

Finding Common Ground: Appropriate Messages about Sex for Youth



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Importance of Behavioral Messages

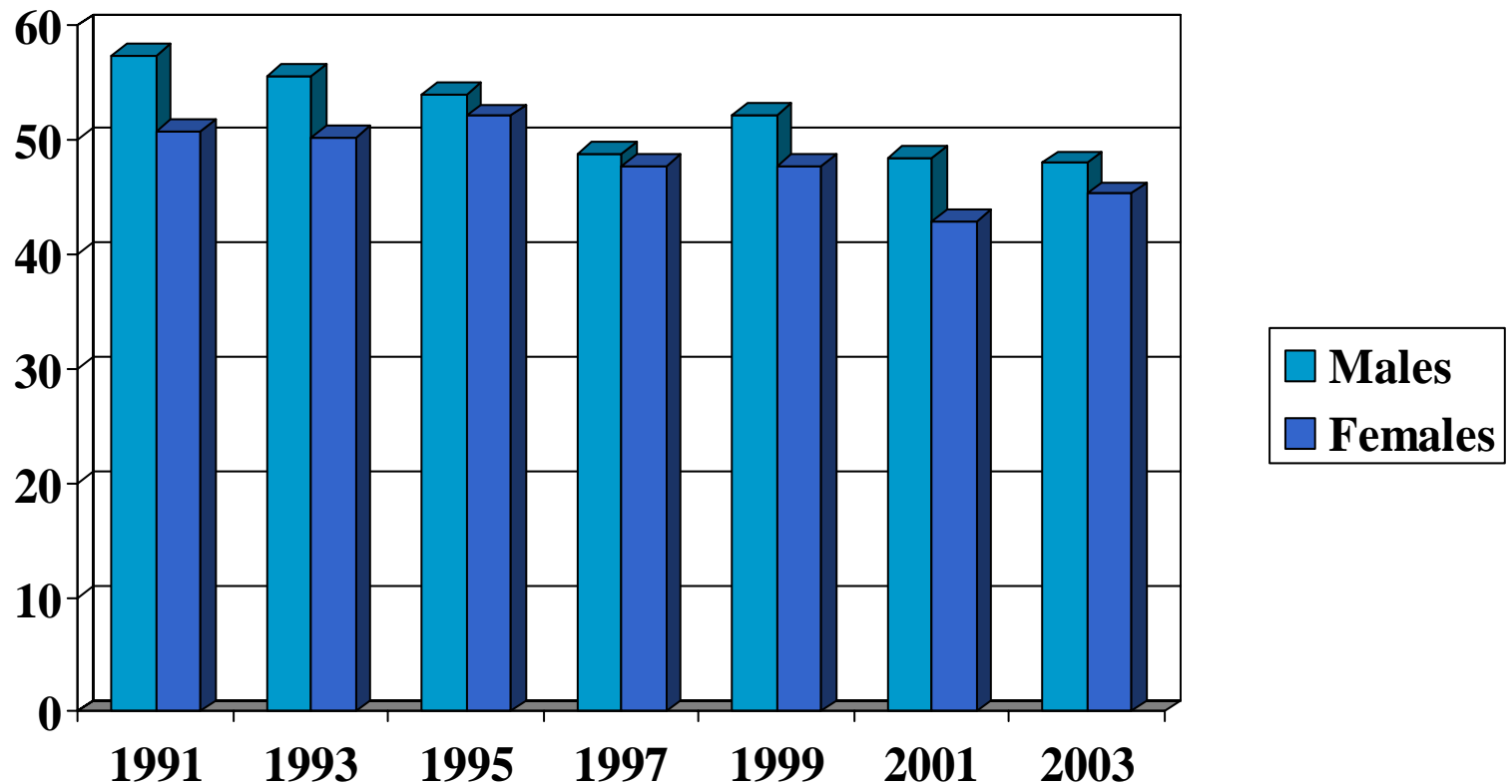
- Research shows that a “clear message” about behavior is one of the most important characteristics of effective programs.
 - Effective sex and HIV education programs (group-based)
 - Clinic protocols (one-on-one)
 - School-based clinics



