

Guide for Parents:



Teens & Sexuality:
Tips and Resources for
"The Conversation"



www.EyesOpenIowa.org

Let's talk about...what? S-e-x? While it may be uncomfortable, especially at first, research continues to show that children and teens want to receive their information about sexual health from their parents and caregivers. And the simple fact is that parents have an enormous influence on their children's decisions about sex and other risk-taking behaviors—more than friends, the media or teachers. This tool-kit aims to help you have continued and open conversations with your teen about sexuality and their sexual health.

Where and When to Begin?

Conversations around sexuality should start when a child is young and continue throughout the lifespan. Haven't started yet? No worries! It's never too late to start talking with your child about sexual health and sexuality. Sexuality is a broad term that refers to far more than sexual behaviors and body parts.¹ It also encompasses how people feel about themselves and being with others, how they see their gender and sexual identities, and how they interact with other people.¹

Using teachable moments is often a great way to begin the conversation. For example, if you're watching a movie and the characters are in a romantic relationship ask your child how they feel about it. Or if you're in the car driving and a song comes on that portrays a negative relationship ask your child what they think a healthy relationship looks like. You can also use news stories or articles to bring up the topic. Use dinner time (or breakfast) as family time free of technology or media. Having open conversations around all topics will help your child feel more comfortable coming to you with questions. But remember, just because your child isn't asking questions, doesn't mean they aren't wondering.

Tips for Talking With Your Teen⁴

- Teens need accurate information and decision-making skills to help protect them from: the pressure to have sex, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.
- If talking with your teen about sex is difficult for you, admit it.
- Don't make the conversation tense; keep your sense of humor.
- Use the media (example: TV, movies, magazines, and articles) as well as real-life situations (example: a friend's pregnancy) to begin talking about sex.
- Share your values regarding sex, but accept that your teen may make choices that do not reflect these values.
- Asking questions about sex does not automatically mean that your teen is thinking about having sex. Don't make assumptions.
- Ask your teen what they want to know about sex. If you don't know the answer, admit it. Find the answers together.
- Talk with your teen about reasons to wait to have sex. Remind your teen that they can choose to wait (abstain) even if they have had sex before.
- Reassure your teen that not everyone is having sex, and that it is okay to be a virgin. The decision to become sexually active is too important to be based on what other people think or do.
- Talk with your teen about ways to handle pressure from others to have sex.
- Reassure your teen that you will not punish him or her for being honest. This will make them feel comfortable talking openly with you.

- Leave age-appropriate articles or books about teenage sexuality around your home. Teens will pick them up on their own to read them (See the Additional Resources Section).
- Your first talk with your teen regarding sex should not be your last! Talk with your teen about sex on an ongoing basis. Let your teen know that you are always open and willing to talk about any questions or concerns they may have about sex or sexuality.

Values/Beliefs

Talking early and often with your child allows you to share your family values and beliefs and hear their perspective. Young people will get a lot of different messages from their peers and the media; however, they continue to report that their parents are caregivers have a big influence on their decisions. Take the time to ask your child how they feel about various topics and share your feelings and perspective. Don't lecture or condemn, but allow for open conversations.

STDs

STDs are sexually transmitted diseases. The only 100% effective way to prevent the transmission of an STD is through abstinence from vaginal, oral or anal intercourse. Condoms can be used as a safer choice and act as a barrier method to prevent the spread of STDs. It should be noted that some STDs can be spread through skin-to-skin contact, like herpes and genital warts. Some STDs are curable and some STDs are only treatable, meaning the person will have it for life. The CDC estimates that young people ages 15-24 make up just over one quarter of the sexually active population, but account for half of the 20 million new sexually transmitted infections that occur in the United States each year.² Young people who are sexually active should talk with their medical provider and get tested regularly for STDs.

Birth Control & Condoms

Parents and caregivers often wonder if talking about abstinence and contraceptives (birth control & condoms) sends mixed messages to their children. However, young people need and deserve comprehensive information, including information about birth control and condoms. There are a variety of different contraceptive options. Some hormonal birth control methods include; the pill, patch, ring, shot, implant and certain IUDs. Some young women may choose to use hormonal birth control to help with issues related to their menstrual cycle or for menstrual suppression. An example of a barrier method would be condoms. Condoms are the only method that help prevent both pregnancy and STDs. If someone is using a hormonal method of birth control they should also use a condom, as hormonal methods only prevent against pregnancy. A new condom should be used correctly and consistently at each sexual intercourse.

