

Pathways & Sequences Towards Success

Decide, Don't Slide!

Overview

This customized lesson is a hybrid and condensed version of two lessons from the 13-lesson program *Love Notes*. (See links to both the entire *Love Notes* program and its Sexual Risk Avoidance adaptation). Three concepts are woven together in this lesson—deciding vs. sliding, pathways and sequence towards success, and through the eyes of a child. Together they offer a way to deepen motivation to decide, to plan, to follow the success sequence, and build agency into one's life.

The first section introduces youth to the advantages of **deciding, versus sliding** when it comes to intimate relationships and other important transitions and milestones in life. Youth are offered a decision-making framework to assist them. A focus in this section is navigating relationship and sexual choices wisely as a teen and young adult in ways that help vs. create hurdles for a young person as they make their way to successful adulthood.

In the second section, the beneficial outcomes recent research has highlighted for young people who follow one of the **pathways and sequences towards success** are presented to raise awareness through activities that draw on a young person's own personal goals. A combination of certain milestones or achievements in teen and young adult life can really matter for successful economic outcomes and family stability (if children are a part of one's vision for their future). It requires planning and making clear decisions.

The final section designed to strengthen motivation adds a critical element to the success sequence. Many teens, and even more young adults today **drift** into unplanned pregnancy and parenthood. An unplanned or poorly timed pregnancy can create

challenges for a young person in achieving their educational and career goals. Thus, pregnancy prevention is a very important element to address if we want to encourage youth to follow a success pathway. The approach here, dubbed *through the eyes of a child*, offers a promising way to get at the motivation it requires to be proactive in pregnancy prevention.

This section highlights how being intentional about deciding on an optimal timing and context for family formation is important not only for achieving a young person's own personal goals but can affect the life of a child. This lesson encourages young people to decide if, when, and under what conditions to have a child. Asking, what do I need to have in place to give a child what I would want to provide? How does education, training, maturity, and employment figure into the timing for starting a family? Deciding this important question includes the question of with **whom**? Who do I want as a parenting partner? Are we committed to each other for the long-term of raising a child together and why does this matter? This is a vital part of encouraging youth to follow a pathway towards success.

Goals

1. Analyze the risks associated with sliding and benefits of deciding.
2. Practice a low-risk deciding approach to handling romantic and sexual attractions and developing relationships.
3. Identify decisions one can potentially make; identify what one needs to find out or do in order to help make those decisions.
4. Become acquainted with the *Pathways and Sequences Towards Success*.
5. Deepen motivation to be pro-active in preventing pregnancy and unintended parenthood; to reinforce motivation to decide an optimal timing and context for family formation while youth achieve key milestones and make their way to successful adulthood.
6. Develop a personal plan for success with education, career, as well as with intimate relationships and family life goals.

Lesson at a Glance

1.1 Sliding vs. Deciding

Activities: *High-Cost Slides*

1.2 Another Way: A Low-Risk Deciding Approach

Activities: *Taking a Low-Risk Deciding Approach*

1.3 Making Decisions

Activities: *Making Decisions*

1.4 Pathways and Sequences Towards Success

Activities: Supplemental & reinforcing media opportunities

1.5 Through the Eyes of a Child

Activities: *A Child's Wish List*; *Discussion—What helps parents provide these?*

1.6 What About Fathers?

Activities: *Being a Good Father Means...*; Music video & discussion; *Father Absence—Insights & Connections*; *Relationship Smarts—What's in it for Guys?*

1.7 Bright Futures for Children

Activities: *Advice from Teen Parents*; *Child Speak*

1.8 My Success Plans & Wrap Up

Trusted Adult Connection



Materials Checklist

Applications to duplicate:

- 1a. *High-Cost Slides* activity cards. Cut and select the one or ones you will use.
- 1b. *Making Decisions*

- 1c. *Bright Futures & Child Speak*
- 1d. *My Success Plans*
- 1e. *Trusted Adult Connection Activity*

Materials:

- The lesson PowerPoint slideshow is a digital download that comes with the curriculum. Easy-to-follow download directions are found at DibbleInstitute.org/agency.
- Glitter bottle: Small clear water bottle filled with 4 different colors of glitter and filled an inch from the top with water.
- Supplemental: Two short videos (6 minutes each) on the success sequence, *His Story* and *Her Story*. View *Dadication* (15 minutes) and determine if you will use in some fashion. Links for each found on the slides.

**Preparation**

- ✓ Read the lesson carefully to become familiar with the three concepts *Sliding vs. Deciding*, *Pathways and Sequences Towards Success*, and *Through the Eyes of a Child*. View the slides as you study the lesson.
- ✓ Read through, select, and cut the *High-Cost Slides* activity cards (Application 1a) to be used. Most of these were written by young people themselves and a few by those working closely with youth. Some reflect heavy situations. Encourage youth to write more scenarios to keep it fresh and relevant.
- ✓ Prepare glitter bottle by filling a small clear water bottle with 4 colors of glitter and filling with water to within one to two inches from top.
- ✓ Duplicate *Making Decisions* (Application 1b) back-to-back and ditto for the multi-page *My Success Plans* (Application 1d). Duplicate *Trusted Adult Connection Activity* (Application 1e) and cut in half.
- ✓ Determine how you will check-in on the *Trusted Adult Connection Activity*.

- ✓ Supplemental media: Preview the two videos (each 6 minutes), *The Success Sequence: Her Story* and *The Success Sequence: His Story*. Preview *Dadication* as well and determine if you will use (all hyperlinked in PowerPoint slides).
- ✓ Decide on the way you will wrap up the lesson. A couple of ideas and songs are offered at the end of the lesson.
- ✓ After you download the PowerPoint slideshow to your computer, you are free to swap in your own images to best reflect your audience if you desire to do so.

SECTION 1.1

Sliding vs. Deciding

- Application 1a: *High-Cost Slides* activity cards
- Glitter bottle

(PP) This lesson starts by introducing an important concept: *Decide, Don't Slide!* It's the first part of this lesson introducing success pathways to build agency in one's life.

- ❖ *Today we're going to focus on your future. There are certain pathways to follow towards success that are more likely to get you there.*
- ❖ *First, I want to introduce you to a concept called **sliding vs. deciding**.¹*
 - *By **sliding** we mean going along in life and kind of just letting things happen.*
 - ***Deciding** is about being intentional, gathering information, making clear decisions, and then taking steps to get to where you want to go. This can be applied to lots of things in life.*
- ❖ **(PP)** *"Are you sliding or are you deciding in life" is a key question to ask yourself.*
 - *For example, do you know anyone who found themselves sliding and then discovered they were seriously off track for completing high school?*
- ❖ *Sliding carries the risk of landing in a place a person never planned to be and sometimes with some serious high-cost consequences.*
- ❖ *Deciding is a safer way to go when it comes to important things that can be life-altering, like finishing high school and preparing for a career. Or events in personal life like starting a relationship, having sex, a pregnancy and having a child, living together.*



Pathways Towards Success

LOVE NOTES



Are you sliding or
Are you deciding?



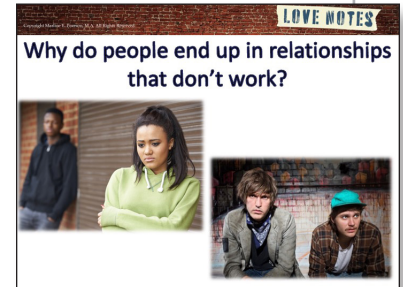
LOVE NOTES

Sliding vs. Deciding with Relationships

❖ *Let's focus for a moment on sliding as it relates to personal life—specifically your romantic and sexual attractions. It may seem like nothing significant but sliding in this area of life can risk derailing a person from their goals—it can involve one of those life-altering events.*

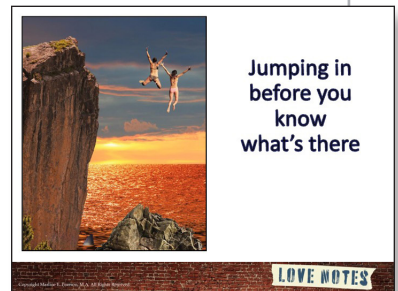
❖ **(PP)** *Let me ask a few questions and let's have a show of hands:*

- *Do you know anyone who got involved with someone and then later regretted it?*
- *Or someone who stayed way too long in a bad relationship?*
- *Like, "What was I thinking? Why did I ever get involved with this person?"*
- *Do you know anyone who found themselves in a complicated relationship—an unhealthy, maybe even an abusive relationship?*
- *Did you ever wonder why this happens? Certainly no one wants a bad relationship.*



❖ *When a person "slides" quickly into getting involved with someone, it increases their chances of getting involved with the wrong person and having a relationship that doesn't work out or more serious consequences.*

❖ **(PP)** *It's just like these young people, jumping in before knowing what's down there (rocks, sharks).*



❖ *And this is what we mean by **Sliding with regards to relationships or sexual involvement:***

- *Sliding means getting involved quickly and then, **only after getting involved**, finding out more about who this person really is.*

❖ **(PP)** *At the start of a romantic or sexual attraction, it can be like exciting fireworks. You don't see each other clearly at first.*



- ❖ *When strongly attracted, there's several neurochemicals and hormones pumping in your body like PEA, norepinephrine, dopamine, and oxytocin.*
- ❖ *They produce great feelings and energy—even euphoria. All you can think about is this person. But these can cloud a person's judgement. It takes a while for this "chemical mix" to settle a bit before you'll see a person more clearly. A good bet is that it may take 3 to 6 to 9 months.*

Shake a glitter bottle.


