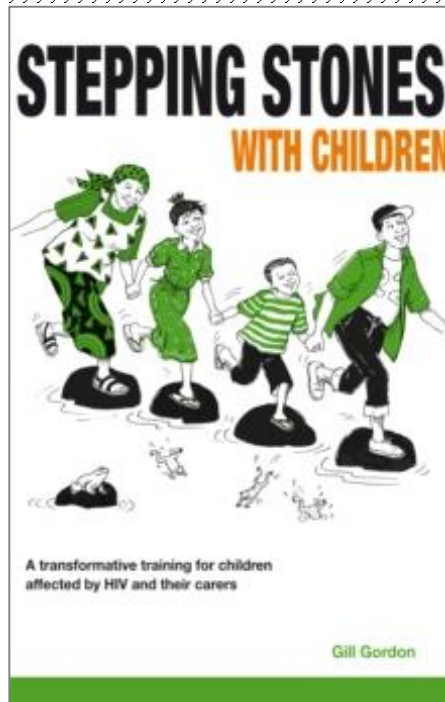


Handouts for *Stepping Stones with Children*



This *Handout for Stepping Stones with Children* is to be used with the *Stepping Stones with Children* training manual published by Practical Action Publishing, 2016.

You can download this handout for free for use with this training manual from the www.stepsstonesfeedback.org website.

On this website there are also many other resources to support you with this training manual and the original *Stepping Stones* training manual.

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DELAYING, STARTING AND STOPPING HAVING SEX

1. Things to consider about early sex

Physical maturity:

Girls: Having sex before the end of puberty (around 16-18 years), when the vagina and cervix are fully grown, is more likely to result in bruising and sores, which make it easier for HIV and STIs to enter the body.

Childbirth is safer when the birth canal and organs are fully developed at around 20 years of age. Younger girls who become pregnant have a higher risk of obstructed labour, fistula, stillbirths, a small baby, and damage to their reproductive organs.

Boys: The penis grows in length and width during puberty, becoming fully grown by about 16 years. Condoms are designed for mature males, so they are too big for many boys during puberty.

Myths: There is no truth in beliefs that girls and boys need to start having sex during puberty.

Mental and social maturity:

The upper brain is not fully developed until sometime after puberty, usually the early twenties. It is important for making good decisions, predicting consequences, controlling feelings, taking responsibility, and communicating and empathising with others. For this reason, young people are more easily overwhelmed by sexual feelings than adults, and may make decisions which harm them and others.

In general, the younger the child the less sexually competent they are. For example, being able to: be assertive about what they want and to act on it; use contraception and condoms; and have an HIV test.

Maturity is also needed to assess a range of other factors:

- whether the person is likely to be a good partner or someone who may harm us (what virtues do they show? Do we have equal power? Do we agree things together? What is our relationship like?)
- whether we may regret having sex after we have done it
- how having sex may affect reaching our future vision

The law: regardless of whether the sex is forced or consensual (agreed to), sex with a child who is under the age of consent is illegal.

Culture: Many cultures expect children to have sex before they are physically, mentally and socially mature. These societies and the children in them are harmed by these norms but we can change them.

2. Ways of saying 'no' to starting or continuing to have sex

- *I have made a decision to delay sex until I am older and ready.*
- *I'd like you to respect my views.*
- *Not having sex is the only 100% effective way to avoid pregnancy, getting an STI or sexually transmitted HIV. Right now I want to avoid all those things.*
- *I want to protect my fertility and life until I am ready to have a baby.*
- *I don't want to upset my parents or keep secrets from them.*
- *I think sex before marriage is wrong. I would feel bad if I went against my beliefs.*
- *Let me tell you what I want in my life and what I want to be doing in five years' time. Having a baby or paying damages or getting sick would stop me from getting to where I want to be, to my vision of a good future.*
- *I'm determined to get through primary school and try for secondary school. If I have sex with you, my mind would go out to you and I wouldn't be able to concentrate.*
- *Let me tell you about what my caregivers hope for me and how they would feel if I had a child or got sick.*
- *We don't have to have sex to love each other. Let's stay safe and focus on our visions for our futures. They are more important than a bit of fun today.*

3. Ways of supporting a child or friend to say 'no' to starting or continuing to have sex

- Be a good role model in your own virtues and behaviour. Share why you think it is best for children to delay having sex until they are mature.
- Show empathy by sharing that you know it is difficult to say 'no' to sex.
- Discuss situations of people like them, such as children who drop out of school due to pregnancy, to explore the consequences of early sex. Talk together about why it may have happened and what people could have done differently.
- Play the 'should they have sex or not' game, where you role play the situation, and consider all the different issues.
- Communicate that children who have had early sex don't have to keep having it. They can benefit by stopping.
- Encourage the child to have a vision of their future, and support them in their vision.
- Try to meet children's basic needs, so it is easier for them to refuse having sex in exchange for gifts. Encourage them to think about their priorities in using resources and explore the possible consequences of gifts in exchange for sex.
- If the child is willing to talk to you, listen to their thoughts and feelings without being judgemental or angry. Support them to find assertive actions they can take to stay safe.
- If the child is being pressurised or forced to have sex by an adult or older child who has power over them, offer to help them to stop the abuse.