

# Chapter 5

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# Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

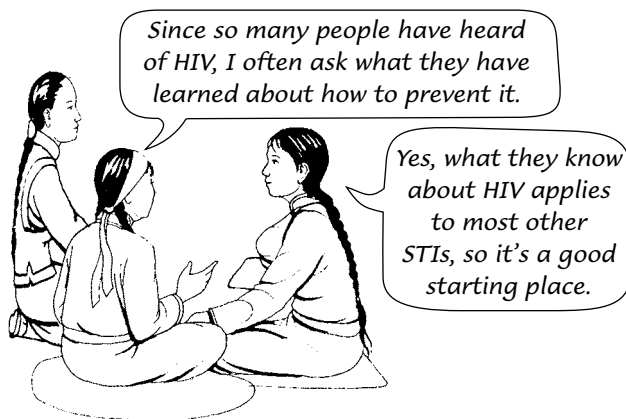


**S**exually transmitted infections, or STIs, are illnesses that pass from one person to another during sex. All STIs can be prevented, but prevention is difficult for many people, especially women.

To prevent STIs, it is important that people become comfortable thinking about and talking about STIs without embarrassment or shame. Discussing STIs in a group can help people talk about these infections as easily as they talk about health problems that are not related to sex, such as diarrhea or the flu. Group discussions can also help people understand how an STI never harms just one person. Learning about STIs with a group can help spread prevention throughout the whole community!

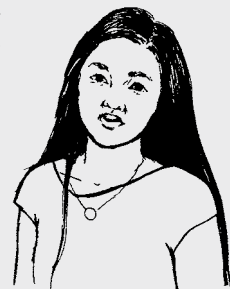
## Start where people are at

When you are starting a conversation about STIs, it is almost always helpful to begin by asking people what their concerns are and what they already know. Many people today know something about HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), because it is the STI that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Millions of people all over the world have died from AIDS, and millions more are infected with HIV now. Because AIDS has been so deadly in the past but is now survivable, most countries have programs to teach people about preventing and treating HIV.



Women are especially vulnerable to STIs and STIs are especially harmful to women if they are not treated. Some STIs can cause severe illness, infertility, problems with pregnancy, and even death. STIs can also cause serious health problems and lifelong disabilities in babies born to women with untreated infections. Supporting women to develop their ability to express their needs is key to helping them prevent STIs. “Gender boxes” on page 44 and “Communication is powerful” on page 58 can help you work with women learning to speak up. Also, you can adapt most activities in this chapter to focus on STIs in general or only on HIV.

*When I gave my first STI talk, I talked mostly about the risks of unprotected anal or vaginal sex. I noticed people were only half listening, and they were whispering among themselves. Afterwards, some women came up to me. They took all the free condoms I was handing out, but that wasn't their main interest. The thing that was on their minds was a man they had seen with sores on his lips. I wish I had asked them at the beginning of the meeting what their concerns were! I would have talked more about signs of STIs that you can see.*



## Activity

## Secret questions

Sometimes people feel uncomfortable asking questions about STIs in a group. This activity can make it easier for people to ask about things they are concerned about, or do not want to admit they do not know.

This activity works best when everyone in the group knows how to write. It can work with a group of both women and men, as well as with only women or only men.

- 1 Ask everyone to write down at least one question about STIs on a small piece of paper. Collect the papers and put them in a bag or hat. No one will know who asked which question, and you can also add questions you think people would like to ask but are too shy to ask even privately.

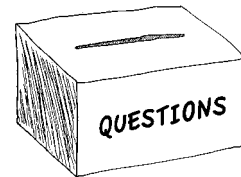
*I ask people to send a text message or call me before the meeting and leave their questions on my voicemail. They trust me not to reveal who asked what.*



- 2 Review the questions and choose some to answer. You can do this at the beginning or end of a meeting, or you can make it the focus of the whole meeting. You can also save some questions for another meeting. But explain what you are doing so no one feels her questions were ignored.

- 3 Depending on the question, you might simply answer it, invite someone else to answer it, or use it to start a discussion. You can invite a health worker to join you to help answer questions.

Keep a box where people can put questions they do not want to ask aloud. Take questions from the box to read and discuss at each meeting.



*I always remind the group that there is no such thing as a stupid question, and that if one person has a question, chances are many others have the same concern.*

## Learn how STIs spread to help prevent them

Sexually transmitted infections are caused by different kinds of germs that live in a person's blood, semen, or vaginal fluids. These germs are too small to see. STIs are passed from person to person only when an infected person's blood, semen, or vaginal fluids get inside another person's body through contact between the vagina, penis, or anus, or through cuts or sores in the skin. You cannot get any STI from touching a person in other ways, from sharing food or toilets, or from insect bites.

**Unprotected sex.** All STIs can pass from an infected person to another person if the couple has intercourse (man's penis in a woman's vagina) or anal sex (man's penis in a woman's or a man's anus) without using a condom.

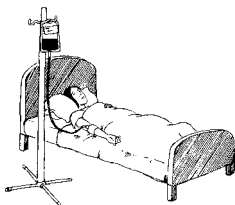


**Oral sex.** STIs can also pass from an infected person to another person if the couple has oral sex (putting the mouth on another person's penis, vagina, or anus) without using a condom or a latex barrier between one person's mouth and the other person's genitals. HIV is rarely passed from person to person with oral sex, but other STIs such as gonorrhea, herpes, and HPV (human papilloma virus) can be passed easily this way.



All STIs can be passed during sex, but some can also be passed in other ways.

**Mother-to-child.** A woman can pass most STIs to a baby during pregnancy or childbirth. HIV is the only STI that can also be passed from a woman to a baby through breastfeeding.



**Blood transfusions.** A person can become infected with HIV, syphilis, or hepatitis B or C through a transfusion of blood that has not been tested to prove it does not contain the germs that cause these infections.

**Injections, skin piercings, or tattoos using unsterilized needles or sharp tools.** A needle or sharp tool used to inject medicine or drugs, pierce the skin, shave, or tattoo a person with hepatitis B

or HIV can pass those infections if it is used on another person. A new sterilized needle or tool should be used each time for injecting, piercing, shaving, or tattooing.



A person can have more than one STI at the same time. Having one STI often increases the risk of getting another one, because the infection weakens the body's resistance to other STI germs. Discharge from the penis or vagina, or sores on the skin, make it easier for germs to get inside the body.

