

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

So How Far Can I Go? A Discussion For Christian Teens And Parents

By Dr. John P. Splinter

This chapter is written for teens and parents to read together and discuss. At every place you see a ♦, stop and talk about what you've just read.

Pop music has always been a reflection of culture. In your grandparents' day, Bob Dylan's "*The Times They Are A-Changin'*" was an announcement of a militant youth culture about to change the values of Western society. In your parents' day, Joni Mitchell's "*Big Yellow Taxi*" was a forerunner of the "green movement." And Sting's song, "*History Will Teach Us Nothing*" was a cultural cry for meaning. Pop music reflects culture.

So what's pop music saying in the first decade of the 21st Century? Here are three intro lines to songs that you might even know. See if you catch a theme.

1.

Touch my body, make me feel like I never felt
Deliver it, make me shiver up from head to toe
Move my waist line side to side
Come on touch my body, make me feel like I never felt
[Song, "*Touch My Body*," ~ by Ashanti]

2.

I like 'em big, I like 'em small
I like 'em round, I love 'em all
I just what to look and see
What you got for me
[Song, "*Show Me Your Tits*" ~ by Anvil]

3.

She makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand up
Just one touch
And I erupt like a volcano and cover her with my nut
Babygirl you make me say (Oh oh oh)
And I just can't think (of anything else I'd rather do)
Than to hear you sing (sing my name the way you do)

When we do our thing (when we do the things we do)
Babygirl you make me say (Oh oh oh)
[Song, “*Sexy Love*” ~ by Ne-Yo]

While not all pop music is about sex, a lot more of it is today than a few years ago, and the words and actions expressed today are dramatically more sexual and graphic than they have *ever* been in the history of pop music. And if you’re a teen today, you’re undoubtedly aware of hip-hop lyrics, where girls are “bitches” and “hos” and where the “f-bomb” is as common as leaves on summer trees.

This is to say, you are growing up in *the most highly sexualized culture* since the ancient biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah ~ for real. The sad thing about it is that your life is literally being bent by it, and for the most part you’re unaware of the effect it’s having on you. You just think of it as “normal.” You might be thinking, “Hey, I see all the sex stuff in my world ~ I’m not blind.” And sure, you do. But what you’re not aware of is what it would be like to grow up in a teen world that is not super-sexually-saturated.

Let me give you a picture of that world. It may sound weird and foreign, but it’s the world your grandparents knew.

- Girls couldn’t wear short skirts to school – the skirt had to be at the knee when the girl was standing, or she was sent home to change clothes.
- Boys had to wear pants with belts, and shirts tucked in.
- Zero cleavage could be shown, or a girl would be sent home.
- There were no sexy TV or magazine ad campaigns aimed at kids.
- The only place you could see naked bodies was in *National Geographic* magazines.
- It was generally safe for kids to hitch-hike.
- HIV-AIDS didn’t exist, nor did herpes, chlamydia, or HPV.
- Almost nobody had heard of oral or anal sex.
- Neighbors watched out for each others’ kids.
- Kids played outside much of the time, and nobody worried about some pedophile kidnapping them or abusing them.
- *All* TV shows were “clean” (no homosexuality, no sleeping around, no bad language).
- Virtually nobody got pregnant in high school; almost nobody got pregnant in college.
- Movies didn’t show nudity, period. Love-making scenes were left to the imagination.
- No stores advertised women’s underwear in their display windows.
- And of course, there were no Internet nor cell phones, so porn was all but non-existent. ♦

That may sound like a strange, perhaps boring world. But it was a safer world back then, than the world in which you’re growing up. This being so, serious questions emerge from the world in which you’re living:

- How do kids today figure out right vs. wrong?
- What *is* right? What *is* wrong? Who says so?
- Are there some things that are *always* right and *always* wrong?
- How do kids learn about what can really hurt them, versus what’s safe and helpful?

- How do kids gain the insight needed to escape advertising aimed at manipulating teens?
- How do kids gain the strength to not copy peers whose lives are crashing and burning?

