

# HIGH RISK ZONE

By Tabitha Armstrong

Maybe you're a virgin.  
Maybe you're not.  
Maybe it wasn't your choice.  
Maybe it was.



Perhaps you've been sexually abstinent and want to stay that way until marriage. Maybe you've had sex and want to be abstinent from now on. Or, you've

had sex and plan to continue. But when it comes to something that can have life-changing consequences, it's worth giving the issue some extra thought.

Emotionally, sex creates a bond between two people that can leave them feeling angry, used, hurt, guilty and embarrassed if they aren't committed to one another by marriage, says abstinence educator Kristin Caldwell.

Physically, both intercourse and oral sex put you at high risk of contracting an STD (sexually transmitted disease). (See box at left.) And, of course, there is the possibility of becoming pregnant.

While you can't undo the past, you can make a change. In fact, Caldwell strongly supports the idea of "secondary virginity" – a commitment to not have sex again until marriage. She also advises making the decision for abstinence *before* situations get hot and heavy. Once that decision has been made, stick to it.

For some teens, the decision to have sex was not even theirs: They were forced into it. Many times, says Caldwell, these individuals may feel as though they are "damaged goods." However, Caldwell says it is completely possible for them to have happy, healthy relationships, especially if they wait until marriage to have sex. Getting counseling can be a major step in the healing process.

Most importantly, says Caldwell, "Value yourself and your decision, find non-physical ways to show love, avoid temptation and find support." 🧡

## Looking for a long-term relationship?

The sad truth is that many people who have sex outside a monogamous relationship are left to deal with a sexually transmitted disease long after the romance is over.

**AIDS/HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus or HIV, is a virus that attacks the immune system resulting in AIDS.

**Chlamydia:** A treatable bacterial infection that can scar the fallopian tubes affecting a woman's ability to have children.

**Crabs:** Also known as pediculosis pubis, crabs are parasites or bugs that live on the pubic hair in the genital area.

**Gonorrhea:** A treatable bacterial infection of the genitals that causes pain or a burning feeling as well as a pus-like discharge. (Also known as "the clap".)

**Human papillomavirus (HPV):** Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that affects the skin in the genital area, as well as a female's cervix. Depending on the type of HPV involved, symptoms can be in the form of wart-like growths, or abnormal cell changes.

**Syphilis:** A treatable bacterial infection that can spread throughout the body and affect the heart, brain, nerves.

Source: American Social Health Association

**If you've been raped or sexually abused, help is only a phone call away. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network operates a toll-free national hotline – 1-800-656-HOPE – that is available 24/7. A counselor there can connect you to the local rape crisis center nearest you.**