

# Handbook for Parents



## **Pono Choices**

*A Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy  
and STI Prevention Program for  
Middle School Youth*

## Welcome

Aloha parents and other *‘ohana* members!

Welcome to the *Pono Choices Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program Parent/‘Ohana Handbook*. Pono Choices has a strong character education component that promotes the Hawaiian value of being *pono* with regard to sexual behavior. It is an abstinence-based program that continually reinforces the fact that abstinence is the only 100% sure way to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

This Handbook provides parents and other *‘ohana* members with an overview of the program, in addition to information and resources on preventing unplanned teen pregnancy and STIs.

Pono Choices is the only teen pregnancy and STI prevention program developed specifically for youth in Hawai‘i. There is a great need to provide Hawai‘i’s youth with the attitudes, skills, and knowledge they need to avoid teen pregnancy and STIs. According to the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey for 2011, about one-fourth of Hawai‘i’s public high school students reported being sexually active – but only about half of them used contraceptives. Hawai‘i youth ages 15 through 19 have among the nation’s highest rates of STIs.

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## Background Information

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*Pono Choices: A Culturally Responsive Teen Pregnancy and STI Prevention Program* consists of 10 lessons that each take about one hour to complete. The lessons provide students in grades 6-8 with the attitudes, skills, and medically accurate knowledge they need to reduce their risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Pono Choices uses education practices that have been proven to help youth learn new information and skills. Students may use this knowledge to help manage their own behaviors and become more prepared to live healthy lifestyles in pursuit of their goals and dreams. A unique feature of the program is its use of Hawaiian cultural practices and stories that youth in Hawai‘i typically find to be more interesting and relevant to their own lives compared to Mainland programs. In addition, Pono Choices promotes parent involvement through activities that youth take home to do with their ‘ohana.

Pono Choices may be delivered anywhere youth ages 11 to 13 gather, such as schools, community centers, or health clinics. The number of sessions can be tailored to fit the schedule of each site. However, it is strongly recommended that all 10 lessons be delivered in their entirety and in sequential order.

The Pono Choices program was developed and packaged between 2010 and 2013 with funding from the U.S. Office of Adolescent Health awarded to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Center on Disability Studies. The program was developed by a partnership of the UH Center on Disability Studies, ALU LIKE, Inc., and Planned Parenthood of Hawai‘i.

**Pono Choices meets the Board of Education’s requirements for sexual health education, as stated in Policy #2110:** “In order to help students make decisions that promote healthy behaviors, the Department of Education shall instruct students that abstinence from sexual intercourse is the surest and most responsible way to prevent unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and consequent emotional distress. The abstinence-based education program shall:

- ✓ Support abstinence from sexual intercourse and provide skill development to continue abstinence;
- ✓ Help youth who have had sexual intercourse to abstain from further sexual intercourse until an appropriate time; and
- ✓ Provide youth with information on and skill development in the use of protective devices and methods for the purpose of preventing sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.”

**Reviews of Pono Choices by experts have been very positive:**

- The U.S. Office of Adolescent Health confirmed that Pono Choices is medically accurate and suitable for the target population of youth ages 11-13.
- The Hawai‘i State Department of Education (DOE) found that Pono Choices meets its Abstinence-Based Policy and sexual health and responsibility standards and benchmarks. Pono Choices is on the approved list of sexual health programs for grades 6-8.
- Pono Choices remains on the DOE approved list following changes to the program, made in June of 2014, in response to recommendations from a diverse group of stakeholders. Education experts have continually confirmed that Pono Choices is medically accurate, age appropriate, and meets the health education standards and benchmarks for Hawai‘i’s public schools.

## The Pono Choices Program

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The Pono Choices program has 10 lessons. Lessons promote *pono* attitudes and provide skills and knowledge about abstinence, sexually transmitted infections, birth control methods, goal setting, effective communication skills, correct steps for effective condom use, refusal skills (how to refuse in a pressure situation), decision-making, recognizing traits of healthy and unhealthy relationships, reproductive anatomy, and puberty. The program introduces students to Hawaiian cultural terms, practices and concepts that stress positive character development, which includes making *pono* or “right” choices about sexual behavior.

Activities that will take place during lessons include:

**Goals and Dreams** - encourages youth to consider their goals for the future and to think about how an unintended pregnancy might get in the way of reaching those goals.

**Locally Produced Videos** - used to illustrate and reinforce the lessons. Topics include medically accurate terms and making *pono* choices to protect sexual health.

**Prevention Skills** – a number of essential skills for preventing pregnancy and STIs are taught, such as honest communication between partners. In Lesson 8, which focuses on preventing STIs, youth learn how to put a condom on using a wooden demonstrator made specifically for health education purposes.

