



## Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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### The Pregnancy Panic

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As my calculus teacher scribbles tangled equations on the chalkboard before me and my fellow juniors, I try to calculate how many days into my period I was when I lost my virginity. Was I in the second week? Maybe day 20?

If the sperm can live for three to six days inside of me and my egg was traveling at a constant rate toward wherever it goes to be fertilized, could I be pregnant now? It's like an impossible math problem on a final exam, only I have far more at stake than a decent grade.

### Calculus & Pregnancy

While my teacher's back is turned, my friend Jill leans over to me and whimpers, "Oh my god, Bianca, I am going to die this week! We have the calc test on Tuesday, then I have my English paper and the bio lab report due Wednesday!" She grimaces at me, sighs noisily, then drops her head into her hands.

I ignore her. I want to tell her how easy life would be if all I had to worry about was cramming for calculus and finding a thesis for an essay.

I want to tell her I think I might be pregnant. That no matter how I calculate it, one night of sex plus a disregard for protection inevitably equals fertilization. That probably, as we sit here in class, the first few cells of a human being are developing inside of me. A baby.

I want to tell her how the thought of kissing my boyfriend makes me dry heave; he infuriates and repulses me. My voice develops a monotone chill whenever I

speak to him on the phone. He doesn't have to worry about going to class or playing lacrosse a few months from now, when his stomach is the size of a backpack, but I do.

## **Longing to Tell**

I want to curl up on Jill's couch and spill to her that instead of researching secondary sources for the lab report, I've been reading up on pregnancy tests, morning-after pills, and abortions. Last night, I locked my bedroom door, buried myself under a comforter, and opened up my calc textbook—behind which I had hidden one of the sex ed guides from my puberty days.

I long to explain my undercover trip to a chain pharmacy where I bought a pregnancy test. I read the instructions while hidden alone in a coffee-shop bathroom, then stuffed the plastic indicator into a deep, dark, zippered compartment in my purse, until I would be far enough along in my cycle to use it.

All of these things I want to confess, but don't. Getting pregnant at 17 seems so messy. In the eyes of my parents, their friends, and even my friends, it signifies poor planning, sloppiness, and loose morals. Pregnant is not sexy and cool.

Even my closest friends wouldn't understand. The virgins would be horrified and condescending. The ones who have "done it" would see me as incompetent, as having bungled the first hurdle of womanhood by not planning enough in advance. My boyfriend? He'd think me immature and a liability, a bother, a nuisance, or so I told myself in my panicked and paranoid state.

## **Confessions**

With my secret fear keeping me tossing at night, I pray for a red stain to appear. Eventually, it does, to my great and intense relief, but what comes to light later is even more relieving and revealing than the menstrual blood.

I discover my concern had not been unique. My friend Rachel calls me a week later, her voice high and strained, and demands I "come over. Right. Now." Sitting cross-legged on her bed and looking anywhere but at me, she explains that she and Brian had sex recently, and now her period is late. "But I'm on the Pill, so I shouldn't be, you know. . . But what should I do, Bianca? What if I am?" Rachel laments.

Over a midnight spill-session the following month, Jill confesses that she and her boyfriend lived in a state of panic after they lost their virginity to one another, despite using protection. Convinced she had accidentally become pregnant, Jill only started breathing again after a test at the gynecologist's office proved she was fetus-free.

Vanessa phones me in tears. For the last 12 hours, she has not stopped vomiting and has suffered stomach-wrenching, body-shaking cramps from taking the morning-after pill.

Fearing that although her boyfriend pulled-out, she could still have gotten pregnant, she went to Planned Parenthood and, without telling her mom, boyfriend, or any friend but me, took the anti-pregnancy pill. Although plagued by the temporary discomfort, Vanessa was relieved to have cast off the burden of doubt, concern, and fear.

### **Rite of Passage**

My first experience with sex thrilled me, stressed me, and informed me. As I realized later, the dark, lonely period of pregnancy-paranoia and shame that I endured was practically a rite of passage of sex, almost as normal and universal among my friends as the physical pain we endured our first times.

But sex doesn't have to be tinged with regret. After my period of panic, I got a prescription for the Pill to ward off pregnancy and anxiety.

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