



Frequently Asked Questions about Heritage Keepers®

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- Is *Heritage Keepers*® effective?

Yes! Extensive third party research reveals the effectiveness. The CDC recommends that evidence-based programs be used for teen pregnancy prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/about/index.htm> and provides a link on their webpage to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health (US HHS OAH) federal list of evidence-based programs, which *Heritage Keepers* is on <https://tppevidencereview.youth.gov/>

- In 2012, US HHS OAH added *Heritage Keepers*® to its list of 44 evidence based teen pregnancy prevention programs (based on its 2011 study). More than 1000 research articles addressing teen pregnancy prevention have been submitted for review, but only 44 met the review criteria that qualifies them as proven effective. *Heritage* is honored to be recognized among a select few! *Heritage Keepers*® is the only program on the US HHS OAH evidence based list that teaches abstinence-until-marriage.
 - 2011 Evaluation: The 2011 study reviewed and approved for the US HHS OAH list was of 2,215 middle and high school students in 41 middle and high schools in urban, suburban and rural communities of South Carolina. The outcomes of the study were strongly positive and long lasting: A year after *Heritage Keepers*®, program students initiated sex at a rate 67% lower than well-matched non-program students. Program and non-program students were matched by age, sexual experience and by proven predictors of teen sex. This study was conducted by Stan Weed, PhD of the Institute for Research and Evaluation, and his colleagues.
- 2005 Evaluation: A study published by the US HHS Office of Population Affairs showed that a year after *Heritage Keepers*®, program students initiated sex at a rate half that of similar non-program students. These findings were across age, gender and race. Although these 2005 results were strongly significant, the program continued to improve, as evidenced by the sexual initiation rates in the 2011 evaluation.

This assurance means that adolescents receiving the *Heritage Keepers*® program receive a program that has proven effective results, which increases the likelihood that the adolescents will not participate in the risky behaviors. Many other sex education initiatives claim effectiveness but are not able to document that actual behavioral impact with hard data. By contrast, extensive data collection over a period of more than 20 years, from hundreds of thousands of students, and documented by three third-party studies, reveals that *Heritage Keepers*® actually improves psychosocial mediators shown to predict initiation of teen sex. Validated research proves *Heritage Keepers*® impacts on the social, psychological and health gains that actually predict sexual risk avoidance a year later, mediating actual health gains that benefit youth, their families and their communities.

-Is *Heritage Keepers*[®] more effective for a specific population than others?

Heritage Keepers[®] addresses issues that cross the human spectrum. The extensive third party behavioral studies indicate that significant positive behavioral outcomes were found across:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Location (rural, suburban, and urban areas)

Therefore, it is effective for ALL populations. There are many school districts that use the *Heritage Keepers*[®] program in some capacity, whether during classroom time or afterschool, and whether taught by *Heritage Keepers*[®] Educators or taught by school district personnel trained in the *Heritage Keepers*[®] program.

-Is *Heritage Keepers*[®] based on science or just opinion?

Heritage Keepers[®] is developed upon a foundation of research-based rather than values-based or religious information and resources. The theoretical foundation and methodological approach to the development and implementation of *Heritage Keepers*[®] is based on Dr. Stan Weed's research on scientifically-derived mediators of teen sex that have been proven to affect behavior and attitudes. The Rationale section of the curriculum briefly summarizes some of the science and rationale that form the foundation of the program rationale, which applies:

- cognitive educational approaches, such as knowledge and understanding, with
- affective educational approaches, such as personal values and commitment,
- to motivate youth towards a positive behavioral outcome, that is, abstinence from too early sexual activity.

The *Heritage Keepers*[®] program goes beyond knowledge and reaches the adolescents' emotional and psychological core, a deeper level of intervention that enables adolescents to grasp the social, psychological and health advantages realized by avoiding non-marital sex.

-What are some of the topics covered in *Heritage Keepers*[®] Abstinence Education Level One?

Heritage Keepers[®] enhances knowledge of physical development and sexual risks, encourages healthy personal relationships, promotes personal attitudes & beliefs that value abstinence, acknowledges and addresses common rationalizations for sexual activity, improves independence from negative peer and social norms, strengthens personal intention and commitment to avoid sexual activity, identifies ways to reduce the opportunities for sexual activity, teaches personal responsibility and self-regulation, promotes healthy decision-making, discourages youth risk behaviors such as drug/alcohol use, and strengthens future goals and opportunities. The *Heritage Keepers*[®] program focuses on the social, psychological, and health advantages of refraining from non-marital sexual activity in order to improve the future prospects, physical health, and emotional health of youth.

