Are You Going?

Key Objective:

Think, write, and plan goals that help teenagers set a clear vision for themselves.

Bible Says:

Psalm 37:3-6: ³Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. ⁴Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: ⁶He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

Jeremiah 1:4-5; 29:11: ⁴The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ⁵“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” ¹¹For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Prayer:

Heavenly God, we know that You have placed different gifts and desires in our hearts and we pray that You come into this space and help us talk about the dreams we have and help us discern the steps to take to achieve those dreams. We ask that Your creativity and wisdom guide our conversations and that You be honored in all we think, say, and plan today. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Identify one goal that you set for yourself that you have accomplished on your own.
2. In consultation with a family member, relative, or friend, select one activity that requires planning (e.g., family gathering, church service, birthday, or wedding) and study closely all of the details that are needed for the celebration to take place.

Connecting Activity:

Choose a professional in your community or school and interview him/her to gain some insight into the plan or vision they had to become who they are today. Ask questions about their goals and about what it took to accomplish them.

Act:

Create a life plan. Put in writing some short-term objectives (academic and non-academic) and some long-term objectives (academic and non-academic). Make sure that these are short and simple to read.

Create paper copies of your plan and place them in your notebooks and/or diary/journal. Transfer your plan onto a poster and, if possible, hang the poster on your bedroom wall or door. You may consider starting a school club where you pledge to accomplish certain things throughout the school year and decide on particular steps to accomplish that goal.

BIBLE STUDY #8

Title:

Identify Your Purpose

Key Objective:

Discover, cultivate, nurture, and build a lifelong purpose to remind teenagers of their reason to hold off on sexual relationships.

Bible Says:

1 Peter 2:9: ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Ephesians 4:7, 12: ⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it, ¹²for equipping his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Prayer:

Mighty Savior and Lord, we thank You for the gift of salvation which You provided for us long ago. We ask that You impress in our hearts the divine purpose of such a wonderful gift so we might better understand why You paid such a price for us. May Your will be revealed in our hearts and may our spirits be open to Your revelation. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Identify the purpose of Jesus Christ coming to earth.
2. Identify your purpose and the reason for pursuing an education. How do you accomplish your purpose?
3. Select a character from a particular Bible story and identify the purpose and the reason for the character's actions.
4. Can you identify the purpose of school exams?

Connecting Activity:

Start a book club at school. You may begin by reading and reflecting as a group on one of the purpose-related books suggested below:

- *The Bible*
- *Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* by Rick Warren
- *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey

Act:

Create a school-wide or community-wide newsletter titled *iPurpose* in which Christian and non-Christian friends will post and write about what they see as their lifelong given purpose.

This can be published weekly or monthly in an online blog or in print format.

BIBLE STUDY #9

Title:

Discover Your God-Given Talent

Key Objective:

Help teenagers explore and discover their lifelong interests, talents, and gifts.

Bible Says:

Romans 12:4-8: ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10: ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

Ephesians 4:11-12: ¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Prayer:

Blessed Lord, we thank You that we were created in Your image and with a wonderful purpose. We ask that You open up our hearts and minds to see the gifts and talents you have deposited in each of us. We pray that in the spirit of humbleness we open up—knowing that they are Your gifts deposited in us for the good of all Your people. In Jesus' powerful name we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Who are some of the people you admire?
What do you admire about them?
Why would you want to become like them?
What would you have to do?
2. Describe what makes people successful.
3. What do you imagine yourself doing when you are an adult? What will you need to do in order to get there? What are you doing right now?
4. What subjects do you like the most in school? In what subjects do you have the best grades? In what areas have you been told you have great promise?
5. What can the Church do to help you accomplish your goals?
6. Do you have a mentor? What characteristics do they embody that you admire?

Connecting Activity:

Select someone that you consider a role model (in school, community, family, or on TV). Describe what he or she does. Explore what steps were taken by this person in order to get to where they are today. Evaluate what you will need to do in order to model your aspirations after this person. Reflect on what you have learned here. Read aloud a biography of a leader you admire to a group of younger students or Sunday school children and explain to them the dreams that this person was able to accomplish.

Act:

Create a large poster or collage with pictures of people you admire. Include people from your community, church, the Bible, TV, family, and even friends. Develop a mini biography for each of them. Write who the person is and what she or he does or has done. If possible, you may want to interview them. Ask one of your classroom teachers to exhibit your project during a free period or during a parent/community event at your school. Write your own goals, desires, and dreams in your own journal or diary. Review them monthly. Are you aware of anyone in your community who has a special talent? Interview them and ask them how they got to where they are today.

BIBLE STUDY #10

Title:

Real Questions = Real Conversations

Key Objective:

Create an attitude of inquiry to discuss sensitive topics.

Bible Says:

Luke 11:9-10: ⁹So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

James 1:5: ⁵If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Prayer:

Blessed Lord, trusting that You speak to us in many ways, we pray that Your Spirit of trust and wisdom dwell among us today as we explore and questions things around us. Make us sensitive to You and give us a discerning spirit that helps us see truth that edifies and transforms us more into Your image. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. What are some of the questions you have about the Bible, relationships, God, the Church?
2. What are some of the questions you have about your school and friends?
3. What are some of the questions you have about the TV programs that you watch or some of the topics that are covered?
4. Think about any questions you are afraid to ask. Why do you think many people fear asking questions and having a discussion?
5. Have you recently had a disagreement with a friend about something? How did you solve this problem?

