

# El Camino

Key Background Information  
for Implementing El Camino

## Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

## About El Camino

*El Camino* is an eleven-lesson (8–9 hours) goal-setting sexual health promotion program based on the principles of Positive Youth Development and targeted toward Latino youth. This culturally relevant program is designed to help students in high schools with large Latino populations to develop behaviors, knowledge, attitudes, and relationships that support their ability to make informed decisions about sex and pregnancy and achieve their goals. The curriculum not only focuses on goal setting, but also includes lessons and activities to help students delay sexual activity, build healthy relationships, and know about, and feel empowered to use, their preferred method of contraception to avoid an unintended pregnancy.

## Unique Features

*El Camino* incorporates several unique features that distinguish it from most other evidence-based/evidence-informed curricula designed to prevent teen pregnancies and STIs. The unique features of this curriculum are as follows:

1. **Designed with a Focus on the Needs of Latino Youth.** Few evidence-based/informed curricula focus on the needs of Latino youth and their families. *El Camino* is informed by extensive assessment data collected by Child Trends and others on Latino youth and their parents. These data demonstrate that achieving goals, such as education, is highly valued by Latino families. Unintended pregnancy can be one key obstacle to achieving goals. The *El Camino* intervention is a response intended to address this key obstacle.
2. **Anchored in Sexual Health Promotion and 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. *El Camino* provides teens the opportunity to develop their own camino, or road, to pursue goals they identify for themselves as well as engage with other participants and facilitators through the program's activities.
3. **Incorporates a Goal Achievement Model Throughout the Curriculum.** *El Camino* includes a comprehensive goal achievement model STAR, which is a major focus in the curriculum. Students are introduced to the model and have ample opportunity to apply it to their personal goals. Their *El Camino* goal maps are revisited, monitored, and revised as needed throughout the program as students learn new information about limit setting, assertive communication, healthy relationships, and more.
4. **Focuses on a Full Range of Effective Forms of Contraception, Including long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs).** Despite many educational campaigns about the effectiveness and safety of hormonal contraception, misinformation about these contraceptive methods

continues to impede their use among youth. *El Camino* provides information about six contraceptive methods—IUD, implant, shot, patch, ring, and pill—how they work, how they are used, and how they can be accessed. Common misinformation about these methods is directly addressed and debunked.

## Background

### Rationale for the Curriculum

Despite recent declines in teenage childbearing among all groups, CDC data on births per 1,000 female adolescents ages 15–19 indicate that the rate among Hispanic teens in 2019 was 25.3, which is more than 1.5 times the U.S. teen birth rate (16.7).<sup>1</sup> Notably, the vast majority of teen births are either unwanted or mistimed.<sup>2</sup> For some, teen childbearing may also limit or delay achievement of other goals related to school and work. CDC data on contraceptive use among U.S. high school students in 2019 show similar patterns by race/ethnicity to teen birth rate data: 18.2 percent of Hispanic teens reported using contraception before last sexual intercourse, compared with 30.9 percent of U.S. teens.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Hispanics in the U.S. go through particular challenges that are only applicable to them and not to other disadvantaged populations, such as language barriers, illiteracy, legal status, expanded family duties (e.g., babysitting, interpreting for family), and religious barriers to contraception, among others.

This curriculum was developed to fill gaps in programming for Latino youth. It draws on research and insights derived from background research.<sup>4</sup> Child Trends supplemented the existing research with interviews. These were conducted with teens, parents, program evaluators, and providers who have modified sexual health promotion programs for Latino teens. This review of both the research and interviews indicated that many current programs and policies are based on inaccurate assumptions. Child Trends found, for example, that the vast majority of Latino adolescents and their parents want to avoid early parenthood. In addition, both teens and parents strongly value education, have high educational aspirations, and see education as a path to economic success. This suggests a fresh approach to reaching Latino adolescents,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, J. A., Hamilton, B. E., Osterman, M. J. K., & Driscoll, A. K. (2021). Births: Final data for 2019. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, 70(2). National Center for Health Statistics, Division of Vital Statistics.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr70/nvsr70-02-508.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Committee on Adolescence. (2014). Addendum—Adolescent pregnancy: Current trends and issues.

*Pediatrics*, 133(5), 954–957. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-0450>

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (n.d.) *1991–2019 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data*. Available at <http://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/>

<sup>4</sup> Moore, K. A., Manlove, J., Walker, K., & Guzman, L. (2013). *Reducing teen childbearing among Latinos: An innovative anti-poverty strategy* [Report]. Child Trends. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/reducing-teen-childbearing-among-latinos-an-innovative-anti-poverty-strategy>

specifically by helping them to align their behavior with their aspirations. Researchers at Child Trends, along with curriculum developers, have worked with school staff, community members, and students to develop, test, and revise the curriculum by identifying activities that are culturally relevant and that help Latino students see the links between unintended pregnancy and their goals.