## STIs pass more easily from a man to a woman

There are 3 main reasons why women's bodies are more vulnerable to STIs than men's bodies.

1. The semen of a man with an STI contains more germs than the vaginal fluids of a woman with an STI, so a woman receives more germs when a man ejaculates or climaxes inside her than a man receives from putting his penis inside the woman's vagina, anus, or mouth.
2. When a man with an STI has unprotected sex with a woman and he climaxes inside her, his semen stays inside her body long afterward, so the STI germs have more time and favorable conditions for causing an infection in the woman. Rinsing the inside of the vagina after sex will not remove all of the semen.
3. The skin of both the vagina and the anus is thin and easily cut or torn during sex, while the skin on the penis is thicker, so STI germs pass more easily through the skin inside a woman's body than through the outside skin on the man's penis.

*Men are more vulnerable to STIs when they have sex with other men, especially the man who is being penetrated. Unprotected sex in the anus is the most dangerous type of sex for spreading HIV and other STIs. Always use a condom!*



## Preventing STIs

Safer sex means ways of having sex that prevent or lessen the likelihood of STIs passing between partners. It means having as little contact as possible with the skin of your partner's genitals and not letting fluids from your partner's penis or vagina touch your genitals or mouth (see pages 90 and 130 to 133 for more information). Safer sex is more likely to happen when a woman is able to talk about sex with her partner (see pages 99 to 103) and when communities promote conditions that empower girls and women, including through access to education and health services for the testing and treatment of STIs.

## How sexual networks spread infections

Understanding how certain patterns of sexual relationships spread STIs can help people understand the importance of preventing STIs in every relationship. Many women want to believe that they can protect themselves by being faithful to their husband or partner. But this works only when both partners are faithful and do not have any infection when they first start to have sex together.

This activity can help people see how an infection can spread through a whole community, even if only some people have more than one sexual partner.

### Activity

### Handshake game

This activity uses HIV as an example, but all STIs can spread the same way.

To prepare, gather a small piece of paper for each person. Draw a circle on 3 papers. Draw an X on 1 paper. Leave the others blank. Fold the papers to hide the markings.

- 1 Mix the papers up and give one to each person. Ask everyone to look at her own paper but not at anyone else's.

- 2 Ask the participants to walk around and shake hands with 3 people and then sit down.

- 3 Ask the person with the X on her paper to stand up. Ask everyone who shook hands with that person to also stand up. Ask anyone seated who shook hands with anyone standing to stand up too. Repeat this until everyone is standing.



Explain that for this activity, the X represents HIV and shaking hands with the person holding the X meant having unprotected sex. This means that all the people standing might now have HIV.

- 4 Ask those with a circle on their papers to raise their hands. Explain that the circle is a condom, so the people using condoms were protected from HIV and can sit down.

**Activity****Handshake game** *(continued)*

- 5** Discuss the activity. You might ask questions like these:
  - How did the person with the X feel to find out this meant having HIV?
  - How did everyone feel when they had to stand? How is this like a person finding out he or she had sex with someone who has HIV?
  - When you learned the circle represented a condom, did you feel relief? Did it make you glad you had used a condom?
- 6** Collect all the papers and pass them out again. Do the activity again, but this time give some choices anyone can use for preventing the spread of the infection.
  - No sex at all — the person does not shake hands.
  - Use a condom — have some plastic bags or socks people can use to cover their hands.
  - Have only one partner who has no infection and has sex only with you — shake hands after looking at each other's papers and stay together without shaking anyone else's hand.
  - Be sexual in ways that do not share body fluids, such as giving pleasure by using hands — touch fingertips or elbows instead of shaking hands.
- 7** After the activity, ask the person with the X to stand up again. Then ask people to stand up if they shook hands with that person without covering their hands.
- 8** Ask anyone who did not stand to say what action they took to protect themselves.
- 9** You might also ask whether it was difficult or uncomfortable for anyone to “use protection” while shaking hands. Why? Would it become more comfortable with time? Or if they had a single, faithful relationship, was that difficult? Why?
- 10** Discuss what makes it easier or more difficult to talk about STIs with a partner.
  - How would you feel if someone you had sex with told you that he or she had an STI? Is it better to know or not know? Why?
  - If you think it is better to know, how can you make telling someone easier?
  - What can you know for certain about a sexual partner? What can you not know for sure?

You can end this activity by reminding everyone that no casual contact such as shaking hands or hugging can pass HIV or any other STI from one person to another.



## Facts about STIs

Discussing the health problems caused by STIs that go untreated can help everyone understand the importance of seeking treatment and of preventing the spread of STIs in the first place. Here is some general information about different STIs. You can find out more in *Where Women Have No Doctor* or by speaking with a health worker.

**Gonorrhea** and **chlamydia** are easy to cure if treated early. If not, they can cause serious infection and infertility in both women and men, and serious problems for a baby during both pregnancy and childbirth.

**Signs in a woman:** she may have no signs at all, or they may not appear for several weeks after sex with an infected person. There will be discharge from the vagina, lower belly or pelvic pain, fever, and pain when passing urine. Oral sex with a man who has gonorrhea can cause a sore throat with pus or swollen neck glands.

**Signs in a man:** often no signs, or signs may appear 2 to 5 days after sex with an infected person. There will be discharge from the penis, pain when passing urine.

These infections can also affect a pregnancy by causing early labor, low-weight babies, baby dying in the womb (stillbirth), or early infant death. In a newborn baby they can also cause pneumonia and eye infections leading to blindness. A woman can also get a womb infection (pelvic inflammatory disease), or a baby can grow outside the womb (ectopic pregnancy), which can lead to infertility and even death.

**Syphilis** is an STI that has effects throughout the body and can last for many years. It can be cured with medicine if treated early, but will lead to serious illness and death if not treated.

**Signs in a woman and man:** a soft painless sore (chancere) on the genitals that may look like a blister or an open sore.

Syphilis does not affect fertility, but it can cause early labor, low-weight babies, baby dying in the womb (stillbirth), or early infant death. Also, the baby may be born with syphilis, leading to severe illness and death.

**Trichomoniasis** (trich) is a very uncomfortable and itchy STI that can be cured if treated. Women and men often do not have any signs.

**Signs in a woman:** unusual bad-smelling discharge from the vagina, with red and itchy genitals, and pain or burning when passing urine.

Fertility in both women and men can be affected, and a baby girl can be born with a vaginal infection. Rarely, a baby may develop problems when passing urine, and have trouble breathing.