You know that the sex thing is pretty much wide open today, starting in late grade school or early junior high. And pop music like Ashati's lyrics (above) makes a strong case to use sex as a personal form of entertainment. So how do kids today protect themselves? The answer is that millions of kids today crash and burn. It's an extremely dangerous world for today's kids. Here are a few examples of crashing and burning:

- Millions of girls ages 12-19 have babies, thereby becoming single moms ~ and single moms are the fastest growing category of poverty in the United States today
- Millions of teens get STDs, and most don't know it until damage has already been done
- Millions of teens are getting hooked on porn, which thereby leads to failed marriages and sex addiction
- Suicide is the #3 killer of teens, and is closely correlated with two things: 1) broken homes, and 2) broken love relationships in which teens were sexually active
- Between 20 – 33% of girls reach their 18th birthday having been sexually abused
- Respect for women, which had been growing in the 1970s – 1990s, is now being hugely eroded through pornography and hip-hop music
- More than half of American kids now grow up in single-parent families, which often lead to attachment issues in adulthood

The rest of this chapter is aimed at answer one question. It's a question that's like the center ring on a bull's eye target ~ the ripples spread out in all directions, answering a thousand other questions. The question is one that teens have asked since before the wheel was invented ~ "How far can I go sexually?"

- Most kids don't talk with their parents about that question.
- Most churches don't address that question on behalf of kids.
- Most sex-education programs in high schools don't provide much wisdom for kids in regard to that question.

In today's crazy world the answer is, "You can go as far as you wish to go ~ nothing's holding you back. It's all good." So this booklet is aimed at helping you think about your answer. ♦

How Close Is Too Close?

When I was six years old my family lived in on the high plains of North Dakota in a little town called Jamestown. One year the James River went crazy and we had a huge flood. My grandfather took me to watch one of those old iron bridges collapse. While we were standing on the banks of the surging river, a hole suddenly began opening in the ground 20 feet from the river. At first it was small, but it grew rapidly and we could see whirling water eating the sides of the hole, making it larger by the second.

I was curious and started to walk toward the hole when my grandfather grabbed me by the collar and firmly led me away from it. When I asked why, he explained that the hole was the effect of a whirlpool undermining the bank of the river. As we watched, the hole grew from 10 inches to

ten feet. Workmen's tools and clothing were disappearing into the hole, and nobody was even trying to save them. It was obvious that anything that fell into the hole was sucked down into the river and never seen again.

Let's build on that story for a moment. Here's a question: How close would have been too close for a six-year-old boy? How close would you have personally gotten? Actually, anyone would have been crazy to be anywhere near that hole, right? ~ because the reason it was getting bigger with each second was that the river was undercutting the ground beneath it ~ and who knew how much wider the whirlpool actually was under the surface dirt.

Let's go back now to the question kids ask all the time. How far is too far, sexually? Is making out OK? How about hands on the body? How about any kind of sex except intercourse? To help think this through we're going to reference some thoughts that were written years ago by a very wise man named Dr. Donald Joy.¹ He described twelve stages of bonding. Each stage is like one of the steps in your house, going from the basement to the main floor. We'll take each step separately. Here we go.

Step One ~ Eye to Body. A quick glance tells us a lot about a person – their sex, size, shape, age, hair style, clothing, cute or not, and perhaps even a little bit about their values and social status. We make decisions in about a half second whether or not we might be attracted to that person. If what we see in a quick glance pleases us, then we may look a little longer ~ or a lot longer.

Step Two ~ Eye to Eye. When our eyes meet a stranger's eyes, our most natural reaction is to look away. If our eyes meet again, we may smile or nod, which sometimes signals that we might like to become better acquainted. We generally don't give much eye contact to people we're not interested in ~ but it's OK to look a little longer at someone who's cute, right?

Step Three ~ Voice to Voice. If we can work it out, we might get into a conversation with that cute person. If their voice is squeaky and sounds like Donald Duck, we're pretty much done with the conversation. But if their voice sounds good, we may hang around. Initial conversations are often trivial and include questions like "What is your name?" "What school do you go to?" Adults ask things like, "Where do you live," and "What do you do for a living?" During this stage we learn a little bit about each other's opinions, pastimes, activities, habits, hobbies, likes and dislikes. If everything is good, we may become friends.

Step Four ~ Hand to Hand. It may take a little while, but if that cute person seems to warm up to us and if we hang out together for a while, the first form of physical contact is usually a non-romantic touch of the hands. We may hold his/her hand for a moment, or for a little while. It's a step forward in the relationship. We generally don't hold hands with people we think are ugly and stupid. Right?

At this point, either person can withdraw from the relationship without rejecting the other. Nobody's feelings are hurt too badly if one says, "I'm just not cool with this ~ nothing personal ~ but I'm at another place right now."

However if continued, hand-to-hand contact will eventually become an example of the couple's initial romantic attachment to each other. It means, "You're special." It means, "We mean something to each other."