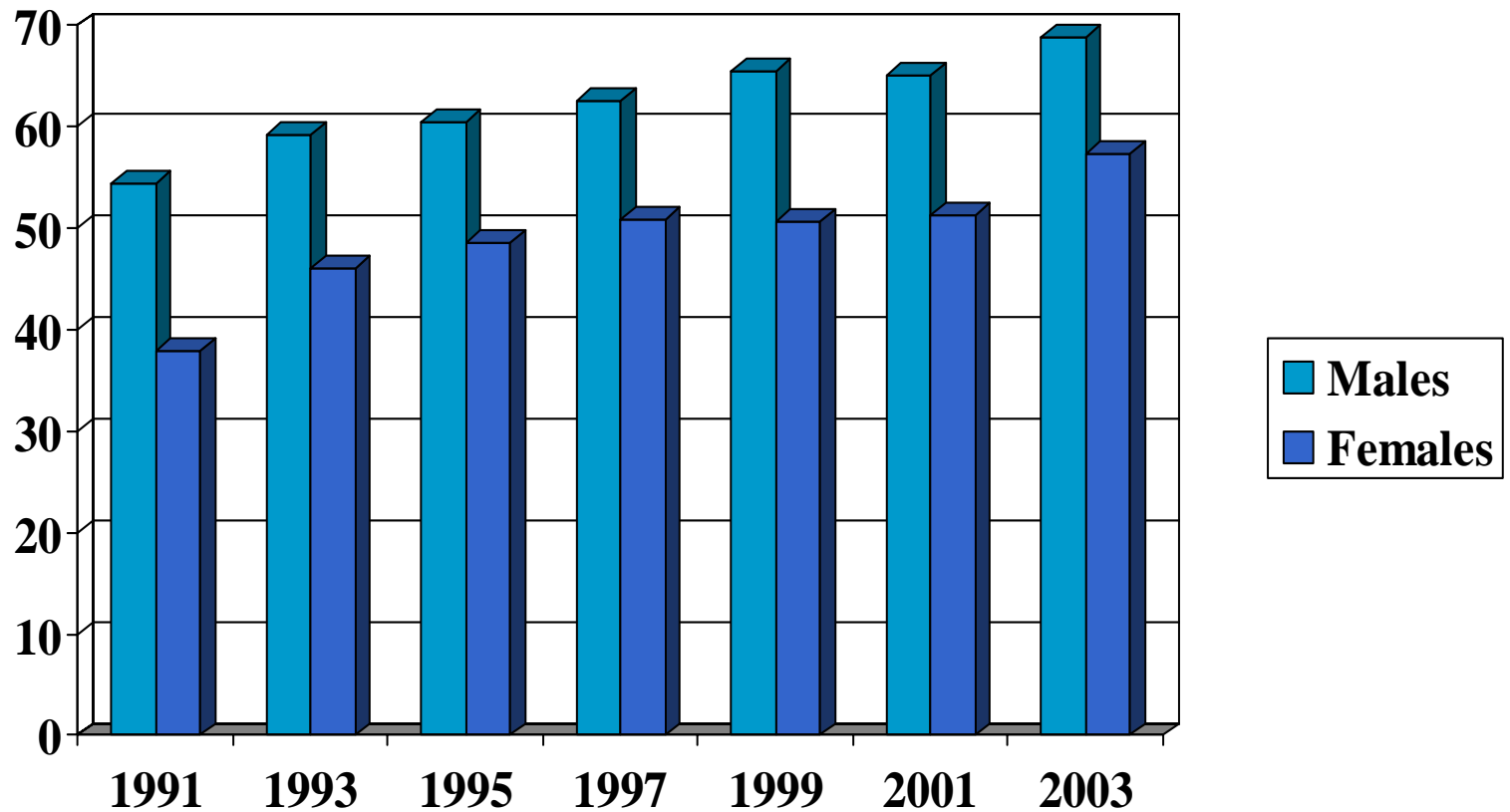
Importance of Behavioral Messages (Continued)