Content includes: Definitions of Abstinence and Commitment to Abstinence, sexual abuse and Erin's Law, determining personal values and goals, integrating personal values with behavior, male and female reproductive systems, video of a developing fetus, the importance of prenatal care, establishing protective boundaries, age of consent and laws protecting minors, human trafficking, benefits of a healthy marriage, building blocks of a healthy marriage, definitions of Lifetime Commitment and Mutually Faithful, STD/STI presentation (focus on Gonorrhea, Chlamydia, Syphilis, Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, Trichomoniasis, Herpes, HPV, HIV—site administrators determine which pictures are presented, if any), contraception efficacy compared with abstinence, demonstration of how STDs spread quickly and without obvious symptoms, how to abstain from sexual activity, student rebuttals to justifications for early sexual activity, differences between love/lust/infatuation, creating lists of character traits for a person to date and a person to marry, developing positive personal character traits, building relationships without having sex, avoiding objectifying or stereotyping, setting and stating boundaries against risky behaviors (sex, alcohol, drugs, social media, etc.), developing a personal S.A.F.E. plan (state boundaries, avoid danger, firmly say no, exit), role plays with SAFE plan to refute and refuse sexual activity, imagining the future, making a commitment.

A Summary document of all of the main topics in all of our curricula is available upon request.

-What does educator certification in *Heritage Keepers*[®] include?

Certification training includes 3 days of extensive training in Theory and Methodology, a complete curriculum implementation demonstration, and time for supervised demonstration of capacity to effectively deliver the program. Theory and Methodology include training in topics including (but not limited to): Adolescent Brain Development, Risk Reduction vs Risk Avoidance theories, Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change, Teaching sexual risk avoidance to all typologies of sexual activity and orientation, scientifically proven predictors of sexual activity and how to address each in the classroom, Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children Sexual Abuse Prevention and Mandated Reporting, Bloom's taxonomies for cognitive/affective/ behavioral objectives, Social and Emotional Intelligence, Social Learning Theory, increasing self-efficacy in students, classroom management skills, Institutional Review Board policies regarding confidentiality protection of minors, Motivational Interviewing, Biology of Love, oxytocin and vasopressin, anatomy and reproduction, sexually transmitted disease and infections, and brain-based learning.

An on-line webinar is available for additional new teachers that require training between "live" certification opportunities. Highly valid and reliable surveys are available that can be used to assess teacher effectiveness in delivery as well as student progress.

-Is *Heritage Keepers*[®] medically accurate?

Yes! The US HHS Administration for Children and Families defines medically accurate information to mean medical information verified or supported by the weight of research conducted in compliance with accepted scientific methods and published in peer-reviewed journals where applicable, or be comprised of information that leading professional organizations and agencies with relevant expertise in the field recognize as accurate, objective and complete.

The content of the *Heritage Keepers*[®] curriculum is referenced by more than 100 publications from educational, scientific, governmental or health organizations. Medical accuracy reviews have involved submitting **all** research articles and books referenced to determine accuracy and appropriateness of the use of the reference. This depth of review has not been met by many programs that claim medical accuracy. Further, the reproduction section was written by *Joshua Mann, MD, MPH*, Professor and Chair, Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Mississippi School of Medicine and contributing author *Joe McIlhaney, MD (Ob/Gyn)*, founder and President of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health. Curriculum review and consultation has been provided by *Paul E. Douthit, PhD, LMFT*, Texas Tech University School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics; *Brooke Burris, Esq.*, Co-Chair Tricounty Human Trafficking Task Force.

Heritage Keepers[®] was originally reviewed and approved for medical accuracy by the HHS Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (OAPP) in 2008. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health (MISH), a nationally recognized agency specializing in providing medically accurate information related to teen sex has also provided a medical accuracy review and has approved *Heritage Keepers*[®] for medical accuracy each year since 2013. MISH's most recent approval letter is available upon request. The HHS Family Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) also completed a medical accuracy review and approval in 2022. The most recent version of the curricula is 2018, which included funding compliance information in the Rationale Section of the teacher's manual, but the content of the program has remained the same. References are also updated periodically as new research becomes available. Any updates were within the guidelines of allowable adaptations/modifications that US HHS allows for evidence-based programs to continue to claim fidelity to the curriculum.