- ❖ *It's like this at the start—exciting, glittering, beautiful—but you can't see through it clearly. If you put the glitter bottle down and let it settle for a while, you'll see more clearly.*
- ❖ *Now let's imagine a person is attracted to someone and gets involved quickly.*
- ❖ *What are some things they might discover about this person after a while that they may not have expected?*

Listen to their responses before going to the next slide.

- ❖ **(PP)** *These are things a person may not discover until they are deeply involved with someone.*
- ❖ *Notice the risks on the **left-hand side**. (Read only a few from the left list that are bolded.)*
- ❖ *True, these are not good, and you can just end the relationship. But look at the list on the **right-hand side**. (Read a few from the right column—the bolded ones.)*
- ❖ *Whoa...these are more serious consequences.*
- ❖ *Just think about getting attached to an abusive person, contracting a lifelong STI, or conceiving a child with someone you now can't stand; or, feeling you have to quit high school to work or take care of your child. How will this affect your future and potentially that of a child?*

Potential Risks of Sliding

- **Find you have no common interests—not much fun together**
- **your values and goals are out of sync**
- **you don't really like their personality**
- relationship feels complicated, too serious
- **you can't really communicate; there's no show of interest in what you say**
- you like someone else better
- **partner lies to you; cheats on you**



DECIDE
DON'T SLIDE

- partner has problems with drugs or alcohol
- **you've contracted an STD**
- **Oops, a pregnancy—and now you can't stand the person**
- partner is controlling, abusive

LOVE NOTES

- ❖ *The point: The faster you get involved with someone, the greater the potential risks. It takes time to get to know a person.*

Activity: High-Cost Slides

(PP) Select one or two *High-Cost Slides* activity cards (Application 1a) that you feel will engage your participants. Work on them together as a whole group. **Instructor Note:** If you have more time, divide into small groups and use one card per group.

Directions:

- ❖ *I am going to read aloud a sliding scenario and then tell you what happened. A warning: Some of the scenarios are pretty tough and may bring up strong emotions.*
- ❖ *Your job is to imagine the person in the scenario has a “do-over” opportunity. So turn back the clock and think about what this person could have done differently to avoid what happened.*
- ❖ *What steps might have been taken or information gathered? What decisions could have been made instead of the slide?*
- ❖ *Consider these questions:*
 1. *How well did they know each other (and how do you get to know someone)?*
 2. *What was the slide?*
 3. *Were there any red flags? Risky situations?*
 4. *Turn back the clock. Identify decisions, steps, or actions that could have made a difference.*

Listen to their answers and then what the person could have done differently. (Perhaps they'll say, “The slide happened when..., A red flag was..., A risky situation was..., They could have talked about... done this or that....”)

ACTIVITY: Turn back the clock on a High-Cost Slide

1. How well did they know each other?
2. What was the slide?
3. Were there any red flags?



Now go back in time. What steps might have been taken, information gathered, and decisions made to have avoided the high-cost slide?

LOVE NOTES

Try to underscore and weave into the discussion the benefits— including physical and emotional safety—of *slowing down and pacing* their involvements. As we know, sex happens pretty quickly these days for a lot of people.

❖ *Although you may not have thought about this, how you handle your romantic or sexual attractions can either help you or create difficulties as you make your way towards a successful future.*

(PP) Some food for thought:

❖ *A person can slide and then decide they don't like someone, just like these people. See the tattooed names crossed off.*

❖ *You can just break up with someone you don't like....*

❖ **(PP)** *But, if you slide into a sexual involvement that results in a pregnancy and birth, your child cannot. They will be your child's parent for life.*

❖ *Having a baby when a person is...*

- *not done with their education and/or training,*
- *not fully employed, and*
- *not with a partner fully committed to them and to raising a child together*

... can carry some serious challenges for the young adults and their child.

❖ *For sure, there are young parents who step up and do a great job raising their child. And later in the lesson, we'll be talking about steps young parents can take to provide bright futures for their children.*

- *But the reality is that today, many children are born to unmarried parents (teens and twenty-somethings) who are not committed to each other nor to raising a child together. They slide into unintended parenthood.*



- ❖ *Taking things slow, making clear decisions about pacing their involvement, about sex, and deciding when and under what conditions to start a family and with whom (if having children is your intention someday) is a safer way to go—for you and for a child.*
 - ❖ *Unintended pregnancy is something you have some control over. We'll be talking more about the kind of planning for sexual choices that puts you in charge in later lessons.*
-

SECTION 1.2

Another Way: A Low-Risk Deciding Approach

- ❖ *There is **another way** to go about romantic and sexual attractions to reduce your odds of having risky relationship or sexual involvements that potentially could derail you as you make your way to a successful adulthood. It's called a low-risk **Deciding Approach**.*
 - *This means taking it slow, getting to know the person, **and then** making decisions about getting involved.*
- ❖ *Notice the first column, labeled "Attraction".*
 - *What do you recall about the brain chemistry of attractions? What tips would you offer someone?*

Pause and listen. (PP) Then, click to populate the first column.

- ❖ *Now look at the second column, labeled “Learn More About Each Other”.*
 - *What should you be finding out and asking yourself to see if this person is a good match for you? Give me your thoughts please.*

Low-Risk Deciding Approach			
Attraction	Learn More About Each Other...	Then, Decide...	Agree to a Plan
Enjoy it! Have fun Don't read too much into it yet			
Remember the "love chemicals" surge 3-6-9 months			
Clearly communicate your desire to take things slowly, your boundaries on physical intimacy			

Pause and listen. (PP) Then, click to populate the second column. Add as needed:

- ❖ *Go out and do fun things that will allow you to talk and get to know each other.*
- ❖ *What interests do you each have? Any common interests? Find out if your values are in sync.*
- ❖ *Do you find this person interesting, and vice-versa? Are you picking up vibes that they find you interesting to talk to? For example, do they make eye contact, or are they on their cell all the time? Do they ask about you or just talk about themselves?*
- ❖ *Do your differences and individual strengths work well together—complement and balance each other?*
- ❖ *Do your personalities work well together? Find out how compatible you are.*
- ❖ *Can you talk easily about anything? Can you disagree safely and respectfully?*
- ❖ *Have you met each other's family? Friends? What might you learn from meeting each other's family and friends? What might that tell you?*
- ❖ *Keep your eyes open to detect problem behaviors.*
- ❖ **Tip:** *Build trust and knowledge of each other before disclosing things that are personal and sensitive. Balance time together, time with friends, and time apart.*

Low-Risk Deciding Approach			
Attraction	Learn More About Each Other...	Then, Decide...	Agree to a Plan
Enjoy it! Have fun Don't read too much into it yet	Common interests? Find each other interesting? Do you have fun? Values in sync?		
Remember the "love chemicals" surge 3-6-9 months	Enjoy each other's personality? "Talk easy" / "fight easy"? Do your differences work together?		
Clearly communicate your desire to take things slowly, your boundaries on physical intimacy	Detect any problem behaviors? Is person mature? Treat you well? Have you met each other's friends, family?		

Important points to add:

- ❖ It takes *time* to learn about a person.
- ❖ It takes a lot of *talk—conversations*—to know what you have in common to learn how you communicate and how you handle your emotions.
- ❖ It takes a lot of *experiences together* in different situations to see how a person is; to learn about their character and level of maturity. To discover if you really enjoy each other.

Focus on columns “Then Decide” and “Agree to a Plan”.

- ❖ Now a person is in a better place to make some decisions.
- ❖ Let’s brainstorm the kinds of decisions and agreements that can be made.

(PP) Click twice to populate the third and fourth columns.

❖ **Decide:**

- Do I want to in a relationship? Be exclusive?
- What tells me the feelings are mutual?
- How do I want to pace the relationship? Where do I draw my line?

❖ **Discuss and Agree:**

- On sexual values and intentions.
- On expectations for the relationship. What sorts of expectations should be talked about?
- On a plan that respects my sexual values, my boundaries, how I want to pace things.
- Or a plan to avoid pregnancy and STDs.

Attraction	Learn More About Each Other...	Then, Decide...	Agree to a Plan
Enjoy it! Have fun Don't read too much into it yet	Common interests? Find each other interesting? Do you have fun? Values in sync?	Do you want to be in a relationship? To be exclusive? Faithful?	Agree on expectations for relationship
Remember the "love chemicals" surge 3-6-9 months	Enjoy each other's personality? Talk easily? Fight fairly? Do your differences work together?	Are your feelings for each other mutual? And how do you know?	Agree to a Plan: * With clear rules to help you enjoy your relationship without adding sex, for pacing things slowly.
Clearly communicate your desire to take things slowly; your boundaries on physical intimacy	Detect any problem behaviors? Is person mature? Trust you well? Have you met each other's friends, family?	Where do you draw your line on physical intimacy? How do you want to pace the relationship?	Agree to a Plan: *If sexually involved, a plan to avoid pregnancy and/or STDs
		When & under what conditions would you move your line?	Solid agreement to avoid a pregnancy until life is more settled with education, employment and a dedicated partner—married.

- *On your intention of waiting to have a child (avoiding a pregnancy) until your life is more settled with your education/training, employed, and married. And, if children and marriage are not part of your vision, agree on the importance of staying on track and avoiding an unintended pregnancy.*

Use this question to conclude before moving on to *Making Decisions*:

- ❖ *How might this approach protect the future of each person?*
-

SECTION 1.3

Making Decisions

- Application 1b: *Making Decisions*

Pass out *Making Decisions* (Application 1b) where they'll apply what they've learned.

