

materials for
parents



Ideas and materials to help parents talk to their kids about sex

did you know?

Teen sex is more prevalent than you think

- Approximately one out of every three ninth graders has had sexual intercourse at least once.¹
- The U.S. continues to have the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world.²
- One out of seven high school students reports having had sex with four or more partners.³

Teen sex has physical and emotional consequences

- One in four teenage girls nationwide has a sexually transmitted disease (STD).⁴
- The younger a teen starts having sex, the greater the risk of pregnancy. Almost half of all girls who have sex before age 15 will get pregnant.⁵
- Research shows that teen sex can deflate self-esteem, erode optimism, and spoil the quality of intimate relationships.⁶
- Sixty-six percent of teens who have had sex wish they had waited longer.⁷
- Teens and young adults have the highest STD infection rate in the U.S., with 50 percent of all newly diagnosed STDs.⁸

Kids want to hear from their parents

- Teens rank parents as the number one influence on their sexual decisions.⁹
- Eighty-eight percent of teens say it would be easier to avoid sexual activity if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.¹⁰
- Six out of ten teens say their parents are their role models for healthy, responsible relationships.¹¹

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2005: Surveillance Summaries," MMWR 2006;55 (No. SS-5).

2 The Guttmacher Institute. *U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, National and State Trends and Trends by Race and Ethnicity*. New York: The Guttmacher Institute, 2006.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance- United States, 2005: Surveillance Summaries," MMWR 2006;55 (No. SS-5).

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance, 2006*. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007.

5 Suellentrop, Katherine and Christine Flanigan. *Pregnancy Among Sexually Experienced Teens*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2002.

6 Hallfors, Denise D., et al. "Which Comes First in Adolescents — Sex and Drugs or Depression?" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 29, 3 (2005): 163–170.

7 Albert, Bill. *America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy: An Annual Survey*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2007.

8 Weinstock, Hillard, Stuart Berman, and Willard Cates, Jr. "Sexually Transmitted Diseases Among American Youth: Incidence and Prevalence Estimates, 2000." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 36.1 (2004): 6-10.

9 Albert, Bill. *With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy: An Annual Survey*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2004.

10 Albert, Bill. *America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy: An Annual Survey*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2004.

11 Albert, Bill. *America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy: An Annual Survey*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2003.

common barriers to talking

“But they’re just children!”

For many parents, seeing their son or daughter transition into the teen years is like losing their “baby.” Parents sometimes feel that talking about sex will make their child grow up too fast and lead to losing their special parent-child bond. The truth is, talking can actually bring parents closer to their child by keeping the lines of communication open and ensuring that they continue to play an important role in their child’s life as he or she gets older.

“Not my kids. I know what they’re thinking”

Many parents struggle with the balance between holding on and letting go of their child as they enter the teen years. Some parents feel that their child isn’t ready to talk about sex; they believe they know what they’re thinking and how they’re spending their time. But it’s not always possible to maintain control in today’s world, especially with all the sex that is shown in the media and on the Internet. The best way to influence a child’s sexual attitudes and behavior is to talk to them about waiting to have sex.

“Do I have to talk with them about THAT?”

The mere idea of talking about sex with their children makes many parents uncomfortable. That’s why it’s important to remember that parents can influence their children to wait to have sex without using explicit language. Parents can simply share their values about what they believe and want for their child. For many parents, this means encouraging children to wait to have sex until marriage. What is important is that the research shows the longer teens wait to have sex, the more likely they are to be happy and successful.

“I’m concerned how my child will view me.”

Parents understandably want to feel empowered and have their children look up to them. Some fear that talking about sex will make them look foolish in front of their children, and they may avoid having the conversation as a result. Other parents believe their children have picked up on parental cues and already know how they think and feel about the subject. However, that’s not really true. Parents have important knowledge that they need to share with their children by talking. Even if the words don’t come out perfectly, parents can make a difference in their child’s life and their child will respect them for tackling the subject.

“What if I can’t answer their questions?”

All parents sometimes feel overwhelmed by parenting, especially when it comes to a difficult subject like sex. Many fear that they don’t know enough. If their child is still in the “sex is yucky” stage, parents might think it’s fine to wait; they can have the conversation later. But parents need to remember that only they can fill that role of parent. Parents don’t need to be experts on everything; they just need to get the conversation started, and they can make the conversation easier by giving small pieces of information over time.