**Chancroid** causes painful sores on the genitals or anus that bleed easily and swollen glands (buboes) in the groin. It is easily confused with syphilis. It can be cured with medicine.

**Herpes** (HSV, genital herpes) is caused by a virus. There is no cure for herpes but there is treatment to make a person feel better.

**Signs in a woman or man:** none, or during the first infection, may feel severe burning and itching in the genitals followed by small painful blisters like drops of water on the genitals that burst open and form painful open sores, along with feeling ill, like having the flu. After the first infection, a sore will appear in the same place over and over, but may be milder.

If a woman is pregnant and it is a first infection, herpes may cause a baby to die in the womb (stillbirth), a severe infection in the baby, or problems in the development of the baby's brain and nervous system.

**Hepatitis B** (hep B) cannot be easily cured because the medicine is expensive and often not available, but it can be prevented with a vaccine.

**Signs in a woman or man:** none, or fever, fatigue, yellow eye or skin (jaundice), dark urine, and whitish stools.

Hep B can affect fertility and pregnancy if there is serious damage to the liver, and can cause liver disease and cancer. A baby born to a woman with hep B may also get the disease.

**Human Papilloma Virus (HPV, warts)** are small, painless bumps that have a rough surface and can be removed, but not cured.

**Signs in a woman:** the bumps appear on the outside (vulva) and inside of the vagina, and around the anus. Warts may grow larger and bleed during childbirth, and a c-section may be required. Rarely, warts can pass to a baby during childbirth.

**Signs in a man:** the bumps appear on or inside the penis and around the anus.

Some types of HPV that can cause cancer of the cervix or penis can be prevented with a vaccine. Regular cervical cancer tests for women can help find early signs.

**Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)** has no cure, but treatment can help people with HIV live longer and in better health.

**Signs in a woman or man:** none, or 2 to 4 weeks after contact a person may feel ill, like having bad flu, diarrhea, fever, swollen lymph nodes, and weight loss.

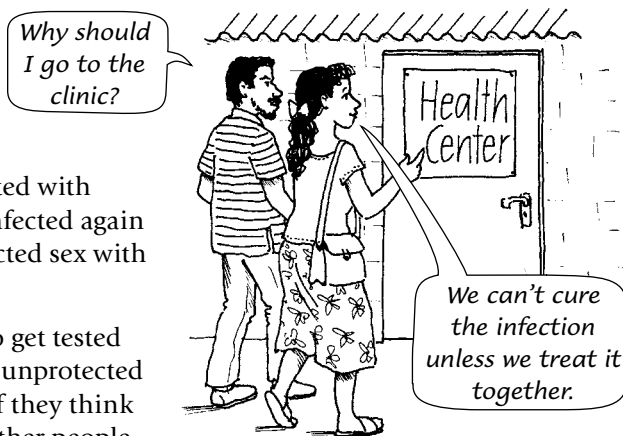
HIV does not affect fertility, but it may cause early labor and can be passed to a baby during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding, so testing is important.

## Testing and treatment are essential

Most STIs can be in a person's body without showing any signs. This means that a person can have an STI and pass the infection to others without knowing it. It also means that many women have serious womb infections, ectopic pregnancies, miscarriages, and other health problems caused by STIs that went untreated, because the women didn't know they had an infection.

One way to stop STIs from spreading is for women and men to get treated as soon as they have any signs and make sure their partners get treated at the same time. STIs can be treated with medicines, but a person can get infected again after treatment if she has unprotected sex with a partner who has an STI.

Women and men should also get tested every 6 to 12 months if they have unprotected sex with more than one partner, if they think their partner may have sex with other people, or if they or their partner injects drugs such as heroin. Some tests use a blood sample; others use a sample of fluid from a woman's vagina or a man's penis, or a sample from a person's mouth.



### Routine testing helps lessen the stigma of STIs

Health centers can help lessen the stigma of having an STI by providing testing and treatment as a routine part of health care for both women and men. For people to be comfortable getting tested for an STI, they need to trust that they will be treated with respect and privacy.

Some health centers do provide STI testing and treatment as part of family planning services and regular pregnancy check-ups. When men accompany women on these visits, health workers can encourage them to get checked and treated for STIs. This means the woman does not have the extra burden of telling her partner and making sure he gets treated.

## **“Wellness check-ups” take the stigma out of STI testing and treatment**

Most people in Papua New Guinea live in rural areas far from health centers. STIs are very common in these communities, because many people do not know about prevention and cannot easily get tested and treated for infections. Many women suffer from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), a serious infection of the womb that is often caused by untreated STIs. PID often causes infertility, so a woman who has had it may never be able to get pregnant and have children. Infertility can be very sad for any woman, but infertile women in Papua New Guinea may be isolated from the community and beaten by their partners.

Marie Stopes International provides STI counseling, diagnosis, and treatment to rural communities through mobile outreach teams. These teams of 2 or 3 health workers travel to remote parts of the country carrying the equipment they need in small vans. By helping people understand how infertility can be caused by STIs, these teams help motivate people to practice safer sex and get tested for STIs.

This program is successful in part because it brings information and services directly to people in their communities. But it is especially successful because STI services are included in “Wellness check-ups” for men, women, and youth. This makes it easier for young people and unmarried women to have access to family planning and STI services as part of general health check-ups.

The outreach teams are also well received, because they provide services without judging people’s customs or relationships. In the highland region, where polygamy is common, clients are provided with treatment for all sexual partners in the marriage, if they choose.



## Women's equality prevents STIs

The larger problems of injustice and inequality make women more likely to become infected with STIs. For example, being poor does not spread STIs, but being poor can mean a woman may trade unprotected sex for money or other needs. Many situations can make it either easier or more difficult for women to protect themselves from STIs.

A woman may be **LESS ABLE** to prevent STIs if:



Most men in her community have many partners.

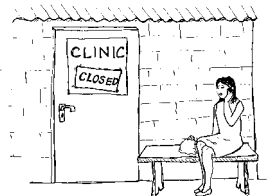


She was married as a girl and is expected to obey her husband without question.

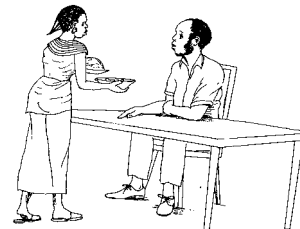


She is a sex worker. Some men will not pay if she asks them to use a condom, or they react with violence.