**Role-play Scenarios** - allow youth to practice the prevention skills taught by the Pono Choices program so they are better able to use them in real-life situations where others may try to pressure them into having sex.

In addition to the in-class activities discussed above, a very important part of the program consists of four take-home ‘*ohana* activities. These activities can help start discussions about the sensitive topic of sexual behavior. Each activity is designed to reinforce the lesson of that day. The ‘*ohana* activities provide an opening for students and their ‘*ohana* (or trusted adult) to talk about puberty, communication skills, relationship issues, and sexual health topics. Pono Choices Parent Nights provide more information on the intent of these activities (see Parent Night section on page 5). Each Pono Choices lesson follows the same format:

- a brief introduction providing a preview of what students are going to learn in that lesson,
- a Hawaiian cultural value that reinforces the key prevention message of the lesson,
- a segment of the story, *The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua*, which supports the lesson message,
- a student exploration activity of the lesson topic, and
- a summary of what was learned.

## The Pono Choices Lessons

The Pono Choices lessons are summarized in the table below.

Goal	Cultural Component	Activities
Module 1: Introduces the Pono Choices program and prepares students for the upcoming Modules.	Description of Hawaiian place-based cultural framework	A. Introduction to the Program B. Cultural Overview C. Workbook Instructions D. Group Agreements E. Conclusion
Module 2: The goal of Module 2 is for students to examine personal goals, values, and beliefs. They will consider how those values are supported in their interaction with their peers, family, and community in order to make <i>pono</i> choices.	Pono: The right result of your actions	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Pono C. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua D. Making a Pono Choice E. Redefining Messages About Sex F. Setting Short and Long Term Goals G. Conclusion
Module 3: The goal of Module 3 is for students to understand the human body and its functions in order to make <i>pono</i> or healthy choices.	Mōhala: To mature physically, emotionally and socially	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Mōhala C. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua D. Different Is Normal E. Puberty Beach Ball Toss Vocabulary F. Anatomy and Changes During Puberty Worksheet G. ‘Ohana Activity: Building a Wa‘a H. Conclusion
Module 4: The goal of Module 4 is for students to have the ability to recognize healthy and unhealthy relationships and to acquire skills in positive communication.	Nohona: How you communicate and relate with others	A. Introduction B. Review ‘Ohana Activity: Building a Wa‘a C. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Nohona D. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua E. Who’s In Your Canoe? F. Healthy, Unhealthy and Abusive Relationships G. Conclusion and Reflection
Module 5: The goal of Module 5 is to develop refusal skills for the prevention of unintended pregnancy and STIs.	Aloha: To have mutual respect for each other	A. Introduction B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Aloha C. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua D. Introduction to the 4Rs E. Practicing The 4Rs F. Ty and Kiara: Keeping It Pono G. Conclusion H. ‘Ohana Activity: Aloha
Module 6: The goal of Module 6 is to understand the emotional, physical, and financial responsibilities of pregnancy. Students will also gain knowledge of birth control methods.	Hāpai Pono: A pregnancy that is right with the person, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially	A. Introduction B. Review ‘Ohana Activity: Cordage/Braiding C. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Hāpai Pono D. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua E. Birth Control Choices F. Gallery Walk for Pregnancy Costs G. ‘Ohana Activity: Hāpai Pono H. Conclusion and Reflection

Goal	Cultural Component	Activities
Module 7: The goal of Module 7 is to gain knowledge about different STIs and how STIs can be transmitted.	Pilina A‘o: Linking your knowledge to understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Introduction</li> <li>B. Review ‘Ohana Activity: Hāpai Pono</li> <li>C. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Pilina A‘o</li> <li>D. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua</li> <li>E. Understanding STIs</li> <li>F. You Cannot Get HIV Ladatt!</li> <li>G. Myth or Fact</li> <li>H. Conclusion</li> </ul>
Module 8: The goal of Module 8 is to understand protective factors and reinforce knowledge of STIs by learning prevention skills.	Pilina Pono: Linking your knowledge to the right action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Introduction</li> <li>B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Pilina Pono</li> <li>C. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua</li> <li>D. Preventing STIs</li> <li>E. Teacher Demonstration of Correct Condom Usage</li> <li>F. Student Demonstration of Correct Condom Usage</li> <li>G. HIV Risk: High/Low/No</li> <li>H. Conclusion and Reflection</li> </ul>
Module 9: The goal of Module 9 is to practice refusal skills and demonstrate the ability to utilize the 4Rs (Respect, Refuse, Reason, and Redirect) in a sexual pressure situation.	Nā Kūlia: A set of skills to help you make <i>pono</i> choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Introduction</li> <li>B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Nā Kūlia</li> <li>C. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua</li> <li>D. Scripted Role Play: Part 1 Scripted Role Play: Part 2</li> <li>E. Unscripted Role Play</li> <li>F. ‘Ohana Activity: Nā Kūlia</li> <li>G. Conclusion</li> </ul>
Module 10: The goal of Module 10 is to review knowledge of teen pregnancy and STI prevention, and help students acknowledge that they are now empowered to make <i>pono</i> choices for their sexual health.	Oli Ho‘omana: Empowered to make <i>pono</i> choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Introduction</li> <li>B. Hawaiian Cultural Value: Oli Ho‘omana</li> <li>C. The Voyage of the Wa‘a Kaulua</li> <li>D. Paddling Toward Your Goals and Dreams</li> <li>E. Tic-Tac-Pono</li> <li>F. Conclusion and Reflection: Lei and Certificate Ceremony</li> </ul>

