

TRICKY SUBJECTS

How to Talk about Abortion, Birth Control, Sex Education and Reproductive Rights without Feeling Nervous

KEY MESSAGES

Birth Control

- **Birth control is basic health care.** Women (and men) have been using birth control in various forms for thousands of years.
- **Birth control is personal.** Each method of birth control is different – there is no one-size-fits-all solution for everyone. That's why it's always important that each person discuss his or her lifestyle with a health care provider, to find the best method that works for them, their lifestyles, and their bodies.
- **Birth control is safe and effective.** There are many methods available, that it's easy to find a method that works for you, your body, and your lifestyle.
- **At Planned Parenthood, we know that birth control isn't just about preventing unintended pregnancies.** It's also about being able to choose when to start a family and when to add to a family. It's about being able to provide for the family you already have. It's about every child being a loved and wanted child.

Emergency Contraception (EC)

- **Emergency contraception is a form of birth control.** It prevents a pregnancy from happening, but cannot affect an existing pregnancy. It does not cause an abortion.
- **Emergency contraception is safe.** It is made from the same hormones that are found in birth control pills. Taking emergency contraception is the equivalent of taking a high dosage of birth control pills.
- **Emergency contraception is effective.** Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy for up to 120 hours (or five days) after unprotected sex. The sooner emergency contraception is administered, the better it works—that is why easy and timely access is so important.

Sex Education

- **Our kids need sex education –** We need to make sure that young people have the tools they need to make healthy, safe decisions. That means making sure every student in every grade and every year is taught comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education in school, and encouraging parents and guardians to talk with their kids about sex and sexuality.
- **Real sex education works –** Study after study has shown that when kids receive comprehensive, age-appropriate sex ed they delay first sexual contact and make safer, healthier decisions if and when they do decide to become sexually active.
- **Parents want sex education –** according to a recent survey of NY voters, not only do 85% want comprehensive sex education taught in schools, 77% of voters mistakenly think it's already a part of the curriculum. We know parents want sex ed, we know kids need it and we know it works. The only question left is "what are we waiting for?"
- **Parents and caregivers should talk with their kids about sex and sexuality,** and that's why Planned Parenthood does all it can to encourage open and healthy communication between teens and their parents or caregivers. In an ideal world, every parent or caregiver would teach

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OF NEW YORK CITY**

SOURCE: Reproductive Health Technologies Project

- **Emphasize personal decision-making.** The concept of personal decision-making is very powerful when talking about abortion. Most people show empathy and understanding for a woman facing an unintended pregnancy, and even if they don't agree with her decision, they believe it is her decision to make.
- **Accept ambivalence.** Ambivalence around abortion is normal. While people may not like abortion, or would not have an abortion themselves, it doesn't mean that they want to make it illegal or would want to make the decision for someone else.
- **Evoke empathy.** Currently, the abortion debate is framed in "right" and "wrong." Shift attention away from the listener's impulse to judge whether a pregnant woman's decision was right or wrong, and help the listener realize a sense of relief that they didn't have to make the decision for themselves and indeed could not make it for someone else.
- **Encourage tolerance for different views on abortion.** We do not need people to feel comfortable with abortion, nor do we need them to believe it's good—we do want them to refrain from concluding that their personal feelings about abortion should be translated into making abortion illegal for all women.
- **Bring the discussion around to shared goals.** "We all want" ...happy, healthy children and families, or for each child to be born to parents who feel ready for the responsibility.
- **Create a role for the listener.** Many pro-choice messages are based on the theme of privacy, which may inadvertently send a signal to some listeners to 'stay out'. Use "we" instead of "they" or "them" or "you." "We" builds the connection between the speaker, the listener and the pregnant woman in the message.
- **Employ the singular "woman" instead of "women".** Use of the plural more readily evokes stereotypes of irresponsible women — while use of the singular leads the listener to connect the issue to a specific woman whom he or she knows.
- **The operative verb should be decision, not choice.** The word "choice" carries a connotation of triviality, since one makes so many routine choices in the course of a day. "Decision" more accurately conveys the gravity of the woman's thinking as she ponders whether to end her pregnancy.
- **The decision is about parenting, not abortion.** At its core, the decision about abortion is a decision about becoming a parent. Or, in many cases, a decision parents grapple with. Becoming a parent is an aspiration for the vast majority of Americans; having an abortion is not.
- **Use words like "pregnancy" or "baby" when talking about abortion if they seem appropriate.** Technologies like sonograms have made pregnancy more accessible to the general public, notably men and younger women who may not have experienced pregnancy. The growing prevalence of genetic tests also makes more listeners familiar with the situation of a wanted pregnancy that has gone awry.

Sample Statements

A woman may have an abortion for any number of reasons. Some of these reasons may not seem right to us, but even if we disagree, it is better that each person be able to make her own decision.

I can accept someone's decision to end a pregnancy, even if I wouldn't make the same decision myself.

There's just something about pregnancy—and everybody has feelings about it. Each circumstance is different, so we should respect and support women and families that must make life-altering decisions about whether or not to have a child.

We can try to imagine the heartbreak of a family when they get the news that a test has shown there is something wrong with their baby.

Ultimately, we all want healthy, thriving families and that is why we need policies that respect our ability to make thoughtful decisions and support us in our role as caregivers and breadwinners.

TIPS FOR FIELDING TOUGH QUESTIONS

The secret to fielding tough questions is to stick to your worldview! After all, questions are simply opportunities for you to get your message out. In order to transition smoothly from question to address, use bridging tactics. Here are some techniques:

Touch and Go — Answer quickly and go right to your worldview.

Question: “Does this clinic provide abortions?”

Address: “Yes, and all of Planned Parenthood’s health centers provide preventive health care services, responsible sex education, and counseling to nearly 5 million American women and their families each year. That’s why Planned Parenthood is the most trusted name in women’s health.”

Hug and Go — Embrace the ideal behind the question and link it to your worldview.

Question: “Don’t you think parents should know when their kids are undergoing surgery?”

Address: “Absolutely they should. NO one works harder than Planned Parenthood to give teens the skills they need to approach their parents and parents the skills they need to talk to their teens. The first thing Planned Parenthood does when a teen comes in is to encourage them to talk to their parents or other responsible adults, and the vast majority of teens follow our advice. Tragically, not every family is a model family.”

Springboard — Jump right over ridiculous remarks and go to your worldview. *

Question: “Why are you a baby killer?”

Address: “I’m proud to work for Planned Parenthood. We’re a nationwide healthcare provider with a track record of over 80 years of excellent service providing responsible sex education, counseling, and preventive medical care for families.”

Pick and Choose — Select a word(s) in the question and use it in your message.

Question: “Some Americans believe that it’s irresponsible to teach kids that sex is safe.”

Address: “What is irresponsible is not giving young people the critical accurate information they need in order to make responsible choices.”

Deflect — Treat tough questions as general issues and don’t respond to specifics.

“I’m glad you raised that point, because responsible sex education...”

“That’s not the point. The point is...”

“Your question raises an important issue...”

**Helpful Hint: We want to be helpful and that makes us want to “answer” “questions.” Both of these words appear in quotes for a reason. It’s essential to rethink the interpretation of both words in order to be an effective spokesperson. First, the issues of “questions.” In your role as spokesperson, you will encounter few actual questions (an actual question would be under “Touch and Go” above.) Instead, what you will likely get are feelings and beliefs that are phrased in question-like formats (see “Hug and Go,” “Springboard,” and “Pick and Choose” above). The best “answer” is to address the underlying issue/belief/feeling such as in the examples provided above.*

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