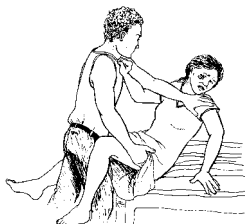
She cannot read, or she has never heard of STIs.



The government does not support affordable health services for women.



She does not give importance to her own health problems and feels ashamed to talk about her private parts.



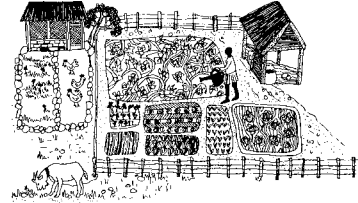
Her partner is abusive and often forces her to have sex, especially when he drinks.

A woman will be **MORE ABLE** to prevent STIs if:



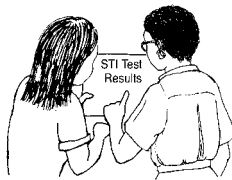
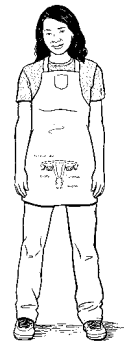
She finishes high school and can get a job to earn her own money.

She inherits property after her parents or her husband die.



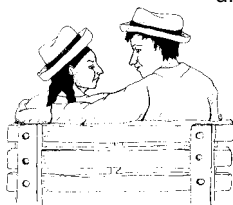
She and her partner know how to give each other pleasure and use condoms each time they have intercourse.

Her schooling included sex education.



She gets free or low-cost health care at a clinic near her home, including STI testing as part of regular health and pregnancy care.

She believes that her own sexual health is important, and she is not ashamed of her body or her sexuality.



She can decide when, how, and with whom to have a sexual relationship.

*It's so easy to blame an individual woman or man for getting an STI and failing to protect themselves. I like to use the "But why?" game to help people see the ways that inequality makes it harder for women to protect themselves. Then we do a yarn toss to brainstorm things to do at a community level to make things better.*

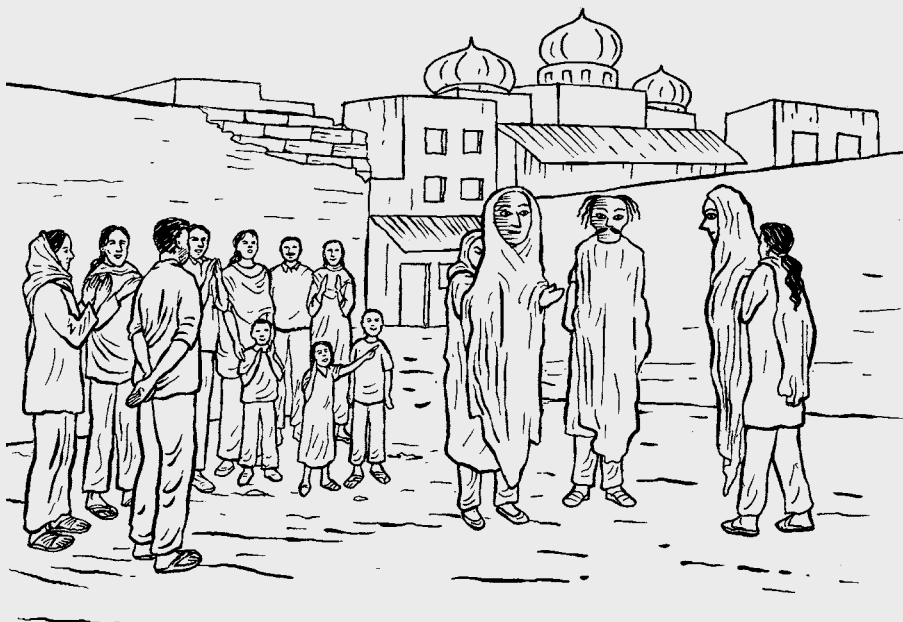


Chapter 3: Gender and Health and Chapter 4: Sexuality and Sexual Health suggest many ways to improve conditions and help women prevent STIs.

### **Puppet theater raises awareness about domestic violence and HIV**

In Lucknow, India, a group of adolescent girls uses giant puppets to speak out against domestic violence and to provide information about HIV. They perform short plays in public places and afterward speak with the audience about the rights of abused women, and what community resources are available for preventing both violence and HIV.

Puppet theater always draws a large audience, including people who would not usually stop to listen to someone giving a talk in a public place. So puppets provide important community education for people who might not have any other access to the information. Just as important, working on this project has transformed the girl puppeteers themselves. Many of them were not accustomed to speaking out in public. Now, they say they feel self-confident and committed to working for change. Their families, especially their mothers, also feel they are doing good work.



# Gender roles and STIs

One of the reasons STIs spread so easily is that unhealthy gender roles prevent women from being able to protect themselves.

Gender roles include expectations about what women and men do in sexual relationships. When men are expected to control how and when they and their partners have sex, they may not consider how women feel, and women often believe that their feelings about sex do not matter. But to prevent STIs, women and men need to be able to talk honestly with their partners about safer sex and to agree to make safer sex part of their relationship.

For more information and discussion about gender roles, sexuality, and health, see Chapter 3: Gender and Health and chapter 4: Sexuality and Sexual Health.



## Use drama to discuss gender roles and STIs

Creating a drama and acting it out with a group is a good way to look at the way gender roles create barriers to preventing STIs. People enjoy radio and television dramas because the characters are always getting into trouble and the stories include many surprises. A drama can show characters doing things no one talks about, such as a man paying a sex worker or having a sexual relationship with another man. You can use a drama to discuss changes that would help more women and men take care of their sexual health. You can also use a drama to have a deeper discussion about how gender roles influence people's sexual relationships.

The sample drama on the next page shows how to combine a drama with discussion. You can also adapt the sample drama using characters and situations that fit your community.



These are some ways to make the drama interesting and useful for discussion:

- Give characters realistic emotions, and understandable reasons for their actions.
- Show characters making mistakes and also making healthy choices.
- Think about ways to include problems with consenting to have sex, power differences between characters, and how people of different ages make sexual choices.

### A sample STI drama

#### Characters:

**Nina:** 18 years old, religious, married to Rajiv with 3 children

**Rajiv:** truck driver, married to Nina, often drives to the city, has a girlfriend named Roopa in another village

**Roopa:** Rajiv's girlfriend, mother of Rajiv's baby

**Mohan:** married and faithful to Maya, has HIV but does not know it

**Maya:** village health worker, married to Mohan

**Gita:** sex worker in the city

Roopa takes her sick baby to see Maya, the health worker. Maya treats the baby and then talks to Roopa about HIV. Asked if her boyfriend uses condoms, Roopa says no. (You can stop here to discuss STI prevention in Roopa's situation.)

