

# El Camino

## Helping Teens Set Life Goals and Promote Sexual Health

El Camino is a research-based goal-setting sexual health promotion program developed by Child Trends based on the principles of Positive Youth Development. El Camino promotes adolescent sexual health by encouraging youth to set goals, make informed sexual and reproductive health choices that align with those goals, and learn to communicate their sexual health limits. The program helps teens develop their own *camino*, or road, to pursue goals they identify for themselves.

This fact sheet describes the El Camino curriculum and preliminary results from a pilot test of the program in seven schools and community-based organizations across six cities. El Camino serves high school-aged, English- or Spanish-speaking Latino adolescents who are male, female, or nonbinary—as well as other adolescents from historically excluded neighborhoods in the United States—and has been implemented with a wide range of students ages 13 to 20.

### About the El Camino Curriculum

The El Camino curriculum is developmentally appropriate, active, engaging, and youth-focused. It incorporates several unique features that distinguish it from other evidence-based/evidence-informed curricula designed to prevent teen pregnancy and STIs. In particular, El Camino's lessons and activities:

- ★ Are anchored in sexual health promotion and goal setting
- ★ Incorporate a goal achievement model throughout the curriculum
- ★ Are designed with a focus on the needs of Latino youth
- ★ Focus on the most effective forms of contraception, including long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs)

The El Camino curriculum contains eleven 45-minute lessons and is divided into three sections, or arcs. The three arcs focus on goal setting, sexual and reproductive health, and healthy relationships. Each lesson is briefly summarized in the table at the end of this fact sheet.

**Arc 1, Goal Setting** (lessons 1–4), uses the imagery of a road (El Camino) to connect adolescents’ long-term goals with specific steps they can take to achieve those goals. Students themselves—without input from adults in their lives—set their goals and determine the steps they need to take to achieve those goals. Participating students think through the benefits of completing their education.

**Arc 2, Sexual and Reproductive Health** (lessons 5–8), works to build young people’s knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behaviors regarding reproductive biology, and to teach them effective methods of contraception—all necessary steps for youth to make informed decisions on ways to protect and reach their goals.

**Arc 3, Healthy Relationships** (lessons 9–11), aims to help youth develop assertive communication skills to protect their progress toward their goals, accurately and effectively communicate their limits with partners, and enjoy healthy relationships.

## El Camino Activities

El Camino incorporates a variety of activities to engage students. These activities are not designed to tell students what to do or think; instead, they encourage students to think for themselves about important issues like relationships, school, and their futures. In El Camino, students engage in activities that include:

- ★ Reading stories/*novelas* throughout the curriculum that feature teen characters with whom they share key characteristics
- ★ “Voting with your feet,” meaning physically moving around a room to show agreement or disagreement with a statement or idea
- ★ Role-playing with other students using scenarios about similar teenagers
- ★ Participating in group discussions with teachers to discuss their thoughts and get answers to their questions
- ★ Goal mapping—writing their personal goal, to achieve by age 25, on a map and thinking about the steps necessary to reach that goal
- ★ Practicing skills by implementing concepts learned (for example, practicing assertive communication with partners or proper condom use)