- ❖ **(PP)** *There are many things one can make decisions about rather than sliding and just letting things happen. Staying or getting back on track in high school is one. Exploring your options after high school for a career path is another.*
- ❖ *And, even the smallest things regarding relationships, like, "Do I want to kiss?" on to, "Do I want to be in a relationship with you?" to "How do I want to pace the physical side of our involvement?" What are my boundaries?" to "Do I want to have sex?" all the way to, "Do I want to commit to a future with you? Marry you? Have a child with you? Live together?"*
- ❖ *These are all opportunities for informed decision-making. These kinds of decisions can build agency in moving towards the life you want.*



- ❖ *Too often, people **slide** into these when they could really make a decision. But good decisions need information.*
- ❖ *On your handout is a list of some of the things a person can make decisions about rather than just sliding. You'll see there is an emphasis on relationship and sexual decisions.*
- ❖ *Decisions you make in this part of your lives can be as important (consequential) as those you make regarding your education and career.*

(PP) Activity:

- ❖ *As I read aloud the list on p. 1 of your handout, check the ones that might be important for a person to make a decision about now or in the future.*
- ❖ *Now, **choose one** of them to focus on for the next step. Once you have chosen, keep that item in mind. Go to the next page. There you will see a long list of possible things that might help a person making decisions—things to find out or do.*
- ❖ *I will read the list. As I do, check **any items** that you feel might help you make that decision. Check as many as you think can help.*

To process:

1. First, ask participants to count up and then call out how many items they checked for their chosen decision.
2. Then, ask a volunteer to pick one item they feel is important for people to make a decision on rather than sliding.
3. Then ask all participants to call out items from the list that they think could help a person make that decision.



Conclude:

- ❖ *Goals and dreams are not realized magically in real life. You need to make real decisions. And to make good decisions, **you need information**—you need to find out things.*

Instructor Note: Encourage participants to go back to these pages at the end of the program and do the same for more decisions they feel are important for them to make for success in their own lives.

SECTION 1.4

Pathways and Sequences Towards Success

- ❖ (PP) *You have had the opportunity to think about relationship decisions and expectations.*
- ❖ *Here are a couple of expectations that I want to ask you about. These expectation questions apply to the **long term**—like your future life five to ten years out or more years out.*

1. *When you think about your future adult life, how many expect or hope to have enough money to live on? To avoid poverty? To live a comfortable middle-class life? Pause for show of hands.*

- Supplemental Videos: *The Success Sequence: Her Story and His Story*



2. *When you think about your future adult life, how many expect or desire to have children someday and provide them with a stable family life—parents who stay together in a satisfying, loving relationship? Pause for show of hands.*

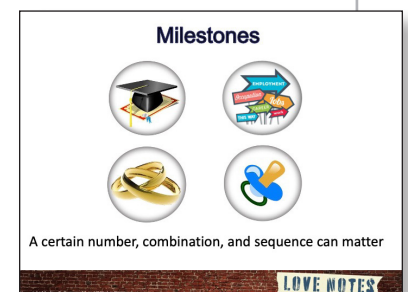
Instructor Note: While you can expect everyone to say they want financial wellbeing for their futures, you will have a greater diversity with the second expectation question. Acknowledge the fact that while everyone wants to avoid poverty in adulthood, not everyone expects/desires to have children.

❖ *Thanks for sharing your expectations.*

- *Now, I want to introduce you to some powerful pathways to avoid poverty and achieve a middle-class status and higher household income in adulthood.*
- *And if, in addition to your desire to avoid poverty and have a comfortable lifestyle, you also want to someday have children with a partner in a satisfying relationship and a stable family life, there are advantageous pathways for that as well.*
- *Do you have any ideas of what things a person can do to up their chances of achieving one or both of these expectations? Pause for brief responses.*

❖ *If you desire to have a middle-class income or higher and avoid poverty by the time you're in your 30s, achieving a certain number and certain combinations of life's big things can increase your odds.²*

- *They may also be associated with either increasing or decreasing one's chances of family stability by one's 30s.³*
- **(PP)** *These milestones are:*
 - *Completing high school (and better yet, add further education or training)*
 - *Full-time employment*
 - *Marriage*
 - *Children*



❖ *The vast majority of young people who follow one of the pathways we describe avoid poverty and are more likely to land in the middle to upper-income groups by the time they are in their 30s, whether born rich or poor.⁴*

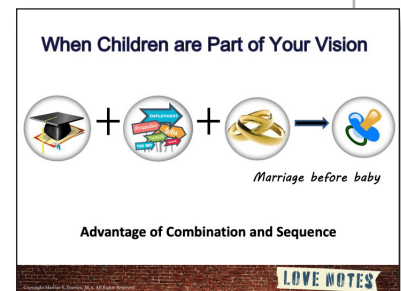
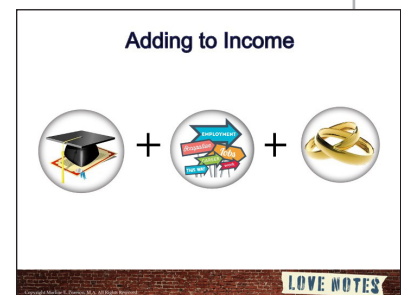
❖ **(PP)** *Finishing high school (better yet, add more education or training) and full-time employment by age 25 (or enrolled in further training/education) are key essentials for having better financial outcomes by one's early 30s.⁵*

❖ **(PP)** *A healthy marriage can add to income level. Adults who achieve these three (education, employment, marriage) are the most likely to achieve a middle-class lifestyle and avoid poverty by their early 30s.⁶*

- *Does anyone have an idea of why marriage might matter here? Pause for responses before continuing.*
- *Marriage can mean the combining of two potential incomes, and those combined earnings can build over the years.*
- *Cohabiting relationships, on average, are much more likely to break up, thus losing the advantage of combined earnings. (More on this in a bit)*

❖ **(PP)** *Now, let's examine when the best time is to add children to the mix. Here a particular combination of milestones and doing one of them in a particular sequence—marriage before baby—can make a difference.*

- *For those who, in addition to desiring economic wellbeing, also envision children in their future—and desire to do so with a partner in the context of a stable and satisfying relationship—the **marriage factor** matters, and the sequence of doing that before having a child can make a big difference.*
- *The **marriage milestone** has a consistent association with family stability.⁷*



- **Instructor note:** Family stability is measured as 1) the presence of 2 adults in the home, 2) the number of residential partner transitions (i.e., none or few break-ups or divorces), and 3) relationship satisfaction as measured by reported happiness in their relationship.⁸

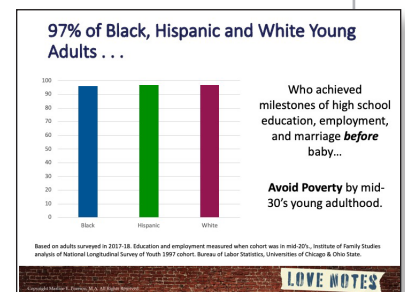
❖ As you see, some pathways may be more *advantageous* than others.

- In particular, if **children** are part of one's vision, the **sequence** in which one does them can matter in terms of how challenging it may be to achieve a good economic future and family stability.
- **For example:** Having a child as a teen may make it difficult to finish high school. Caring for a child while finishing school is doable but more challenging. And without an education, a person may be at a disadvantage in finding good-paying employment.
- And without a committed partner, a parent may be on their own financially. Neither parent may have the earnings to cover the expenses of a child, housing, etc.
- And even if one has achieved high school completion and is working if they don't have a partner to share in childrearing, it is challenging on many fronts. Children take a lot of time, care, and money.
- Whatever one's gender identity or sexual orientation, having a committed partner—a spouse—with whom to raise a child can help financially, socially, and emotionally.

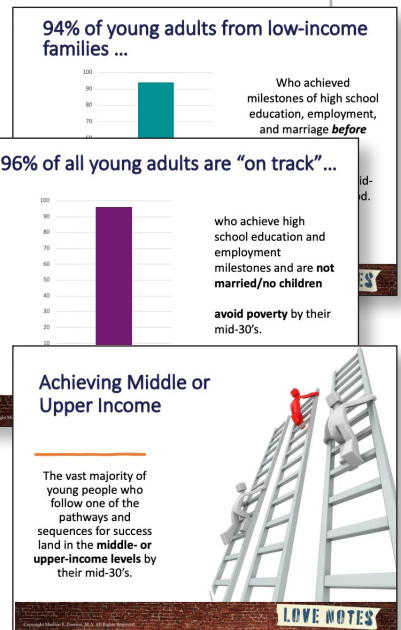
❖ It really makes a difference to have finished high school, and better yet, acquired additional education or training, to be employed, and to have a committed partner before having a child.

❖ **(PP)** Let's examine some more research that looked at thousands of 32-38 year-olds who followed one of the pathways and sequences.⁹

- 97% of young adults who achieved the education and employment milestones and followed the sequence of marriage before baby avoided poverty by their mid-30s. 97% for Hispanics, 96% for blacks, and 97% for whites.¹⁰ That's impressive.



