



## Frequently Asked Questions about Heritage Keepers® South Carolina

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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://youth.gov/evidence-innovation/tpper>

- 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 SC 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 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. Heritage has served more than 400,000 diverse middle and high school students across South Carolina. 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.

### **-Are *Heritage Keepers*® Educators qualified and trained?**

All *Heritage Keepers*® Educators at Heritage Community Services have at least their Bachelor's degree, with some also having a Master's degree. The Project Directors that oversee the program all have their Master's degrees. Each Educator attends approximately 40 hours of curriculum certification training every year and then also receives constant feedback for improvement training. They are experts in abstinence-until-marriage education.

Curriculum Certification training includes 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, Trauma and trauma-informed/trauma-sensitive approaches, scientifically proven predictors of sexual activity and how to address each in the classroom, Benefits of Marriage, Grit, Darkness to Light's Stewards of Children Sexual Abuse Prevention and Mandated Reporting, Bloom's taxonomies for cognitive/affective/behavioral objectives, Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Social Learning Theory, increasing self-efficacy in students, classroom management skills, brain-based learning, Institutional Review Board policies regarding confidentiality protection of minors, Motivational Interviewing, Biology of Love, oxytocin and vasopressin, anatomy and reproduction, Medical Institute's training in sexually transmitted diseases and infections, Ascend's Sexual Risk Avoidance Specialist training, and SC Comprehensive Health Education Act (SC CHEA) and Health and Safety Standards.

Heritage Community Services staff also participate annually in trainings, conferences, and technical assistance provided by US HHS Family Youth Services Bureau and Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention.

### **-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 adding 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/demographics. *Heritage Keepers*® believes that its message is valuable and applies to *everyone* regardless of family circumstances, sexual orientation, sexual history, age, race, or gender. The *Heritage Keepers*® program does not ask questions, or express a judgment, or seek to influence the beliefs of participants with respect to sexual orientation or gender identity. 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, STDs, and family structure. The intent is for every student to leave believing in their intrinsic value and worth.

### **-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!*

*Heritage Keepers*® Educators 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. *Heritage Keepers*® Educators are also trained Mandated Reporters of abuse, and Heritage Community Services has been a Partner in Prevention with Darkness to Light every year since 2012. 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.

During the 2021-2023 years of exit surveys of approximately 16,000 adolescents who completed the *Heritage Keepers*® program in SC:

- **93%** of youth indicated the program made them more likely to better understand what makes relationships healthy.
- **95%** of youth indicated the program made them more likely to make plans to reach their goals.
- **86%** of youth indicated the program made them more likely to resist or say no to peer pressure.
- **84%** of youth indicated the program made them more likely to think about the consequences before making a decision.
- **90%** of youth indicated the program made them more likely to resist or say no to someone if they pressure them to participate in acts such as kissing, touching private parts or sex.
- **82%** of youth indicated the program made them more likely to plan to delay sexual intercourse until married.

### **-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 *Heritage Keepers*® supplemental curricula are available if schools allow more minutes and would like increased dosage and positive 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 Skills 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.

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

### **-How are schools chosen for the *Heritage Keepers*® program?**

Principals or other school personnel can request the *Heritage Keepers*® program and decide which grades/classes receive the program. Heritage Community Services currently has federal and state grants that fund six full time certified Heritage Educators who can teach in South Carolina (approved by Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester 4, Sumter, Greenwood, and Cherokee school boards). Final selection is based on the availability schedules of the schools and Heritage Educators.

*Heritage Keepers*® is one of the options offered in the school district that schools/principals can choose. Schools may choose to implement more than one curriculum, so Heritage does not require that it is the exclusive curriculum offered at any school. The School Board voted for the district to offer a choice in curricula so that each school may garner parental and community support for which program(s) best suited the needs of their community. This approach allows for communities to have input about their needs rather than having a “one size fits all” approach for a county with tens of thousands of students. Many schools choose to use *Heritage Keepers*® as one of the components within a comprehensive sex education approach. This means that the school teaches more than just abstinence but uses the *Heritage Keepers*® program to teach the abstinence-until-marriage parts of the SC CHEA law and Health and Safety Standards, and the school provides additional information beyond abstinence.

### **-How is *Heritage Keepers*® implemented in the schools?**

In a typical school year, the school decides which class period (ROTC, health, PE, science, elective, etc.) and grade levels receive the program. According to US HHS, *Heritage Keepers*® meets the criteria to be listed as evidence based for middle and high school students. The school provides the classroom space for the males and females to be divided, per the SC CHEA law. The school designates Site Approved Representatives (usually the typical certified classroom teacher) to observe the *Heritage Keepers*® curriculum at all times (liability to protect school, students, and Heritage Educators). Heritage provides a parent permission form that the school distributes to parents two weeks in

advance of scheduled curriculum instruction. The principal (or another person with decision-making authority at the school) decides whether to use Heritage's Opt In or Opt Out parent permission forms. Heritage provides male and female educators to implement the *Heritage Keepers*® program. A confidential entry and exit survey is distributed to measure program impact and to enable administrators and educators to strategize to make improvements.

