

Talking to Teens about Sex

Recent national statistics regarding teenage sexual health are alarming:

- 25% of female teens infected with a STD
- 31% of female teens pregnant at least once before they reach age 20
- 1/3 of 9th graders and 60% of 12th graders sexually active

How do you prevent your teen from becoming one of these statistics? In a study, “Beyond the ‘Big Talk’: The Roles of Breadth and Repetition in Parent-Adolescent Communication about Sexual Topics,” researchers found teens who talked repeatedly about sexual topics with their parents felt closer to their parents and felt their discussions about sex were more open. Experts insist that when parents openly address sexual questions in a factual, honest and non-lecturing way, teens are more likely to come to their parents with sexual concerns. In today’s hyper-sexualized culture of internet and mass media messages, parents must carefully prepare children for the media glorification of irresponsible sexuality. One way to do this is to turn encounters with the media into teachable moments. Encourage your child to discuss the messages he or she sees in ads or in movies. Focus these discussions on the concept of responsibility and safety by discussing what the consequences for sexual decisions may be. By discussing media messages together, parents can build trust with their child.

Parents often wonder at what age they should start discussing sex with their child. It is a good idea to start laying the groundwork for these discussions long before the onset of puberty. The more frequently and frankly these matters are discussed, the more likely a teen will feel comfortable to talk openly with a parent as he or she grows. As your child matures, key topics to discuss include:

- Specifics regarding the risks of pregnancy & STDs and effectiveness of birth control
- Dispelling “urban myths” your child may hear on the street
- Empower your child with tools and your support to withstand peer pressure

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