- **(PP)** *And 94% of young people who grew up in low-income families who did the same also avoid poverty by their mid-30s.¹¹*
- ❖ **(PP)** *Not everyone desires to marry and have children. 96% of those who have achieved milestones of high school education and employment and no marriage/no children also avoid poverty by their 30s.¹²*
- ❖ **(PP)** *Most hope for more—most want to achieve a middle to upper-income level, not just avoid poverty. The good news is that the vast majority of young people who follow one of the pathways and sequences land in the middle or upper-income levels by their mid-30s.¹³*



Instructor Note: There is living below the federal poverty line and living just above that line. The analysis done by Wang and Wilcox divided the U.S. income percentiles into three groups. 1/3 includes those under the poverty line plus others who are low-income but over the poverty line. 1/3 middle income and 1/3 upper income. Using these three income brackets, 86% of Hispanics, 80% of blacks, and 82% who grew up in low-income homes who followed one of the pathways not only avoided landing in the bottom 1/3 but achieved the middle or upper-income level by their mid-30s.¹⁴

❖ **Key takeaway points:**

- *Following one of the success pathways is not just a way to avoid poverty, but to boost one’s odds of achieving a middle to upper income level.¹⁵*
- *And, if marriage and children are not your thing, achieving your education and full-time employment while avoiding an unplanned pregnancy can make a big difference.*
- ❖ **Why do we include marriage as a milestone for those who desire children and financial stability, and not, let’s say, just living together? A few points:**
 1. *First, because the research shows these outcomes for marriage, not for cohabitation.*

2. *We know from research that cohabiting relationships are relatively unstable—there are more break-ups and re-partnering. As more young adults enter into and end cohabiting relationships, a pattern of serial cohabitation has increased.*¹⁶
- *Perhaps the **upside** to this is that young people may be learning to end cohabiting relationships that aren't working.*
 - *But the **downside** is that if the cohabiting relationship includes children (as 54% do), and it ends and is followed by another relationship (and possibly another) all those changes in people and homes (instability) can be rough on a child.*
 - *Of the 54% of cohabiting relationships that include children, 35% share at least one biological child, and 19% include children from a previous relationship.*¹⁷

Let's Go Deeper than Money and Income

❖ **(PP)** *Having a child is a life-changing event. Making a clear decision—having clear intentions—about **when** you are ready to do that, under **what circumstances**, and **with whom** is really important.*

- *Having a **committed partner—a spouse**—with whom to raise a child really helps—financially, socially, and emotionally.*

❖ *Today, many births occur to teens and especially young adults in their 20s who have not previously decided they are committed to a future together and to starting a family.*¹⁸

- *71% of births to women under 24 years of age are unmarried.*¹⁹
- *Most of the pregnancies are unintended.*²⁰
- *And many have not finished their **education** nor obtained **full-time employment**.*²¹

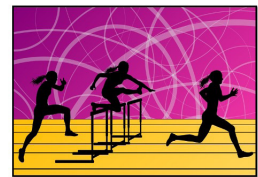


- ❖ *The majority of relationships of unmarried parents fall apart.²² (2/3's of cohabiting parents split up before the child reaches age 12 (and many before that age), compared with ¼ of married parents who split up.)*
 - *It's tough to raise a child alone, especially when there are relationship troubles with the other parent (i.e., baby mama/baby daddy drama).*
 - *It's tough to support a child if one hasn't finished one's schooling or secured a full-time job. It contributes to many challenges for both parents and child.*

Achieving Milestones Can Be Challenging

- ❖ **(PP)** *While achieving the milestones that matter—with or without children—may look or sound simple, it is clearly easier for those born with privilege to finish high school, go to college, obtain additional education or training, find a good full-time job, and in the case of having children, marrying before doing so.*
 - *For example, if you have parents who are in a healthy relationship and have college educations and higher incomes, live in a neighborhood with good schools, have a network of adults to help you, and parents to help pay for college, it really assists a young person in achieving these milestones.*
- ❖ *There are more hurdles for those without these advantages. But many young people have been determined and have pushed forward.*
- ❖ *No matter how hard for those who do commit to completing their education and training so they are better positioned for employment, there are **real benefits**.*
 - *This is why it's so important to seek out sources of support, like a school counselor, a caring teacher, or a trusted adult who may be able to help you **stay on track for graduation** or obtain a high school equivalency. They may be able to link you up with programs in the community and help you **apply for college**.*

Achieving milestones can be challenging



LOVE NOTES

- *Also, talk to a career counselor at your high school or local community college to learn more about **vocational, technical, apprenticeship, and college-transfer programs.***

Instructor Note: It's important to offer these suggestions and to know the specific places in your community where participants can access support. Aside from the school counselors and community college offices, is there a Youth Build or other community-based or youth-development organizations in your community that you can recommend?

The Key Importance of Avoiding an Unintended Pregnancy

- ❖ *Completing high school, acquiring further education or training, and obtaining stable employment can all be challenging, for sure.*
- ❖ *Being determined—no matter what—to do so will increase the odds of your success.*
- ❖ *And here is one thing you can all do. And, that is to **avoid a pregnancy—that is in your control.****
- ❖ *Whether children are or are not part of your vision:*
 - **Not part of your vision:** *Avoiding an unintended pregnancy while you work towards achieving your education/training and secure full-time employment will mean fewer barriers on your pathway to your future goals.*
 - **Part of your vision:** *Avoiding a pregnancy until your life is more settled with your education/training, employment, and a committed partner—a spouse—will also mean fewer challenges as you travel on the path towards your future goals.*
- ❖ **(PP) A person can avoid a pregnancy several ways. You've got this!**
 - *Decide not to have sex now—enjoy the benefits of leaving sex out of your teen relationships.*

Avoiding a pregnancy is possible



- Decide not to have sex now; avoid risky situations.
- Pace your involvements more slowly and make real decisions vs. sliding.
- Have a clear plan and agreement for how you will avoid a pregnancy and/or STDs/HIV if sexually active.

You can do this!

LOVE NOTES

- *Avoid risky situations; pace your involvements more slowly. Make clear decisions, don't slide.*
- *Have a clear plan and agreement for how you will avoid pregnancy and STDs/HIV if sexually active.*

❖ **Either way, it takes motivation**—*knowing why it really matters.*

- *You've got the facts on why avoiding an unintended or a poorly timed pregnancy can make a real difference.*


*Point out that not everyone has control. Some have been forced, trafficked, or coerced. See Lesson 7 for tips and support.

Expecting and Parenting Youth

❖ **(PP)** *Sometimes, despite a person's best intentions, including the possibility of birth control failure, a pregnancy can occur. For young parents, there are milestones and a sequence that can increase the odds of having the life you want:*

1. **Focus on being the best parent you can be.** *Reach out to a family resource center or public health department in your area for parenting classes and programs for health, nutritional, and financial assistance for young parents.*
2. **Finish high school and get as much college or training as you can** *to help you obtain better employment. Seek support from a caring teacher or school counselor who may be able to help you stay on track or get back on track for graduation or obtain a high school equivalency. See a career counselor at your local community college to learn more about vocational, technical, apprenticeship.*
3. **And most importantly: Decide, don't slide with your love life.** *Use the knowledge and skills you are gaining in Love Notes to make wise relationship choices. Avoid sliding into a second pregnancy.*

**Success for Young Parents
Combinations and Sequences**



1. Focus on being the best parent
2. Finish high school and get as much college or training as you can
3. Obtain employment
4. Decide, don't slide with your love life. Have a committed partner—a spouse—**BEFORE** having a second child

LOVE NOTES

- ❖ *Focusing on parenting, education, and employment is key. And if additional children are part of your vision, wait until you are more settled and with a committed partner in a healthy marriage.*

Instructor Note: Be familiar with the resources and supports in your community for young parents.

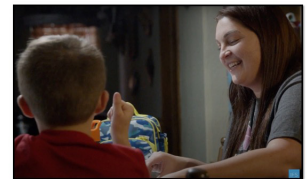
SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT

Media Opportunities

Two short videos (each 6 minutes) to consider showing highlight stories of real young adults who are seeking to follow a success pathway and sequence or working on getting back on track. A synopsis of each:

- ❖ **(PP)** *The Success Sequence: Her Story.* Stephanie, a young single mom who has struggled with drug addiction and other difficult challenges as a teenager, makes changes to get back on track for herself and her son.
- ❖ **(PP)** *The Success Sequence: His Story.* Scott, who became a father as a teenager, struggles to get back on track for his sons. Keenan, a high school student, explains his plan to follow the success sequence—focusing on his education and career preparation –and plan to be married before starting a family.

The Success Sequence: Her Story



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thxul-cvdoA>

LOVE NOTES

The Success Sequence: His Story



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=183aXPrmIEQ>

LOVE NOTES

SECTION 1.5**Through the Eyes of a Child**

- Flipchart papers & markers

To deepen motivation to decide if, when, and under what conditions to have a child—an important part of the success pathway—the activities here are designed to help youth step outside themselves and look at life through the eyes of a child.

In this section, youth will make a wish list of what they think children might need and want at different stages of their lives (newborn baby, toddler, school-age child, a teenager). They are asked to identify anything from essential material things to social, emotional, and physical needs to help a child grow up healthy, safe, and happy. This activity leads to a discussion of what can help parents meet some of the needs they identify.

This unique, strengths-based approach prompts students to imagine and identify what helps children grow and thrive and to use that awareness of children's needs to reinforce their motivation to plan; like, *when would be the best time for me to have a child if that is part of my vision for the future? Why is it important for me to avoid an unintended pregnancy?*

The lesson taps into participants' own aspirations for what they want for all children (whether or not they personally desire to have children) and taps into aspirations that they may have for the parent they want to be (if children are part of their vision).