## Theoretical Framework

*El Camino* is grounded in formative research and three social and behavioral theories: the Theory of Planned Behavior,<sup>5,6</sup> Social Learning Theory,<sup>7,8</sup> and Social Cognitive Theory.<sup>9</sup>

**The Theory of Planned Behavior** focuses on how young people learn and develop behaviors. It explains how behavior is based on previous intentions and posits that people are better able to act on intentions if they have norms about the appropriateness of the behavior, believe they have control over the behavior, and believe the benefits will outweigh the costs. Examples of this include addressing norms about sexuality, teaching about benefits of safer sex, and equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves.

**The Social Learning Theory** and **Social Cognitive Theory** posit that people learn better when cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants are all considered in lesson planning. Lessons that allow young people to act out sketches (role plays), practice behaviors, and then reflect with the group allow them to intentionally engage in the cognitive processes that shape behavior. These skills-based lessons also allow young people to think about how their environments—physical spaces and the people in them, both formal and informal—might impact their behavior.

## Logic Model

*El Camino* is a program that promotes sexual health in the context of academic supports, which will decrease students' exposure to unprotected sex—either by abstinence or improved contraceptive use—and ultimately reduce rates of unintended pregnancy and births. The diagram below details the logic that underpins *El Camino*:

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<sup>5</sup> Fishbein, M., & Azjen, I. (1975). *Belief, attitude, intention, and behavior: An introduction to theory and research*. Addison-Wesley.

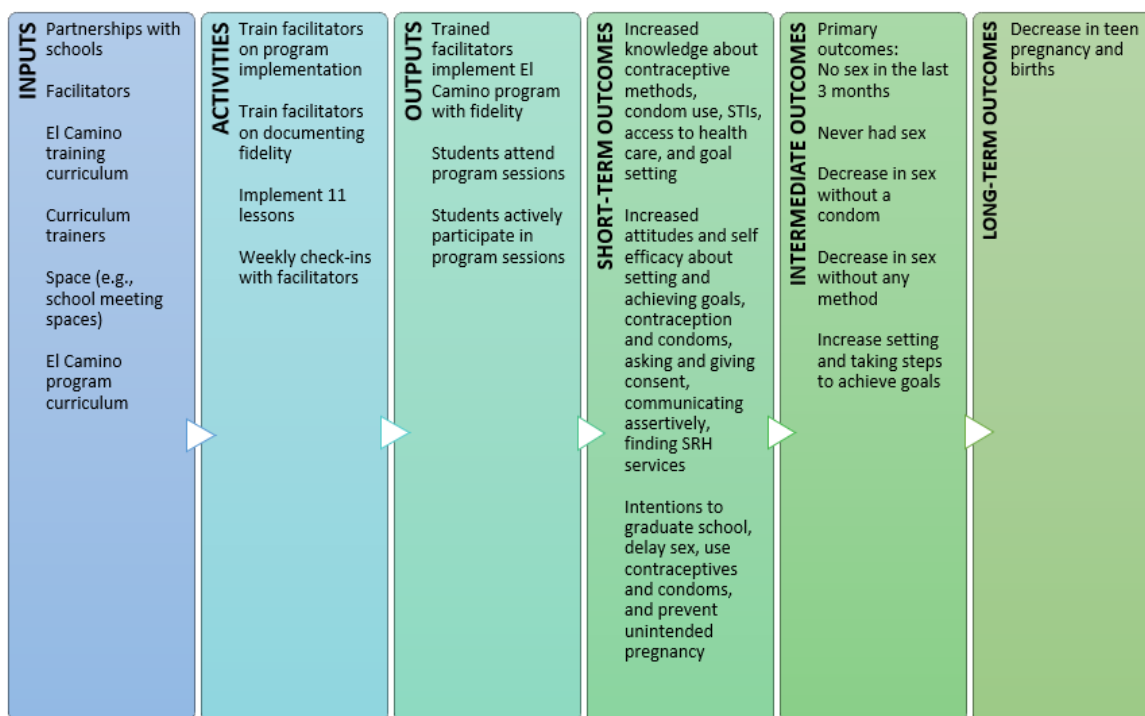
<sup>6</sup> Montano, D. E., & Kasprzyk, D. (2008). Theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior, and the integrated behavioral model. In K. Ganz, B. K. Rimer, & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research, and practice* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass. <https://www.med.upenn.edu/hbhe4/part2-ch4-introduction.shtml>

<sup>7</sup> Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.

<sup>8</sup> ETR & Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ReCAPP). (n.d.). *Theories & approaches: Social learning theory*.

