Why It Matters

People who have an STD know it.

Most people with an STD don’t know they have one. Many STDs don’t have symptoms. Or the symptoms are so mild that people overlook them. When people who are at risk don’t get tested they may pass an STD to others without knowing it.

The risks and consequences of STDs, including HIV, can have a big impact. Young people need to know about STDs and take steps to protect themselves. STDs matter at a social level as well. Friends and peers influence the choices a teen makes, and a teen can, in turn, influence the choices made by friends and peers. STDs also affect communities throughout the world. They take up energy and resources that could be focused on other needs. They hurt health, productivity and survival.

Most young people care about doing well in their lives. They also want to support their family and friends to do well and stay healthy. Their vision, energy and idealism can help make the world a better place. This is why STDs matter on a personal, social and global level.
The Personal View

 Teens are in the middle of huge changes. Over the course of a few years, their bodies and brains change. They have new ways of thinking, new friendships, and new feelings and impulses. Sometimes these shifts happen slowly. Other times, they’re quite sudden. Some changes are mild. Others feel dramatic and confusing.

It’s important for teens to think things through and make decisions when they’re not in the middle of powerful feelings. It takes a level head to make responsible personal choices about health, including choices about sexual behaviors. It takes commitment and planning to follow through on those choices.

Benefits of Healthy Choices

 Teens are more likely to commit to staying STD free when they see the many benefits:

■ Better physical health. STDs can cause serious health problems, both now and in the future. Some STDs, such as herpes and HPV, can be treated but not cured. Some, such as HIV, are life threatening. Short-term health problems from an STD can include itching, pain, warts or sores. Over time, untreated STDs can cause permanent damage to the reproductive organs and other body systems.

■ Better emotional health. Some people feel ashamed about getting an STD. It can be embarrassing to seek treatment. Telling a partner about an STD can be hard and can cause problems in a relationship. If a person has an incurable STD, he or she has to worry about giving it to future partners and take steps to protect them.

■ Better mental health. Making thoughtful choices when faced with complex issues such as STD helps teens build decision-making skills and strengthens cognitive development.
Confidence and success. Avoiding STD lets people focus their energy on activities they enjoy and reaching personal goals. Teens show their maturity and independence by making smart, healthy choices and resisting pressure to take risks.

A sense of doing the right thing. Making choices that fit with their moral values, their family’s values or the values of their faith can help people feel good.

Making Smart Sexual Choices

The choice to take personal responsibility for avoiding STD brings many benefits. But making good decisions about sexual risks isn’t always easy. People need to make clear decisions about what they will do to avoid STD before they get into a potentially risky situation. Here are some things that can help:

Believe in the choice. Young people who know their reasons for wanting to avoid STD and who understand the beliefs behind their decision are more likely to follow through.

Student Corner

How Do You Decide?

☐ How do you make important decisions that affect your life?
  — Is your style thoughtful? Do you take time to think things through?
  — Are you more impulsive? Do you like to make decisions quickly?
  — Are you somewhere in between?
☐ What’s a choice you made where your style of decision making led to a great outcome?
☐ Has there ever been a time when your style of decision making led to problems or disappointment?
☐ What’s the best way for you to make decisions about sexual health?
Remembering and valuing this decision can motivate teens to remain abstinent or always use a condom.

- **Know that feelings are real and powerful.** Teens can feel a range of very powerful emotions—love, happiness, jealousy, anger, despair. It can be hard to make good decisions when feelings are strong. Seeing the influence of these emotions can help people balance the pull of their here-and-now feelings against the promise they’ve made to protect themselves.

Taking steps to be more prepared to deal with strong feelings can help too. Teens can get support from parents or friends, practice how to say no before a pressure situation comes up, or make plans to talk to a romantic partner at a less emotional moment.

- **Find good resources for information.** Many young people have questions or concerns about their bodies, relationships, sex and feelings. It’s healthy and normal to have questions. It’s natural to be curious about life and its changes, and good questions deserve good answers. Friends often share information with each other. But peers aren’t always the best source for accurate information.