Together, this and the last two sections of the lesson connect some dots between children's developmental needs and the advantages that maturity, possessing the skills for forming and maintaining healthy relationships, finishing school and/or training, being employed, and having a spouse—a committed partner—offer parents in providing for these needs. These final sections of the lesson reinforce the importance of planning and decision-making are helpful for developing agency—and ultimately for following a pathway towards success.

(PP) Introduce the lesson to youth:

- ❖ *We've talked about the benefits of deciding and planning for your future.*
- ❖ *One thing really worth planning is when to start a family (if having children is a part of your vision). And whether having a child is or is not a part of your vision, we'll look at why preventing an unintended pregnancy is really important for everyone.*
- ❖ *Even though teen pregnancy has been going down, there are still a lot of unintended births among teenagers **and** among those in their twenties.*
- ❖ *This is why we're going to spend some time looking at life **through the eyes of a child**—**what children may want and need**. Then we'll discuss what might help parents provide these.*
 - *It may underscore why planning for optimal timing and context for bringing a child into the world can matter.*



Through the Eyes of a Child

LOVE NOTES

Activity: A Child's Wish List

- ❖ **(PP)** *We are going to work together to create a wish list placed by a child about to be born. The child is looking for a family.*
- ❖ *Pretend you are the child making a list of needs and wants you hope your parents will provide.*
- ❖ *Your task is to work together and come up with a list of what you think children might need or want at **different stages** of their lives.*
 - *For example, what might a newborn **baby** need or want?*
 - *How about a **toddler**? A **school-aged** child? A **teenager**?*

**Child Wants & Needs at different stages of life—
infant, toddler, school-age, teenager**

- Basics/material needs
- What contributes to child's physical health?
- To a child's social & emotional health?
- What helps develop a child's self-esteem?
- What helps a child feel confident? Helps them succeed in school?
- As a teenager what helps them stay out of trouble? And stay on track? Build abilities?
- Parenting skills; discipline style?
- Education/Finances/parents' relationship
- Anything else you can think of!



LOVE NOTES

- ❖ *Think of all the things that would be helpful for a child's growth and development.*
- ❖ *Your list can include material things—the basics like food, shelter, etc., but also include social, emotional, and physical needs of children at **these different stages** that will help a child grow up healthy, safe, and happy. For example:*
 - *What contributes to a child's physical health?*
 - *To their social development and emotional health?*
 - *What helps develop a child's self-esteem—feeling good about themselves?*
 - *What helps a child feel confident? What helps them succeed in school?*
 - *As a teenager, what helps them stay on track? And stay out of trouble?*
- ❖ *Think of anything and everything you can that will help meet a child's needs or wants.*
 - *Go for it. Here are some prompts on the slide to get your creative juices going. (**Now advance slide** for prompts to show. Read them aloud.)*

Note: Participants can work in small groups. Pass out large sheets of flipchart paper and markers. Alternatively, to save time, you can do as a whole group brainstorm with instructor or volunteers jotting down ideas on flipchart paper. Spend no more than 4 minutes on brainstorming list. Underline the different stages of life.

What Can Help Parents Provide These?

Drawing from their list, use the following prompts to engage discussion and in making connections. Phase 1 of the discussion:

- ❖ *You've done a great job identifying some important needs for a child!*
- ❖ *With the list you've just generated, let's discuss what would help a parent to provide some of the items on your list.*

(PP) Prompt participants by asking:

- ❖ *For example, how and why would **maturity** help a parent provide for a child’s needs and wants? What shows maturity in a parent, or immaturity?*

Instructor note: In the full *Love Notes* program we have specific content and applications on developing maturity and character.

- ❖ *How would **completing high school** and obtaining more education or training help parents provide items on your list? Pause and listen to their connections.*
- ❖ *And how would having **good communication and conflict management/anger regulation skills** help? Pause and listen to their connections.*

Instructor note: In the full *Love Notes* program we have specific lessons teaching and practicing these skills.

(PP) Transition to examine how a healthy relationship might help.

- ❖ *As a group, let’s think about how a **healthy relationship** might help parents provide some of the things on their lists. By healthy relationship we mean one that is physically and emotionally safe—one that is loving, stable and committed.*
- ❖ **Offer a moment of reflection:** *Let’s hear your thoughts. What on your lists would be helped by parents having a healthy relationship?*

(PP) Use the next slide on the financial benefits of healthy relationships to add more connections as needed. **Note:** Advance so only first bullet shows up:

- ❖ *Let’s talk for a moment about the financial benefits of two together.*



- ❖ *Parents who finish high school, and obtain additional training or education, increase their odds of better-paying jobs.*
- ❖ *A committed relationship—like marriage—can mean pooling together two incomes.*

Pause before advancing bullets and discussing the other points on the slide and say:

- ❖ *Clearly, money doesn't buy love, happiness, or a well-adjusted, healthy kid. We all know there are rich kids who are messed up.*
- ❖ *But money **does** buy things that can give a child some real advantages.*
- ❖ *What thing on your list might they be? **Listen to their connections.***

Now advance the rest of the bullets. Read and elaborate, as needed:

- ❖ *Money can pay for stable housing and housing in safer neighborhoods with better schools and parks.*
- ❖ *Money can buy childcare, food, healthcare, and medicine.*
- ❖ *Money can buy a car for transportation—to doctors, to grocery store, for activities for the child.*
- ❖ *When super stressed about money, it can make it hard to focus on parenting.*

(PP) *Let's look at the **emotional and social benefits** of a healthy relationship. (Note: Only advance the first bullet.)*

- ❖ *There is the time and energy of two parents. What on your lists would relate to this? (Pause to listen and then advance the 2nd bullet.)*
- ❖ *Raising a child involves a lot—care, feeding, play, reading, stimulation and encouragement, limit-setting/discipline, homework, extra activities, along with providing, work, cooking, cleaning, etc.*

Emotional and Social Benefits of a Healthy Relationship

- The time and energy of two to provide nurture and care
- Two to play, read to the child, discipline, help with schoolwork
- Less stress than if alone
- Feeling loved and supported by partner contributes to emotional health
- Married couples are more likely to receive support from both extended families



LOVE NOTES

- ❖ **Advance 3rd & 4th bullets:** *The support of a loving and caring partner who is committed can reduce stress; also, support from both extended families can help.*

A key point to stress:

- ❖ *Yes—absolutely—single parents raise healthy and happy children—many of us have been raised by a parent on their own. Many parents on their own are working very hard to provide for and raise their children well.*

(PP) These points are important to state about parents' relationships:

- ❖ *When parents have a cooperative and committed relationship—like a healthy marriage—it offers real benefits to a child—more financial, social, and emotional resources.*
- ❖ *But the take-home message is **not** to stay in a destructive or dangerous relationship—or run out and get married if a person is pregnant.*
- ❖ *Destructive and dangerous relationships and marriages harm children.*
- ❖ *It's also hard on a child for parents to go from one relationship to another. That kind of instability is hard on a child.*
- ❖ *A stable, single parent, like the mom you see in the image, is far better than a destructive or abusive relationship or going in and out of relationships.*
- ❖ *And, whether parents are together or apart, being able to be supportive and communicate with each other and cooperatively co-parent really helps a child.*



Final words of wisdom:

- ❖ *Thinking about it through the eyes of a child is a big reason to prevent unintended pregnancy and to be a **planner** when it comes to starting a family (or when to have another child).*

- ❖ *Deciding if and **when** you are ready to have a child, and **with whom**, and what you want to have achieved before then really matters. Finishing high school, getting additional training or education, obtaining employment and establishing a healthy marriage, is a pathway to increase your odds of greater financial success, family stability, and the wellbeing of a child.*
-

SECTION 1.6

What About Fathers?

- Flipchart paper and markers
- Music videos: *Back Where You Belong*, Brian Nhira
- Supplemental video: *Dadication*

This section aims to do several things: raise up the importance of fathers and connect some of the dots between healthy marriages/healthy relationships to involved fathering. It aims to motivate males in deeper ways to be proactive in avoiding an unintentional pregnancy and poorly timed family formation as they work towards achieving their educational and employment goals.

There is a considerable body of research on the positive impact fathers can have who actively and positively participate in the lives of their children on a host of child development outcomes, including behavior, academics, and health.²³

For example, according to a recent study by Harvard's Raj Chetty et al., it was found that Black father presence in low-income neighborhoods (not just Black male presence) is associated with better outcomes among Black adolescent boys; specifically greater mobility, higher income as a young adult, and lower incarceration rates. Black father presence at the neighborhood level strongly predicts boy's outcomes irrespective of whether their own father is present at the household level.²⁴

Activities in this section examine the contributions of positive fathering, and especially what it can mean to a child. Importantly youth explore some of the reasons for high levels of father absence. They gain knowledge of how healthy relationships and healthy marriages are associated with positive and involved fathering.

This section on fathers is important for all youth. LGBTQ+ teens can face unintended pregnancies and many youth, regardless of gender, identity or sexual orientation may have their own father issues.

Activity: *Being a Good Father Means...*

- ❖ *The importance of mothers is generally acknowledged. Most can readily point to the attributes of positive mothering.*
- ❖ *Less attention is given to the role and attributes a good father can play in the lives of children.*
- ❖ **(PP)** *We're now going to turn some attention to fathers.*
- ❖ *What does it mean to be a good father? Think about what it truly means to be a good father.*
- ❖ *Some people can have positive fathers or male role models in their lives. Some people may not.*
- ❖ *Some can have a great single mom, and some can have two great moms or two great dads. Some are raised by relatives or foster parents.*
- ❖ *In this activity, we want you to focus on what you feel are the characteristics and qualities of being a good father or father-like figure.*
- ❖ *What does it entail, in your opinion?*
- ❖ *Jot down the qualities and characteristics that come to mind, and then we'll share our ideas.*



Allow a couple of minutes, and then take a few minutes to listen supportively to what participants identify.