Step Five ~ Hand to Shoulder. An arm around someone's shoulder still doesn't mean anything like "love" or "physical intimacy," but it does mean a little more than just holding hands. It can be a "we're buddies" kind of thing. Boy and girl are still standing side by side. The world is still in front of them, but now the relationship is a little closer than it was a while ago. Generally speaking, a person doesn't put their arm around the shoulder of someone unless they're pretty comfortable and familiar with them. This level still isn't about sex, but it's a lot more than Step One or Step Two.

Step Six ~ Hand to Waist. Because this is something two people of the same sex would not ordinarily do, things are now probably getting a bit romantic. At this level of closeness, the two people may be starting to share secrets with each other. They may be starting to use more intimate language with each other, especially when others are not around. Yet, as they walk side by side with hand to waist, they are still facing forward. This is important to note, in light of the next step.

Step Seven ~ Face to Face. This level of contact involves looking into one another's eyes for a longer time than just a quick glance. Now we're noticing eye color, and are beginning to read feelings and emotions that are communicated through the eyes. Now the couple is facing each other. The rest of the world is somewhere "out there," but right now the universe is contained in the face of the person into whose eyes we're melting.

In this stage hugging and kissing may begin. If none of the previous steps were skipped, the boy and girl will have developed a deeper friendship. They may know how to "read" each other's feelings better. They are probably more open and vulnerable with each other.

At this point, sexual desire almost always becomes a growing factor in the relationship. It becomes increasingly difficult for this couple to "just talk" now. There is a natural desire to go further – at least to kiss and hug. And as they kiss and hug, they increasingly feel their own sexual equipment preparing them for next steps.

Some people believe that kissing and hugging are best saved for marriage, so some kids don't kiss anyone (except perhaps family). The Bible doesn't say anything about kissing and hugging, but it does say, ***"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23).*** There is almost no faster way to lose emotional and sexual control, than to start doing prolonged kissing and hugging (i.e., making out). So those kids who draw the line at step six actually have good reason for their decision.

Step Eight ~ Hand to Head. As unusual as it may seem, this step is an extension of the previous stage. The boy and girl may cradle or stroke each other's head while kissing or talking. Rarely do people in our culture touch the head of another person unless they are either romantically involved, or are family members. Touching the head or face is almost always a designation of emotional closeness.

The **last four levels** of involvement are **distinctly sexual**. A normal person cannot go into these next steps without some level of emotional activity. For married people, these steps help make their love-bond stronger and stronger. The Bible describes this step as two people being “...*naked and unashamed*” (*Genesis 2:25*). For people who are not married, these steps usually make them *less* able to sustain a marriage relationship. These steps do emotional *damage* to people who are not married.

Step Nine ~ Hand to Body. This is not like “hand-to-elbow” or “hand-to-big-toe.” This is now distinctly sexual, and it usually begins with touching the breast or buttocks. It may begin with touching outside of clothing, but it often proceeds to touching under clothing. For married people this step is natural and it creates trust. For unmarried people, it creates a pattern of disobedience to God, and it becomes damaging to the person’s future ability to sustain healthy relationships.

Step Ten ~ Mouth to Breast. There is a natural part of love-making in which the male’s mouth explores and enjoys the female’s breasts. It is natural for males to want to do this, and it is natural for females to want it to happen. It is natural a step further into the “bonding” process that God created for married people. But this step becomes damaging to people who are not married.

Step Eleven ~ Touching Below the Waist. Again, with married people this is fun stuff. As in step nine, this touching may begin on top of clothing, but it often moves to touching the naked genitals, and then to full sexual exploration and activity. Again, in marriage it is bonding. Outside of marriage it becomes destructive.

Step Twelve ~ Intercourse. This is the final stage of “pair-bonding.” It was created by God not only for making babies, but for married people’s enjoyment. In fact, the majority of times that married people have intercourse, are not for purposes of making babies but for the pleasure of sexual enjoyment. Sexual pleasure was created by God, for married people to enjoy to its fullest. There is no guilt or shame in married sexuality.

But with unmarried people, sexual involvement in steps nine through twelve tends to create memories they later wish they could erase. It creates a sense of “Velcro attachment,” as in quick attaching and then ripping apart, which is often painful. According to God it is morally wrong, so it gains His displeasure. And it sets a person up for future relationship failures.