## The Importance of Parent Night

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A Parent Night is typically held before youth begin the Pono Choices program. The purpose is to give parents the chance to find out how the program is conducted and what it teaches. We urge you, and other adults in your *'ohana*, to attend Parent Night to learn first-hand about Pono Choices and to have your questions answered. You will then be able to make an informed decision about whether you would like your child to participate.

By attending a Pono Choices Parent Night, parents will be better prepared to do the four take-home *'ohana* activities with their children. They will also be better able to reinforce the healthy attitudes, prevention skills, and medically accurate knowledge offered by this program. Research shows that youth are more likely to delay starting sexual activity when their parents are involved in their sexual health education.

The Parent Night presentation takes about one hour. It describes the development of Pono Choices and provides an overview of each of the 10 lessons. Many parents who attend Parent Night report they are reassured their child will be taught age-appropriate materials and feel more comfortable talking with their child about sexual health after learning more about the program. Some of the topics to be covered are described below:

### **Why do youth need sexual health education?**

Youth today are constantly bombarded with sexual images in the media that promote sexual activity. Youth tend to talk about sex only with other youth, which often spreads misinformation and overlooks the potential risks of sexual activity. This is hazardous because teen pregnancy and STIs are serious public health issues. Hawai'i has the nation's 10<sup>th</sup> highest teen pregnancy rate and 12<sup>th</sup> highest rate of chlamydia. Sexual health education provides youth with the accurate knowledge and prevention skills they need to protect themselves from these risks.

### **What is the targeted age group?**

Pono Choices is designed for youth ages 11-13 (grades 6-8) because this is the age that most will start to enter puberty and may develop romantic interests. It is therefore important to begin preparing youth in this age group to handle situations that might put them at risk for pregnancy or STIs. These risky situations will increase as youth go through high school. However, once students exit grade 8, sexual health education is not required to be taught in Hawai'i's public schools until grade 10.

### **Why is Pono Choices appropriate?**

Pono Choices is the only teen pregnancy and STI prevention program developed specifically for Hawai'i. It is designed to engage youth in Hawai'i by using Hawaiian values and practices that most youth find to be interesting and relevant to their lives. The U.S. Office of Adolescent Health has examined Pono Choices and found it to be medically accurate and suitable for the target population of youth ages 11-13. The Hawai'i DOE has also found that Pono Choices meets its Abstinence-Based Policy and sexual health and responsibility standards and benchmarks. Pono Choices is on the Hawai'i DOE list of approved sexual health programs for grades 6-8.



## Myths and Facts about Pono Choices

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*Myth: If a teacher is teaching Pono Choices, all of their students are forced to participate.*

**Fact:** Students have the “right to pass” on all activities and during any point if they feel uncomfortable.

*Myth: Pono Choices teaches students that having multiple sexual partners is normal.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices does not place values or judgments on sexual behaviors. Medically accurate and age appropriate sexual health information is provided should an individual decide to engage in behaviors that may place them at risk for unintended pregnancy or STIs.

*Myth: Pono Choices has been kept a secret.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices was implemented in 17 schools across the state during school years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. All of these schools volunteered to implement the program. It is one of several medically accurate, abstinence-based middle school sexual health programs being conducted in Hawai‘i public schools. It is the only locally developed, culturally responsive sexual health program for grades 6-8.

*Myth: Pono Choices is being "tested" on our children.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices is being evaluated for effectiveness in preventing unintended pregnancies and STI transmission in schools where parents consented for their child to participate.

