

Angela Riddell, Mike Robison, Traci Wainscott and Tim Werner met with author Jim Auer and Youth Update's editor to check out this text before publication.

The four 16-year-olds recommended some reorganization, some new divisions and asked (on your behalf) the three questions answered here by Jim.

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## 'Safe Sex': What Does the Evidence Say?

"How brainless do you think we are? There's no such thing as safe smoking! Stop insulting us just because we're kids, we're automatically going to smoke? I don't think so. Most of us have more sense than that. As for protecting health, doesn't it occur to you that *not* smoking might be better than 'safe smoking'?"

Now, let's say that you decide to check into this "safe smoking" campaign, and you discover the following facts: Studies have

shown that the special "safe

smoking" filter fails at least 10 to 12 percent of the time, and people suffer the same effects as

filters. It takes a little effort, and, of course, you have to remember to use them each time you smoke, but it's worth it. After all, you have a responsibility to protect your health. If you can't afford to buy the special filters, you can come to one of our SAFE SMOKING centers and we'll give you some free. We won't tell your parents, either."

Are you buying this so far? O.K., it's imaginary, but *would* you buy it if you heard it?

Your reaction might be,

“Listen, we know that practically all of you kids are going to smoke, even though you're told not to. Sooner or later, you're just plain going to smoke, right? Well, we adults care about you, so we're here to tell you about SAFE SMOKING.

“There's a special filter that you put on a cigarette when you light up. We have a video that demonstrates how to use these

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if they hadn't used it. That's minimum; according to other studies, it could be as high as 35 to 40 percent.

Now you would probably be angry because the "safe smoking" people are not being truthful. They're covering up facts and misleading people.

Yet you see more and more of your classmates starting to smoke! Why?

Because they've been told (A) that they're going to do it sooner or later since everybody does; and (B) that they can do it safely, with no harmful consequences. So they're figuring, hey—it gives me kind of a rush, it makes my friends think I'm cool, it gives me something to look forward to. Why not?

And as time goes on, you would see more and more of your classmates becoming victims of the filter's failure rate. "Safe smoking" would be a lie, responsible for a drastic increase in shattered lives.

"Safe sex" is a lie—a lie that is responsible for a drastic increase in shattered lives.

The same is true of phrases like "protected sex," which is like saying "protected smoking." Even Magic Johnson in *What You Can Do to Avoid AIDS* says, "Please notice: I said 'safer sex,' not 'safe sex.' In today's world, there is no such thing as absolutely 'safe sex' when we're talking about intercourse. The safest sex is no sex."

Yet to some people, even "safer sex" sounds pretty good. How much safer is it? It depends, of course, on what you're comparing it to. Compared in all areas to abstinence or chastity, it has a miserable track record.

### The Great Condom Solution

**S**afe sex" usually refers to preventing pregnancy and guarding against sexually transmitted diseases. Later, we'll

investigate whether that's all the protection a person needs. For starters, though, let's look at The Great Condom Solution with regard to preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. How effective is it? A long report titled *The Condom: Is It Really Safe Sex?*, published by the Public Education Committee on Children and Youth, contains some unsettling facts that, unfortunately, don't get mentioned very often.

For years the condom has been known to have at least a 10 percent failure rate in preventing pregnancy. That figure comes from the *more favorable* studies. Other studies, which consider not only condom defects but "use effectiveness" (mistakes by the user), indicate failure can be as high as 36 to 40 percent.

When it comes to preventing disease, the condom outlook

gets worse. Here it's trying to contain or ward off much smaller organisms than a sperm cell. A syphilis spirochete is 7.5 times smaller than a sperm cell. The herpes virus is 150 times smaller. HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is 450 times smaller. Looking at those possibilities and saying, "Oh, well..." is just not facing reality.

Dr. Theresa Crenshaw, past president of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, and a member of the Presidential Commission on HIV, was giving a talk to an audience of 800 professional sex therapists and educators. She asked them how

many recommended condoms for AIDS protection. Most raised their hands.

Then she called for another show of hands. She asked them to imagine that the partner of their wildest dreams was available to them sexually that night and that this person was infected with the AIDS virus—but a condom was available. She asked how many would go through with it, trusting the condom to protect them.

No hands went up.

The safe sex campaign keeps repeating and recommending what isn't working. For many years, we've invested huge amounts of time, energy and dollars promoting "safe sex." Why? To reduce the increasing number of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, especially among teenagers.