When teens can access reliable sources of clear, factual information, they can get the guidance and support they need to make good decisions. Parents can be a great resource. Health teachers, school nurses, counselors or health care providers are other helpful sources.

- **Stay connected.** Having good relationships with peers helps young people build social skills and enjoy the many benefits of friendships. Feeling connected to parents and other family members gives teens a sense of belonging and responsibility. Being involved at school also helps teens succeed there and avoid risky behaviors. Relationships with friends, teachers, family and other adults who support healthy choices lowers a person’s risk of STD. It can take time and effort to
sustain positive relationships. But the support and feeling of connection are well worth it.

**Think about the future.** Many young people live in the present. What’s happening today is the biggest thing in their lives. Others may spend a lot of time thinking about what happened in the past. Some focus more on the future. Because teens’ thought patterns are more fluid than adults’ they often think about all these things. Where people focus their thoughts can affect their choices about staying healthy and avoiding STD. Setting goals for the future can help young people avoid impulsive, just-for-the-moment choices and actions that put them at risk.

### Being Aware of Gender Roles

Everyone has his or her own ideas about gender roles: What should women do? What should men do? What should women or men *not* do? Many people don’t think about these things in a conscious way. But, in the area of sexual health, being aware of ideas about gender roles can be crucial.

For example, if a couple decides to be abstinent, who’s responsible for keeping that commitment? Is it shared equally? Or does it fall more to the female or the male? What about buying condoms? Talking about STD risks? Setting sexual

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**Student Corner**

**Reaching Goals**

- Think of a goal you want to reach in the next year. Is there a way making healthy choices to avoid STD/HIV can help you achieve that goal?
- What about a goal you want to reach in 5 years?
limits? Young people who talk about gender roles will be better prepared to take steps in their own relationships to follow through on healthy choices.

The Challenge of Responsibility

Taking more and more responsibility for their actions is a process people start as children. By their teen years, most people are able to think in more complex ways. They can analyze a situation, think through possible actions and imagine consequences. But these thinking processes are still developing during the teens and early twenties. So the younger a person is, the more likely he or she will act on impulse.

Adults often put pressure on teens to “be more responsible.” This is usually good advice. But for most young people at one time or another that pressure brings up feelings of frustration.

Thinking About Gender Roles

- Think about some characters you’ve seen in a TV show or movie, or read about in a book.
  - Who is a female character who’s done something usually thought of as a “female” task or activity.
  - Who is a female character who’s done something outside of the usual female role.
  - Who is a male character who’s done something usually thought of as a “male” task or activity.
  - Who is a male character who’s done something outside of the usual male role.
- How do you feel about the things these characters have done? Do you approve or disapprove of any of the behaviors? Would you feel OK about friends or family members doing these things? What about yourself?
and a desire to rebel. Rebelling is one
of the ways some young people feel
independent and find out what it means
to make decisions for themselves. Peers
also may put pressure on teens to be less
responsible and more rebellious. They
may push someone to take a chance, risk or dare.

Teens need to recognize the tensions that can arise between
being responsible and rebelling. Both can be appealing, based on
the situation. But sometimes young people choose risky behavior
as a reaction to pressure from an adult to be responsible, or
pressure from a peer to take a risk. The ability to make a truly
independent decision is a sign of more complex thinking and
greater maturity.

Ultimately, the responsibility for avoiding HIV and other STD
rests with each person. Young people have to decide that they
want the benefits that being STD free can bring. They have to
know how to make good decisions when faced with pressure to
take sexual risks. They need to be responsible for their health
and future.

**Student Corner**

**Rebellion and Responsibility**

- What things or people in your life make you want to act
  responsibly?
- What things or people make you want to rebel?
- How can being aware of your emotional responses to other
  people’s statements or actions help you follow through on the
  independent choices you want to make?
Family and Friends

Family, friends, school and the community influence young people's lives. As teens grow older, their social range grows. Family is still important. But teens also often look to friends, peers and the media for ideas on what it means to grow up and be more independent.

