



## Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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### Journey to the Condom Rack

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Imagine this scenario:

*Jim and Stacey are high school seniors who've been dating for a year. After talking it over, they decide they are mature and careful enough to have sex. Since they know that having unprotected sex can lead to unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), they plan to use protection. So, they go to their local drugstore and head to the condom section.*

*Jim and Stacey thought that they could just go the condom section, grab a box of Trojans, and go home. But what they found startled them—from floor to ceiling were dozens of multicolored boxes of different types of condoms: latex, sheepskin, spermicidal, flavored! They didn't have a clue which condom to pick out. They went home in a daze, without purchasing any condoms.*

Don't let this happen to you! Today, with so many choices out there, it's important to know which type of condom is right for you, and how to use condoms correctly.

### Condom 411

First, what's a condom? It's a sheath of thin rubber, plastic, or animal tissue that a male wears on his penis during oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse. A "reservoir-tip" at the end of the condom collects the male's semen from ejaculation. A condom also prevents transmission of other bodily fluids, like blood or vaginal fluids.

Anyone can buy condoms at a drugstore or supermarket, or get them at low cost or for free at a local health clinic. (You don't have to be a certain age.)



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When used properly each and every time, latex condoms are 98-percent effective at preventing pregnancy. But the reality is that not everybody uses condoms properly every time. This brings the effectiveness rate down to 85 percent. Latex condoms are also effective at preventing the spread of STDs, including HIV and gonorrhea.

### Know Your Types

Condoms are made of three different materials. The first type of material is latex, which is a kind of rubber.

"Latex is the most common and effective type of condom to prevent pregnancy and STD transmission," says Rebecca Bedner, community education coordinator at the Family Tree Clinic, in St. Paul, MN.

The second type of material is polyurethane, which is a type of plastic.

"Polyurethane condoms are generally used by people who are allergic to latex," says Bedner.

But beware! Polyurethane is not as flexible as latex, so a polyurethane condom can slip off more easily during intercourse.

The third and least effective type of material is natural skin (or lambskin). These condoms are effective at preventing pregnancy, but not STD transmission. Why? Natural skin condoms contain natural pores that are larger than many STDs, such as HIV, and smaller viruses can pass through the pores of the condom.

### Wet vs. Dry

Some condoms come with lubrication. Lubricated condoms are known as "wet" condoms. Non-lubricated condoms are known as "dry" condoms. Lubricated condoms can help prevent condom breakage.



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"Many people prefer using lubricated condoms, because the extra fluid on the condom may make intercourse feel more comfortable or more enjoyable," says Bedner.

Some condoms are lubricated with nonoxynol-9, a spermicide that kills sperm.

"But if a person uses a condom with spermicide on it and notices an itching or burning sensation, that person should stop using it, because he or she may be allergic to spermicide."

When adding lubrication to a dry latex condom, Bedner warns that only water-based—not oil-based—lubrication should be used.

"Oil and latex do not mix," she says.

"Never put baby oil, Vaseline, or anything made with oil on a latex condom, because it may eat a hole through the latex. There are lubricants made with water that are safe for condoms," she says.

K-Y Jelly or AstroGlide are safe lubricants for condoms.

### Added Features

Condoms also come in a variety of sizes and textures, such as ribbed. Ribbings, located at the base of many condoms, can enhance sensation for the partner.

"Different people prefer different types of condoms. People should use the type that they feel the most comfortable with," says Bedner.

Condoms also come in a variety of colors and flavors. Bedner says that these specialty condoms should be used with caution.

"Condoms can be different colors and/or different flavors. Generally, flavored condoms should be used for oral sex. The flavoring may cause infection if the condom is used for other types of intercourse. Some condoms are considered novelty condoms [like glow-in-the-dark ones]. Novelty condoms are for fun only



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and should not be used for protection against pregnancy or STDs," says Bedner.

As with any type of condom, it's important to read the label to make sure the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves the condom for use against unplanned pregnancy and STDs. It's important to check the expiration date, too (it's printed right on the package).

### **Stay Educated**

Even though so many condom types are on the market, choosing a condom doesn't have to be an impossible task. After all, condom use is extremely important for teens that are having sex. So, don't go into a drugstore unprepared like Jim and Stacey.

That day, they left the drugstore in a daze, not knowing which kind of condom to buy. They could have asked for help from a pharmacist, an adolescent health clinic, or a trusted adult. But instead, they let their emotions get the better of them, went back to Jim's home, and had sex without protection—leaving them at risk for unplanned pregnancy and STDs.

Remember: don't let this happen to you! Get the facts about condoms, and practice safer sex each and every time.

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