

Suggestions for Sexual Control during Engagement

By Brent A. Barlow

Sexual control during the engagement period is essential. Yet, some think that “being in love” makes the transgression less serious. This is false. Listed below are “Suggestions for Sexual Control during Engagement” from Dr. Brent A. Barlow’s book, *Worth Waiting For*.

1. **Repent of Past Sins** “If sexual sins have occurred in the past, either with the intended marriage partner or someone else, I encourage my students to immediately go to their LDS bishop so they can eventually marry in the temple. . . . Those who have committed a sexual transgression should get complete clearance from their bishop before sending out wedding invitations announcing marriage in the temple. No one should go to the temple unworthily - even if clearance takes a long time.”

2. **Decide Now** “I suggest that when couples become engaged, they should verbally commit (or re-commit) to sexual abstinence before marriage. They should also avoid the double standard of giving the young woman the primary responsibility for maintaining standards. . . . Both male and female, I believe, mutually share the responsibility for sexual conduct before marriage.”

3. **Avoid Long Engagements** “Many young couples are unaware of the temptations that await them after they get engaged. They are equally unaware that familiarity creates familiarity – and that the longer they have to wait for sexual intimacy, the more difficult it is to do so. . . . Once a couple decides to marry, they should marry as soon as possible. This implies that they have been careful in the first place in deciding to get married – the process of coming to a decision may take several months. But once the decision of who to marry is made, the when should generally follow quickly.”

4. **Stay Out of Bedrooms** “It is wise for engaged couples to stay out of bedrooms no matter how honorable the intentions may originally seem. Bedrooms clearly have sexual connotation; by avoiding them one can also lessen temptations.”

5. **Learn to Control Your Thoughts** “If it is true that ‘as we think so we become,’ then we should constantly guard our thoughts, particularly during the engagement period. Some engaged couples believe they can go to questionable PG-13 or even R-rated movies and come out unscathed. Or they believe they can watch provocative videos or read erotic magazines and not let it affect their behavior. They’re wrong, of course. What we see affects what we think. And ‘as [a man] thinketh in his heart, so is he.’(Prov. 23:7.)”

6. **Recognize the Level of Your Sexual Development** “Some LDS couples who genuinely in-

tend to wait until marriage for sexual relations end up not waiting for an unusual reason. Because they have so completely lived the law of chastity until that point in their lives, they are often quite naïve. They either do not understand or else underestimate their level of sexual development.

Most couples can initially share appropriate types of affection such as holding hands and kissing and still stay well within the bounds of propriety. They often do not understand, however, that if they move to new levels of intimate behavior the circumstance becomes proportionately more difficult to control. Erotic kissing and caressing various parts of the body only lead to greater levels of intimacy. If such behavior occurs frequently and with great intensity, it is not a matter of if, but only a matter of when they will progress to sexual intercourse."

7. Meet with the Bishop(s) Often "Bishops should be seen as allies and not enemies when it comes to temple worthiness. When a Church member desires to enter the temple, he or she must receive the endorsement of two elders of Israel (usually the bishop and stake president), signifying his or her worthiness to enter. I encourage newly engaged couples to meet with their bishop soon after their engagement. Ask him to review the temple recommendation questions. Also ask him to help define the appropriate boundaries for affection during the engagement period."

8. Choose Peers Wisely "Peer influence can be great in all areas, including sexual behavior, so associates should be chosen who share the same values. Even engaged couples with good intentions can eventually yield to sexual temptations if they continually associate with other couples, married or single, who engage in inappropriate sexual conduct."

9. Avoid Fatigue and Isolation "Some engaged LDS couples valiantly combat sexual temptations during this critical period only to yield once they become either fatigued or isolated. I believe there is a direct correlation between physical fatigue and a lessened ability to resist sexual stimuli. In other words, the more tired we are, the less likely it is we'll resist temptation."

10. Use Discretion with Prayer "When Susan and I became engaged while attending BYU, a General Authority gave a devotional address that discouraged engaged couples from praying together in intimate settings. He particularly suggested that engaged couples not go into bedrooms to pray. Furthermore, he noted that prayer can help create added intimacy between a man and a woman and is encouraged with married couples for that reason."

"I believe it may be appropriate for a couple to pray together at the beginning of a date or the beginning of a long trip. But extended prayers in isolation, particularly late at night, should be avoided by LDS engaged couples striving for sexual abstinence prior to marriage."

Barlow, B. A. (1995). Worth waiting for: sexual abstinence before marriage (pp.100-107). Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co.