



Promising Youth Programs

Personal Responsibility Education Program

Healthy Sexuality for Youth in Foster Care: Tip Sheet

Contraceptive Options

To protect their health and reduce the risks of sexual activity, youth need access to medically accurate information and clinical services. This is especially important for youth in foster care because they can be more susceptible to unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Multiple placements can disrupt access to sexual health education and care, making these young people even more vulnerable. Parents and caregivers can make up for this by being powerful champions who help youth understand and access contraceptive options.



For more information on contraceptive options, see module 6 in Healthy Sexuality for Youth in Foster Care: An Online Training for Parents and Caregivers of Youth in Foster Care www.fosterparenttalk.org/home.

Help youth understand the risks that come with sexual activity

It is important for parents and caregivers to understand the risks that come with sexual activity, and for them to be prepared to share information about these risks with youth. If a young person decides to be sexually active, they could get pregnant or contract an STI, especially if they have unprotected sex.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that spread through vaginal, oral, and anal sex. Some STIs, like herpes and Human papillomavirus infection, can also spread through contact with genitals or body fluids. Without treatment, STIs can lead to serious health problems.¹ Adolescents and young adults are particularly susceptible to STIs, and cases of STIs in this group are rapidly increasing.¹ Parents and caregivers can help protect youth from STIs by educating them about prevention and equipping them with ways to protect themselves.

The tips and activities provided here are explained in more detail in "Healthy Sexuality for Youth in Foster Care: An Online Training for Parents and Caregivers of Youth in Foster Care," a resource for parents and caregivers of youth ages 10–19 from the Family and Youth Services Bureau and the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The training and supporting materials are available at www.fosterparenttalk.org/home. Additional tip sheets related to the training cover communication, sexual orientation and gender identity, and safety.

Youth are at a higher risk of acquiring STIs than older people because they are: ^{2,3}

- Less likely to know about or understand the risk of STIs.
- Less likely to know how to protect themselves and their partners.
- Less likely to use condoms consistently or correctly.
- More likely to have shorter relationships and more partners.
- More likely to be too embarrassed to seek health care.
- Less likely to trust health care providers or the system.
- Less likely to find health care that keeps their information private.






Help youth understand their contraceptive options

Contraception, or birth control, is used to prevent pregnancy. There are several types of contraception, so it is vital for youth to understand all their contraceptive options so they can choose the one that best fits their needs.



Reminder: The only guaranteed way to prevent pregnancy and STIs is to not have sex.

The following table describes some of the contraceptive options available in 2022.

Methods				
Description		Use	Chance of getting pregnant	How to obtain
 External condom (male condom)	A barrier method, this is one of the two contraceptive options that protect against both pregnancy and STIs.	Must be used correctly in every sexual encounter.	18/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.	Available over the counter.
 Internal condom (female condom)	Also a barrier method and one of the two contraceptive options that protect against both pregnancy and STIs.	Can be inserted up to 8 hours before sex, and must be used correctly in every sexual encounter.	21/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.	Available over the counter.
 Birth control shot	An injection that administers hormones to prevent pregnancy.	Must be administered every 3 months.	6/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.	Administered by a health care professional.
 Oral contraceptives ("the pill")	A hormonal birth control method in the form of a daily pill that requires a prescription.	Must be taken at the same time every day.	9/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.	Requires a prescription.
 Intrauterine device (IUD)	A small, flexible plastic, shaped device inserted into the uterus. IUDs are available both with and without hormones.	Must be replaced every 3-10 years, depending on type.	Less than 1/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.	Inserted by a health care professional.

Methods				
Description		Use	Chance of getting pregnant	How to obtain
 <p>The Implant</p>	<p>A tiny, thin rod inserted in the arm that releases hormones to prevent pregnancy.</p>	<p>Must be replaced every 3-10 years, depending on type.</p>	<p>Less than 1/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.</p>	<p>Inserted by a health care professional.</p>
 <p>Vaginal contraceptive ("the ring")</p>	<p>A ring that is inserted into the vagina and releases a continuous dose of hormones to prevent pregnancy.</p>	<p>Must insert a new ring each month and remove it after three weeks (there is no ring use during the fourth week).</p>	<p>9/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.</p>	<p>Requires a prescription.</p>
 <p>Patch</p>	<p>A skin patch that is worn on the lower abdomen, buttocks, or upper body that releases hormones into the bloodstream.</p>	<p>Must apply a new patch each week for three weeks (there is no patch use during the fourth week).</p>	<p>9/100 people will get pregnant when using this method.</p>	<p>Requires a prescription.</p>
 <p>Emergency contraception ("Plan B" or "Morning After Pill")</p>	<p>Pill(s) that can be used when contraception was not used during sex, or a contraception method was used but failed (for example, the condom broke).</p>	<p>Must be taken as soon as possible after sex; most effective when used within 72 hours of unprotected sex.</p>	<p>13/100 people will get pregnant when using this method ^a</p>	<p>Available over the counter.</p>

^a There are different types of emergency contraceptive pills, and some are more effective than others. This method prevents between 55 and 85 percent of pregnancies, depending on the type of pill. The rate provided above is for Levonorgestrel.