The choices teens make are affected by the values they’ve learned from their families, the expectations in their community, and the choices they see their friends making. Family and friends are, in turn, affected by a teen's behaviors. For example, parents trust teens who show maturity and responsibility. And adults in the wider community feel more positive about young people in general when they know teens who are making good choices.

Relating to Parents

When teens feel close to and supported by their parents, they make better choices about avoiding STD. They choose to be abstinent, postpone sex, have fewer partners and/or use condoms (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001). A good relationship between parents and teens can be a powerful influence:

- Almost 7 in 10 teens agree that open, honest talks with their parents about topics such as sex, love and relationships would help them delay sexual activity.
- More than half of teens say their own choices about sex are strongly influenced by their parents’ and their own morals, values and religious beliefs. These influences are stronger than the media or school.
- When parents clearly express their belief in the value of waiting to have sex, young people are more likely to delay. When parents discuss birth control with their teens, young people are more likely to use it if they do become sexually
active. Teens can hear both of these messages without confusion, and believe both are important. Most teens want to hear more about both topics.

Most teens want to talk with their parents about sex. They may hesitate because they’re embarrassed. Some worry their parents will think that wanting to talk about sex means they’re having sex. Some just don’t know how to bring up the subject. But many benefits come from good communication with parents. Teens usually find it’s worth the effort.

Most teens have talked with their parents on some issue related to sexuality. Both parents and teens can use some simple strategies to start new conversations. Things that often work include:

- Commenting on a news program, TV show or movie that brings up issues related to sexual health. (“Did any of those characters having sex even think about getting an STD?”)
- Starting on a different topic, such as responsibility, making healthy choices, or goals for the future. Then include sexuality as a natural part of the discussion.

The Power of Parents

A strong, close relationship between teens and their parents is the most important protective factor for young people. Parents can influence teens to choose abstinence, delay sexual activity, and avoid pregnancy and teen parenthood, when they:

- Clearly communicate their values and expectations to their children.
- Express concern and love often, beginning when their children are young.
- Stay involved with their children, and supervise and monitor their activities.

Why It Matters

• Talking about a friend who’s having problems, such as not being able to talk with his or her parents or engaging in risky sexual behaviors.

Here are some phrases and ideas that can get conversations started:

• Have you heard about (topic, report, event)? What did you think about it?
• Have you ever known anyone who’s gone through (describe relevant event)? What happened? What did the person do? What did you do?
• What are your thoughts and feelings on these kinds of (topics, reports, events)?
• Was there ever a time you worried about something negative happening to a friend of yours who (did a risky behavior)? Can you tell me more about what happened?

Other topics that can get conversations started and keep them going are hopes, fears, goals, dreams, likes, dislikes, and past experiences, both negative and positive.

What do parents want their teens to choose in terms of sexual behaviors and risks? There are some issues on which many parents agree, and others on which they are more divided in

Who’s Talked About What?

• More than 2 out of 3 teens have talked with a parent about a sexual topic.
• Almost 6 out of 10 girls have talked with parents about how to say no to sex. Just under 5 out of 10 boys have.
• About half of teens have talked with a parent about STD.
• About 1 out of 3 teens, both male and female, has talked to a parent about how to use a condom.

their opinions. But the basic theme is that parents want their children to be healthy, act responsibly, and make choices that align with the family’s values.

Most parents want their teens to be abstinent. More than 9 out of 10 believe a strong abstinence message is important. Nearly 3 out of 4 would like to see young people get more information about birth control as well as abstinence. And 6 out of 10 disapprove of teen relationships in which one of the people is 3 or more years older than the other (Albert, 2007).

**What About Peers?**

Most people agree that friends or other peers have a strong influence on teens. Much of this influence has to do with social norms—the beliefs and behaviors shared by and accepted within a group. Whenever a behavior, belief or value is shared by more than half of a group, it’s a norm for that group. Different groups can have different norms.

One school or neighborhood might have different norms about dress, music or sexual behaviors than another. Even different social groups within a school often have different norms. Norms have a powerful impact. They may address simple choices (What TV show will I watch tonight?) or serious ones (Is abstinence the best choice for me?).

