

Choosing Abstinence After You've Already Had Sex

By Erica Fernandes, 18, Staff Writer

Deciding to have sex is one of the most important decisions teens have to make. Saying no to sex after you've already said yes can be even more complicated: Will my partner get upset if I say no to sex now? Will he or she break up with me? Will my partner feel like I'm rejecting him or her?

The choice to be sexually active does not have to be a permanent one. Anyone can decide to stop having sex for a number of reasons. Some teens choose abstinence after they've already had sex, because they realize they are not ready for the responsibilities of birth control and protecting themselves from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Others don't feel emotionally ready to be that vulnerable with another person or ready for the intense feelings that can come with being sexually intimate. Some teens are just beginning to get comfortable with their own bodies and aren't comfortable having someone as physically close to them as the act of sex requires.

The Reality of Sex

In movies and on TV, sex is depicted as this super-romantic act with flowers, music and candles nearby—but it doesn't always play out this way in reality.

Cristina, 17, of Fair Lawn, NJ, decided to stop having sex after she realized she wanted sex to be special and more out of love.

"I was with someone for four months before we lost our virginity to each other," she says. "Initially, we only had sex romantically and on special occasions. I wasn't comfortable with having sex if it wasn't real, meaningful and romantic. As time went by, we began to make sex a casual thing."

Cristina thought sex would be romantic and magical every time she had it with her boyfriend, but that wasn't the case. When she realized this, she knew she wasn't ready for the reality of a sexual relationship, which isn't always about romantic bliss.

It's not just girls who feel disappointed when sex isn't all about romance. Leo, 18, of Weston, FL, says, "I had sex once before, but I wish I hadn't done it. After we had sex, everything felt so wrong. Now that I look back, I can say I had sex, but I haven't made love. So, I'm waiting until I know I'm ready."

Not a Cure

While sex can be an amazing experience between two people who are ready to take on the responsibilities that go along with it, it can't fix a broken relationship or keep you and your partner together.

"I had sex because I thought it would make our relationship more legitimate," says Cristina. But she learned that sex is not a remedy for relationship problems, and it can often complicate things. "I felt that having sex could potentially bring us back together and revive our love. But... sex did not erase our problems. In fact, having sex kept us from fixing anything."

Both partners must feel comfortable with the decision to have sex.

"I was under pressure," says 15-year-old Skylar, of Minneapolis, MN. "I wanted it to mean more than what it did. But it was something that I chose to do, thinking it would make a guy care about me more."

If you're having sex to fix a relationship or just to please your partner, it's a good idea to stop. When you choose to have sex again, it should be something that you want to do for you. And you have to be ready to be responsible for protecting yourself from STDs and pregnancy.

Choosing What's Healthiest for You

"It is always perfectly fine to stop having sex once you start feeling the least bit uncomfortable with it," says Cristina.

Sex may be an intimate act shared with another person, but choosing to have or stop having sex is an individual decision. It is important to be certain that you are ready. "Listen to your gut feeling. If you aren't feeling confident or stress-free about having sex, then please don't," says Cristina.

Sex is a big step for anyone. If you can't talk openly with your partner about sex, aren't protecting yourself from pregnancy and STDs or don't feel good about yourself for having it, then you are probably not ready for sex.

Tell your partner honestly why you no longer wish to have sex, and your partner will understand if he or she is worth keeping around. It may be difficult to tell your partner that you no longer wish to have sex, but you need to do what's best for you. If your partner cares about you, then he or she will respect your decision.

Sex can be a wonderful thing. But if you're not ready for it, then it's perfectly fine to stop having it.



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