<sup>9</sup> McAlister, A. L., Perry, C. L., & Parcel, G. S. (2008). How individuals, environments, and health behaviors interact: Social cognitive theory. In K. Ganz, B. K. Rimer, & K. Viswanath (Eds.), *Health behavior and health education: Theory, research, and practice* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass. <https://www.med.upenn.edu/hbhe4/part3-ch8-key-constructs.shtml?3.1>

**Goal: To promote sexual health among Latino high school age youth as a way of preventing unintended pregnancy and births**



## Core Components

Core components are the essential characteristics of a program that are responsible for its effectiveness and success. Core components can be categorized into three types: (a) Content, (b) Pedagogical, and (c) Implementation. The chart below details the core components within *El Camino*:

Content: What is being taught in the curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The curriculum is youth focused, not adult focused.</li> <li>Facilitators do not tell the youth what to think, believe, or do.</li> <li>Youth identify goals for their future and ways to reach them.</li> <li>Youth utilize a goal setting model (STAR) to identify the goal they want to achieve by age 25.</li> <li>Youth have the right to accurate information about reproductive biology and effective methods of contraception to help them avoid unintended pregnancy and STIs.</li> <li>Youth learn about healthy relationships, consent, and assertive communication skills.</li> <li>Youth learn about resources (interpersonal, institutional, economic) that could assist them as they work toward their goals, learn about reproductive health, and learn about healthy relationships.</li> <li>Parents/guardians/trusted adults are engaged to support youth to reach their education and family formation goals.</li> </ul>

Pedagogical: How the content is being taught
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini lecture</li> <li>• Brainstorming</li> <li>• Novela/story</li> <li>• Large group discussion</li> <li>• Small group work</li> <li>• Individual reflection/work</li> <li>• Facilitator demonstrations, student skill practice, and role plays</li> <li>• Games/simulations</li> <li>• Homework assignments</li> <li>• Question box</li> <li>• Use of imagery that depicts life as a road to support youth taking steps to reach their goals</li> </ul>
Implementation: The logistics of how the curriculum is implemented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented in a high school setting (during school or in after-school programs)</li> <li>• Implemented with English- or Spanish-speaking students as well as students from historically excluded neighborhoods in the U.S. (schools serving Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, low-income communities)</li> <li>• Implemented with students ages 13–20</li> <li>• Preference for 2 facilitators</li> <li>• Class size of 15–25 students.</li> </ul>

It is important to maintain fidelity to the *El Camino* curriculum to ensure participants benefit

from the program as intended. As part of the program, the facilitator will complete fidelity forms to monitor how closely program delivery adheres to the written program. The **Fidelity Monitoring Tool** is available in **Appendix A** of the curriculum.

## Content

### Lesson Overviews & Key Messages

*El Camino* is divided into eleven (11) 45-minute lessons and is divided into three arcs. Content within each arc has been organized around the following topics: the STAR goal setting framework; reproductive biology, contraception and condoms; and communication and healthy relationships.

Listed below are the descriptions of each arc, titles of each lesson, and the corresponding key message. Refer to **Appendix B, *El Camino* Lessons At-A-Glance**, for a more comprehensive summary of the description and timing of each lesson and activity.



Lesson	Key Messages
<b>Arc One (Lessons 1 to 4): Goal Setting</b> Introduction to the imagery of life as a road (camino) and the STAR Framework.	
<b>Lesson 1:</b> State Your Goal: Intro to <i>El Camino</i>	YOU are in charge of setting and reaching your goals.
<b>Lesson 2:</b> Think About the Steps: My Life at 25	Take steps now to reach your goal.
<b>Lesson 3:</b> Assert Your Camino: Dating & Decisions about Sex	Learn to identify and respond to “warning signs.”
<b>Lesson 4:</b> Reach Your Goal: Setting Limits to Stay on Track	Only have sex when you are ready. Experience life’s road trips and identify resources that support reaching your camino.
<b>Arc Two (Lessons 5 to 8): Sexual and Reproductive Health</b> Factual information about reproductive biology and how pregnancy occurs, contraception, condoms, and contraceptive decision making.	
<b>Lesson 5:</b> Teen Pregnancy and Understanding How a Pregnancy Occurs	Both partners are responsible for preventing unintended pregnancy and/or STIs. To prevent unintended pregnancy, abstain from penile-vaginal sex or use an effective method each time. To prevent sexually transmitted infections, use a condom consistently.
<b>Lesson 6:</b> Promoting Sexual Health: Contraception	Choose and always use an effective contraceptive method to help you stay on your camino.
<b>Lesson 7:</b> Promoting Sexual Health and Preventing STIs: Condoms	Safe sex means preventing unintended pregnancy and STIs.
<b>Lesson 8:</b> Promoting Sexual Health and Staying on Your Camino	Healthcare providers are a resource for choosing and using an effective contraceptive.
<b>Arc Three (Lessons 9 to 11): Communication and Healthy Relationships</b> Skills to support students to reach their goals, including use of assertive communication and understanding the concept of consent.	
<b>Lesson 9:</b> Assertive Communication: Setting and Protecting Our Personal Limits – Part 1	Communicate your limits assertively to prevent unintended pregnancy and STIs.
<b>Lesson 10:</b> Assertive Communication: Setting and Protecting Our Personal Limits – Part 2	Communicate assertively to support yourself, your relationships, and your camino.
<b>Lesson 11:</b> <i>El Camino</i> and Your Future	While there is no “key message” in this lesson, Lesson 11 summarizes and reinforces key messages from lessons 1 to 10.