- A clear message nation-wide can lead to nation-wide behavior change
- Examples:
 - Messages about abstinence and condoms

U.S.: Percentage of 9th-12th Graders Who Had Ever Had Sexual Intercourse, by Gender



U.S.: Percentage of 9th-12th Graders Who Used a Condom the Last Time They Had Sex



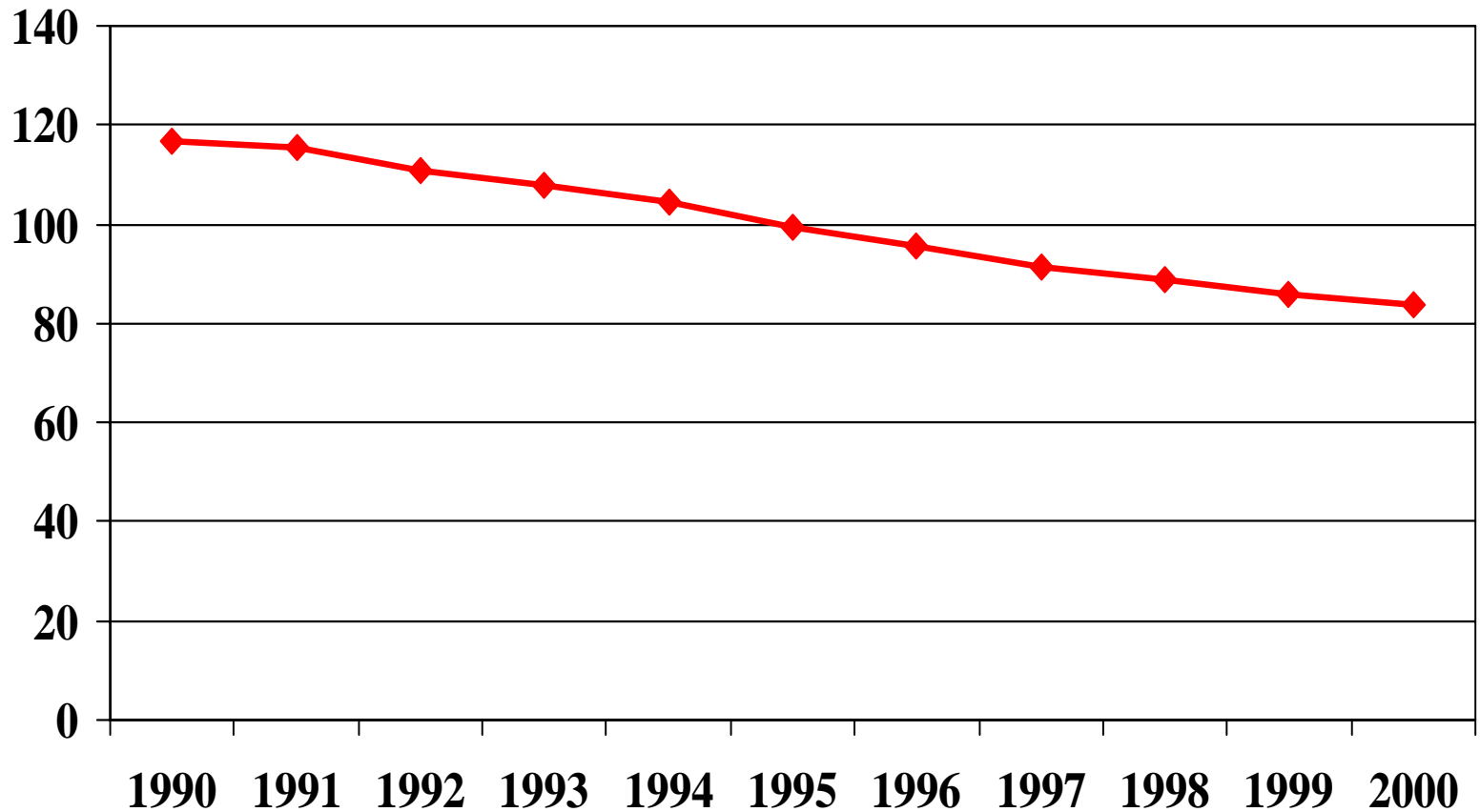


Importance of Clear Messages

(Continued)