Discussion

Earlier you read the story about my grandfather and the flood in Jamestown. The question I wondered in my little six-year-old head was, “How close can I get to that growing hole in the ground?” My grandfather’s physical response in grabbing me was, “You don’t want to be close enough to find out, because it’ll kill you.” So he was protecting my life, in spite of my natural curiosity.

That's a bit like how God does things with us. He teaches us that sex is wonderful and beautiful, for married people. But he also tries to keep us away from it until we're mature enough to handle it ~ because sex is like gun powder. It can make a rocket shoot up into the air, or it can blow up and hurt bystanders. It's like fire in a fireplace that can keep a person warm on a cold night ~ but if it gets out of the fireplace it can burn the house down.

OK, it's time for you to do some of your own thinking now. Here are a few questions. How would you answer them?

- You just read three analogies about sex. One was that it's like a river using a whirlpool to erode a shoreline. The second was that it's like gun powder. The third was that it's like a fire in a fireplace. Which of these three analogies do you think is best, and why?
- In his culture, Jesus probably never "dated" because that wasn't how things were done back then. But use your imagination ~ if he had dated, how far do you think he would have gone using the one-through-twelve outline used above? ♦
- What is the last "step" listed above, beyond which emotional damage to both partners is certain to happen? ♦
- Many kids today are skipping the first eight stages and leaping to the last four. What are some of the obvious problems of skipping the first eight stages? ♦
- Research has found that when kids get involved sexually and then break up (as they always do), many become suicidal. Girls' rate of attempted suicide goes up by 300%; boys' rates leap by 800%. Why is this? ♦
- Research has also found that when kids become sexually involved, the overall rate of depression rises. It's a both/and situation. Kids who are depressed tend to become sexual in their dating relationships, and kids who are sexual in their dating relationships tend to become depressed. Why do you suppose this happens? ♦
- How seriously do kids take the STD risk? Do you know any kids who have, or have had, STDs? Do you know how many STDs there are today? [For a partial list, look at page ten.] It may surprise you. Can you name three STDs that are incurable? Can you name two that will kill you? ♦
- Using the hypothetical "medical map" on page eleven, notice why STDs spread so rapidly in adolescent cultures. The colored items in that "medical map" represent kids who carry an STD. Take a moment and track how many people these few kids will likely infect. As you do this, consider that *one* study in *one* Midwest high school, in *one* kid's life, found there were 286 partners in his "medical map" ~ people who had been sexually active before he and his girlfriend had sex ~ people whose "juices" were now found in his body. This boy's sexual encounter raised the medical map to 288 partners. What people do you know who are likely placing themselves at this kind of risk? What other thoughts come to your mind? ♦

- Research has found that kids who are sexually active prior to marriage, have a far higher probability of divorce. At what point in the 12-steps you just read about, would it have been smart for these kids to stop? ♦

Research has found that two things protect kids from the heartaches of later life sexuality issues. The **first** is an active faith in Christ ~ this is not the same thing as just going to church. It's a real, active, daily relationship with Christ. The **second** is parents who talk with their kids about everything including sex, on a regular basis, in an open and supportive manner. Nothing else even comes close to matching the effect of these two ways of protecting kids. So how are your parents? Would they talk openly with you about sex? Or would your mother faint and your dad throw up? What if you came to them and said, "Mom, dad, I have this list of 10 questions I want to discuss with you ~ they're all about sex. When can we talk?" Would they plan emergency hernia surgeries in order to avoid talking with you, or would they actually talk with you? ♦

If you want to talk with them, but they seem weird about it, here are some ground rules that may be helpful.

1. Nobody asks anyone else whether they've actually done this or that sexual activity. (We'll assume your parents have had sex because you're alive, but beyond that assumption we'll leave the door closed to probing.) However, anyone may volunteer information about their sexual experiences if they wish to do so (but no pressure.)
2. We're all here to dialogue, so no lecturing. Anyone who talks for longer than 2 minutes in any single issue is a bore.
3. All subjects are in bounds. Here are a few examples: Making out; hands on the body; masturbation; mutual masturbation; oral sex; anal sex; STDs; pornography; sexting; affairs; homosexuality. That should at least get the conversation started.
4. If mom and dad are too squeamish about talking about these things, they need to get over it. They're adults.
5. Kids might think they know a lot, but most of the time they don't know what they don't know, so it's a positive thing to listen to mom and dad.

OK, now answer the question for yourself: How far should you go sexually? Is your answer something you actually believe, or is it just "the right answer" that you might give your parents while planning on doing something different in real life?

