

EVALUATION OF *GAME PLAN* ABSTINENCE PROGRAM

Prepared for Project Reality

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Background and Evaluation Design

Game Plan is an innovative abstinence education program that is offered within the regular classroom setting taught by the schools' own faculty. The goals of this program are to build participating youths' knowledge about abstinence until marriage, to recognize its potential benefits in terms of health and well-being, and to decide for themselves that abstinence is the healthiest choice. In order to evaluate the impact of *Game Plan* on participating youth, a 24-item questionnaire was developed from the most psychometrically sound items from our previous evaluations of abstinence education programs. This questionnaire was administered anonymously to each participating youth prior to and following teaching of this eight-unit program. Anonymous pre- and post-program questionnaires were matched using a complex coding system generated by each individual youth completing ten additional demographic questions.

The sample for this evaluation consisted of 1,518 youth who participated in the *Game Plan* program throughout Illinois and whose pre- and post-instruction tests were individually, and anonymously, matched through the coding system. The sample was reflective of the population at large: Caucasian (71.5%); African American (10.1%); Hispanic/Latino (10.3%); Asian (2.9%); Native American (0.7%). Classified as "Other" were 4.5% of the sample.

The 1,518 youth were distributed over four grades: 7th (21%); 8th (30.5%); 9th (20%); 10th (26%). The sample was evenly divided between girls and boys.

To evaluate the impact of *Game Plan*, we generated five basic research questions. Survey results were organized based on these questions.

1. Do youth who participate learn the meaning of the term "abstinence"?

Two items on the survey directly addressed the definition of the term "abstinence". One item was worded as follows:

Abstinence is voluntarily choosing not to engage in sexual activity until marriage.

	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	73.1%	89.2%

The average improvement was **statistically significant** (t=16.7, p<.001).

The second item is relevant to the youths' understanding of the term "sexual activity". This item stated:

Sexual activity refers to any type of genital contact or sexual stimulation including, but not limited to, sexual intercourse.		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	63.2%	77.2%
The average improvement was statistically significant (t=11.8, p<.001).		

A third item on the survey is indirectly relevant to this question. This item addresses youth perceptions as to whether abstinence can be a choice. This item stated:

Sexual urges can be controlled.		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	60.4%	74.3%
The average change in this item is statistically significant (t=11.6, p<.001).		

Thus, the evidence suggests that youths' understanding of the terms "abstinence" and "sexual activity" improved over the course of the program. After participation, three-quarters of teens believed that sexual urges are controllable.

2. Do youth who participate agree that abstinence is a healthy personal choice?

Two items on the survey directly addressed the youths' views of the potential health benefits of abstinence. The first question read:

Abstinence is the only 100% effective protection from the possible physical, emotional, mental and social consequences of sex before marriage.		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	56.8%	86.8%
The average improvement was statistically significant (t=22.5, p<.001).		

For further information on Game Plan or other abstinence education materials and services, contact Project Reality at 847.729.3298 or www.projectreality.org.

The second item was quite direct and stated:

Practicing abstinence is healthy.		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	58.1%	86.1%

The average improvement was **statistically significant** (t=22.0, p<.001).

It appears clear that following participation in *Game Plan*, the vast majority of youth stated that they believe that abstinence is a healthy personal choice.

3. Do youth who participate understand the potentially negative emotional, mental, and physical consequences associated with adolescent sexual activity?

Two items on the survey address this question regarding the health consequences of teenage sexual activity. The first item stated the following:

Even if there is no pregnancy, having sex can cause a lot of problems for unmarried teenagers.		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	81.2%	92.2%

The average change for this item was **statistically significant** (t=16.0, p<.001).

The second item stated:

Choosing to be sexually active can have negative physical, emotional, mental and social consequences.		
	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	74.7%	91.6%

The average change in this item was **statistically significant** (t=15.2, p<.001).

Interestingly, most youth already believed that sexual activity has potentially negative health consequences even before participating in *Game Plan*. **Following participation, nearly all youth shared this perspective.**

4. Do youth who have already been sexually active experience any benefit from participating in the program?

This issue is sometimes referred to as “secondary virginity” and is an important evaluation question for abstinence education programs. If youth are already sexually active, does an abstinence message have any meaning for them? One item addressed this issue in the survey. This item stated:

A person who has been sexually active is able to choose abstinence for the future.	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	47.6%	83.3%
Disagree/Strongly Disagree	20%	8%
Not Sure	33%	9%

Change in this item was **statistically significant** ($t=22.8, p<.001$).

Although these data do not address the issue of behavioral intention, it is clear that a large number of youth who did not believe abstinence was a choice for sexually active teens prior to participation in *Game Plan*, changed their perspectives and felt that sexually active teens could choose abstinence in the future.

5. Are youth who participate more likely to intend to choose abstinence until marriage?

One item addressed this issue. This item stated:

I plan to save sexual activity for marriage.	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Agree/Strongly Agree	55%	66.8%

The average change in this item was **statistically significant** ($t=13.1, p<.001$).

While a little over half of all participating teens intended to remain abstinent from sexual activity until marriage prior to the program, an additional 12% intended to practice abstinence following the program. Thus, the behavior intentions of these youth support the impact of the program towards reducing teenage sexual activity.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Results of this evaluation support the use of *Game Plan* as an effective abstinence-until-marriage education program. The survey findings clearly demonstrate that youth have a clearer understanding of abstinence and of the health consequences of engaging in or refraining from sexual activity after participating in the program. It also appears that the abstinence message can reach youth who are already sexually active. Finally, the reported behavioral intentions to remain abstinent from sexual activity until marriage increased significantly to two-thirds of all program participants.

Of course, there are limitations to this evaluation. The absence of a control group makes it difficult to know whether these changes would have occurred over the same period of time (two to six weeks) without intervention. However, this seems rather unlikely in that generally, if any changes occur naturally, teens tend to become more permissive in their attitudes about sexual activity over time. All the changes in survey responses were consistent with the design of the program. Secondly, the question may arise that youth are merely reporting what they believe the program teachers want to hear. However, all surveys were anonymous and done within the context of a normal classroom environment thus reducing the demand characteristics on youth responses. And, even if youth were merely reporting back what they had heard, that would be evidence that they clearly had heard the *Game Plan* message.

In sum, the evidence supports *Game Plan* as an effective means of promoting the health and well-being of youth through a message of abstinence from sexual activity.