(PP) Further discussion:

- ❖ *In your opinion, is there anything unique that fathers and positive males bring to children's lives?*
- ❖ *Is there anything special that a child gets from having a positive father or male role model? Does a kid have any advantages if they have access to a positive father or male role model?*

Pause to listen supportively.

- ❖ *In your opinion, are there disadvantages children and teens may face from experiencing negative fathers or male figures? From father absence?*

Pause to listen supportively.

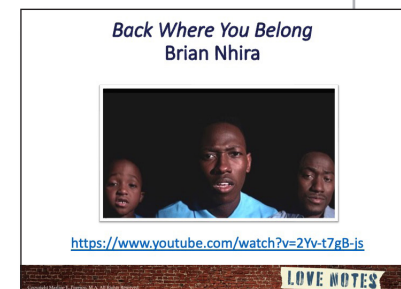


Media Opportunity: *Back Where You Belong*

There are many songs about fathers. We recommend the one below because it relates to the activity in 1.5 on different stages of life, as well as to the activity they just did.

(PP) Introduce the music video:

- ❖ *There are many songs in every genre of music on the subject of fathers. They express what fathers have meant, positively and also negatively.*
- ❖ *We'll listen to a recent one by Brian Nhira, Back Where You Belong. It may be a tough song to listen to and bring up strong feelings. It's always fine to put one's head down or leave the room.*



- ❖ **Before playing, say:** *As you listen to this song, think back to the lists you generated. You will notice, in the video, him as a child and then as a young man, talking to his father, who was absent from his life. See if he mentions or points to any of the things we discussed when generating our child wish lists or as we began our discussion of what being a good father means.*

After the music video, offer a moment of silence. Pass out small squares of paper and invite anonymous (no names) short written “talk-backs”. Talk-backs are a great way to allow space and safety to process. It also gives the instructor a read on how things are being received and for follow-up. Repeat that these are anonymous/no name. However, if anyone wishes to put their name on, that is fine too.

(PP) Here are some prompts to choose from:

- A thought or comment I had as I listened to this...
- A question that came to my mind as I listened...
- A connection I made to what we’ve been learning while listening...
- A feeling I had while listening...
- At this time, I have nothing to write....

After allowing a moment to write, invite anyone to share if they’d like. Afterward, collect to read after class. Follow up with discussion on themes that may emerge, and especially with anyone who added their name, which could indicate they’d like to talk one-on-one.

Talk-backs

- A thought or comment I had ...
- A question that came to mind ...
- A connection I made to what we’ve been discussing..
- A feeling I had while listening....
- At this time, I do not care to write

LOVE NOTES

Why Are So Many Fathers Absent?

This section tries to connect some dots that aren’t so clear to many participants—namely, the connection between healthy relationships, involved parenting, and child wellbeing.

(PP) Before leaving the topic of fathers, let's explore a question many people wonder about:

- ❖ *People wonder why so many fathers are absent today from children's daily lives.*
- ❖ *Some are absent because their presence is dangerous (e.g., domestic violence or other serious behaviors). But for many others, it's complicated.*
- ❖ *Of course, we assume if you love your child, you'll stay connected. But it may be hard to stay connected when you don't live with your child.*
- ❖ *With daily contact, a parent can better stay in tune with a child's daily triumphs, setbacks, experiences, and emotions. Without being present for the daily rhythms of life, it's harder for a parent to stay connected to a child.*
- ❖ *Now, it's not impossible, but it may be hard to stay connected emotionally and socially when a parent doesn't live with their child and especially when they have relationship troubles with the other parent.²⁵*

So why does this happen, and how does it relate to the question of why so many fathers are absent? Advance slide now, so bullets appear.

- ❖ *Many children today are born to parents who have not made a mutual decision to have and raise a child—nor a commitment to a future together.²⁶*
- ❖ *We know from research that the **relationships of unmarried parents** are far more likely to **break up** and be followed by new relationships—and often multiple relationships.²⁷ About 40% of all children today are born to unmarried parents.²⁸ 71% of births to women 24 and younger are non-marital.²⁹ Most of the births to women under 30 are unintended, and most to cohabiting parents.³⁰*
- ❖ *After a break-up, children **typically live with the mother.***
- ❖ *When parents can't communicate and have a lot of hostility (i.e., baby mama/baby daddy drama), it's hard for the non-residential parent (typically the father) to stay connected and for them to co-parent effectively.³¹*

Why are so many dads absent?



- Many kids are born to parents who haven't made a commitment to each other or to having a child together.
- Relationship troubles can be a barrier to father involvement.

LOVE NOTES

- ❖ *Relationship troubles can be a **barrier** for father involvement.*
- ❖ *On the contrary, if the parents have a cooperative relationship with each other, involvement of the non-residential parent is likely to be welcomed and encouraged by the other parent.*
- ❖ *Healthy marriages and healthy relationships (whether together or apart) are positively associated with more positive and involved fathering, effective co-parenting, and child wellbeing.³²*

Relationship Smarts—What’s In it for Guys?

- ❖ **(PP)** *When a guy slides into sex versus pacing, deciding, and planning, babies can happen. A slide into unintended parenthood can create challenges and difficulties.³³*
- ❖ *He can become an “accidental father” with someone he never really chose to be connected to. And if he disengages, that can hurt his child, who wants him to be there.*
 - *Even if he can’t stand the mother, he will be connected for a long time because of the child. And he’ll be connected to the courts for a long time with child support issues.*
- ❖ *Some young fathers step up and stay closely involved with their child, some don’t. For many, relationship troubles between the parents create barriers.*
- ❖ *Better to decide now to avoid a pregnancy and to be intentional—intentional about developing oneself, finishing school, preparing for employment. It means learning how to build healthy friendships and romantic relationships. And it means being intentional about forming a healthy marriage that brings you joy before bringing a child into the world.*
- ❖ **Ask:** *What might a young guy who sees children and family in his future do right now to put himself on a path to being the father he would like to be someday? And, if children are not part of his vision, avoid an unintended pregnancy and stay on track? Let’s brainstorm. Listen to students’ suggestions.*



SUPPLEMENTAL CONTENT

Media Opportunity

- ❖ (PP) *DADication* is a supplemental short documentary (16 minutes) you can assign participants to view. This is a truly inspiring documentary highlighting fathers who have overcome substantial barriers (such as their own experience of father abandonment, recovery, incarceration) to realize the importance of their involvement for their children and themselves. Produced by the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse in partnership with the Ad Council and Campbell Ewald.
- ❖ You can either assign some thought-provoking questions for the participants to think about after watching the documentary, or you can hold a brief discussion about it the next time you meet.



SECTION 1.7

Bright Futures for Children

- Application 1c: *Bright Futures & Child Speak*

(PP) Introduce this section.

- ❖ *Most of you do not have a child at this time.*
- ❖ *But looking at how things affect a child might underline how important it is to avoid a pregnancy until you finish your education, are employed, and are in a healthy marriage.*
- ❖ *Let's focus on steps young parents can take to provide bright futures for children.*
- ❖ *Focusing on what one wants for children (one you might have in the future, your own now, or just children in general) might bring home how important it is to follow one of the pathways and sequences towards success; and to make clear decisions vs. sliding.*
- ❖ *Let's consider how a child can benefit from young adults applying what you've learned in Love Notes.*



Activity: Child Speak

(PP) Announce that they will start by examining some advice offered in discussions with former teen parents.

Directions for the *Child Speak* activity, Part 1:

1. Pass out *Bright Futures & Child Speak* (Application 1c). *These nine pieces of advice were gathered from former teen parents. These are things they wish they had known earlier and would like to share with all young people.*



2. Have volunteers (ask for volunteers who like to read aloud) take turns reading each piece of advice aloud to the whole group. Stop before #9.
3. **Ask the group to focus on #9 and instructor reads it aloud.** *“If separated, both parents put their child first before any new partner. Be wise about your love life. Go slow, avoid sliding quickly into new relationships. Casually bringing new partners into the home can be hard on a child and pose risks—even abuse. Be wise about choosing partners and pace your involvement more slowly.”*
4. Now let’s consider what life is like if parents **do not** follow the advice in #9. Let’s listen to a child who is experiencing the **opposite** of that advice. Jason is describing what his life is like to someone who cares and who will listen. His life is confusing and sometimes scary.


Read aloud little Jason’s experience:

- *Hi. I’m Jason, and I’m 8 years old. I love my mom, but a lot of the time she pays more attention to her boyfriends than to me. My mom brought James home to live with us when I was two. I liked him. He played with me a lot. But they broke up, and I never see him anymore. I miss him. Soon after my mom started bringing a new guy around. Neither of them paid much attention to me, but they broke up a few months later. Since I was 6, JB has been living with us. He’s mean to my mom, and I’m scared of him. I just go to my room, play video games, and try to stay out of the way. Why can’t my mom take care of me instead of these guys?*

Directions for the Child Speak activity, Part 2:

- ❖ **(PP) Let’s turn it around!** Assume parents are following the pieces of advice, and the child is benefiting. Turn over to p. 2.