Are you committed to your success in life, or are you the kind of kid who just drifts along and accepts whatever happens? If you have a belief system, what will it take for you to live out your commitment to yourself? How tough are you? By contrast, how needy are you? Are you weak and willing to cave in if the right person comes along? Or is there a tiger inside you, ready to help you be strong?

If your parents aren't willing to talk openly with you about sex, then find some other Christian adults who will ~ perhaps the parents of one of your friends. Or perhaps your youth worker at church. Or your pastor.

What do you want for yourself in your life, particularly in regard to your sexuality? You basically have two options. You can either save it all for the person you marry, and then have all the sex you want. Or you can give yourself away to others, and create memories you'll later wish you could forget.

It is a ***very big challenge*** today, to reach your wedding day and be a virgin. Everything in today's world pushes kids toward sexual activity. Advertisers are slick ~ they make sure that kids are unaware that they're being played like guitars, and the messages of many advertisers in the teen world are, "be sexually active." Movies, magazines, TV, Internet ~ they all push sex.

Research finds that the average kid today receives something in the area of 14,000 sexualized messages per year. Yet research also finds that by the time they're 24 years of age, seventy-five percent of kids who were sexually active, deeply regret having been sexual and wish they had not done what they did. That's three of every four sexually active kids.

So if you had a revolver and it had four chambers for bullets, and there were three bullets in it ~ would you play "Russian roulette?"

Half of sexually active young people will come down with an STD. That's 50%. If that gun had two chambers for bullets and had a bullet in one of the chambers, would you play "Russian roulette?"

There's one final thing to consider. In the Bible, we are taught that God values purity. Christ taught, ***"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"*** (Matthew 5:8). That's quite a promise. ***Psalms 119:9*** asks, ***"How can a young man keep his way pure?"*** and then answers its own question by stating, ***"By living according to (God's) Word."*** Here's a thought worth considering. The person who obeys God will never regret the decision; but the person who disobeys God will risk an entire life of regret.

Obedience to God is like a ship's captain bringing one of those old wooden sailing ships in to harbor. The ship was still a few miles at sea and the coast line was renowned for its under-water rocks that had sunk scores of ships. The captain was training a young helmsman to guide the ship. The young man asked, "Captain, how can you possibly know where all the rocks are that could sink this ship? This is a dangerous area and has sunk many a ship." The captain replied, "I have absolutely no idea where the rocks are." The young seaman became terrified and asked, "Then how can we survive coming into this port?" The captain replied, "Because I know where the rocks ain't."

He then explained how to line up the ship's course with various lights on the shoreline. He said, "As long as you stay properly lined up with the lights, you won't hit any rocks." That's a terrific metaphor for "living according to God's Word."

Scripture teaches that God designed sexuality to be used within marriage, but not outside marriage. And we know that God blesses people who are obedient. This means that kids who maintain their sexual purity until marriage, will have God's blessing. Is that worth anything to you? Seriously? Kids who do their own thing are going to crash and burn in many ways all their lives. You'll see it, and you'll understand, as you grow up in the most sexually active culture in the last 4,000 years. ♦

STDs In Today's Teen World

Here are a few of the STDs that are in the bodies of American teens today. This is just a partial list. Medical doctors now tell us there are 25 – 30 different varieties of STDs in our corner of the world. The majority of people who carry STDs are unaware they have them, sometimes for years.

TWENTY TYPES OF STDS

Bacterial vaginosis	HTLV
Chancroid	HPV ~ Human papillomavirus (this
Chlamydia	is the cause of cervical cancer)
Cytomegalovirus	~ <i>often fatal</i>
Genital warts ~ <i>incurable</i>	Lymphogranuloma venereum
Gonorrhea	Molluscum contagiosum
Granuloma inquinale	Nongonoccal urethritis
Hepatitis B ~ <i>incurable</i>	Pubic lice (crabs)
Hepatitis C	Scabies
Herpes ~ <i>incurable</i>	Syphilis
HIV-AIDS ~ <i>incurable ~ fatal</i>	Trichomonas

All of these diseases can be caught genitally and orally. All are transmitted sexually, mainly through exchange of bodily fluids. Condoms do not prevent spread of STDs.