People feel a sense of belonging and approval when their actions fit the norms of their group. Then their choices make sense to the people they value. They feel more fully a part of the group and more sure of their own identities. For most young people, family connections and values are still powerful. But, for young people who have difficult relationships within their families, a sense of connection to peers becomes even more important.

*Perceived norms*—what people think others are doing or believe—can be an even more powerful influence than actual
norms. But teens’ views of their peers’ behaviors may not be accurate. For example, teens often overestimate the number of peers who are having sex.

Peers can put pressure on young people to take sexual risks. But peer norms can also be used to reinforce healthy choices about sexuality and STD/HIV prevention. **Here are some strategies:**

- **Find existing norms that support healthy choices.** There are studies that show teens are making healthy sexual choices. For example, over two-thirds of U.S. ninth graders have never had sexual intercourse (CDC, 2010). Abstinence is a well proven and healthy norm for this group. It’s very important to correct misunderstandings when actual norms are healthier than perceived norms.

- **Connect with peer groups that share healthier norms.** Data about national or regional trends can be informative. But young people are most strongly affected by the choices their friends make. Teens can look for ways to connect with groups that have healthier norms. This might include community or faith-based youth groups, school clubs, or even a health class.

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**Healthy Norms in Youth Sexual Behaviors**

- More than 50% of all high school students have never had sexual intercourse.
- In high school, 87% of students have learned about HIV in school courses.
- Only about 1 out of 3 high school students is currently sexually active (has had intercourse with at least one person in the past 3 months).
- Among sexually active students, 61% used a condom at last sexual intercourse.
- Among sexually active students, 78% did not use drugs or alcohol at last intercourse.

Source: CDC, 2010.
Balance information about risky norms with information about healthy norms. For example, some statistics about teen sexual behavior point to norms that pose greater risks for HIV/STD (and high rates of STD and unplanned pregnancy as a result). On the other hand, many teens are making healthy choices. It’s important to know that healthy choices tend to be the norm among young people today.

Why STD/HIV Matters to the World

STDs, including HIV, have a big impact in countries all over the world. The most severe problems occur in developing countries where rates are high and treatment options are limited. The social and economic fallout of these illnesses has been far reaching.

The Impact of STD

The impact of STD varies from one region to another, from country to country, and between rural and urban areas. STD trends, treatment and prevention have received more notice worldwide since HIV. Because having other STDs increases the

The World Numbers

- 333 million new cases of curable STD every year
- Highest rates occur in teens and young adults (15–24 years old)
- 65 million total cases of HIV since the beginning of the epidemic
- 2.5 million new cases of HIV every year
- 25 million HIV-related deaths since the beginning of the epidemic
- 2.1 million deaths from HIV every year—5,700 every day

risk for HIV, and the risk factors are similar, other STDs must be addressed to reduce the rates of HIV (Dallabetta, Laga and Lamptey, 2008).

Over the past few decades, rates of STD in Northern and Western Europe have gone down. But in developing countries the rates remain very high. Many of the burdens of illness are felt among women. Among women of childbearing age (15 to 44 years) in developing countries, curable STDs are second only to problems of childbirth as a cause of death and illness. Because women are less likely to have symptoms, they often don’t seek medical care until a disease is causing serious problems. When women with untreated STDs become pregnant it can result in a range of problems. These include miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth.

In most cultures in the developing world, fertility is an important aspect of social life. PID from untreated STD causes 50% to 80% of the infertility among women in Africa, and 35% among women in Latin America (Dallabetta, Laga and Lamptey, 2008). Women who are unable to bear children in these regions often suffer severe social consequences. They may be divorced or abandoned by husbands, rejected by families, or be the victims of domestic violence by men who are “punishing” their wives for not bearing children. These women may be forced to turn to prostitution to survive. Then their risks of getting another STD, including HIV, is even greater.

