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The 'born-again virgin' trend: Is it healthy?

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We've heard it a lot lately; celebrities like Bristol Palin, and more recently *Real Housewives* Danielle Staub, announcing their plans to abstain from sexual activity until marriage. Although their vows of virtue may be admirable, is the "born-again virgin" trend really healthy?

According to Dr. Noelle Nelson, author of *Your Man is Wonderful*, for some people, abstinence or celibacy is a part of healing from the hurt and disappointment of a failed relationship.

"Sexual abstinence can be helpful at any time in one's life, especially if you feel that you have made poor relationship choices based on sex," she explained. "Abstinence can give a person a certain distance from focusing on the immediate pleasures of sexual activity, and with that the opportunity to reflect on how to make better choices."

In fact, Dr. Nelson make the comparison that abstaining from sex is no different than an alcoholic choosing abstinence from alcohol to help heal their disease.

Although this can be a helpful solution, abstinence should not replace sex education, understanding STDs, pregnancy, the relevance of sex to a relationship, and other such issues she explains. Nor should abstinence replace understanding and dealing with post-partum depression, the stress of dealing with a new-born, and other "baby" issues.

When it comes to teens like Bristol Palin, Dr. Karen Rayne of *Adolescent Sexuality* said, "I believe we must teach teenagers to honor sexuality. And denying that a sexual interaction existed, essentially annulling the experience is not honoring it. Even if the experience comes with regret, I think it is more important to teach teenagers to deal with that regret rather than deny the event's existence."

While abstaining from sex can be beneficial in the healing process, there are consequences to consider. "To call oneself a 'born-again virgin' in the presence of having had children makes me wonder just how those kids are going to make sense of it," said Dr. Nelson. "Will they feel unwanted? Rejected? Despised?"

With both Bristol Palin and Danielle Staub being mothers as well as celebrities, is their public "born-again virgin" declaration the start of a trend?

"It is a profoundly personal choice, not one that needs to be announced on national TV," explains Dr. Nelson. "Abstinence and celibacy have been used throughout the ages by all sorts of different men and women for all sorts of reasons. Talking about it in the media, however, brings a certain kind of attention that some people thrive on. So talking about it in the media may indeed become a trend."