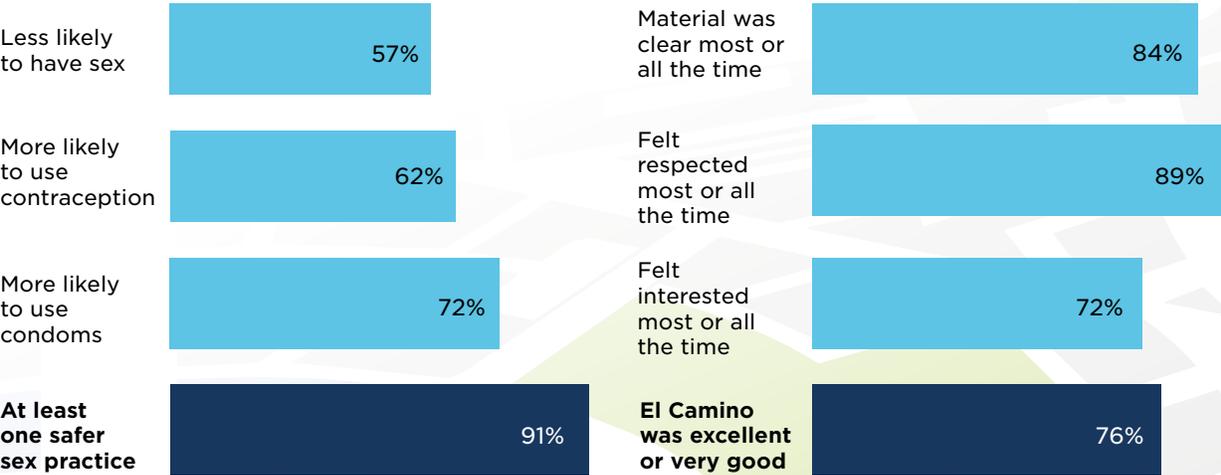
# Pilot Data and Findings

From 2015 to 2018, Child Trends developed and tested El Camino with more than 300 students in Washington, DC; East Chicago, IN; Tacoma, WA; Baltimore, MD; Los Angeles, CA; and Philadelphia, PA. We worked with partner schools and organizations to implement El Camino with racially diverse groups of students in both English and Spanish; during and after school; and with classroom teachers, AmeriCorps volunteers, and Communities in Schools staff.<sup>1</sup> After each implementation, we revised the curriculum based on classroom observations, fidelity data, and debriefs with students and facilitators.

Reach	Demographics <sup>2</sup>
<p><b>7</b> sites</p> <p><b>16</b> classrooms</p> <p><b>319</b> students</p>	<p><b>Age:</b> Ages <b>14–20</b>; average 16 years</p> <p><b>Gender:</b> <b>60%</b> female, <b>39%</b> male</p> <p><b>Race/ethnicity:</b> <b>69%</b> Hispanic, <b>23%</b> black, <b>3%</b> multiracial, <b>5%</b> another race</p> <p><b>Sexual experience:</b> <b>44%</b> of students reported they had ever had sex at the time of pre-test</p>

## Preliminary outcomes<sup>3</sup>

Child Trends surveyed students before and after their participation in El Camino. At the post-test survey, we asked students whether they thought El Camino had made them more or less likely to have sex and whether, if they were to have sex, the program had made them more or less likely to use contraception or a condom. Results were very encouraging, with the vast majority of students (91%) reporting that El Camino had made them either less likely to have sex, more likely to use contraception, or more likely to use a condom. Students reported high satisfaction with the program, and about three quarters said it was “excellent” or “very good.”



<sup>1</sup> Moore, J.A., Manlove, J., Faccio, B., Parekh, J., & Beckwith, S. (2018). El Camino, a goal-setting teen pregnancy program, finds promising results (blog). Bethesda, MD: Child Trends.

<sup>2</sup> Based on survey data from 136 students.

<sup>3</sup> Based on post-test survey data from 94 students. Number of surveys varies by outcome.

From pre-test to post-test, students who participated in El Camino also reported significant changes in important attitudes and knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

- ★ **Confidence about discussing sex and consent.** Students reported feeling more confident in talking about sex and consent with their partners at the end of the program.
- ★ **Contraceptive knowledge.** When given three questions about contraceptives, at the beginning and end of the program, students improved from getting 49 percent correct, on average, to getting 74 percent correct—a 25 percentage-point increase.<sup>5</sup>
- ★ **Setting goals.** Before El Camino, 64 percent of students agreed they had goals to accomplish before having a child. This increased to 80 percent of students at the end of El Camino.

[Click here to download a summary of El Camino curriculum lessons](#)

For more information, please contact [elcamino@childtrends.org](mailto:elcamino@childtrends.org).

El Camino is available online both in English and in Spanish on the Child Trends website. Materials are available at no cost here: <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/el-camino-a-goal-setting-sexual-health-promotion-program>

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<sup>4</sup> Based on a sample of 55 matched student surveys

<sup>5</sup> Questions ask about the effectiveness of the IUD relative to the condom, the effectiveness of the implant relative to the birth control pill, and about whether the IUD causes infertility.

