

Conversation Starters: Engaging Males in Family Planning Services

For several reasons, men of reproductive age, from adolescence on up, are less likely to come into a clinic for family planning services, such as contraception, preventive screenings, or preconception counseling. The term “family planning” often does not resonate with men, or they may have a misconception that family planning services are for women only. They may be reluctant to show that they have questions and don’t have all the answers. Or they simply feel uncomfortable in what they may see as a women’s health domain. At the same time, Title X staff may feel uncertain about how to raise the subject of family planning with men.

This resource offers suggestions to start a conversation with a male client about family planning services, using the opportunity afforded when they come into the clinic for another reason.

■ First, some **conversation basics**:

- **Set a positive tone.** *“It’s great that you came in today” or “It’s so good that you’re taking care of your health.”*
- **Use normalizing language**, so that the client doesn’t feel singled out or judged. *“I talk about this with all of my clients” or “A lot of guys have questions about...”*
- **Assure confidentiality** of the conversation. *“This conversation is confidential” or “What we talk about stays between you and me.”* If the client is younger than 18, be sure to include a discussion of the limits of confidentiality with minors.
- **Ask permission to continue the conversation.** *“Would it be okay if I ask you some questions about your sexual and reproductive health?” or “Would it be okay if we spend some time talking about this today?”*

■ Now, **some conversation starters** for inviting a male client to learn more about and consider accessing family planning services.¹ After building rapport and addressing the reason for the visit—perhaps STI testing, vaccination, or a sports physical—take just a few minutes to let the client know about additional sexual and reproductive health services available to them. Modify these conversation starters according to your role.

“We have you down for a sports physical today. It’s great that you’re active and prioritizing your health. We like to let everyone know about our other services—like getting tested for sexually transmitted infections or how to get condoms and birth control if that’s something you’re interested in. This conversation will remain between you and me.”

“I ask everyone who comes into our clinic about their sexual and reproductive health, because it is an important part of overall health and often goes undiscussed—especially with men. Can we discuss this today? This will be completely confidential.”

“You may have questions about sex, maybe related to fertility and birth control. Many men do, but don’t know how or where to ask these questions. I am happy to talk to you about any of this today, if you’d like, so that you know what resources are available. Our conversation will remain confidential.”

“I see that you’re here today to get tested. It’s great you came in. While you’re here, I just want you to know that we ask everyone about their plans for parenthood. We can talk about contraception (birth control) today if you want to. Or if you’re thinking of becoming a parent soon, we can talk about how to support a healthy pregnancy. Would it be okay if we talk confidentially about these today?”

■ And, finally, some **follow-up questions** to ask once the conversation has started. These questions are part of the [PATH Framework](#) and can be used with clients, regardless of age or gender.

Questions about parenthood:

- *Do you think you might like to have (more) children at some point?*
- *When do you think that might be?*
- *How important is it to you to prevent pregnancy (until then)?*

Questions about birth control:

- *Do you and your partner use birth control?*
- *Have you spoken to your partner about their experience taking birth control?*
- *What method of birth control do you and your partner use? Please feel free to talk about all methods you use. This could be the pill, condoms, or pulling out.*
- *How consistent are you/your partner when it comes to your method of birth control?*
- *What do you know about the effectiveness of the method(s) you are using?*

Questions about emergency contraception:

- *What do you know about the different types of emergency contraception?*
- *Have you or your partner ever used emergency contraception?*
- *Are you aware of how to access/where to obtain emergency contraception if you or your partner needs to?*

¹These conversation starters are modeled after integration statements included in the [Engaging Young Men in Pregnancy Prevention: Making Referrals for Sexual and Reproductive Health Services Trainer's Manual](#).