Tip: The IUD and Implant are the most effective and longest-lasting contraceptive options for pregnancy prevention. They do not protect against STIs.



Caution: Condoms are the only method of birth control that protect against both pregnancies and STIs, but for condoms to be effective, youth need to use them correctly every time they have sex.



Conversations about contraceptive options may evolve to conversations about sexuality and safety. See other tip sheets related to the training www.fosterparenttalk.org/home for more information on discussing these topics with youth.

Help youth access contraception

It is important for both youth in foster care and their parents and caregivers to be aware of the contraceptive options available to them, and how to find these options. In many states, youth have the right to access free or inexpensive health care confidentially. In most states, public insurance such as Medicaid covers contraception.

There are many ways parents and caregivers can help youth access contraception:

- They can help a young person make an appointment to discuss contraceptive options with their health provider or at a family planning clinic in the area.
- They can drive them to and from a clinic or help them navigate other transportation.
- They can keep condoms and emergency contraception in a medicine cabinet or another secure place for them to access as needed.



Tip: The **Title X program** provides family planning services to youth, often free of charge. Click on the resource, [Family Planning Clinic Locator](#), to locate a Title X Family Clinic near you.

Communicate with youth about using contraception, and discuss their options

Parents and caregivers can talk with youth about the risks of having sex and their plans for staying healthy and safe. Parents and caregivers can also encourage youth to talk with their partner before having sex. It's important for a young person to talk to their partner about how they will keep themselves safe before they engage in any sexual activity. It is also important youth share their sexual history and previous STI testing with partners.

It may be difficult to begin a conversation about contraceptive options. Youth need to feel sure the conversation will be kept private. This confidentiality helps them feel more comfortable talking about contraceptives they want to use or learn more about. It is important to listen to them and their needs, because when someone feels listened to, they are more likely to listen to you and be open to what you have to say.



Tip: Practice asking questions like, “**What do you know about birth control or contraceptive methods?**” or saying things like “**I want you to know you can come to me with questions about sex and contraception any time.**”

Use additional resources

It is developmentally appropriate for youth to explore sexual feelings and behavior.⁴ The information and guidance they receive can prepare them to make less risky decisions during adolescence and live healthy lives as adults.

We recommend reviewing these additional resources for parents and caregivers and for sharing with youth:

For parents and caregivers

Birth Control: Information for Parents of Adolescents. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides information on types of birth control.

Contraception Explained: Options for Teens & Adolescents. The American Academy of Pediatrics provides information on advantages and disadvantages of contraceptive options.

Health-Care Coverage for Youth in Foster Care and After. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides information and resources to help youth in foster care understand their health care options.

Discussing Contraception and Abstinence with Young People. The Family and Youth Services Bureau provides tips, resources, and strategies for discussing contraceptives and abstinence with youth.

For parents, caregivers, and youth

Fact Sheet on Birth Control and Condom Use. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides guidance for correct usage of external (male) condoms.

Minors' Access to Contraceptive Services. The Guttmacher Institute provides information on state legislation covering minors' access to contraceptive services.

Health Center Locator. The Health Resources and Services Administration provides a tool to help locate nearby health centers.

Family Planning Clinic Locator. The Office of Population Affairs provides a tool to help locate nearby Title X family planning clinics.

The Right Way to Use a Male Condom. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides information and graphics on how to correctly use an external (male) condom.

The Right Way to Use a Female Condom. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides information and graphics on how to correctly use an internal (female) condom.

How to Use a Dental Dam as a Barrier for Oral Sex. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provides information and graphics on how to correctly use a dental dam for oral sex.

Endnotes

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "CDC Fact Sheet: Information for Teens and Young Adults: Staying Healthy and Preventing STDs." April 12, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/life-stages-populations/stdfact-teens.htm#:~:text=Young%20people%20are%20at%20greater,nurse%20about%20their%20sex%20lives.>
- 2 Shannon, C.L., and J.D. Klausner. "The Growing Epidemic of Sexually Transmitted Infections in Adolescents: Neglected Population." *Current Opinion in Pediatrics*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2018, pp. 137–143.
- 3 Keller, L.H. "Reducing STI Cases: Young People Deserve Better Sexual Health Information Services." *Guttmacher Institute*, April 2, 2020. <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2020/04/reducing-sti-cases-young-people-deserve-better-sexual-health-information-and-services.>
- 4 National Guidelines Task Force. "Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten Through 12th Grade." 3rd edition. New York, NY: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 2004. <https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Guidelines-CSE.pdf>.

This toolkit was developed by Mathematica under contract HHSP233201500035I/HHSP23337008T with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau. Dfusion, Inc. partnered with Mathematica in developing the associated training.