Maya tells Roopa that although her husband Mohan is faithful, they always use condoms because they had sex with others in the past. At first Mohan did not want to use them but now he is used to them. (Another place to stop and discuss.)

Meanwhile, Rajiv is driving his truck to the city. That night, he arranges to have sex with Gita, a sex worker. (Stop and discuss again.)

To Rajiv's surprise, Gita insists on using condoms! Her sex workers' union taught about HIV, and they agreed to demand that all their customers use condoms. Rajiv has had sex with many women, but Gita is the first to make him use protection. He objects at first, but she makes using a condom so sexy that he does not mind. (Stop and discuss again.)

In the morning, Rajiv returns to Nina. He remembers what Gita said about HIV. Rajiv considers talking to his wife about condoms but decides she would suspect he is unfaithful. That evening, Rajiv and Nina have sex without a condom.

(The story could continue with more scenes, but this is a good place to stop. Discuss what has happened and what people think will happen next. See the questions in step 4 of the activity on the next page.)

## Activity

## An STI drama

Before this activity, create a drama. It should have several situations that connect different characters to each other through sexual relationships.

- 1 To begin the activity, make sure the participants understand how STIs spread. See page 110. If the group has not done the Handshake game on pages 112 to 113, it may be a good idea to do that first.
- 2 When the group is ready, ask different people to be characters in the drama you have created. Tell them the story and give them a few minutes to work out how they will act out the scenes.
- 3 As the actors perform the drama, stop it at certain points to ask how their actions help spread or help prevent STIs. You might also ask at each point what a character could do differently to protect her own or her partner's health.

*What do you think the characters in the drama should do now?*



*I think Roopa could decide to ask Rajiv to use a condom. After all, she knows he has sex with other women.*

*I want to know what Gita does with the condom to make Rajiv like it.*

- 4 At the end of the drama, ask the actors to leave their roles and join the group to discuss how the characters' gender roles influenced their ability to protect themselves or their partners from STIs.

You might ask people to consider the ways each character fits gender expectations about being a man or woman. How does gender inequality make it more difficult for the women in the drama to protect themselves from STIs?

What would happen if the characters were more honest with each other about their sexual relationships and how they can give each other pleasure? What makes this difficult?

## Activity

## An STI board game

You can adapt the board game on pages 197 to 199 to discuss the facts about STIs and how to prevent STIs from spreading. The discussion during the STI board game will help your group:

- test what they know about different STIs.
- explore the reasons why women may have difficulty preventing STIs.
- practice explaining why preventing STIs is important for women's health.
- find out what they want to learn more about.

For more instructions about how to make the board game and how to play, see pages 197 to 199.

**To prepare:** Make STI health fact questions. The chart on pages 114 to 115 has information about STIs that you can use to make health fact questions such as the ones on this page. (The answers are included for you here, but do not put them on the cards. Make a separate answer sheet instead.)



**Kissing will NOT pass HIV from one person to another. True or false?**

(correct answer: True)

**Name 3 STIs that can pass from a woman to her baby during pregnancy or birth.**

(correct answer, any 3 of these: syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B, gonorrhea, chlamydia)

**A person with chlamydia always has signs of illness. True or false?**

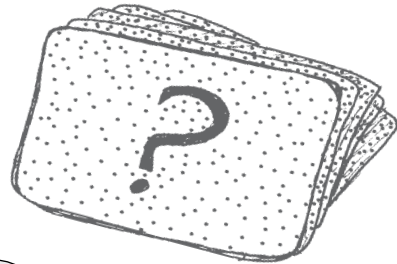
(correct answer: False)

**Name 2 STIs that can cause infertility in a woman if not treated with medicines.**

(correct answer, any 2 of these: chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis)

**Activity****An STI board game** *(continued)*

**STI discussion questions.** To make discussion questions, think about real-life situations and reasons why it may be difficult for women in the community to protect themselves from STIs. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The purpose is to discuss the situation as a group. Here are some examples:



Clara and Esteban have been married for 6 years and they have 3 children. Esteban went to the city to work as a bricklayer to make extra money. Not long after he returned, Clara started having a yellow discharge from her vagina. She is too ashamed to say anything to Esteban, and too embarrassed to tell a health worker.

What should Clara do? What do you think Esteban would do if she told him? Why?

**To play:** When a team or player lands on a discussion question, ask them to think about different solutions and then explain to the whole group why they think one solution may be better than others. Invite others in the group to make suggestions too.

When the game is finished, invite the players to talk about something they learned from the activity. Ask if there are other issues or information related to STIs that the group would like to discuss or learn more about. Use their responses to plan other activities.

Anisha has had HIV since she was born. The government provides free medicines, and she is a healthy young woman. A few years ago, a man she loved asked her to marry him, but when she told him she had HIV, he was very upset and went away. Later she met Milan. They are very happy, and he says he wants to marry her and have a family. Anisha is afraid to tell him she has HIV for fear he will abandon her too.

What should Anisha do? What should Milan do? Why?

## Men share responsibility for STI prevention

Ideas about masculinity often make men believe they should have control over how and when they have sex. For some men, this includes having several sexual partners or keeping secrets from their wives or girlfriends. Men may feel it is unmanly to worry about protection from STIs or to take care of their health. They may also be ashamed to admit that they do not fit the male gender role they are expected to play, for example, having sex with other men or preferring to solve problems without using force or violence.

But some men are also actively promoting gender equality, working to prevent violence, and showing how men and women can have healthier sexual relationships. There are examples of these activities in most of the other chapters in this book — see especially Chapter 3: Gender and Health, Chapter 4: Sexuality and Sexual Health, Chapter 6: Ending Gender-based Violence, and Chapter 8: Healthy Pregnancies and Safe Births. Here are some examples of ways men are organizing to prevent STIs, especially HIV.

### Men as peer educators and role models

One of the most effective ways to engage men in promoting sexual health is for them to have mentors and to be recognized and admired for their efforts. Many projects all over the world are training men to listen to and talk with other men about what kind of man, husband, and father they want to be.