## Lesson Plans

The lesson plans follow a consistent format and are divided into two main components: Facilitator's Notes and Procedures.

**Facilitator's Notes:** this section is designed to help facilitators plan and organize for the lesson prior to class. Within the Facilitator's Notes section contains the lesson number and title, lesson learning objectives and key messages, the lesson at-a-glance, and preparation for virtual adaptation. To see a summary of all materials needed for the entire program, reference

**Appendix C, List of Materials.** This is an easy-to-use reference for securing the appropriate flipcharts, facilitators resources, handouts, and other materials needed to facilitate each lesson.

**Procedures:** this section provides step-by-step instruction on how to facilitate each of the activities in the *El Camino* lessons, as well as the estimated time it will take to facilitate each activity. The Procedures section provides suggested language that the facilitator can use. Facilitators can follow this language verbatim or put it into their words as long as the essence of the instruction is not changed. Within the Procedures section contains the facilitator's notes, virtual adaptations, and slogan and closures. Note that some lessons contain a large group discussion. For those discussions, some questions are denoted with double asterisks (\*\*).

These questions should be prioritized if running short on time. Questions that are not emphasized in a discussion section can be skipped if an activity exceeds the time guidance. Additionally, in some of the lessons/activities there are optional activities available. These can be used if a format (e.g., small group vs. large group) is a more efficient and effective way to convey the information to students.

To see a breakdown of all lessons and the timing of each activity, reference **Appendix B, *El Camino* Lessons At-A-Glance.**

## Resources

At the end of each lesson, there are resources and information that can be put on a flipchart, Smartboard, or used to develop a PowerPoint presentation to share with students. The corresponding resources needed for each activity within a lesson are found listed under Lesson-at-a-Glance in the Facilitator's Notes section. For a comprehensive list of resources for facilitators to advance their knowledge of various topics, refer to **Appendix D, Additional Facilitator Resources.** This list contains credible organizations and resources covering a variety of topics, such as, Latino health, contraception, STIs, and more. For **Supplemental Resources for Working with LGBTQ+ Youth**, refer to **Appendix H.**

## Participant Materials

Each student will be given a booklet with handouts for all of the lessons. Corresponding Student Handouts for each activity are also listed under Materials in Student Workbook.

# Pedagogical

## Key Teaching Methods

In *El Camino*, a range of pedagogical methods and teaching values are employed to deliver and reinforce the core components. This includes large group discussions, role plays, games, homework assignments, and more. It is important for facilitators to recognize that most students do not have the information and knowledge they will learn in *El Camino* before starting the program. Therefore, it is necessary to provide sufficient time for participants to ask questions and to talk through what they are learning. The aim is to have a youth-led program, meaning, students are given the space and autonomy to discuss what they think, believe, and experience. This reinforces that students have a voice and have the capacity to make decisions.

## Facilitator Competencies

High performing *El Camino* facilitators should be able to demonstrate mastery of the key content and skills. Examples of key content include, but are not limited to, explaining and defining consensual sex, and explaining basic facts about contraceptive methods (including condoms), how they work, how to use them, and how they can be accessed. Key skills include facilitating role plays, managing classroom behaviors, and coordinating the logistics of implementing the program. Additionally, all facilitators need to have a professional set of values and beliefs, and a comfort level that is consistent with implementing *El Camino* effectively. Among these is believing that all teenagers have the right to medically accurate and up-to-date information about human sexuality and sexual health. Implementing schools/organizations can use the **Facilitator Competency Assessment Tool** found in **Appendix E** to find a facilitator who is the best fit to implement *El Camino*.

Whether a seasoned facilitator or someone who is new to sexuality education, it is critical that facilitators stay up to date on best practices, including, how to create an inclusive climate, how to answer difficult questions, and how to employ trauma-informed practices within the classroom. For these **General Facilitation Tips**, refer to **Appendix F**. Lastly, if completing this program virtually, reference **Appendix G** for **Virtual Facilitation Tips**.