The curriculum is taught for sequential days until it is complete (Ex: if 45-minute class periods, it is taught for 10 sequential school days; if 90-minute A/B class periods, it is taught for 5 sequential class periods). The program has only been evaluated in this "high impact" implementation model. It can also be taught in sequential after-school activities, retreat setting, or all-day program. It has not been tested for effectiveness if delivered in any other format (Ex: once a week, twice a month, less than 75% of the curriculum, etc.).

Heritage does not require that it is the exclusive curriculum offered at any school/agency. Many schools choose to use *Heritage Keepers*® as one of the components within a comprehensive sex education approach.

Heritage Educators are also able to provide options for virtual implementation when necessary.

### **-How much does it cost the school or students to use the *Heritage Keepers*® program?**

Currently, Heritage has the ability to provide six certified Heritage Educators to teach the program in the South Carolina. Because of our current federal and state grants, it does not cost the school district, schools, students, or families anything to have Heritage provide the program. The grants pay for the Heritage Educators' time plus workbooks for all of the students and any other resources that are used. Heritage has provided this service to the districts in this "no cost" capacity for almost 20 years.

Also of note: Heritage Community Services (developers of the *Heritage Keepers*® program) apply for and receive grant funds from federal and state government sources. Heritage is currently funded with grants from US Health and Human Services Family Youth Services Bureau Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and from SC Dept of Education. These funding sources require programs to be evidence-based, proven-effective, medically accurate, trauma-informed, sensitive to LGBTQ+ youth, and not in violation of any state or local sex education laws. Therefore, since funding has been approved and awarded based on meeting these eligibility requirements, SC school districts can also be confident in these assurances offered through the funders' oversight.

### **-Does the *Heritage Keepers*® program comply with the SC CHEA law regarding sex education?**

The *Heritage Keepers*® program fulfills almost every component of the SC CHEA and does not violate any portion of the law. One of the first requirements of the SC CHEA is that abstinence-until-marriage must be *emphasized* (as opposed to "abstinence-until-whenever" and as opposed to not being the emphasis), a requirement that few sex education programs meet. Heritage provides expertise and a proven-effective curriculum to especially fulfill the abstinence-until-marriage emphasis portions of the state law requirements. Heritage has documented the *Heritage Keepers*® alignment and compliance with the SC CHEA (document available upon request).

Schools may choose an additional program that teaches about contraception, or may choose to offer just one lesson about contraception provided by the regular classroom teacher rather than using an entire program about contraception. The SC CHEA does not require middle schools to teach about contraception.

For schools teaching 9-12 grade, there is a requirement that over the 4 year time-span, 750 minutes of sex education is to be provided (there is no time requirement for middle school students). The *Heritage Keepers*® core curriculum is 450 minutes, but there are additional follow-up curricula available to help a school reach the 750 minute requirement (see description above), or schools may implement the program a second time to increase the behavioral results.

It is up to the public schools to make sure that they fulfill the SC CHEA law. It is a school's responsibility to make sure that requirements are met for all students. Principals and teachers have reported appreciation for Heritage's expertise and ability to help the school fulfill the SC CHEA requirement, especially at no cost.

**-Does the *Heritage Keepers*® program comply with SC Health Standards?**

Yes. Heritage has a lengthy document outlining how the *Heritage Keepers*® curriculum addresses the 2017 SC Health Standards for grades 6-8 and high school (which are the current, most recent Standards). That document is available upon request.

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

*Heritage Keepers*® recognizes that parents are the most vital influencers when it comes to adolescent sexual activity. Also per SC CHEA law, the parents/guardians at each site have the option of allowing or not allowing their child to participate in the program. Heritage provides schools with parent permission forms at least 2 weeks before the program begins (the principal or another person with decision-making authority at the school decides whether to use Heritage's Opt In or Opt Out parent permission forms). Permission forms ensure that parents play an active role in being informed before any teen participates in the program.

Heritage offers a parent orientation meeting at each site before beginning instruction, either in-person or virtually, in *Heritage Keepers*® to inform parents about program content before they determine whether their adolescent will participate.

The curriculum is made available for each school where the program is taught, in accordance with the SC CHEA law. A copy of the curriculum is placed in the school district's office for review by parents/guardians and any interested member of the public. Parents can also review the curriculum in our Corporate office (Clements Ferry Rd) by appointment. Photocopying or electronic posting/distribution is not allowed per copyright law protections.

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 teen, 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*. The book provides access to seven (7) professionally produced online videos that teach parents how to effectively address predictors of teen sex at home and includes the *Heritage Keepers*® student workbook.

**-Does Heritage offer anything for Spanish-speaking families?**

The *Heritage Keepers*® curriculum, Parent Permission forms, and Parent Take Home Sheets are all available in Spanish for Spanish-speaking families. We also have bi-lingual educators that are available to present the program in Spanish.

**-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.



SEXUAL RISK  
AVOIDANCE PROGRAM

MEDICALLY ACCURATE

AGE APPROPRIATE

  
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ABSTINENCE EDUCATION  
Raising the Standard

US HHS  
EVIDENCE BASED

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