#### **Men in Tanzania become HIV prevention champions**

The CHAMPION Project encourages men in Tanzania to become more involved in family health as a way to prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs. The project promotes a national dialogue about men's roles, shared decision making in couples, and practicing safer sex.

In politics and public life in Tanzania, men make the decisions. But in many people's minds, men do not step up to care for their families' health. The CHAMPION organizers found this was not exactly true. The organizers met with community leaders in many districts around the country. They asked these leaders "which man in your community stands out because of his efforts to promote the health of his family or community?" And there were 2 or 3 men named in almost every village. That may seem like a small number of men, but the CHAMPION Project saw it as a good starting place.



One man was working to stop family violence and restore peace in households where there was fighting.



One man decided to have only 1 wife and remain faithful to her, unlike almost every other man in his village.

The Project held community meetings where these men made presentations about their lives, their motivations, and their efforts to promote better health. After hearing their testimonies, each community chose one of the men as their local champion.

Then, to show everyone there were men like this in Tanzania, the CHAMPION project selected a group of men and created a national campaign about them. The campaign included a photo exhibit to share the stories of 12 of the men. They held a big event in the capital city to get the attention of the whole country. They also put the men's pictures and their stories into a calendar that was distributed all over Tanzania.

By training men about gender awareness, the Project has drawn both younger and older men into the work of counseling couples, talking with men about preventing HIV and other STIs, and helping other men see how gender roles can harm their health and the health of their families.



## Community education where men gather

The best way to involve people in any activity for change is to meet them in activities they are already involved in. Sporting and religious events, workplaces, transit centers, and men's social gathering spots such as bars, cafes, truck stops, and brothels are good places to offer HIV information to men or engage men in discussions about STIs.

It is also important to take an education project to places where men in the community seek other men to have sex or to inject drugs. If you keep showing up, and if you show the men that you are not judging them, trying to convert them, or turning them over to the police, they will begin to trust you. Giving out free condoms or showing how to sterilize needles can be good ways to start a conversation.



BEMFAM, an organization in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, decided to do outreach at a popular samba school where young men from the neighborhood practiced and prepared to dance for Carnival. By training the dance instructors to teach about STI and HIV prevention, along with samba lessons, they were able to reach a large audience.

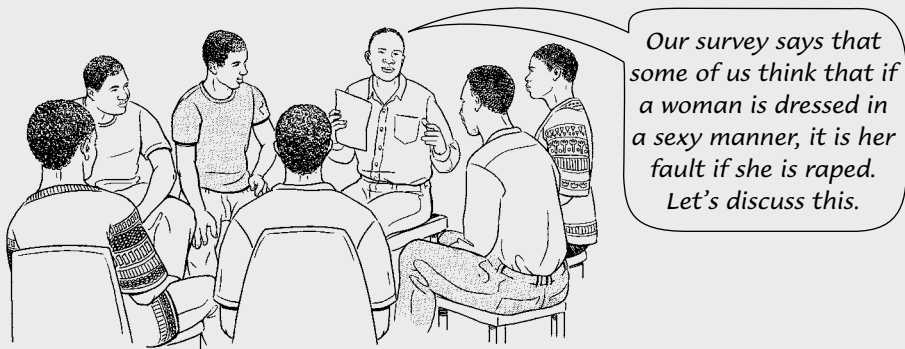
## Opposing gender-based violence

Rape and violent sex harm women in many ways, including the spread of STIs. And then, having an STI makes a woman a target of violence. Many women with HIV have been blamed, beaten, and abandoned by their families. Men who oppose these attitudes and actions play an important role in working to end violence against women.

## Men As Partners (MAP)

Some years ago, a group of people in South Africa was very worried about how HIV infection and gender-based violence were both increasing. They also saw how each of these problems made the other worse. Knowing how important it was to engage men directly in reducing both violence and HIV, they started a group called Men As Partners – MAP. One of their goals was to encourage men to become actively involved in violence prevention and to take more responsibility for HIV-related prevention, care, and support. Another goal was to help men look at their attitudes, values, ways of acting, and ideas about masculinity. MAP helps men think about how some gender expectations lead men to harming their own health, as well as the health of their partners and families.

To tackle the complexities of looking at gender roles and changing long-held attitudes and ways of acting, MAP holds educational workshops with groups of men and boys in many settings—schools, workplaces, trade unions, prisons, faith-based organizations, community halls, and sporting arenas. The workshops use discussions, role-plays, and other participatory activities to help groups look at violence, sexual relationships, parenting, caregiving, and how gender roles limit choices for both women and men.



MAP groups also use other activities, including street theater, rallies, murals, and other media to show men working toward more gender equality. They also provide trainings for health care staff to improve STI services for men.

Many organizations all over South Africa have joined together to create a MAP Network. There are now Men As Partners programs in more than 15 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.



## Safer sex requires good communication

Practicing safer sex means having sex in ways that prevent or decrease the likelihood of STIs from passing between partners. In general, this means having as little contact as possible with the skin of your partner's genitals, and not letting fluids from your partner's penis or vagina touch your genitals or mouth. For more information, see Safer sex can increase pleasure for women and men (page 90).

Because it takes 2 to practice safer sex, a couple will need to communicate their concerns to each other and come to an agreement. If one partner wants to practice safer sex one way, and the other partner does not, or wants to do something different, they will need to negotiate. Negotiating about sex can be difficult, but you can learn to do it. For ways to practice and become more comfortable and skilled at communicating about sex with a partner, see Communicating for healthier relationships (pages 97 to 105), and Practice talking about birth control (page 184).

Safer sex is easier to practice when more people in the community are doing it. The more people talk about safer sex and encourage others to learn about and practice it, the easier safer sex will be for everyone.

## Comfort with condoms

Using a condom every time a couple has intercourse is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of HIV and other STIs. And more people than ever are using them. Men and women who once rejected the idea of using condoms are now comfortable discussing, buying, and using them.

People can learn to make condoms a normal part of sex and even sexy. Women can learn to put a condom on a man's penis in ways that give him pleasure. Since this is something a woman can give and a man can receive, it can help men accept a woman having more control over what the couple does during sex. If a man accepts that, then a woman often feels freer to do things in ways that give her the most pleasure, and the sexual relationship may be more enjoyable for both of them. Some men can also stay erect longer using a condom, and many women enjoy that.

Before people can become comfortable using condoms, they need to learn how to use them, think about how to make them more fun, and get over any embarrassment about using them. The activities mentioned above (on pages 97 to 105, and page 184) can also be adapted to help a woman become more comfortable asking her partner to use a condom.