*Myth: Pono Choices teaches and encourages sex.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices does not place values or judgments about how students behave, but **provides medically accurate and age appropriate information** about how to abstain from sex, how to refuse unwanted sexual pressures, and how to prevent unintended pregnancies and STIs. Prevention attitudes, skills, and knowledge are encouraged and taught throughout the lessons.

*Myth: Parents do not know their children are being taught Pono Choices at participating schools.*

**Fact:** Parents and guardians are invited to a Pono Choices Parent Night through a letter that is sent home with their child. Also, the Pono Choices program includes take home activities that encourage families to discuss and reinforce the message of pregnancy and STI prevention.

*Myth: Parents have no say if their child is taught Pono Choices.*

**Fact:** All parents have the right to hold their children out of any sexual health education course offered at Hawai‘i’s public schools. If Pono Choices is being taught at a participating school, we encourage parents and ‘ohana members to attend Parent Night to learn about the program so that they can make an informed decision.

*Myth: Pono Choices is not medically accurate.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices is medically accurate, age appropriate, and aligned with middle school health education standards and benchmarks and state law as confirmed by the U.S. Office of Adolescent Health and the Hawai‘i DOE.

*Myth: Pono Choices sexualizes youth.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices provides medically accurate and age appropriate sexual health information for students ages 11-13. Pono Choices is an inclusive program that provides both same sex and different sex examples. Activities focus on the behaviors of the individuals in the examples,

regardless of their gender. The program teaches that you can get an STI from anyone, regardless of their gender and your gender.

**Myth:** *Pono Choices teaches our youth how to be gay.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices is an inclusive program that provides both same sex and different sex examples. Activities focus on the behaviors of the individuals in the examples, regardless of their gender. The program teaches that you can get an STI from anyone, regardless of their gender and your gender.

**Myth:** *Schools and teachers are forced to teach Pono Choices.*

**Fact:** Schools, principals and teachers can choose if they want to use the program. Pono Choices is one of several DOE approved medically accurate and age appropriate sexual health programs for grades 6-8.

**Myth:** *Pono Choices targets Hawaiian youth.*

**Fact:** The culturally responsive Pono Choices program draws upon place-based, theoretical foundations using the Hawaiian culture as the host culture. Many studies have shown that using culturally responsive teaching, which involves a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to students' lives and fosters a trusting relationship with students and families, extends beyond the classroom. Pono Choices is relevant for all youth in Hawai'i.

**Myth:** *Pono Choices seeks to undermine the traditional family.*

**Fact:** Pono Choices encourages parental involvement, which is one of the core components of the program. Studies show that parental involvement in students' sexual health education can delay initiation of sex. A very important part of the program focuses on several take-home 'ohana activities to help initiate and encourage conversation about this sensitive topic area. They provide an opening for students and their 'ohana (or trusted adult) to have conversations about puberty, communication skills, relationship issues, and sexual health topics.

## Testimonials about Pono Choices

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### From Teachers:

*"As a secondary social studies/health teacher in a small Hawaiian medium charter school, here on the island of Kauai, it is my responsibility to provide my students with the knowledge and skills necessary to survive and thrive in a constantly changing world.*

*"Pono Choices curriculum provides both knowledge and skills in a culturally appropriate context that when used correctly, allows my students to make Pono Choices regarding their personal and most intimate relationships impacting their lives. Their health, personal well-being and future success greatly depend on choices made at this age and in the near future. Personally and ironically, I gave birth to two children during my 'high school' years. Like many of my former students parenting has been a life goal sometimes achieved too soon. Receiving this curriculum to share with my current students empowers them to delay familial goals until personal goals are achieved.*

*"Additionally, Pono Choices assists students to gain confidence in communicating effectively with parents and eventually potential partners. The curriculum provides many opportunities for parents to participate in the process of supporting their student's healthy development!"*

*“In retrospect my students refer often if not daily to choices made, good and bad, with the motto ‘Pono Choices,’ meaning choose wisely! I know they all appreciate the time we spent reviewing this curriculum. They actively engaged, were and are very respectful of the importance of making Pono Choices in their lives for their future, and that of our small community. Mahalo for this opportunity to share our experience.” ~ Kae‘eonalani Ah Loo, Kawaikini Public Charter School*

*“PC has definitely changed my understanding of place-based education....It has really got me thinking about what other subject areas can be approached with place-based education.” ~ Teacher response on post-implementation survey, 2012-2013*

*“The program demonstrated how powerful place-based education is as a framework for the health education curriculum.” ~ Teacher response on post-implementation survey, 2012-2013*