# A Summary of El Camino Curriculum Lessons

## Arc 1: Goal Setting

### Lesson 1: State Your Goal: Intro to El Camino

Students will (1) explain how El Camino can help them set and achieve their goals; (2) agree on a set of group agreements; (3) explain the four **STAR** steps in the El Camino Goal Map; (4) identify a goal for themselves at age 25; and (5) use **STAR** to identify Sofia's and Santiago's (characters in a story they will read) goals and the steps they will need to take to reach those goals.

### Lesson 2: Think About the Steps: My Life at 25

Students will (1) identify some of the steps they will need to take to achieve the goal they identified in Lesson 1; and (2) identify some of the tools and resources they have available to help in achieving their goal.

### Lesson 3: Assert Your El Camino: Dating & Decisions about Sex

Students will (1) discuss positive and negative road trips that can affect their camino; (2) recognize warning signs and how to use them to stay on their camino; (3) describe possible consequences from engaging in early sexual behaviors; and (4) describe how these consequences can affect school success and high school graduation.

### Lesson 4: Reach Your Goal: Setting Limits to Stay on Track

Students will (1) discuss warning signs and how road trips can affect their camino; (2) recognize pressures teens face to have unwanted and/or unprotected sex; (3) recognize external and situational factors that can lead to unwanted or unprotected sex; and (4) describe challenges associated with being a young parent.

## Arc 2: Sexual and Reproductive Health

### Lesson 5: Teen Pregnancy and Understanding How a Pregnancy Occurs

Students will (1) describe basic reproductive anatomy; (2) explain how a pregnancy occurs; (3) learn important facts about pregnancy; and (4) discuss the benefits of delaying pregnancy/parenthood until completing their education and obtaining a good job.

### Lesson 6: Promoting Sexual Health: Contraception

Students will (1) list six methods of safe and highly effective contraception; (2) explain how to use six methods of safe and highly effective contraception; (3) describe where teens can get accurate information and support to make healthy decisions around contraception; (4) discuss the benefits of delaying pregnancy/parenthood until completing their education and obtaining a good job; (5) describe how using contraception can help protect their camino; and (6) describe how a person can support their partners in using hormonal contraception.

### Lesson 7: Promoting Sexual Health and Preventing STIs: Condoms

Students will (1) describe the benefits of correctly and consistently using condoms to prevent unintended pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections (STIs); (2) explain the steps to using an external condom correctly and consistently; (3) overcome obstacles to using contraception and condoms; (4) describe risks, signs, and treatments for STIs; (5) explain how using condoms and contraception, if sexually active, supports staying on their camino; and (5) describe the roles both partners can play in using condoms.

### Lesson 8: Promoting Sexual Health and Staying on Your Camino

Students will (1) discuss how effective hormonal methods of contraception work; (2) discuss ways to feel more comfortable talking about contraception with a health care provider; (3) discuss how contraceptives can help them protect their camino; and (4) describe the role both partners can play in using condoms.

## Arc 3: Healthy Relationships

### Lesson 9: Assertive Communication: Setting and Protecting Our Personal Limits – Part 1

Students will (1) explain why limit setting is important in keeping on their *camino* so they can reach their goals; (2) define passive and assertive communication; (3) explain how to use “nonverbal communication” when “Asserting Your Camino”; (4) set, communicate, and protect limits regarding sex and protected sex with partners; and (5) describe how limit setting is part of a healthy relationship.

### Lesson 10: Assertive Communication: Setting and Protecting Our Personal Limits – Part 2

Students will (1) identify healthy relationship characteristics; (2) explain the characteristics of consensual sex; (3) use assertive communication to set and maintain limits regarding sex and protected sex in skits with both heterosexual and homosexual couples; and (4) describe external factors that can lead some teens to have unwanted and/or unprotected sex.

### Lesson 11: El Camino and Your Future

Students will (1) complete steps for using the El Camino Goal Map; (2) set, communicate, and maintain limits regarding sex and protected sex with partners; (3) use **STAR** to work toward their goals and delay having sex; (4) explain, if they are sexually active, how using condoms and contraception support the achievement of goals in El Camino maps; and (5) explain the role a person can play in supporting their partners in using hormonal contraception.