Many women and men have never seen or touched a condom. Looking at condoms, feeling them, unrolling them, and stretching them are all part of making condoms more familiar. It may sound silly, but playing with condoms is a great way to help people be less shy about them.

## Activity

## Playing with condoms

To do this activity, you need plenty of condoms and some things to put the condoms on. It is good to have things that are shaped like a penis, such as bananas or cucumbers, and also some larger things, like squashes, to show how much condoms can stretch.

- 1 First give everyone a few condoms. Ask them to open one, take it out of the package and see how it feels. Have them unroll it and stretch it out. What do they think could fit into the condom?
- 2 Ask them to pull it over 2 of their fingers. Will more fingers fit? A whole hand?
- 3 You can also have a contest to see how many fruits or objects people can stuff inside different condoms. This will also make people laugh, which helps them relax and have fun with the activity.

Putting a gourd or melon in a condom — or stretching a condom over a person's head — shows that a man will rarely be “too big” for a condom. However, some condoms are bigger than others, so people can see this too. People can also blow them up like balloons to see how much they stretch.

- 4 Using a banana (or some other model), you can show how to put a condom on correctly. Let people try it themselves. Have a contest for how fast people can put them on, or ask people to do it with one hand, with their eyes closed, or with their mouths.



- 5 Keep encouraging people to play creatively with the condoms. As they do, you can explain how to use condoms most effectively (see page 132).

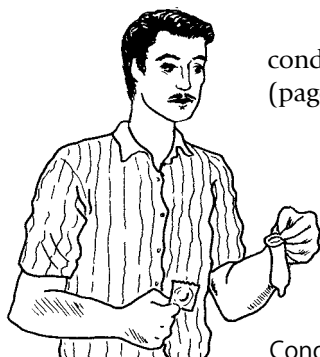
You might also ask people what worries they have about using condoms, and reassure them that condoms are safe to use. You can also explain that condoms are less effective for preventing STIs that cause sores, such as herpes, syphilis, and HPV, unless the condom fully covers the sores.

You can also play with female condoms. A woman will be more comfortable using female condoms if she can first practice alone. After putting one in a few times, it will not be difficult to do when she wants to have sex.



### Important information about condoms

- Condoms should be kept in a cool, dry place and used before their expiration date. After that date, they are more likely to tear or break when used.
- Do not put condoms in trouser pockets or anywhere they will get warm, because they will become more likely to break.
- Only saliva (spit) or a water-based lubrication is safe to use with condoms. Oils, butter, and Vaseline damage condoms and make them more likely to tear.
- Condoms will be more comfortable for the man with a drop of lubrication put inside the condom, near the tip, before it is unrolled.
- Condoms will be more comfortable for the woman — and less likely to tear — if the woman is fully aroused (wet) before the man enters her. Using a water-based lubricant is especially important for anal sex.
- Condoms for women (female condoms) are larger than condoms made for men and are less likely to break. The female condom should not be used with a male condom.



Condom for men

For instructions about using male and female condoms, see *Where Women Have No Doctor* (pages 202 to 204).



Condom for women


## Change — it's a process

It takes more than knowing how STIs spread and how they harm health to change the ways we act and communicate in our sexual relationships. People also have to change long-time habits. But women and men of all ages and in all kinds of relationships do change and practice safer sex in one way or another.

Changing any behavior is a long process. It is helpful to start by thinking about the desired goal — in this case, safer sex. Then think about the gradual steps needed to make that change. Finding ways to recognize progress and to see the steps towards change can help people feel that change is possible.

Most changes in behavior involve 4 stages. First people **think about changing their behavior** and explore their options. They might then **accept the need to change** and decide on a goal. They would then **try to change**, and **reinforce the change** by doing things that make them feel good about their decision. Remember that the process of creating change is not usually a straight line to the goal. Sometimes people might backtrack or get stuck. Keep encouraging them anyway. It is a big achievement to set the goal in the first place!

GOAL: USE CONDOMS WITH A SEXUAL PARTNER	
1. Think about change	Concern about health risks. Talk with a health worker to learn more.
2. Accept need to change	Decide to use condoms. Practice to prepare to ask partner to use condom.
3. Try to make change	Talk with partner and begin to negotiate change. Try out different kinds of condoms.
4. Reinforce change	Encourage each other about condom use. Be proud of the advances you have made.



## Community strategies for STI prevention

Community education and action can help prevent the spread of STIs in many ways. Girls, boys, men, and women around the world are organizing in schools, churches, clubs, workplaces, and neighborhoods. These community groups are finding creative ways to make condoms available, raise awareness about safer sex, empower women to negotiate for safer sex, reach out to youth, and provide access to STI testing and treatment. The following pages share activities and examples of different community strategies.

### Community mapping of sexual health resources and dangers

A mapping activity is one way a group can discover and share information about sexual health resources. The map can include places where condoms are distributed, where STI testing is available, and where information about STIs is available. It can also include places to avoid, such as bars or areas where people buy and sell sex. For an example of community mapping, see Mapping the way to safe motherhood (page 218).



## Activity

## A treasure hunt to find resources for community STI prevention

People may not be aware of all the resources in the community that can help prevent the spread of STIs. You can create a treasure hunt game to help explore resources that exist and then think about what other resources could be made available. You can adapt the activity to focus specifically on resources for vulnerable groups, such as adolescent girls, migrant women, or sex workers. (You can also adapt this activity for other topics in the book.)

- 1 Explain to the group that this is a competition to find as many resources as possible in the community that support STI prevention. The team that identifies the most resources wins.
- 2 Form teams and ask them to imagine the resources or services people need for STI prevention and where they might find those resources in the community. These might include people, groups, organizations, schools, workplaces, markets, pharmacies, and places people gather for transportation or recreation. If possible, encourage the teams to visit places in the community and bring back information to the next meeting.
- 3 Bring the groups together to share what they have found, and then vote for the team with the greatest treasure — the winner!



*We learned the high school has a Boys Outreach Brigade to teach other boys about condoms and safer sex.*

*We learned there is a safe house for women who have experienced violence. We also discovered that there are friendly courts to defend us against forced marriage.*



- 4 Together, discuss the resources that have been discovered and then talk about the gaps. Ask the group: Where is the community well equipped to prevent and treat STIs? Where are there gaps? Are there groups of people that are not well served by the existing resources? Ask the group to think of ideas for new resources to cover those gaps. (This discussion can lead to developing an action plan.)