*“I am a teacher who has been teaching Pono Choices for about three years. It is well developed. It is an amazing curriculum and it reaches every style learner, but the knowledge is to help the kids and it might be for them, but it might be for their peers because there is a lot of misinformation out there.*

*“There is a lot of goal settings in this curriculum there are short and long term goals and the things that can get in the way like unintended pregnancy and the condom demonstration, that’s a health skill.*

*“So, if they are going to use it. If they are going to tell friends how to accurately put a condom on that’s something that’s going to keep them safe. And that’s raising their awareness. I think as an educator what we are doing is giving them the knowledge so they can arm themselves.” ~ Molly Mair Yates, Hawai‘i Academy of Arts and Sciences*

*“I am one of the pilot teachers for the Pono Choices Program and it is one of the best and the finest that teaches sex ed with respect.*

*“I have had students come up to me and say I can’t talk to my parents when I start the curriculum I ask students, you know, give me a show of hands how many of you are uncomfortable talking to your parents about sex. And it’s usually about 70% of the class have their hands go up.*

*“And I say, but by the time we finish this curriculum you are going to be really comfortable and a lot of you are going to be able to talk to your parents when you couldn’t talk to them before. And generally that’s the case. I mean the numbers go down. By the time we finish the curriculum it’s about 20% of the kids who raise their hand.*

*“The 12 and 13 year olds who are educating their older cousins and teaching them, hey, you are not being safe this is what I have learned in class and I have had many of the students come back and tell me exactly that.” ~ Kathie D’Amico, Kealekehe Intermediate, veteran teacher of 20 years*

A teacher described what happened when controversy over Pono Choices led to a much larger than usual turnout of parents at Parent Night: *“I went through the whole thing and then I braced myself for all of those questions and they [parents] said so what’s the big controversy? And I told them about the same sex scenario. I told them about some of the definitions. And....last semester, I only had two students out of the 150 for an opt-out.” ~ Donna Rodenhurst, King Intermediate*

## From Students:

*“I have chosen abstinence and try to make the best choices for my sexual health thanks to this program. Before I didn't even know what abstinence or STIs were, and now I can make healthy choices.” ~ Anonymous student response from the Module 10 reflection worksheet*

*“I now feel aware about myself and my health because if I decide to have sex in the future, I will know what to do and protect myself from STI's.” ~ Anonymous student response from the Module 10 reflection worksheet*

## From Parents:

*“Teaching the four R's to the young teens will provide an excellent tool in life skills.”*

*“Thank you for teaching critical health information with dedication to excellence.”*

*“These four R's will aid the young teens communication skills and life skills.”*

*“They [the 4 R's] are building blocks for life.”*

*“You provide Excellent exercises for the young teens to complete and learn from, and incorporate the family into the learning process and lessons.”*

*“It should be a class that is a mandatory core class and required all year long.”*

*“Your health class is such a wonderful opportunity for <student name> and the young teens to learn and process new health information.”*

*“I am impressed.”*

*“You utilized a whole family approach with making a canoe, and the braid to facilitate learning.”*

*“Thank you for teaching critical health information with dedication to excellence.” ~ Iao middle school parent as expressed to the Pono Choices teacher*

*“My daughter participated in Pono Choices. When I began to hear about the controversy, I asked her what she thought. Her response was along the lines of the content was factual and informative. There were no videos of anyone having sex. The material wasn't graphic — it was factual. Homosexuality wasn't a part of the discussion other than to point out you can get an STI from participating in gay sexual activity. She really liked the lessons about good communication skills. As a parent, I talk to my kids a lot and try to prepare them to deal with pressures that come their way. The curriculum helped open this discussion up even further with the inclusion of the 'ohana activities.” ~ K. Mendoza, Hilo*

## From the Public:

*“I commend the work that you guys are doing. I think it’s appropriate to inform our teens about the kinds of sexual activities there may be peer pressure to engage in and the stated health risk and the bottom line for me is whether the curriculum is promoting abstinence as the best and healthiest choice.” ~ Kim from Honolulu, Town Square program on Hawai‘i Public Radio*

*“As a minister, I am deeply troubled by the recent negative attention on sexuality education here in Hawaii. The idea that we need to withhold valuable and essential health information from our keiki is counterproductive to these youth acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to protect themselves throughout their life journey. Instead, I encourage us all to support early intervention and prevention education, two components that are key to our health, including our sexual health.” ~ Reverend Jonipher Kūpono Kwong*

## The Pono Choices Website

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More information about Pono Choices can be found at the program's website at <http://www.cds.hawaii.edu/ponochoices/>. Click on the "Resources" tab for a listing of publications for free downloads and links to other websites with a wide range of useful information on teen sexual health issues.



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