Effective diagnosis and treatment for curable STDs is limited in most developing countries. Often the resources may be too costly, or are simply not available. In many countries, the cost of treating a woman for a single curable STD exceeds her per capita share of the national health budget.

Even when people with STD are able to get treatment, there are often problems in developing countries:
- Resistant strains of STDs won’t respond to available drugs.
• Patients get smaller amounts of drugs, or lower doses, because they can’t afford the recommended doses. This can cause resistant strains to develop.
• Drugs may be out-of-date.
• Drugs are ineffective or don’t fit the condition.

The Impact of HIV

In many ways, HIV’s impact is even greater than that of other STDs. Untreated HIV tends to be fatal, and treatment in developing countries is much less available than in the United States. So HIV has led to high death rates. The impact of HIV has been particularly hard in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of disease and the lowest level of treatment.

Since the beginning, almost 7 out of 10 people with HIV in the world have lived in Africa. More than 8 out of 10 deaths from AIDS have occurred there. Life expectancy in Africa has dropped by about 15 years. Most of those affected become ill and die during their prime productive years, when they could be adding most to the local economy, culture and society (Gayle and Hill, 2001).

When a culture is affected this profoundly by the illness and death of so many young people, the impact becomes very broad across the society. These effects, like the disease itself, are felt most deeply among communities and families already living in poverty. Many experts believe HIV is the single greatest barrier to Africa developing as a region and building a better standard of living for its people.

Some of the effects of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa include (AVERT, 2008):

- **Health care burdens.** Hospitals, clinics and health care workers are overwhelmed by the costs and time demands of HIV treatment. More than half of all hospital beds are filled by
people with HIV. In some regions, 60–70% of hospital costs focus on treatment for people with HIV. Health care workers can’t keep up with the demands of care, which become more challenging as people become more ill. Many health care workers are also caring for affected family members at home. Quite a few have HIV themselves—in one area, 40% of midwives had HIV.

- **Family structure.** When parents die, children are often placed in the care of relatives. Families take on increasing financial and social burdens as they care for more children. In some cases, there is no family for children to turn to. Some live in households led by other children. Some go to orphanages. Some become homeless, and may turn to prostitution to survive.

- **Basic needs.** When adults become too ill to work steadily, family income drops. Families are less able to buy food, clothing or other needs. Children may become responsible for earning part of the family’s income.

- **Food production.** When agricultural workers or family members become ill, less work is done on farms and in family gardens. Food production drops. Hunger and poor nutrition increase.

- **Health care and funeral costs.** Care for a family member with HIV, on average, takes up one-third of a family’s monthly income. On top of the lost income of the person who is ill, this can be devastating. In some cultures, funerals are important. The costs of a funeral can create deeper debt for the family.

- **Education.** Families with ill relatives cannot afford school uniforms and fees, So children, especially girls, are removed from school. Fewer young people get the education that can help move the country forward.
Essential jobs. As workers with HIV become ill, they must take more time off work. If they become very ill, they can’t keep working. If they are healthy but have family members who are sick, they may also miss work or have to stop working. This has created shortages in some essential fields, including teaching.

Businesses. Businesses have a harder time surviving. They must deal with sick workers, people missing work, lower productivity, higher turnover and increased costs to train new workers. There may be lower demand for their products because people don’t have money to buy things. Outside investors, including foreign investors, are less likely to take the risk to support developing businesses in Africa.

Governments. Governments face increasing cost burdens as the demand for HIV care and services increases. At the same time tax revenues from individuals and businesses decrease.

Today, a worldwide effort is needed to help Africa fight HIV. When wealthier nations provide support for prevention and treatment, African countries will become more stable. With a healthier population of working adults, their economies can begin growing. These countries can again be a part of and add to the world economy. With healthier and better educated teens and children, there will be chances for growth in the future. Progress of this sort is virtually impossible in the regions most deeply affected by HIV today.