## Empowerment in all parts of women's lives

Some communities are combining STI prevention activities, gender-awareness training, and social or economic support for women because they see how these issues are often woven together in women's lives. Working on one area alone is not enough to create change.

### Sisters for Life makes life healthier for women

The Sisters for Life microfinance project in South Africa helps women start businesses and become more self-sufficient. They also organize to stop gender-based violence and protect themselves from STIs. The women who receive loans are organized into groups of 5, and each group meets every 2 weeks to discuss domestic violence, rape, and the importance of safer sex, including the use of condoms. And they practice with each other ways to discuss these issues with their partners.

After several discussion sessions, each group selects a leader. These leaders meet with elders and other important community members to ask for help organizing workshops and meetings in the village to discuss domestic violence and rape. The women also organize street demonstrations about HIV and STIs, and about rape and crime in the community. These public meetings and events mean women are not left to confront their partners on their own but can speak out with support from the community.



This project has been very successful. Most of the Sisters for Life have built businesses, repaid their loans, and gained self-confidence. The women bring money into their households and no longer feel they have to go along with everything their partners want. The project has especially helped younger women to better negotiate safer sex.

## End stigma and harmful beliefs about STIs

Shame and stigma are major obstacles to preventing STIs. When women are made to feel ashamed of their sexuality, it's harder for them to ask their partners to use condoms or to try new and safer practices. When men who have sex with men are stigmatized, they hide their sexuality and have fewer supports for practicing safer sex. Women who have sex with women also face stigma in the community. Although their sex practices are not usually a high risk for spreading STIs, if they are forced to hide their sexuality they won't have the opportunity to learn to limit their contact with body fluids by using dental dams and other safer sex practices.

When even more kinds of stigma are layered on women, gay men, and lesbians — such as disability, sex work, using needles to inject drugs, having dark skin, or being from a “lower” class or caste — it is that much harder for the community to prevent STIs.



Sex workers' unions are demanding legal protection and human rights.

## Help adolescents protect themselves from STIs

HIV and other STIs are a serious and growing problem for young people, especially young women. Many young people turn to their peers to work out their values, plans, and choices. In many communities, especially those affected by HIV, young people may not be able to rely on their families for support.

Programs that provide gathering places for young people can help. Besides providing health information and sex education, they can help young people develop skills such as ways to earn and manage money, use public services, and practice self-defense. They can also help young people learn about their legal rights and what to do when their rights are violated. Youth connected to caring adults may have better access to practical and financial support, school fees, food, and help coping with family illness. They will be less likely to sell sex for money or turn to other risky behaviors.



## ***Straight Talk* takes on sexual health in Uganda**

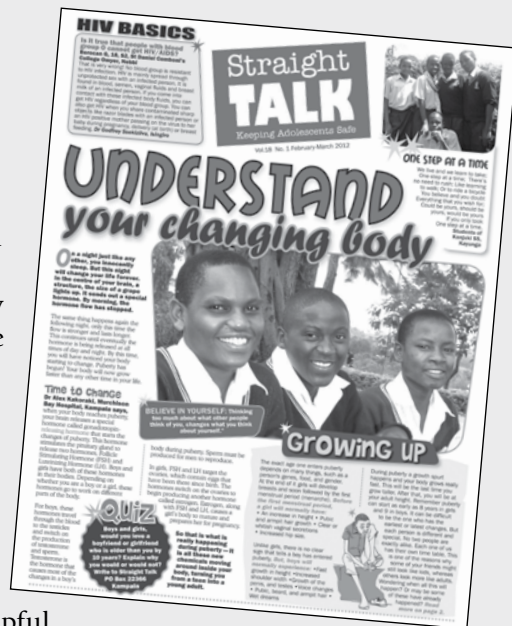
*Straight Talk* started in Uganda in 1993 as a free newspaper written for young men and women aged 15 to 24 years old. Its main goal is to provide information about sex and sexual health, life skills, and child and adolescent rights. The newspaper quickly became very popular, and a second newspaper, *Young Talk*, was started for adolescents aged 10 to 14 years. Then in 1999, a 30-minute “Straight Talk” radio show started broadcasting. Today it is heard all over the country.

*Straight Talk* newspapers and radio programs are produced in several local languages as well as English. *Straight Talk* and *Young Talk* are also published in Braille.

To encourage young people to participate, *Straight Talk* formed clubs in many schools and communities. Many young people write to *Straight Talk* every day, and their questions, comments, life stories, and concerns shape the content in every issue. The newspaper also gives out prizes to encourage letters — a few schools might win soccer balls for sending in the most letters in a week.

In some ways, the newspaper is like a giant advice magazine, with helpful answers to many common questions. Also like a magazine, it is filled with photos of young people, drawings, and useful tips. For example: “Believe in yourself: Thinking too much about what other people think of you changes what you think about yourself.”

While young people are at the heart of *Straight Talk*, parents and teachers are also included because they have the most influence in a young person’s life. *Straight Talk* also produces the “Parent Talk” radio show and the *Teacher Talk* newspaper, and holds face-to-face sessions in schools and communities to talk about some of the issues young people face.



## School-based programs promote sexual health in Colombia

Young people need to learn about sexual health, but they also need health services that enable them to make healthy choices to prevent STIs and unintended pregnancies. Putting a clinic near or inside a school makes it much easier for students to get the help they need.

In Bogotá, Colombia, a group of public and private schools worked with the non-governmental organization PROFAMILIA to start school-based programs that teach youth and adults about sexuality, sexual health, and how to prevent pregnancy and STIs. Young people can visit sexual health counselors to ask questions without fear of being judged for

their sexuality or their concerns. The program also has regular Health Days when students can have private health exams and also receive birth-control methods if they request them.

At first, some people in the community felt strongly that young people should not be given sexual health information or services. PROFAMILIA met with community members and shared information about the high numbers of pregnancies and STIs among students and other adolescents. This information helped change people's minds. Parents and teachers want to keep young people safe, so they were willing to support programs to prevent pregnancy and STIs. And the program involves parents and teachers, so everyone learns about sexual health and how to talk with each other about it.

The PROFAMILIA program has also been successful because young people are trained as peer sexual health educators, and they also participate in decision making about the clinics' programs and services. By creating many partnerships between schools, community groups, health centers, and the government, the program has been able to obtain the funding and resources it needs to continue for a long time.

