



TEEN TOPICS

Pledging A Better Life

(NAPSA)—More and more teenagers are discovering the joy and contentment of waiting. Virginity pledges have helped teens across the country navigate the rough waters of adolescence.

Research supports the value of focusing on abstinence in keeping teens from becoming sexually active. A recently published analysis and study by the Heritage Foundation found that teens who signed a pledge of abstinence—a virginity pledge—were shown to experience significantly better life outcomes and are far less likely to engage in risky behaviors than those teens who did not sign a pledge. In particular, the analysis showed that teens who take the pledge:

- Are less likely to experience teen pregnancy;
- Are less likely to be sexually active while in high school and as young adults;
- Are less likely to give birth out of wedlock; and
- Are less likely to engage in risky unprotected sex.

The recently-released analysis examined data compiled by the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, which is funded by more than 17 federal agencies and is the largest study ever conducted that followed teenagers over several years. The analysts at the Heritage Foundation found that teens have everything to gain and nothing to lose by taking a virginity pledge. For example, only 30 percent of teens who are strong pledgers—defined in the study as teens who consistently report over the years that they made a pledge—became sexually active before age 18, com-



Studies show that teens who make a pledge of abstinence are often rewarded with better life outcomes.

pared to 63 percent of teens who did not take a virginity pledge. Girls who are strong pledgers are 50 percent less likely to become pregnant as a teen, and half as likely to ever have a child out of wedlock, compared to girls who did not sign a virginity pledge. Interestingly enough, the study found that the benefits of virginity pledges remain even when controlling for differences in variables such as socioeconomic status, race, religiosity, and academic performance. At the same time, the study found no downside to signing a pledge. A teen pledger who becomes sexually active, for example, is not less likely to use contraception.

While often argued over by politicians, virginity pledges and abstinence education are effective ways to teach teens responsibility in their relationships. Talking to your kids about your values and what you expect of them can be immensely helpful in guiding them to make the right choices in life. For more information, visit www.heritage.org/Research/Family/wm570.cfm.