1. Announce that each group is assigned **one** of the pieces of advice. (Use #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7. They are to assume the child’s parent(s) are following this advice.
2. In their groups, they are to identify any skills, information, decisions they’ve made and steps they are taking that are helping the parent(s) follow that particular piece of advice.



Child Speak

Assume parent(s) are following the advice. Describe what they are doing. Specifically:

- What **decisions** do they make?
- What **skills** are they using or what skills do they need to learn?
- What **steps** are they taking?
- What **behaviors** do you see?
- Include any other ideas you have.

Describe what the parent(s) are doing and **how it feels** to the child? How it **benefits** the child. Give your child a name and age.

LOVE NOTES

- What **decisions** are they making?
 - What **skills** are they using or what skills do they need to learn?
 - What **steps** are they taking?
 - What **behaviors** do you see?
 - Include any other ideas you have.
3. Be specific in describing what the parents are doing and how this feels to the child and helps the child. You can give your child a name and age.

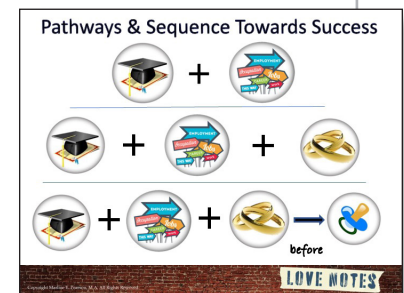
Allow 4–5 minutes for groups to discuss and to write their script through the eyes of a child. Ask one or two groups to share their ideas or read their script.

As you are processing, bring it back to the **original lists** they created in the first activity and ask **how the positive steps, decisions, skills, and behaviors they identify** help parents give a child some of the items they identified in their child wish lists.

Note: If short on time, the whole group can focus on one piece of advice following the same directions.

(PP) Advance to the next slides that remind participants of the *Pathways and Sequences Towards Success*.

- ❖ *If you follow one of the pathways and sequences towards success, your chances of ending up in the middle to upper-income levels are greatly increased.*
- ❖ *Money doesn't guarantee the healthy development of a child, but it sure does help parents meet the needs of children in many ways.*
- ❖ *Finishing high school and obtaining further education or training can help young adults in obtaining better-paid employment.*



- ❖ *If children are a part of your vision, waiting until you are older and your life is more settled with schooling, employment, and you are in a healthy and committed relationship like marriage will benefit you and any children you might have.*
 - ❖ *And if having children someday is not part of your vision, avoiding an unintended pregnancy will offer a clearer pathway toward reaching your goals.*
 - ❖ *Everyone can work to develop themselves—develop their strengths, their maturity and character. You can take your time when attracted to someone; get to know a person, discover if your values are in sync and if you truly enjoy each other; discover if this is someone worthy of your love. Learn everything you can about healthy relationships—the skills for forming them and the skills—especially communication and conflict management skills—for maintaining them.*
 - ❖ *Be a planner, decide, don't slide. Avoid an unintended pregnancy while you work towards success with your education/training and career goals. If children and family are a part of your vision, take a mindful approach to establishing a healthy marriage first.*
-

SECTION 1.8

My Success Plans & Wrap Up

- Application 1d: *My Success Plans*
- Application 1e: *Trusted Adult Connection Activity*

This final part reinforces the importance of planning and decision-making which is critical to developing agency—and ultimately to following a pathway towards success.

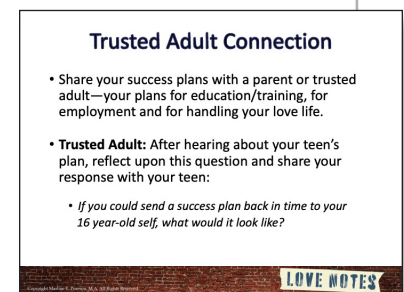
Plan for Success

(PP) Pass out Application 1d, *My Success Plans*. Briefly go over and point out the questions which relate to education, career, their romantic and intimate lives. Set a date for completion.



Trusted Adult Connection

- ❖ (PP) Pass out the *Trusted Adult Connection Activity* (Application 1e).
- ❖ **Teen:** Share your plan with a parent or trusted adult—your plans for education/training, employment, and for handling your love life.
- ❖ **Trusted Adult:** Look over your teen's success plans and then reflect upon this question and share with your teen:
 - *If you could send a success plan back in time to your 16-year-old self, what would it look like?*



Wrap Up

(PP) Consider playing a positive song. Here are some suggestions, but feel free to use a song of your choice. Links are provided.

- India Arie, *Steady Love*: A beautiful love song.
- Maren Morris, *The Bones*: Refers to a strong relationship foundation.
- Brad Paisley, *A Letter to Me*.

Afterward, ask participants to go around (if they choose) and say one thing they will remember—one thing they will pass on to a friend or family member.



Notes

¹ Sliding versus deciding is a concept adapted for teens from the original work of Scott Stanley, Galena Kline Rhoades, and Howard Markman. This concept has become important in scholarly discussions on cohabitation and the inertia effect. See Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55(4), 499–509. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2006.00418.x>.

Also, see Pearson, M. E., Stanley, S. M., & Rhodes, G. K. (n.d.). *Within my reach*. PREP Inc. <https://prepinc.com/collections/within-my-reach>.

² Inanc, H., Spitzer, A., & Goesling, B. (2021). *Administration for Children & Families (OPRE Report 2021-148): 'Assessing Benefits of Success Sequence for Economic Self-Sufficiency and Family Stability'*. Washington, D.C: Targeted News Service. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/assessing-benefits-success-sequence-economic-self-sufficiency-and-family-stability>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. See Figure 3 in report.

⁸ In the evaluation by OPRE (see footnote 2), family stability was measured by 1) the presence of 2 adults in the home, 2) the number of residential partner transitions,

and 3) relationship satisfaction as measured by reported happiness in their relationship.

⁹ Wang, W. & Wilcox, W. B. (2022). The power of the success sequence for disadvantaged young adults. *Institute of Family Studies* analysis of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 cohort Bureau of Labor Statistics, Universities of Chicago & Ohio State. Based on adults surveyed in 2017-18. Education and employment measured when cohort was in mid-20s.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Wang, W. & Wilcox, W. B. (2022). The power of the success sequence for disadvantaged young adults. *Institute of Family Studies*.

And Wang, W., & Wilcox, W. B. (2017). The millennial success sequence: Marriage, kids, and the success sequence of young adults. *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY)*. Data drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) to study the success sequence among the current generation of adults age 28–34.

Using longitudinal data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth allowed Wang and Wilcox to better capture the order of certain life events—for example, whether marriage occurred before or after childbearing along with the other key milestones of education and employment.

And it could capture those who completed the first two milestones of their success sequence model (education and employment) but did not have children and were not married. Wang and Wilcox refer to this as "on track" in their report.

- ¹⁴ Ibid. And author's discussion with principle researcher, Wendy Wang (June 2023).
- ¹⁵ Wang & Wilcox 2017.
- ¹⁶ Eickmeyer, K. J., & Manning, W. D. (2018). Serial Cohabitation in Young Adulthood: Baby Boomers to Millennials. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(4), 826-840. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12495>
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- ¹⁷ Horowitz, J. M., Graf, N., & Livingston, G. (2019, November). *Marriage and cohabitation in the U.S.* Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. See table on page 20.
- ¹⁸ Martin, J. A. (2021, March 23). Births: Final Data for 2019. *National Vital Statistics Reports* 70, no. 2. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr70nvsr70-02-508.pdf>

nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr70nvsr70-02-508.pdf

For a breakdown according to age, education, and race, see: Child Trends. (2018, August 8). *Dramatic Increase in the proportion of births outside of marriage*.

- ¹⁹ Author's calculations from National Vital Statistics Report. (2021, March 23). Nonmarital birth share for women 24 & under, 2019, was overall 71.4%. (White: 61.0%; Non-Hispanic Black: 90.9%, Hispanic: 73.9%, Asian 43.4%.)
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- ²² Fomby, P., & Osborne, C. (2016). Family instability, multipartner fertility, and behavior in middle childhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79(1), 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12349>
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- ²³ Jeynes, W. H. (2014). A meta-analysis: The relationship between father involvement and student academic achievement. *Urban Education, 50*(4), 387–423. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914525789>
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High-Cost Slides

SITUATION:

Their relationship has been rocky since they met 8 months ago. When he heard she was pregnant, the relationship just went downhill. She knew he wasn't faithful and told him it was over. But then, when the baby came, he was sweet and said he wouldn't cheat again. She left her foster mom's place and moved in with him right after the birth.

WHAT HAPPENED LATER:

Several months later, he's back to his same old ways. Cheating, staying out late at night, coming and going. She's really raising her child alone. This isn't the kind of relationship she wants...but now she's just found out she's pregnant again.

SITUATION:

He's begun to make some changes and has joined a program to help him get his high school equivalency and some technical training. He wants a better life than what he came from. He's doing well in the program and has recently met a girl he likes. Things have been progressing fast.

WHAT HAPPENED LATER:

She just told him she's pregnant. He likes her, but they've known each other barely three months. He doesn't have a job but has always pictured himself as being a good father someday—not like the one he had. It's all happened so fast, and he has no idea how he will further his education and training and better his life while trying to support his child. It's created a lot of tensions in his relationship with his girl.

SITUATION:

There's a lot of chemistry between them. They got sexually involved right away. They haven't talked about whether they are seeing other people or really defined their relationship. Since his feelings were so strong, he thought his partner must feel the same way.

WHAT HAPPENED LATER:

He later finds out his partner has been having sex with others. He's angry and feels betrayed. This seems to keep happening to him.