-Is *Heritage Keepers*[®] non-discriminatory and sensitive to all youth?

Heritage Keepers[®] focuses on internal, not external, qualities and ensures its program is sensitive to all youth. Heritage does not believe external qualities (such as race, gender, residence, etc.) predict sexual activity; therefore, every student is provided with the same information regardless of their external qualities. *Heritage Keepers*[®] believes that its message is valuable and applies to *everyone* regardless of family circumstances, sexual orientation,

sexual history, age, race, or gender, and does not express a judgment or seek to influence the beliefs of participants in this regard. All young people can benefit from the optimal health message of abstaining from non-marital sexual activity.

Heritage Keepers® is sensitive to families of origin. Many students are in never-married, divorced, cohabiting and/or single-parent families. The program focuses on the students' potential future families, not their families of origin. Heritage seeks to build up whatever family structure they have been or are currently in. This includes sensitivity to students that already have one or more children, encouraging love and support for them and any children they have, ensuring relevance to a diverse audience. Heritage requires fidelity to the curriculum, which is carefully reviewed for sensitivity. Awareness of the potential impact of word choices is stressed, particularly as related to any past sexual activity, sexual abuse, STD's, sexual orientation and family structure. The intent is for every student to leave believing in their intrinsic value and worth. Mark Gray, a well-respected health advocate within the HIV/AIDS arena, carefully reviewed and approved *Heritage Keepers*® for having no objectionable or judgmental text pertaining to LGBTQ youth. His review letter is available upon request.

-Is *Heritage Keepers*® relevant to sexually active teens?

Many students, including those that are sexually experienced (consensually or as a result of coercion or abuse), benefit from a program that effectively teaches the benefits and skills associated with delaying sexual activity. A "whole person" approach is applied relative to emphasizing a "sense of self" – how students see themselves, what and whom they value, how they relate to others, their future goals, and how they will react to stimuli that are introduced into their lives. Some adults assume that sexually active students should only hear a strong contraception message, but so-called "high risk" students often report they have never even been told about the abstinence option. Too often they have been labelled unfairly and can actually embrace the concept of taking control of their futures by avoiding risk. Though our ultimate objective is that young people embrace avoiding non-marital sexual activity, we recognize that there is value in delaying sex in the immediacy, reducing partners, and avoiding STDs and early pregnancy. Heritage is careful to not criticize other behavioral options while promoting the optimal health choice of abstinence until marriage. In addition, independent research determined that *Heritage Keepers*® does not decrease condom use among sexually active teens. *ALL students deserve to hear a strong abstinence message and to learn how abstaining from sex until they are in a stable committed monogamous relationship, such as marriage, can contribute to a positive future!*

Certified instructors are trained to address every student in the classroom, no matter their sexual experience. During certification training, instructors learn about seven (7) different typologies of sexual experience and how to ensure that each person in the classroom feels that the curriculum is relevant to them. The typologies include students that have had many partners, students that have had sex multiple times with only one partner, students that have had sex only one time, students that have been sexually abused, students that haven't had sex but aren't committed to abstinence yet, students that haven't had sex but are committed to abstinence for at least a year, and students that are committed to abstinence until marriage. All youth, regardless of any previous sexual experience, can commit to abstaining from sex until marriage and deserve to receive a strong abstinence message to equip them with the knowledge of the benefits and the skills to abstain.

Heritage Keepers® can be used as a stand-alone risk avoidance program or as a supplement to a risk-reduction program. Heritage does not require that it is the exclusive curriculum offered at any district/school/agency, and many schools choose to use *Heritage Keepers*® as one of the components within a comprehensive sex education approach.

-What do students think of *Heritage Keepers*®?