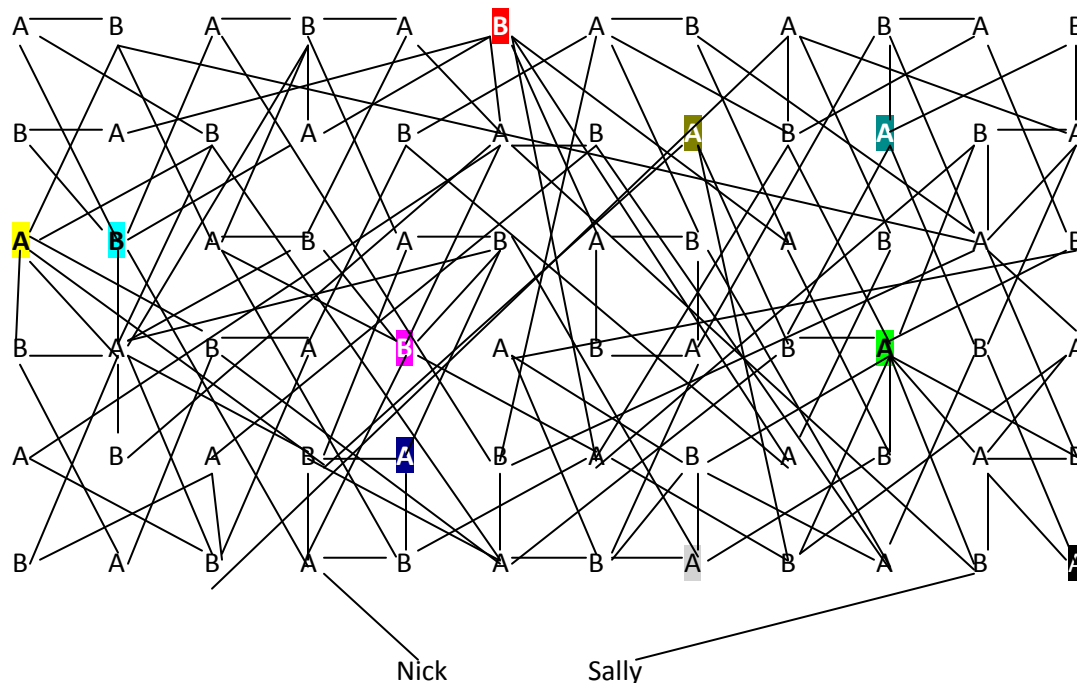
SOME OF THE EFFECTS

Vaginal or penile discharge
Warts
Sores, lesions ~ some stay, some come and go
Flu-like symptoms, from moderate to severe
Abdominal pain
Pelvic inflammatory diseases
Infertility
Severe mental and physical birth defects in children
Ectopic pregnancies
Cancers
Death

Medical Map Of One Teenage Couple

Both Nick and Sally (two hypothetical sophomores in high school) were only sexually active with one other person before having sex with each other. So they were surprised to have gotten herpes. Count the number of other teens whose “juices” are now flowing in their bodies.

Research now finds that today’s sexually active teen has an average of four sexual partners before graduating high school. This means that if anything, this hypothetical “medical map” (below) dramatically under-represents the facts in today’s American teen world. The diagram below would represent only the sexually active teens in one class, in one high school.



Pink = Herpes
Black = HIV/AIDS
Red = Chlamydia
Light green = Hepatitis B
Dark green = Syphilis
Light blue = HPV
Dark blue = Gonorrhea
Teal = Scabies
Pea green = Genital warts
Yellow = Hepatitis C
Grey = Trichomonas

- * These are not all of the available STDs. It's just a sampling of what's out there.
- * Sexually active kids between 12 – 25 now have a 50% probability of getting an STD.
- * The CDC says: 26% of American girls now carry at least one STD.
- * Twenty-five percent of American adults now carry Herpes.
- * Twenty percent of gay/bisexual men now carry HIV/AIDS.

This “medical map” only involves 72 partners upstream from Nick and Sally ~ 74 if you count Nick and Sally. As we said above, one Midwest teen unknowingly had 286 people upstream in his medical map. So how’s your map? There is only one way you can be absolutely certain that you don’t have an STD, and that is to remain a virgin. Condoms are *not* effective against STDs. And one can catch any and every STD orally that may be transmitted genitally, including Herpes and AIDS. If you have been sexually active, even just one time, are you *absolutely certain* you don’t carry any STDs? Some STDs like AIDS can “hide” in one’s body for several months before a medical doctor can even identify that the person has AIDS.

Final question: How would you want your future husband’s/wife’s medical map to read? Do you have a plan that will get you there? ♦

References:

Joy, D. (1985). *Bonding*. Quality Books, Inc., Evangel Publishing House, 2000 Evangel Way, Nappanee, IN 46550. ISBN 0-916035-69-7.