



Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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A Moment of Unprotected Sex Leads to HPV

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When I was little, I idolized my parents' relationship. When I was old enough to learn about sex, my mother explained that my father was the only man she'd ever been with. She said a girl's virginity was sacred—"a gift." I decided then and there that I wanted to be like her and save that gift for "the one."

Nearly 16 years old, I'd never been kissed. I even wanted to save that first kiss for someone special. I went through boyfriend after boyfriend, breaking up with them as soon as I realized they weren't "the one."

The One?

Then I met Eric, and, within months, I was in love. We talked about marriage, and, after nine months, I decided to give myself to him. I knew we'd be safe, because I had vowed to always use condoms and was already on the birth control pill for menstrual problems.

Eric and I started planning for our "special night." But my visions of a bed covered in rose petals and a wedding ring already on my finger turned into a blanket thrown across my 17-year-old boyfriend's bedroom floor. Sex was nothing like I'd imagined—no fireworks, no tingling. As Eric rolled over me in a heap when he was through, I couldn't help but wonder, *this is it?*

We had sex for the next few months, but nothing seemed to get better. I started to speak out about it, but then he yelled at me on New Year's Eve to "at least act like you like it!"



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I decided to stay with him only if we didn't have sex anymore. He agreed, but dumped me a month later.

Moving On

After dating a couple more guys, I started seeing Marc. One night, I stayed over at his house and was amazed to find him watching me when I woke up. I had this tender thought—*like, Wow, this could be something*—and wanted to sleep with him.

Looking back, I don't know what I was thinking. I just felt close to him; it felt right at the time. And for the first time, sex started to feel good. One night, in the heat of the moment, we didn't bother with a condom.

I was on the Pill and he pulled out, so we weren't too worried. But I knew that he had a history of being with a lot of girls, sometimes without using protection. It's funny how quickly you can push a worry like that aside when caught up in a "moment."

Things fizzled with Marc soon after.

Phone Call

Two months later, after a routine gynecological exam, my doctor called. She told me that my Pap smear came back abnormal and I had HPV, the human papilloma virus, the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD). She said I had to be tested right away for signs of cervical cancer. I was in shock. I just heard the words "HPV" and "cervical cancer" over and over in my mind. I was certain that Marc had infected me.

I immediately tried to learn as much as I could about HPV. I did online research and talked to my gynecologist. I discovered that there are different types of HPV. Certain ones are "low risk" and can cause genital warts. Others are "high risk" and can cause abnormal Pap smears and lead to a higher risk for cancer of the cervix, anus, or penis. And some have no negative effects.



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Further tests showed that I have a high-risk type of HPV, one of the few that lead to an increased risk for cervical cancer. If the HPV is caught early enough, the cancer is almost always preventable. Yet girls who don't get yearly Pap smears to check for abnormal cell changes might develop cancer and not know it.

Since being diagnosed with HPV, I've had two biopsies, which test for cancerous cells on my cervix. My second biopsy showed signs of moderate dysplasia, which is precancerous cell growth. Since I've had rapid abnormal cell-growth changes on my cervix, I have to have minor surgery to remove the "bad" tissue area.

After surgery, it's a toss up. The abnormal growth may or may not come back. In three more months, I go for my Pap. If that shows the dysplasia is back, it's another biopsy for me, and so on—but the HPV will remain.

Staying Safe

Now my life is forever changed. I'll never get used to waking up every day and realizing that my odds of getting cervical cancer are permanently hiked.

The best advice I can give to teens is to be abstinent. But I understand how unrealistic that is for many. So, the next best thing is to truly know whom you're having sex with. Talk to each other. Know your partner's sexual history. If your partner has been with a lot of people, you'd better make sure he or she has been tested for STDs.

Always use condoms, but realize that they don't always protect you from HPV, since the virus can be transmitted by parts of the skin not covered by a condom. And if you notice any changes on or around the genitals, see a doctor immediately.

Girls, you must see your gynecologist and get a Pap smear every year once you turn 18 or start having sex. Even though HPV rarely leads to cervical cancer, it's



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still the number one cause of that disease. If you don't get Pap tests, you may never know that you have it.

I can't turn back time. And now, because of a moment's desire, I suffer from a lifelong STD. But you don't have to. Take care of yourselves—now and always.

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