- A clear message nation-wide can lead to nation-wide reductions in teen pregnancy

Number of Pregnancies Per 1,000 15-19 Year Old Females



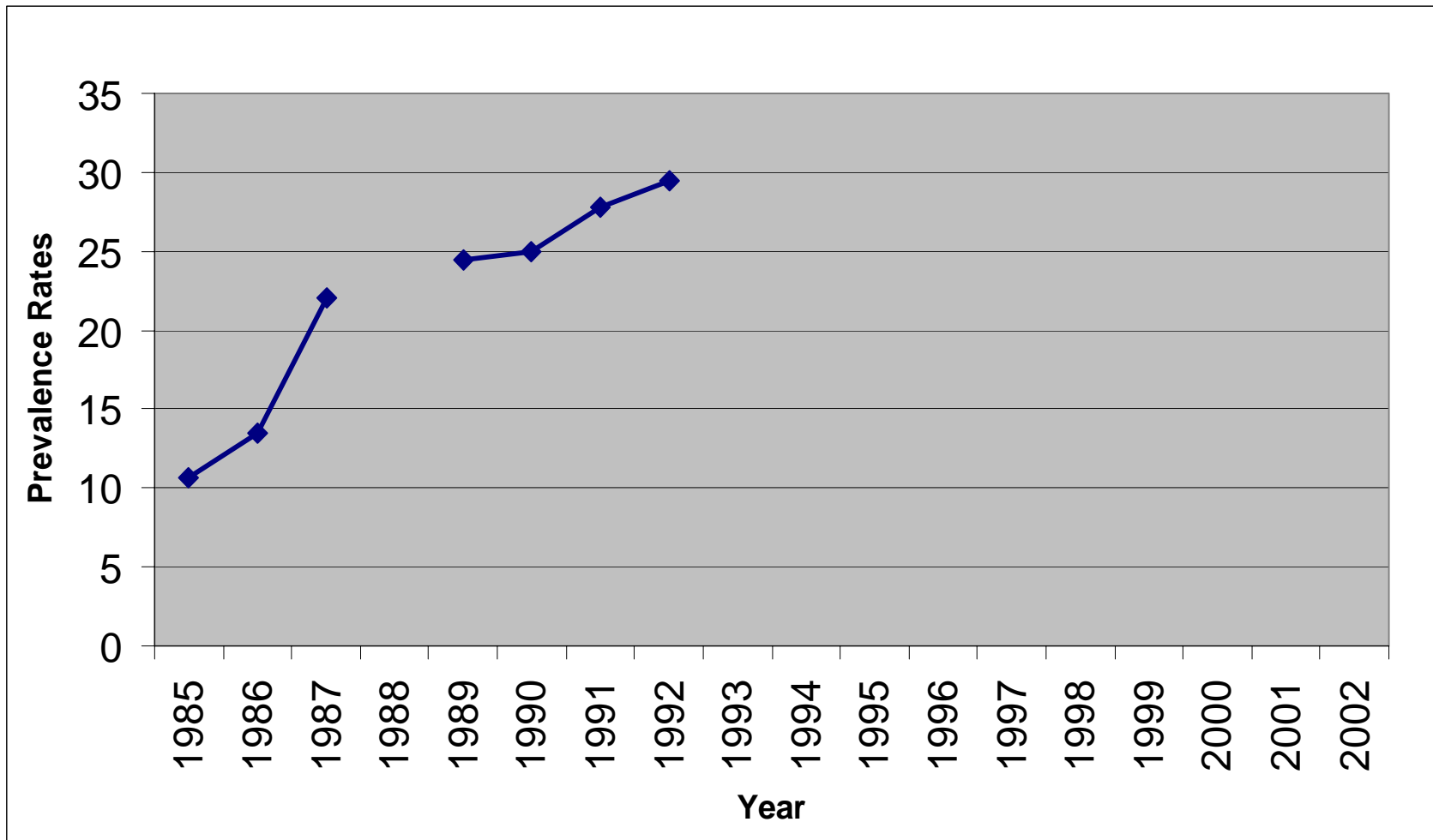


Importance of Clear Messages

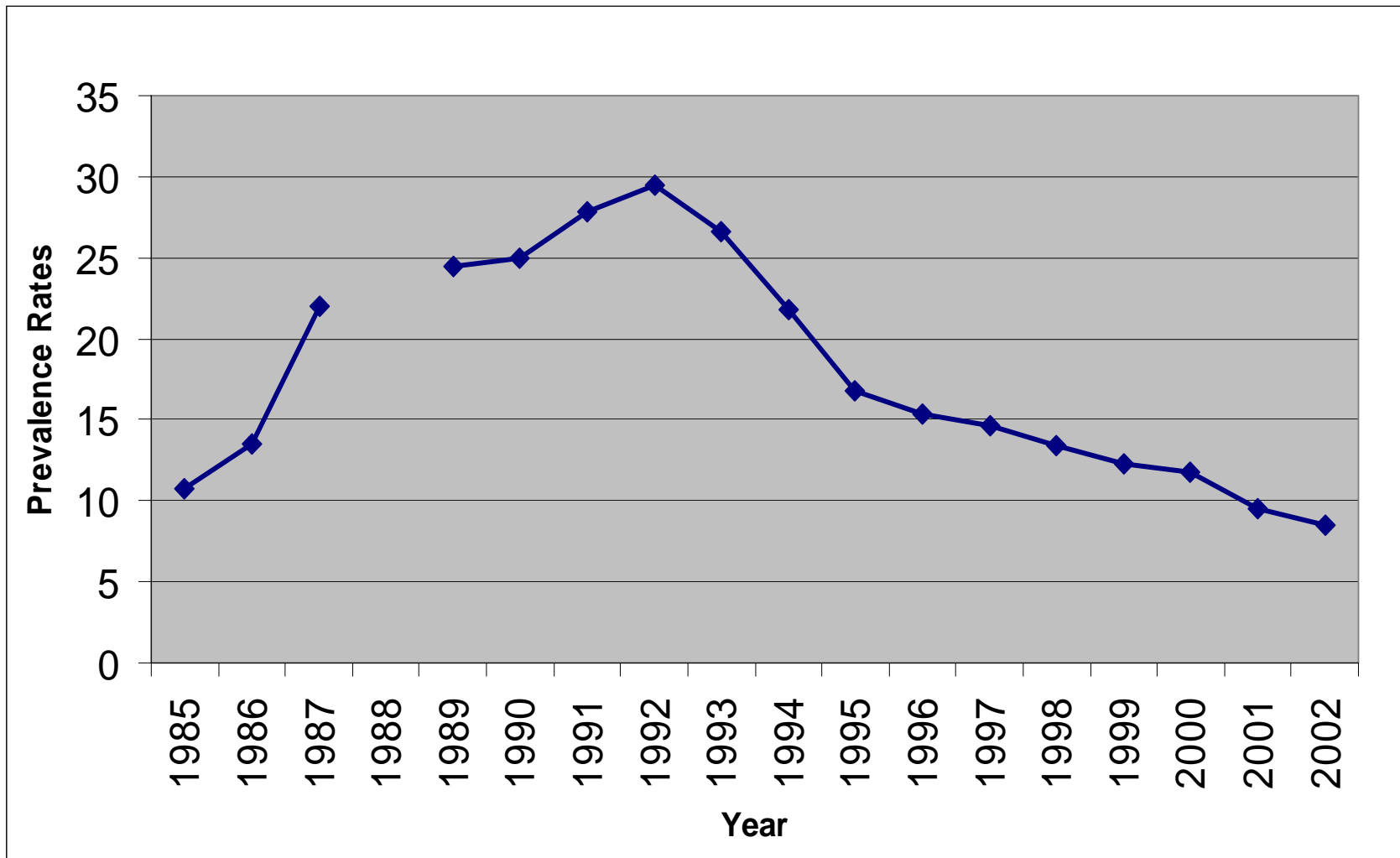
(Continued)

