

Marriage is becoming less popular,^{1,2} even though studies show it is the healthiest and most satisfying relationship for an active sex life. The decision to wait for marriage and communicating that to your partner is difficult, but making the commitment can lead to a happier life and better sex.³

Sex Outside of Marriage

- Sex outside of marriage affects our whole being.
- Sex outside of marriage hurts future relationships.⁴
- Sex outside of marriage can make us sick.⁵
- Sex outside of marriage is no commitment at all.^{6,7,8,9}

Making the Commitment

Keeping sex in marriage is best for you and your children and even for your spouse. But getting from a place where sex was not saved for marriage to a solid loving marriage relationship takes some work and planning. Here are three steps you can use to change your relationships forever.

Step 1: Make the Choice

The first step is to make the choice to save sex for marriage. We have the freedom to do as we please, and no one can force you to do what's good for you. But experts agree that for the best possible romantic relationship, *marriage* is absolutely, hands-down, the right choice. If you're convinced to save sex until marriage from now on, then we want to equip you, so you can make the commitment and stick with it.

To take this step you will have to figure out your "why" and write it down so that you can remember it later on when your resolve starts to crumble. Is it because you want to avoid STIs, unplanned pregnancies, painful break-ups, or any of the other consequences? Is it to give yourself a great future with a man who is totally committed to you and you to him? Include your goals for education, career, and family—and whatever else you need to be like minded on with your future spouse. You need to be able to look back and remind yourself about the kind of guy you're looking for and why you are choosing to wait for marriage.

Making the choice to save sex for marriage is actually the easy part. It's clear that choosing to wait for marriage is the best choice— but following through, communicating, and sticking with your decision can be a little more difficult.

Step 2: Set Your Dating Boundaries

If you're not in a relationship yet, then this is the perfect time to start fresh with new healthy boundaries. Establish these *good* boundaries now, and then look for the guy who will respect them.

Setting these boundaries is a bit trickier if you're already in a long-term relationship. But remember, you are still in *control* of your own body, and you can always set boundaries that are healthy for you. Just make it clear that the next time you have sex, it will be with the person you are married to. Start by telling him what you've learned and what's important to you. Discuss goals you have in common. They don't have to match perfectly, but marriage should be one you both share if you're planning to stay in the relationship.

Give your partner *time* to understand that it is a real decision that you will be sticking with and don't let yourself be talked out of it. It's important that you both have the same goal of marriage in sight. And then be careful that you don't put yourself in a situation where you will be tempted to sleep with him again.

Step 3: Living the Plan

The decision has been made to wait until marriage, check. Boundaries and priorities are now in place and communicated, check. Now live the plan. Let your partner know what these boundaries are so they are clear and agreed upon. Then, instead of skirting around THE line of "how far is too far," find things to do together where it would be impossible to do anything sexual. In other words, don't do things that will set you up for failure, like being alone at each others homes or sleeping over because it got "too late" to drive home. Practicing these boundaries is how you live out the plan to reach a healthy marriage.

You are worth the work of saving sex for marriage. It can be uncomfortable and difficult, sometimes lonely, and you might make mistakes along the way, but you are a strong, capable individual. Commit to the most emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy life, and save sex for marriage. You and your future happiness and security are worth it!

Resources include:

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4. Treas J, Giesen D. Sexual infidelity among married and cohabiting Americans. *Journal of marriage and family*. 2000 Feb;62(1):48-60.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 2017. Atlanta, GA. Found at <https://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/newsroom/docs/factsheets/std-trends-508.pdf>, accessed 2/16/2019.
6. Booth A, Crouter AC, Landale NS. Just living together: Implications of cohabitation on families, children, and social policy. Routledge; 2002 Feb 1.
7. Manning WD, Lamb KA. Adolescent well being in cohabiting, married, and single parent families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2003 Nov;65(4):876-93.
8. Waite LJ. Does Marriage Matter? *Demography*. 1995 Nov 1;32(4):483-507.
9. Wilmoth J, Koso G. Does marital history matter? Marital Status and Wealth Outcomes Among Preretirement Adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2002 Feb 1;64(1):254-68.