What are the results? What has happened with teen pregnancies since we've been doing this? They've gone up. Abortions? Up. Sexually transmitted diseases (STD's)? Up—off the charts into "epidemic" proportions.

Scientists do not toss the



q. The figures you mentioned about how many people will develop AIDS by the year 2000—I think I've read a much higher number. Could that higher number be true? a. Yes. Not necessarily, but yes. Several scientific centers study AIDS and make predictions about it. Some predict conservatively, and some imagine the worst, so to speak. And new data are always coming in. Remember that, as diseases go, AIDS is still practically brand-new territory. It didn't even have a name until barely over a decade ago! But the general trend is all in the same direction: I don't know of any study that concluded, "It's not nearly as bad as we thought it might be."

word "epidemic" around lightly just to be dramatic or get attention. When they use it, things are ruinously bad. In June 1992, researchers at Harvard University predicted that 24 million people will have developed AIDS by the year 2000—and, of course, far more will be infected with HIV and will eventually develop AIDS. In a report released in July 1992, the World Health Organization cited 350,000 cases of sexually transmitted diseases occurring every day.

Linda Wildey, associate director of training in the Division of Adolescent Medicine at Children's Hospital Medical Center in Cincinnati, recently gave a list of advice to teens for protecting themselves from infection. The first two items were: "Do not have sex" and "If you do have sex, limit it to a lifetime partner who is not affected."

### No Baby, No Disease, No Harm?

So far we've considered only pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. "Safe sex" promotions nearly always stop there because they assume the following: "If there's no baby and no disease, there's no harm done."

Are pregnancy and disease the only things worth avoiding in a relationship? What about far more heartache than there has to be if the relationship doesn't last? What about the feeling of having given it all, the most intimate gift you have, to a relationship that now seems like one huge mistake? What about the feeling of being used, the feeling that if you didn't have certain actively operating body parts,

the rest of you might not be enough?

There's no condom for your heart, no pill for your feelings. Something that leaves the body free of disease or an unplanned pregnancy but leaves the feelings torn and the spirit shattered: that doesn't qualify as a "safe" activity.

### Sex: Three Teens Talk

Meet three kids, all of them former students of mine, now in their late teens. They're all guys because it's more comfortable for me to talk very personally, one-on-one, about sex with guys than girls. But in two of the three conversations, the girl and the guy have come to the same decision together. I've changed the names, but these are all real people, each living with a different decision about safe sex, and these were real conversations.

● John has been going with Angela since tenth grade. Both just finished their first year of college. They've been very serious about each other for over two years.

Both are virgins. "It's not that we haven't thought about it," John says with a grin and a roll of his eyeballs, indicating that he's making a huge understatement. "Actually, we've talked about it quite a few times—always decided no."

"Why?" I ask.

John gets a puzzled "Whose side are you on?" look.

"I can think of lots of good reasons," I explain, "but I'm interested in yours."

"Well, I guess we want something to look forward to. If our relationship goes all the way to marriage, we want an 'all-the-way' way to celebrate it, something that hasn't happened before.

"And if it doesn't go all the way—our relationship, I mean—if we have to break up sometime..." John pauses and rolls his eyeballs again. "That's going to be enough hell. If we shared sex along with everything else for several years—we don't need that kind of pain."

● Alex just graduated from high school. Over his high school years, he has dated quite a few girls and was sexually active with four of them.

"But I'm not bragging," he insists. "I hate it when guys do that." He answers my questions honestly. He knows I'll still like him, even though we totally disagree on this issue. We've talked about it before.

"Were you ever worried about consequences—STD's, that stuff?"

"You think I'm stupid? Sure."

"I guess you used protection?"

"Like I said, you think I'm stupid?"

"Those things aren't foolproof."

"I know."

"Does having sex make breaking up a lot harder?"

"Oh, yeah. Much harder."

"So how do you feel about it all—bottom line? Any regrets?"

Alex pauses. "Well...two of them are regrets for sure. It's hard to figure."

I'm not sure if I should ask the next question or not. But we know each other well: "Do you sometimes wish you were still a virgin?"

"I don't know," he says. "It's not like I feel I'm all messed up or something because I'm not anymore. But if I got really serious about a girl who was a virgin, I guess I'd probably wish I was too."