The importance of supporting effective prevention and treatment in Africa, and in other areas with high HIV rates, has become increasingly evident to world leaders. Prevention efforts have worked in developing countries, including Senegal, Thailand and Uganda (Gayle and Hill, 2001). But approaches must be tailored to the culture and the circumstances of each location (e.g., who is most at risk, background issues of poverty, levels of education). Things that have worked include mass media...
outreach, counseling and peer education. These have focused on increasing awareness of risk and teaching skills for prevention among those most at risk.

The United States has programs to help fund prevention and treatment efforts in Africa. While the situation there is grave, there is hope that international support can be used to expand effective programs and that Africa’s future will be better.

**Understanding Media Influences**

*Young people are exposed to a wide variety of popular media.* These include TV, movies, music, music videos, websites, magazines, gaming and online social networking sites. All of these forms of media can influence people's attitudes and create perceived norms about sexual behaviors that may not be accurate. An awareness of media influences can help young people make healthier choices in many areas of their lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Much Media?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average daily hours spent by U.S. youth ages 8–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total media use*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV content (watching TV, DVDs, prerecorded shows)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer use (games, social networking watching online videos, surfing websites)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing video games</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This number is less than total exposure due to multitasking when people use more than one form of media at a time.

**Source:** Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010.
Sexual Content in the Media

There is a lot of sexual content in popular media. A recent study of prime-time TV shows found that more than 75% had sexual content. But less than 15% referred to negative consequences—such as unintended pregnancy or STD—or to making responsible choices—such as abstinence or condom use. Studies have found that young people who see more of this sexual content in the media are more likely to become sexually active at an earlier age (Brown and Strasburger, 2007).

Some researchers describe the effect of the media as a sort of “super peer” group. Teens may get the idea from the media that almost everyone is having sex, that there are no negative consequences to having sex, and that people don’t need to take steps to avoid STD or pregnancy.

Online Influences

Young people going online may come in contact with sexual content. This can range from discussions on blogs or in chat rooms, to pressure to engage in sexual activities, to pornography. Talking about sex isn’t unusual among teens in these settings. Teens may also talk about sex in face-to-face social interactions at school, a party or the mall. But because the Internet provides a sense of being anonymous, people may push limits or say or do

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Student Corner

How Much Media for You?

On most days of the week, how many hours do you spend:

- [ ] Watching TV and DVDs?
- [ ] Listening to music?
- [ ] Using the computer?
- [ ] Playing video games?
things they wouldn’t say or do in person. Some people also make up stories about their sexual experiences.

All of these things can skew teens’ view of norms about sexual behaviors. Readers of blogs or social networking profiles might get the idea that sexual activity is much more common among peers than it really is. This could increase the internal pressure a person feels about sex, and the chances that he or she will be sexually active. Like TV and other offline forms of media, online posts and discussions often ignore the negative consequences of sex, including STD, unwanted pregnancy and emotional issues.

Most young people who are sexually harassed or receive offers of sex online by peers or adults ignore it or adjust their privacy settings to block the sender. But teens who feel lonely or unsure, might respond. They could get involved with people or activities that put them at risk for unsafe sexual contact, assault or other dangers.

In surfing the Internet, many young people also come across pornography. In the past, it was unusual for people to see porn unless they sought it out. But, in one recent survey, about

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**Teens and Social Networking**

About 93% of teens are using the Internet, and 64% of these have created and shared content online.

**Here’s what teens are doing online:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Posting artistic creations—artwork, photos, videos, stories</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining web pages or blogs for others (organizations, friends, school)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping an online personal journal or blog</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a personal web page</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remixing content they find elsewhere</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Lenhart et al., 2007.*
1 out of 3 young Internet users (ages 10–17) encountered pornography he or she didn’t want to see (Wolak, Mitchell and Finkelhor, 2008).

The outcomes of this aren’t fully understood. Most youth in the survey weren’t upset by what they saw. Some knew that they were entering an X-rated site but continued to follow the link because they were curious.

The content of online porn disturbs most parents, teachers and health educators. They believe it often shows sex in ways that disrespect or degrade people. Often there is no emotional connection between partners. Many of the activities shown also carry a high risk for STD, including HIV, and unplanned pregnancy.

