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I actually have to talk with my teen about sex?

It's important to talk with your teen about sex because recent studies show that nearly half of high school students have had sex, 6.2 percent before age 13, and 14 percent have had four or more partners. Parents need to share their values about sex with their children, because teens will also get information from other kids and the media. Avoiding the issue does not mean your child will avoid sexual activity.

But it is such an awkward subject...

It is okay to let your child know it makes you uncomfortable to discuss sex with them. They will probably feel the same. They will respect your honesty. Admitting it is awkward may make it more comfortable for both of you.

Can I pass my values to my teen?

What you believe about sexuality is important to your teen. How do you feel about your own sexuality and your teen's sexuality? Be willing to talk with your teen about what you think is right and wrong. Be prepared for your teen to disagree with you. Listen to his or her disagreements, but state your beliefs firmly, and be honest and clear about the values you hope your teen will adopt.

Tips for talking with your teenager about sex:

- Know what you are talking about. Make sure you are dispelling the myths about sex and sexually transmitted diseases, and giving your teen the facts.
- It is okay to say you don't know right now, but be sure to find the answer and tell your teen



later. Check out the resources on the back of this publication for more information.

- Listen carefully to your teen's concerns and feelings, and respect his views. Be sure to answer the question he is asking. This will help prevent you from giving information your teen might not be ready for.
- Let your teen know love is not the same thing as sex (teenagers fall in love frequently and intensely) and that everybody is *not* "doing it."
- Emphasize that your teen has a choice about whether or not to have sex, and role-play how to say no without becoming a social outcast. There are a lot of safe, intimate things teens can do without having sex.
- Don't lecture or threaten your teen. This will discourage your teen from talking to you in the future.

You can't control your teen's sexual activities once she leaves your house. It is possible to explain your values to her in hopes of influencing her decisions.

What should I say to my teen about sex?

Deciding what to say to your teen about sex is a personal decision. Regardless of what you say, be sure the information is age appropriate. You may want to look at the resources below so you are ready to answer their questions. In general, younger teenagers (7th grade) are concerned with biology, the definition of slang terms, and intercourse. Older teens (10th grade) are more interested in learning about birth control, health risks, and communication in relationships. In general, boys are more interested in slang terms and intercourse. Girls want information on health risks and communication in relationships.

How can I prepare myself to talk with my teen about sex?

You can never be totally prepared to talk with your teen about sex. You can be prepared to tell them what you think and to answer some of their questions. Ask yourself what you would do if:

- You suspect your daughter is getting serious with her boyfriend?
- You find your son and his girlfriend home alone in his room?
- You found condoms or birth control pills in your teen's room?
- You found out your daughter was pregnant?

Where you can go for more information:

Families with Teens – University of Minnesota Extension
www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/

Children, Youth & Family Consortium – University of Minnesota
www.cyfc.umn.edu

Healthy Teen Network
www.healthyteennetwork.org

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States
www.siecus.org

STDs and HIV – Minnesota Department of Health
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/stdhivsection.html

Teen Wise Minnesota
<http://moappp.org/>

You may also want to look at:

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things: Specific questions and answers and useful things to say*. San Francisco: Wiley.

Younger, F. (1992). *Five hundred questions kids ask about sex and some of the answers*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher.

Contact your church or local health department, or speak with your physician. You can also get free information on many issues from *Planned Parenthood*.

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