Connective Activity:

Analyze your own family, community, school, or shows you watch on television for answers they give to the issues and/or problems and conflicts that teenagers face. Compare answers, formulate questions, and write some conclusions.

Act:

Create an informal survey. Host conversations with peers where you ask questions about relationship choices and share your answers. Create a school-wide or community-based questionnaire asking questions about relationship choices that your friends have made or create a diary/journal with the questions that run through your mind.

BIBLE STUDY #11

Title:

Sex is God's Good Gift

Key Objective:

Differentiate between God's intention and popular concepts.

Bible Says:

Genesis 1:27-28: ²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Genesis 2:21-25: ²¹So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." ²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Prayer:

Almighty God, we bless Your name and come before You with thankful hearts that You created us in Your image and blessed us as a good creation. We ask that, as we explore Your gift of life and Your words of instruction, that we may be able to better understand Your purpose. Give us courage to discuss the truth of what we believe and may Your spirit of wisdom expand our minds and hearts as we seek to understand You and Your purpose better. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. What are some of your opinions regarding sex?
2. What are some of the messages regarding sex that come from the media?
3. What messages have you learned from the Church about sex?
4. What message do you get from the Bible directly?
5. Which messages do you believe to be truths and which ones do you believe to be lies? Explain your responses.
6. Consider the following truths:
 - a. 44% of Latinas get pregnant at least once before turning 20—a rate nearly twice the national average.^{lxii}
 - b. Latinas have the highest teen birth rates of any group in the United States.^{lxiii}
 - c. Motherhood is one of the top reasons Latina teens drop out of high school^{lxiv} and more than half (54%) of young Latina teen mothers (those who have a child before they turn 18) never get their high school diploma or GED.^{lxv}
 - d. Roughly one in four teen moms go on welfare within the first three years of having a baby.^{lxvi}
 - e. Babies born to teens are more likely to be premature,^{lxvii} have health problems,^{lxviii} suffer abuse,^{lxix} and grow up poor.^{lxx}Do these statistics surprise you? What do you think of them? How do they make you feel?
7. How can you counter the 'lies' and live out the 'truths'?
8. How can the church, family, and community help you?

Connecting Activity:

Interview/survey several parents, medical doctors, ministers, and community leaders about their views on sex with one or two basic questions.

As a group, listen to some music and draw out the 'truths' and/or 'lies' spelled out in the lyrics.

Create a poster that demonstrates 'truths' and 'lies' and ask if it can be hung in your youth group/ Sunday school classrooms.

Create a Group Declaration to be signed by participants committing to live out the 'truths' and defend them for yourselves and others around you.

Act:

For the purpose of inviting and stimulating further discussion, submit a short article to the local or school newspaper regarding various views of sex compared to the biblical view you hold.

Ask your church/school leadership if your posters can be posted in a common room to expose others to what you've created.

BIBLE STUDY #12

Title:

Their Mistake, My Lesson

Key Objective:

Uncover lessons learned by other people and learn from them yourself.

Bible Says:

1 Corinthians 10:11-13: ¹¹These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. ¹²So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Proverbs 11:14: ¹⁴For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.

Romans 8:28: ²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Prayer:

Holy and Merciful God, we bless You and thank You for having created us in community where we can live and learn from the lives of others. We ask that today You fill us with a spirit of discernment and grace as we think of lessons learned by others. Help us understand the links between choices and consequences and give us courage to think of ways in which we can grow and live out Your purpose with excellence. Bless our conversation and our work in the name above all names, Jesus Christ, Your son. Amen.

Things to Ponder and Share:

1. Identify some biblical characters, their choices, and the consequences of these choices.
2. What are some lessons you know others have learned "the hard way"?

3. What are some lessons you would tell a younger version of yourself if you could?
4. Can you identify some daily choices you make and the possible consequences of these choices?
5. What criteria do you use to make decisions?
6. Share a decision that you made concerning your school and the consequence that followed.
7. Did you know that motherhood is one of the top reasons Latina teen girls drop out of high school^{lxxi} and that more than half (54%) of young Latina teen mothers (those who have a child before they turn 18) never get their high school diploma or GED by age 22?^{lxxii} What do you think about that?

Connecting Activity:

Make a list of the most important decisions you think you will be making in the next few years.

Create a diagram that shows who/what you consult depending on the decision at hand. (e.g., to pick a college you might consult your school counselors, check school rankings on *U.S. News and World Report*, and visit college websites.)

Create a family tree where you explore which family members had an early pregnancy or visit a health center to learn more about the possible consequences having sex at an early age can bring.

Act:

With the permission/advice of your pastor, principal, or a parent, invite a well-respected adult figure in the community to present at your church, school, or community center. The person should be willing to talk openly about the lifelong consequences she/he experienced by choosing to not have sex at an early age and how that decision impacted his/her development, career, maturity, self-esteem etc. As a follow-up, invite an adult who was a teen parent to come and share how they coped with being a teen parent and the challenges they may have faced.



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