

## **BrdsNBz Aiken**

### **Overview**

#### ***Helping youth make informed decisions***

BrdsNBz Aiken is for youth in our community who have questions about issues related to growing up, preventing pregnancy/STDs and relationships and don't have a trusted adult they can turn to for answers. Teens can text their question to BrdsNBz, and a trained staff member will provide a medically accurate, non-judgemental, confidential and free\* answer within 24 hours.

#### **WHY? – Meeting teens *'where they are'*.**

Research has shown:

- While adolescents often report turning to parents and physicians for health information, many felt that discussing certain issues such as sexuality, body changes, contraception, menstruation, private health issues and physical or sexual abuse with providers would be too embarrassing. <sup>1</sup>
- Adolescents frequently refer to media as a resource for sexual health information. In fact, 75% of youth have used the Internet to search for health advice. <sup>2</sup>
- C&R Research, stated that 22% of young children (ages 6-9), 60% of tweens (ages 10-14), and 84% of teens (ages 15-18) own a cell phone.
- In a 2010 report from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, half of teens send 50 or more text messages a day, or 1,500 texts a month, and one in three send more than 100 texts a day, or more than 3,000 texts a month.
- Mobile technologies, including text messaging, are becoming a teen's primary source of communication and accessing information. As a result, many health care providers have begun utilizing applications have aided in a range of health issues including diabetes management, drug avoidance, bulimia outpatient care and sexual health.

The BrdsNBz Text Message Warm Line was launched by the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina (APPCNC) in February 2009 to address the sexual-health needs of our state's teenage population. The primary objective of BrdsNBz is to provide a trusted forum for adolescents to ask questions and receive medically accurate information about their sexual health.

Formative research conducted in cooperation with Dr. Jane Brown and investigators at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Journalism and Mass Communication found that adolescents not only felt they could trust the service but were more likely to follow-up on an answer from BrdsNBz than from other resources they were exposed to in schools, at home, or in the community.

Modeling their service on a similar city program in Alexandria, Va., the BrdsNBz staff members worked up guidelines: No medical advice — urge questioners to speak with a doctor. Do not advocate abortion. When necessary, refer questioners to local clinics, web-sites or emergency hot-lines. Give reasoned, kind advice. Read answers twice before sending. No sarcasm.

## **BrdsNBz Features**

### **\* Anonymous**

Youth who text BrdsNBz do so anonymously. Current research has demonstrated that youth are more likely to share intimate questions they have regarding sexual health with trained health educators using an anonymous channel. Youth will feel safe and secure knowing they can send their questions to BrdsNBz.

### **\* Personalized**

Each question sent to BrdsNBz receives an answer with a proven formula for response that is also personalized for each and every adolescent. Youth will feel as though they are having a one-on-one conversation with a trained health educator every time they send a question.

### **\* Free-of-Charge**

There is NO CHARGE† for questions sent to the BrdsNBz! Whether they send one question or 100 – youth will receive a prompt, medically accurate answer from us at no charge.

### **\* Comprehensive**

Whether asking about puberty or how to know if they're in love – health educators can answer adolescents' questions with information that is comprehensive and medically accurate.

### **\* Certified Health Educators**

The APPCNC staff has over 25 years of service working with youth in sexual health education and public health. Their certified health educators assure that youth get the information they NEED from a reliable, accurate source.

## **References**

<sup>1</sup> Ackard and Neumark---Sztainer, "Health care information sources for adolescents: Age and gender differences on use, concerns and needs."

<sup>2</sup> Lalita K. Suzuki and Jerel P. Calzo, "The search for peer advice in cyberspace: An examination of online teen bulletin boards about health and sexuality," *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 25 (2004): 685---698.