

## Helping Your Client Develop a Reproductive Life Plan

A reproductive life plan is a tool you can use to help your clients identify life goals and help them think about how having a family fits into those goals. Helping your client develop a reproductive life plan gives you an opportunity to address issues with your client that can help them be as healthy as possible whether they are avoiding pregnancy, trying to get pregnant, spacing their pregnancies, or are already pregnant. A reproductive life plan helps:

- Determine when, or if, to have children
- Plan the timing and spacing of pregnancies
- Identify factors (medical, behavioral, economic, environmental or social) that might negatively impact pregnancy outcomes

### Why is a Reproductive Life Plan Important?

Development of a reproductive life plan can help:

- Prevent unintended pregnancies
- Manage health conditions and health behaviors that can affect pregnancy outcomes
- Choose an appropriate family planning method if your client wants to wait to have children
- Prompt a discussion about preconception care if your client wants to get pregnant now or in the near future

### How Do I Help My Client Develop a Reproductive Life Plan?

Many factors should be taken into consideration when developing a reproductive life plan. For many clients, setting reproductive life goals can be a challenge. You can help your client develop their reproductive life plan by asking them to think about things that might influence their decisions about if, or when, they want to have children. Have them consider the following:

- Age
- Educational goals
- Living situation
- Financial situation
- Social support system
- Relationship status
- Health status and health behaviors
- Hereditary risk factors

Ask your client to consider the following questions when developing a reproductive life plan:

- Where do I see myself in 5 or 10 years?
- Do I want to have children? If so, when?
- Am I financially stable enough to have a child?
- Is my partner supportive of having a child?
- Am I healthy enough to have a child?
- Do I have health problems that might affect a pregnancy?
- How do I keep from getting pregnant if I want to wait to have children?

## The Link Between a Reproductive Life Plan and Preconception Care

During development of your client's reproductive life plan, your client may indicate that she wants to get pregnant now or in the near future. If so, this is an excellent opportunity to incorporate preconception care counseling into her family planning visit. Preconception care counseling can help your client prepare for a healthy pregnancy by focusing on the medical, behavioral, and social risk factors which may affect her health and the health of the baby. Preconception care counseling should include:

- Checking for medical conditions that might affect a pregnancy such as STIs, HIV, genetic conditions, or chronic disease
- Discussing any past pregnancies and if there were complications
- Talking about the importance of multi-vitamins and folic acid
- Stressing the need to discontinue the use of tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs
- Making sure your client is up-to-date on vaccinations
- Encouraging your client to learn about pregnancy, breastfeeding and parenting

## Conclusion

A reproductive life plan can be an important tool to protect the health and well-being of your client. It can help avoid an unplanned pregnancy at a time when your client's health or social situation may not be ideal. It can prompt a discussion about the appropriate contraceptive method your client would like to choose to avoid pregnancy, or if your client wants to become pregnant now or in the future, it can help examine the things that need to be considered to have a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby. For more information about reproductive life planning and preconception care, see the resources listed below.

## Resources

*Preconception Care and Family Planning Services*, Family PACT Clinical Practice Alert, December 2008 <http://familypact.org/en/Providers/clinical-practice-alerts.aspx>

*Preconception Health and Health Care: The Clinical Content of Preconception Care*. American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology. AJOG 2008: 199 (6 Suppl).

*Preconception Care Questions and Answers*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/preconception/QandA.htm>

CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5506a1.html>