- A clear message nation-wide can lead to nation-wide reductions in HIV/AIDS

Percent of ANC Women with HIV in Kampala, Uganda, 1985 - 1992



Percent of ANC Women with HIV Kampala, Uganda, 1985 - 2002





Success in Uganda

- Uganda became the first nation with a horrific generalized AIDS epidemic to dramatically reduce the prevalence of AIDS



What Contributed to This Success?

- Many things
- They found common ground
- They gave a clear message about behavior



Initial Conclusions

- Youth (and people more generally) do hear the message and do change their behaviors accordingly
- Content of the message is important



Content of Current Messages for Youth in the U.S.

- A: **Abstain from sex**
 - Until older
 - Until married
- AC: **Abstinence is safest. If you have sex always use a Condom (or Contraception)**



Limitations of the “A” and “AC” Messages

“A” message

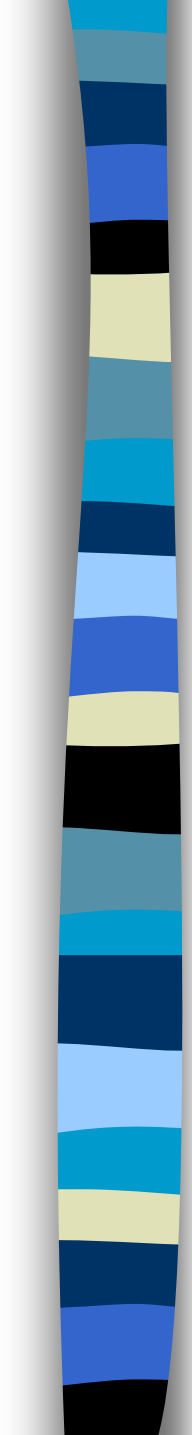
- A majority of youth have sex in high school
- The vast majority of youth have sex before marriage
- Many young people value their sexual intimacy prior to marriage and do not want to forgo it



Limitations of the “A” and “AC” Messages (continued)

“C” message

- Condoms are not 100% effective, even if used consistently and correctly
- Sexually active youth do not always use condoms consistently and correctly
 - Many youth stop using condoms when they have had sex a few times with same partner
 - As youth become older, they are less likely to use condoms
 - Females have less control over condom use



Limitations of the “A” and “AC” Messages (continued)

Other limitations:

- Includes nothing about having fewer sexual partners (mutually monogamy) or STD tests
- Fails to include other values about sexual behavior



Important Questions

- What messages do we want to give to youth about behavior to prevent unintended pregnancy and STD?
- What other values do we want to convey to youth about sex?



Important Characteristics of Messages:

Should be:

- Consistent with family and community values
- Based on best research -- accurate
- Realistic
- Clear
- Tailored for different groups (appropriate to gender, age and sexual behavior)

Some Options





Option #1:

Three slides:

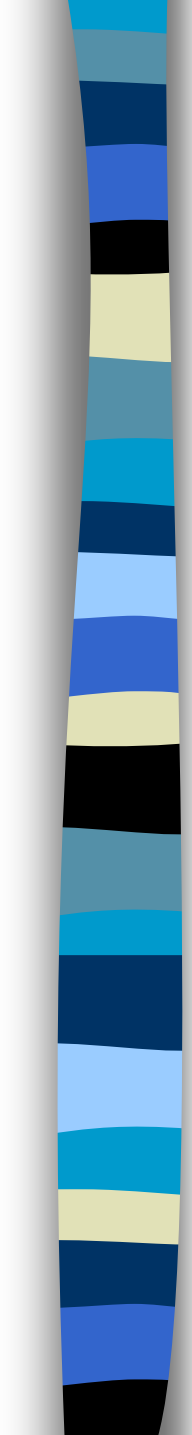
A = Abstain from sex

- *Absolutely the safest option*
- *Best option for young people*



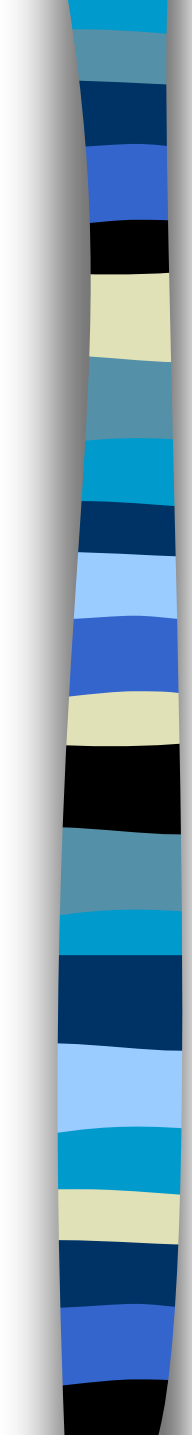
B = Before you have sex,

- **Be** at least 18,
- **Be** in love and in a mutually faithful relationship for at least 3 months,
- **Be** tested and treated for STD,
- **Be** protected against pregnancy (use contraception)
- **Be** sure it is what you want
 - Voluntary, not pressured, consistent with values
- *(Not as safe as **A**, but is much safer than other options.)*



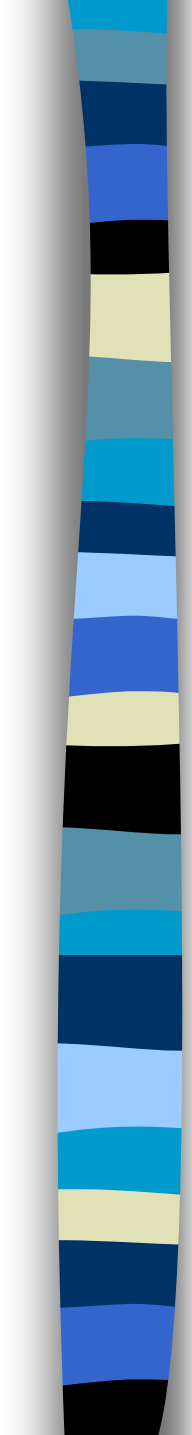
C = **C**onsistently and **C**orrectly use
Condoms every time you have
sex.

- *(Less safe than **A** or **B**, but is much safer than sex without protection against pregnancy or STD.)*

- 
- Consistent with values of many teens
 - Consistent with many teens' beliefs about romantic sex



Option #2

- 
- **A = Abstain** from sex; this is safest
 - **C =** If you have sex, always use a **C**ondom
 - **B = Be** faithful and use hormonal contraception: That is:
 - If you have been in a mutually faithful relationship for at least 3 months, and
 - Have been tested and treated for STD,
 - Use a hormonal method of contraception
 - *For all youth or possibly higher risk youth*



Option #3



Always avoid sex that is not protected against both pregnancy and STD.

A = Abstinence is safest.

D = If you have sex, use Dual protection:

- To protect against *pregnancy*, use a female hormonal method of contraception during every act of sex.
- To protect against *STD*, either:
 1. Use a condom every time you have sex, *or*
 2. Be in a long term mutually faithful relationship *and* be tested (and treated) for STD before having sex without a condom



Looking Ahead: Option #4



Before you ever have sex:

- Be vaccinated against:
 - Hepatitis B
 - HPV (human papilloma virus) (soon to come)
- Be circumcised (males only)



If you have sex, use dual protection:

- To protect against *pregnancy*, use a female hormonal method of contraception during every act of sex.
- To protect against *STD*, either:
 1. Use a condom every time you have sex, *or*
 2. Be in a long term mutually faithful relationship *and* be tested (and treated) for STD before having sex without a condom



Principles about Support:

- Not all groups have to support all elements
 - Faith communities might wish to promote A more than C
 - Reproductive health clinics might wish to promote C or D more than A
- No group should undercut or contradict any element of the message
- Overall, there should be an appropriate balance across the elements from different sources in each community