● Gary and Lori have been going together for a little over a year. As he puts it, "I really think this could last. We want it to last." That's why they're no

● **Q**—Is an unplanned pregnancy always total heartbreak and disaster? Can't it ever work out? **A**. Sure. There's a lot more to work out if the mother keeps the baby than if she gives it up for adoption, of course. Just because something isn't "total heartbreak and disaster" doesn't mean life goes on rather smoothly. When a single teen mother raises a baby, there are far more tears, stress, regret and broken dreams than you ever see. She's often torn between truly loving her baby and desperately wishing she had never gotten pregnant. It's not easy to balance those feelings. Yes, it can work out, but usually at quite a price.

longer having sex. "We did a few times, not right away, but, you know, when we started to really care about each other."

But they discovered that sex was hurting, not helping, their relationship. Gary is very articulate about it.

"It was always on our minds should we or shouldn't we, whenever we got together. It was almost like a pressure. Plus we knew we were taking chances, and it was starting to come between us. We've both seen

## Talk It Over:

### True, False, Misleading?

1. "No baby, no disease = no real harm."
2. "Everybody does it—it's just that some people don't use protection and get caught."
3. "If it's really love, why would anyone need protection? Real love can't ever be harmful or dangerous."
4. "I think they exaggerate all those statistics on sexually transmitted diseases just to scare teens away from having sex. I don't know anybody who has one."
5. "Protected sex now is better than an abortion later."

that happen to other people."

"You mean where sex sort of breaks up the relationship instead of making it better?"

"Yeah. So we decided to stop. Like I said, we want this to last."

"How are things since then?"

"Better. We have more fun, really. It's a lot more relaxed."

"You're not saying that just because you think it's what I want to hear, are you?"

"No." Gary grins. "Do I spot you any points in racquetball just because you're old?" (He took four straight games from me earlier in the afternoon. I warned him that he's doomed the next time we play.)

### Only the Best for You

like all three of them—John, Alex and Gary. They're all trying to be "safe," but they have different ideas of what the term means.

Alex is guarding against being a father and getting a disease. I think that overall he's

hurting himself and some of the girls he dates. He knows that. He knows I wish he would make a different decision about sex and relationships. It doesn't look likely at the moment. We're friends anyway.

But I worry about him—and his partners. Already there are signs of something I'm completely, heart-and-soul convinced of after over two decades of teaching and talking with teens.

It's this: Overall, in the end, in the long run—however you want to put it—teen sex produces far, far more regret, disillusionment, bitterness and pain than it does joy. Something that produces those results can't be called "safe"—even if there were a 100 percent foolproof way of avoiding pregnancy and disease.

I didn't come to that conclusion sitting at a desk with my adult mind in full gear. I came to it from talking with lots and lots of young people. It's not a theory; it's what the evidence shows.

John and Gary and their girlfriends have a much broader view of being "safe." They're

protecting themselves against more than consequences that might show up in their bodies. Their perspective and their actions include a concern for their feelings down the road, not just tonight; their view respects the long-term possibilities for their relationship.

### The Reason for 'God Said...'

**W**here do we find God and God's laws about sexual behavior in all this? Once

again, look to the human experience, the evidence. Sure, it's "on the books" (the sixth and ninth commandments), but it's in the evidence, too.

And it's like any of God's words in general. When people honor the divine message, life goes pretty well. When people ignore it, life gets messed up and painful, full of disappointment and regret.

The confusion and upset that come with an unplanned pregnancy, the pain that comes with AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, the sorrow and hurt that come with being sexually used:

These aren't God's direct punishments. They're simply the reasonable results of human choices.

God wishes your happiness, not your harm. It's as if your Creator was whispering in your ear, "Don't do that. You'll hurt yourself. You'll hurt other people. What I want for you is all

- **q.** Are "consequences
- always mainly for the
- girl? **a.** They shouldn't
- be mainly for the girl?
- but in some cases that's
- unfortunately how it
- happens. Some guys
- instantly change their
- plans too, even give up
- college scholarships, in
- order to be responsible
- fathers. Others just wal-
- away. Another factor is
- the relationship. Often
- the pregnancy and othe-
- factors have strained th-
- relationship so badly
- that it's over, maybe eve-
- turned extremely bitter.
- That makes it very
- difficult to share
- responsibilities for
- a baby.

**Next: Putting Up With Put-downs**  
by Kathleen M. Paton

good, only the best."

Enjoy—when a permanently committed, married love enables true lasting joy to come from sex. **YU**

This is Jim Auer's eighth *Youth Update*. He is married to "one wonderful wife" and his two great kids have graduated from high school and are now in college.

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