SITUATION:

This person's partner says they don't want to get tested for STDs because it's a sign of mistrust. And besides, they say they'd never use a condom—they don't like them. They say, "You shouldn't be afraid. Trust me; I'm clean."

WHAT HAPPENED LATER:

A year later, this person finds out they're HIV positive.

SITUATION:

He's hit her up pretty badly. She's broken up with him several times, but each time he comes back with roses, promising to change. She wanted to believe his promises and keeps getting back together with him.

WHAT HAPPENED LATER:

This time she's told him it's over, and she means it. He's threatened to kill her if she leaves. He says, "No one is going to have you if I can't." She knows he's capable of anything and doubts any restraining orders will work.



Making Decisions

Below is a list of things a person really could make a conscious decision about, rather than just letting it happen. Look over the list and consider which of these might be important for you to make a decision about, either now or in the future.

Check 3 or 4 things important to make a decision about.

- How to get back on track to graduate
- Whether to pursue a trades/ apprenticeship or academic college path
- The education or training I need
- Whether to take it from just friends to a romantic level
- Kiss—make out
- To be known as a couple—be exclusive
- To clarify my own sexual values, boundaries, and how I want to pace my involvement
- When and how to start a discussion with a partner about sex
- To say, “I love you”
- How we can have more fun together
- A plan—that we both take responsibility for—for how we’ll prevent STDs and/or pregnancy
- To have sex or to continue to have sex
- To get tested for STDs/HIV
- Whether I want to commit to a future together
- To get engaged—married
- When to have a child (or a second child)

Focus on 1 decision and proceed to the next page. Check items on the following page that can help you make this decision. Do in pencil so you can go back and do the same thing for additional decisions that will help you reach your goals.

Decision #1: _____**In order to make this decision, I would need...**

- to talk to a school counselor to establish a plan to finish high school (or high school equivalency).
- to meet with a community college advisor to explore programs and career paths; learn about apprenticeships.
- to find out what education or training is necessary: technical, 2 yr, 4 yr, military, etc.
- to visit, apply, enroll, or re-enroll in college.
- to discover if we are compatible in ways that are important to us—interests, goals, ambition, and energy levels.
- to be together for 6 to 9 months—until the love chemicals settle and I'm seeing more clearly.
- to have a discussion about my sexual values, boundaries, and how I want to pace my involvement.
- to know my partner respects my sexual values.
- evidence partner is responsible—attends school, holds job, can handle money, is bettering self.
- to trust my partner to be faithful.
- to brainstorm ideas for having fun with my partner.
- to discuss the good and not-so-good experiences from our pasts.
- to meet each other's families.
- to have a conversation about our relationship expectations and core values.
- to feel respected.
- to feel emotionally and physically safe.
- to have an honest discussion about our level of commitment to each other.
- to be engaged or married.
- to be settled with a stable job, a place to live, and to be in a healthy marriage for at least a year.
- to know we are both willing to work on communication.
- my partner to complete anger management classes.
- to know my partner is drug-free or working a recovery program.
- to know if my partner has been abusive in past relationships.
- to know my partner will take responsibility with me to avoid a pregnancy and/or STDs.
- both of us to get tested for STDs.
- to talk to a health professional.
- to know if my partner will take a parenting workshop with me or watch or read parenting skills resources.
- to know my partner agrees on waiting for a second child until we're more settled.
- to have a conversation about future plans for marriage.
- to attend a relationship or marriage skills workshop together.

How will gathering this information help me make a decision? And how will making clear decisions help me have the life I would like?

Bright Futures for Babies



Advice from Former Teen Parents

- 1 There is zero tolerance for abuse.** Growing up amidst domestic violence and high levels of conflict puts a child at risk for all sorts of problems.
- 2 Parents assess their relationship.** Is it safe? Should it end? Or does it have potential, and do we want a future together? If so, what skills do we need to build? Children benefit if parents work on building a healthy relationship and deepen their commitment to each other.
- 3 Parents work on communication,** whether they stay together or not. Avoid the drama by building communication skills for handling differences and conflicts so you can co-parent effectively. Never badmouth the other parent in front of your child—it only hurts the child.
- 4 Parents learn about child development,** especially the experiences in the first few years that set a child up for a healthy start. Babies need loving interaction and stimulating experiences to build their brains and emotional world. As they grow, children also need parents who encourage, protect, and use effective discipline practices. Together or apart, get on the same page about parenting practices. Seek out resources/parenting classes.
- 5 Parents focus on education and employment goals.** A child will benefit from parents who focus on finishing school and pursuing employment goals.
- 6 Parents wait on having another child** (whether together or in a new relationship) until each is more settled with education and employment and with a solidly committed partner—spouse.
- 7 Dad isn't missing in action** but stays involved daily—unless his presence is dangerous. Dad needs to be part of a parenting team, not a treat parent who drops in occasionally. Mom should welcome Dad's participation and try hard not to shut him out or use the child to punish him.
- 8 Both parents understand the importance of stability and safety for a child's wellbeing.** Establish routines (bed, nap, eating, reading). Avoid taking a child on a roller coaster of multiple relationships as you figure out your love life. Reach out to community and family connections for support.
- 9 If separated, both parents put their child first before any new partner.** Avoid sliding into new relationships. Casually bringing new partners into the home can pose risks to children, even abuse. Use the relationship skills you've learned to be wiser about choosing partners and pacing your involvement more slowly.

Try to see it through the eyes of a child.



My Success Plans



My Education and Career Plans

What kind of jobs or careers do I see for myself? (For example: working outdoors or with your hands, working with people, with children, industry/trades, healthcare, first responder, retail, restaurant, STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math fields], business, agriculture, military, recreation, teaching, the music industry or graphic design, etc.)

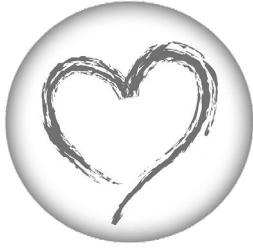
What level of education and/or training will I need? (diploma, two-year associate degree, military training, four-year college, technical training, etc.)

Write two specific steps you can take toward these goals: (For example: meet with my school counselor, improve my attendance, do my homework, ask for tutoring help, get my GED, job shadow, volunteer or intern, talk to people in careers or apprenticeships I'm interested in, stay active in stuff I like—sports, music, art, JROTC, etc.)

Step 1

Step 2

Are there things you are doing now that might get in the way of you reaching your dreams? (For example: procrastinating, skipping school, not doing homework, smoking weed or drinking, unprotected sex—risking pregnancy, poor relationship choices, hanging with the wrong people, etc.)



My Relationship Vision

What qualities are important to you in a relationship? (For example: fun, romantic, supportive, equality, trust/faithfulness, mutually respectful, good communication, etc.)

What are you looking for in a partner/friend? (For example: kind, caring, responsible, adventurous, has drive/goals, trustworthy, physically fit, clean/neat, drug free, good dancer, values good communication and managing stress and conflict peacefully, etc.)

My Relationship Reality

If you are in a relationship or have been in one, offer an honest appraisal of how healthy or unhealthy, safe or unsafe, fun or difficult the relationship is or was. Offer a few examples of how. If you have not had a relationship, analyze a relationship of someone you know.

*If you're not sure, check out LevelsRespect.org

Handling Attractions—Making Relationship Decisions

What will be most helpful in guiding your relationship choices in the future? What will help you handle your attractions and make smart decisions about your relationships in the future?

- Define what's important to me in a partner—in a relationship • Enjoy, but be aware of how the "love chemicals" may keep me from seeing a person clearly at first • Respect for my boundaries & expectations
- Discover if we share some interests/have fun • Look for maturity and character in a person • Pay attention to how we communicate & handle conflict • Mutual respect—no tolerance of abusive/controlling behavior
- Take my time, gather information, make decisions—don't slide •



Decide, Don't Slide, Into Sex

The more you define a personally meaningful **context and timing for sex** for yourself, the more you decide for yourself your **boundaries**, the more you decide how you want to **pace** any intimate involvement, and the more you **plan** for the choices you make, the likelier you are to achieve your goals. Reflect on all you've learned that can help you in your sexual decision-making.

(For example: I will wait for the love chemicals to settle a bit before getting too involved; I will be upfront about my values, my boundaries, and how I want to pace things; I will pay attention to how I am treated, how we communicate and handle differences; we will agree to take responsibility to avoid STDs/HIV and/or pregnancy and follow one of the pathways to success).

What are your decisions? Spell out your intentions for the questions below:

What would I want any level of physical intimacy to mean—from a kiss, to making out, onto greater touch, to sex?

Where do I draw my line on physical intimacy? Or where would I like to redraw my line in the future?

When, with whom, and under what conditions would I move my line?

What rules and plans do I have to stick to my intentions to protect my future?

How will you know if you're on the same page?

Trusted Adult Connection Activity

Teen: Share your success plans with a parent or trusted adult--your plans for education/training, employment, and for handling your love life.

Trusted Adult: Look over your teen's success plans and then reflect upon this question and share with your teen:

- *If you could send a success plan back in time to your 16-year-old self, what would it look like?*

Signature: _____

-----cut line-----

Trusted Adult Connection Activity

Teen: Share your success plans with a parent or trusted adult--your plans for education/training, employment, and for handling your love life.

Trusted Adult: Look over your teen's success plans and then reflect upon this question and share with your teen:

- *If you could send a success plan back in time to your 16-year-old self, what would it look like?*

Signature: _____