If seeing these images gives young people the idea that this is the kind of sexual contact most people have, they may be more likely to engage in risky behaviors. Over time, a young person who keeps seeing porn may find it harder to see the role sex plays in a committed, caring relationship.

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Sexual Solicitation and Harassment Online

**Among young people who use the Internet:**
- 15% report an unwanted sexual solicitation (requests to talk about sex, provide personal sexual information, or do something sexual)
- 33% report online harassment (rude or mean comments, spreading of rumors)

Solicitations were most common through instant messaging (43%) and chat rooms (32%). Harassment was most common through instant messaging (55%). Social networking sites were also a source of solicitation (27%) and harassment (28%).

Healthy Influences

The media can also send positive messages about sexual responsibility and health. TV shows and movies, for example, sometimes have characters who choose abstinence and have good things happen. They may show realistic consequences of having sex. Some programs show more realistic romantic relationships, whether or not these are sexual.

Many websites promote healthy and responsible sexual choices. These often give answers to young people’s questions about sexual health online or through text messages. Some groups promote sexual responsibility through their own YouTube channels, or post videos and teaching activities on their websites. In some cities, health departments have health educators who keep an eye on social networking sites to provide users with safer sex information and support.

Being Media Literate

Media companies have several goals. They provide entertainment, help people stay connected, and keep people informed. Commercial media, such as TV, movies, magazines, music and certain websites, all have another big goal—to make money. Earning a profit isn’t a bad thing. Businesses making

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Student Corner

Influences You See and Hear

☐ What kind of things do you see or read in the media that promote healthy and responsible sexual choices?
☐ What kind of things do you see or read that promote risky behaviors?
☐ What influence do these things have on you?
☐ What influence do you think they have on your friends?
money drive the economy and add to the financial well-being of the nation.

But when profit is a company’s top priority, the bottom line is often “do whatever makes money.” Media companies know that sex sells. It sells products. So sexual images are often used in ads for tobacco, alcohol, clothes and cars. It sells entertainment. So movies, TV shows and music videos often show sexual activity or “sexy” styles of dress.

Consumers need to recognize the impact of ads or programs that use sexual images. These messages are carefully made to have an effect. Their influence can be both subtle (so it’s hard to see) and powerful (so it’s hard to resist).

No one likes being manipulated. Many young people can spot manipulation quickly. Most don’t like it. Young people can become media literate. This means they are aware of how media messages influence attitudes and behaviors. This helps them avoid being “played” by advertisers. Teens who are media literate have a better chance to make free choices that reflect their own values, interests and goals.

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### Student Corner

**Resisting Media Manipulation**

- What’s a manipulative message you’ve seen in the media (TV, music, videos, games, magazines, Internet ads)?
- What made you recognize the message was manipulative?
- What group of people did the message target?
- Do you think most of these people will believe the media message?
- What will happen if they do?
Young people can analyze media messages by asking themselves 5 key questions (Center for Media Literacy, 2008):

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques were used to get my attention?
3. How might other people understand this message?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view does this message promote? What values, lifestyles and points of view are left out?
5. Why is this message being sent?

Student Corner

Messages in My Favorite Media

☐ Watch an episode of a popular TV series (a drama, comedy or reality show). What messages does this program give:
   — About children?
   — About teens?
   — About parents?
   — About families?
   — About friendships?
   — About appearance, including weight?
   — About sexual behaviors?

☐ Do any of these messages support healthy relationships? Do any support responsible choices about sexual behaviors? If so, which ones?

☐ Do any of these messages damage healthy relationships? Do any glamorize unsafe choices about sex? If so, which ones?
The main points to know about why STD/HIV matters:

☐ Making healthy choices to avoid STD/HIV leads to many personal benefits, including better physical, emotional and mental health.

☐ The choices young people make about STD/HIV risks affect their relationships with family, peers and the wider community.

☐ The impact of STD/HIV worldwide is profound. The effects have been most devastating in Africa.

☐ Young people who are media literate have a better chance of making independent, healthy choices about sexual behaviors.