

Having the BIG TALK: Parent-Child Communication About S. E. X.

Talking about sex with your pre-teen or teen is never easy. You may feel your adolescent is not mature enough, you will not have all the answers or you are giving permission for your son or daughter to have sex. Having these fears or concerns are natural; however, deciding to delay or avoid the sex talk with your adolescent may result in life-changing consequences.

WHY TALK TO YOUR ADOLESCENT ABOUT SEX?

Sexual activity begins early for many adolescents. According to 2009 data produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- 46% of high school students had sexual intercourse; 14% had 4 or more sex partners;
- 39% of currently sexually active high school students did not use a condom during last sexual intercourse;
- 21% of high school students consumed alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse; and
- Over 9 million youth ages 15 to 24 became infected with a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

WHAT ADOLESCENTS ARE SAYING?

A 2009 study on parent-child communication about sex and sexuality, revealed:ⁱⁱ

- 40% of female adolescents noted they had not had a conversation with their parents about how to refuse sex before engaging in genital touching;
- Nearly 70% of male adolescents reported they had not discussed with their parents how to use a condom or other methods of birth control; and
- 40% of adolescents had sexual intercourse before talking to their parent about safe sex, birth control or STDs.



WHAT YOU SAY MATTERS!

As a parent, you play a major role in influencing the thoughts and behaviors of your son or daughter. Contrary to popular opinion, your adolescent will look to you to learn about self-respect, healthy relationships and responsible behaviors including sex. In a recent study, parent-child communication was shown to have delayed initiation of sexual intercourse, improved contraception and condom use and decrease sexual risk behaviors.ⁱⁱⁱ

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Here are a few tips for beginning and maintaining conversations about sex with your adolescent.^{iv}

1. Schedule a regular time to talk with your adolescent.
2. Reassure your adolescent he or she can talk to you about anything.
3. Respect your adolescent's views.
4. Listen more than you talk.
5. Take advantage of teachable moments (e.g. a friend's pregnancy, a TV show, etc).
6. Ask your adolescent what he or she knows about sex and verify the facts.
7. Be open and honest with your adolescent so he or she can better understand your views about acceptable sexual behavior and your wishes for them to stay safe.
8. Teach your adolescent ways to make good decisions about sex and coach them on how to get out of risky situations.
9. Admit when you do not know the answer. Suggest the two of you find the answer together.
10. With your adolescent, identify a trusted adult he or she could talk to other than you.

REFERENCES

- i. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System – United States: 2009 (June 2009).
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- iii. Advocates for Youth. Parent-Child Communication: Promoting Sexually Healthy Youth (August 2009).
- iv. Advocatesforyouth.com. 10 Tips for Parents Talking about the Facts of Life (October 2007).



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