10 tips for talking

1. Start early at age 10 or 11, before your child begins puberty.
2. Use bite-sized pieces of information — build up information over time.
3. Use movies, TV or everyday occurrences as “ways into” the conversation.
4. Use child/parent activities as forums for brief conversations.
5. Share your values and expectations; you don’t have to use explicit language.
6. Avoid confrontation — there’s no need to have “the big talk” all at once.
7. Ask questions.
8. Don’t judge or criticize.
9. Invite ongoing dialogue
10. Keep it casual and light.

good answers for tough questions

They Might Say	Suggested Answer
"Everyone else is doing it."	"It might seem that way, but that's not true. Most teenagers have not had sex. That's right, a majority of high school students in America are not doing it. I'm sure there are plenty of kids at your school that aren't doing it either."
"Pregnancy or STDs won't happen to me."	<p>"Honey, I wish that were true. Any time that a boy and a girl have sex, there is a chance of a pregnancy. I'll bet those girls, and the boys who slept with them, thought that it wouldn't happen to them."</p> <p>"It is the same story with STDs. Teenagers and young adults get half of the newly diagnosed STDs. I love you too much to have you be a statistic."</p> <p>"Pregnancy and STDs can happen to you. You don't know how many kids at your school have STDs, since you can't tell by looking at someone whether they have an STD or not. And you do know kids at your school who got pregnant. If it can happen to them, it can happen to you."</p>
"But we are in love."	"Just because you feel you are in love doesn't mean you should have sex. There are many ways to show love without sex. And if he/she really loves you, then he/she should respect your choice to wait. Remember everything we've talked about; it's healthy to wait."
"There are girls in my high school who are pregnant."	<p>"That is a big responsibility. I hope they finish school, have help, and are able to continue working toward their career and other life goals."</p> <p>"Did you know that a baby born to an unmarried teen mother who didn't finish high school is nine times more likely to grow up in poverty than a child born to a married adult woman who did finish high school?"</p>

good answers for tough questions

They Might Say	Suggested Answer
<p>"I feel pressure. Everyone is doing it. I'm not sure I know how to say no."</p>	<p>"First of all, let's talk about the situations where you feel pressured to have sex."</p> <p>"Let's practice how you are going to say no."</p> <p>"Remember, call me anytime you are in an uncomfortable situation, and I'll come get you right away. We can even have a code word that means, 'Come get me right away.'"</p>
<p>"You know I'm not a virgin anymore, so stop bothering me."</p>	<p>"I want to talk about this because I love and care about you. Just because you've had sex doesn't mean you have to continue. There are so many health and emotional risks."</p> <p>"The healthiest choice is for you to wait. You need to think about what will make you happy and healthy from now on. You can still say no now even if you've said yes before."</p> <p>"Okay, let's talk about STDs and pregnancy so we can be sure you are making healthy choices."</p>
<p>"All you tell me is, 'Don't do this, don't do that!' So what am I supposed to do?!?!"</p>	<p>"That's fair. There are some things I don't think you should be doing. But I'm actually saying that you should do something better than have sex. I'm saying there are more important things out there to do right now. Like pursuing your goals and dreams. Learning how to be in an emotionally mature relationship. Staying focused on your friends."</p>

hey,
I did it!

I, _____, participated in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Parents Speak Up National Campaign "Ready to Talk" workshop to learn about talking with my child about waiting to have sex.

As a parent, I have the greatest influence over my child's decision regarding sexual activity, and by talking to my child about waiting, I can make a difference in my child's life.

As a result of today's workshop, my goal regarding talking to my child about waiting to have sex is:

we'd like your
feedback

Thank you for your participation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Parents Speak Up National Campaign "Ready to Talk" workshop.

We invite you to share any feedback regarding your experience today so that we can continue to provide parents with the most helpful information and tools to talk with their children about waiting to have sex.

If you would like to receive future campaign materials, including helpful tips for talking to your child, please complete the information below:

Name: _____ Address: _____
Email: _____ City/State/Zip: _____
Phone: _____

thank you



Parents Speak Up
NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

www.4parents.gov