

# An Abstinence Program's Impact on Cognitive Mediators and Sexual Initiation

Stan E. Weed, PhD; Irene H. Ericksen, MS; Allen Lewis, PhD;  
Gale E. Grant, MA, CPP; Kathy H. Wibberly, PhD

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**Objectives:** To evaluate the impact of an abstinence education program on sexual intercourse initiation and on possible cognitive mediators of sexual initiation for virgin seventh graders in suburban Virginia. **Methods:** Measures of sexual behavior and 6 mediating variables were compared at 3 time periods for program participants and a matched comparison group (n=550), controlling for pretest differences. **Results:** At posttest, program stu-

dents scored significantly better on 4 of the 6 mediators. After one year, program students had a substantially lower risk of sexual initiation than did comparison students ( $RR=.457$ ,  $P=.008$ ). **Conclusion:** The program achieved a significant reduction in teen sexual initiation, and the role of the cognitive mediators was supported.

**Key words:** abstinence, teen pregnancy, STDs, sex education, program evaluation

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