Confidential post-survey results show that teens enjoy and appreciate *Heritage Keepers*®. Students that have completed the program say:

- They would recommend the program to a friend (90%)
- It raised their confidence to resist peer pressure to have sex (93%)

- They liked the presentations by the educator (94%)
- They liked the program exercises and activities (93%)
- The educator knew the subject matter well (90%)
- The educator cared about the students (90%)
- The educator gave clear explanations (91%)
- The educator related topics in class to everyday life (90%)

Many teens that believe in, support, and are committed to abstaining from sexual activity have never been adequately trained to be able to practice resistance skills or verbalize the benefits. Heritage Educators are often told by students that their parents had encouraged them to abstain, but after the program, they knew how and understood why!

Heritage Keepers® has been shown to improve outcomes on scientifically-derived mediators/predictors of teen sex among both sexually active teens as well as those who have not experienced sex. However, because they have too often been denied information about avoiding risks associated with sexual activity, it is often those at greatest risk that show the most substantial movement from pre to post program.

-How much time is needed to implement *Heritage Keepers*®?

Heritage Keepers® Level One is 450 minutes and was designed to be delivered in a “high impact” schedule, meaning that each lesson is taught as close to the previous one as possible in order to have the most impact on the behavior of the teens. For example, if schools operate on a 45-minute class schedule, the curriculum would be taught in that class period for 10 straight school days. If schools operate on an A/B 90 minute schedule, the curriculum would be taught in that class every other day when it typically meets for 5 days. Our program has only been researched for effectiveness in this type of learning schedule and has never been tested for effectiveness if taught only once per week or any other type of non-“high impact” schedule. The school decides which class period (ROTC, health, PE, science, elective, etc.) and grade levels receive the program. The curriculum is appropriate for grades 6-12.

Best practices and US HHS standards require that in order to assure fidelity to the *Heritage Keepers*® program, at least 80% of the program must be taught; there is reduced likelihood of effectiveness if the program is not presented in the same model of the research study.

Additional supplemental curricula are available if schools allow more minutes and would like increased dosage and youth development.

It is recommended that students receive the *Heritage Keepers*® Abstinence Education Level One twice in their student career (meaning, a total of 900 minutes), or once plus additional curricula available (below).

-What other curricula are available from *Heritage Keepers*®?

There are 6 additional *Heritage Keepers*® curricula available. The *Heritage Keepers*® Abstinence Education Level One is the core curriculum that is taught before anything else and is designed for middle and high school students. After students have received the core curriculum, we offer “maintenance” curricula that act as a follow-up to the core curriculum. These are character-based positive youth development Life Skill curricula. There are five different *Heritage Keepers*® Life Skills curricula, each with 12 45-minute lessons (for a total of 60 lessons). These Life Skills curricula do NOT require the “high impact” schedule and can be taught in many different types of schedules—once a week, once every 2 weeks, once a month, etc. They also do not necessarily need to be taught sequentially, so a school could decide which lessons they want taught.

There is also a 600-minute *Heritage Keepers*® Abstinence Education Level Two curriculum that is designed for high school students and should only be taught after they have received Level One—this is another “high impact” curriculum.

Therefore, *Heritage Keepers*[®] offers at least 3300 minutes' worth of curricula dosage in addition to the core Level One 450-minute curriculum, for a potential of 3,750 minutes of program towards fulfilling many common academic health standards for students.

-What does *Heritage Keepers*[®] provide for parents?

Heritage Keepers[®] recognizes that parents are the most vital influencers when it comes to adolescent sexual activity. *Heritage Keepers*[®] suggests providing schools with parent permission forms 2 weeks before the program begins. Permission forms ensure that parents play an active role in being informed before any teen participates in the program.

Also, “parent take home sheets” are sent home with the student to give to the parents to help start a discussion between the student and parents. Many parents had previously reported feeling ill-equipped to discuss sex/abstinence with their child, so this resource helps provide some guidance and discussion questions for the parents.

Heritage has also written a book for parents, *Sex, Lies, and Hookups: A Parent's Guide for Fighting Back*. We recommend that a copy of that parent book be provided to the schools for them to keep as a resource in their library to offer to parents. The book provides access to seven (7) professionally produced on-line videos that teach parents how effectively address predictors of teen sex at home, and includes the *Heritage Keepers*[®] student workbook.

-Is *Heritage Keepers*[®] available in languages other than English?

The *Heritage Keepers*[®] curriculum is available in English, Spanish and French Canadian. There are also versions available specific to America Samoa and Hawaii.