Healthy Relationships

When talking about sexuality the topic of healthy relationships is often forgotten. However, among Iowa teens in 9th through 12th grades, 8% have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by their boyfriend or girlfriend during the past 12 months. Discuss values around dating and relationships, including components that contribute to a healthy relationship (i.e. - trust, open communication, respect, compromise, etc.). Also offer support if your child is in an unhealthy relationship and let them know you'll be there for them.

Sexting

Sexting is the act of sending sexually explicit messages or nude photos, typically between mobile devices. There are no laws in Iowa specifically regarding sexting; however, sexting falls under state and federal child pornography regulations, which state that the “visual depiction of a person under the age of 18 engaged in sexually explicit conduct” is a crime.¹ Sexting is a very serious and dangerous act, so having open and honest conversations about the consequences of sexting is important. Remind your child that once a message or picture is sent they no longer have control over it, and it could resurface years later.

LGBT

LGBT stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. Many people ask how sexual orientation or gender identity is determined. According to PFLAG; no one knows exactly how sexual orientation and gender identity are determined. However, experts agree that it is a complicated matter of genetics, biology, psychological and social factors. For most people, sexual orientation and gender identity are shaped at any early age. While research has not determined a cause, homosexuality and gender variance are not the result of any one factor, such as parenting or past experiences.³ Coming out to family members and friends can often be a fearful or nervous time for young people. Providing love, support and a listening ear is important. To learn more about LGBT issues and support please visit: www.pflag.org

Resources

Books for Parents/Caregivers:

What Every 21st Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today's Challenges with Wisdom and Heart, Dr. Debra Haffner

Beyond the Big Talk, Dr. Debra Haffner

From Diapers to Dating: A Parents' Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children, Dr. Debra Haffner

Websites for Parents:

EyesOpenIowa- www.EyesOpenIowa.org

Parent Sex Ed Center- <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home>

Tips & Advice for Talking to Teens About Sex- <http://www.pamf.org/parenting-teens/sexuality/talking-about-sex/sex-talk.html>

Information for Parents from KidsHealth.org- <http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/>

CDC's Parent's Portal- <http://www.cdc.gov/parents/index.html>

PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)- www.pflag.org

American Sexual Health Association- <http://www.ashsexualhealth.org/parents/>

Mayo Clinic- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/sexual-health/in-depth/teens-and-sex/art-20045927>

Websites for Teens:

AskTxTina- Iowa Teens (13-19) can text Tina, a trained health educator, with questions regarding healthy relationships and sexual health on the first and third Friday of the month. Text 'TxT' to 877-877 to enroll- www.AskTxT.com

Sex, Etc.- www.sexetc.org

Stay Teen- www.StayTeen.org

Teen Health Information- www.kidshealth.org

Information on Cyberbullying- www.ThatsNotCool.com

Glossary of Terms

A glossary of terms from the American Sexual Health Association can be located at http://www.iwannaknow.org/teens/glossary_a_d.html

A glossary of terms from SexEtc with Rutgers University can be located at <http://sexetc.org/sex-ed/sex-terms/?pageNum=1&alphabet=%23>

Breast- A set of glands on the chest that produce milk. Males may develop breast, however they don't produce milk. Breast development is an early sign of puberty.

LGBTQ- The acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning).

Penis- The external male sex organ.

Puberty- A time of great physical and emotional change when a child's body matures into an adults.

Pubic Area- Area between the legs of a boy (male) or girl (female) where their genitals are located.

Ovaries- Part of the female reproductive system, stores ovum (eggs).

Scrotum- The loose bag of skin beneath the penis that holds the testes and regulates their temperature.

Sex- Refers to either a person's physical sex (male or female), or the act of sex (anal, vaginal, oral sex).

Sexuality- A broad-based term referring to more than biological sex or the act of having sex.

Sperm- Male sex cells.

Vagina- The internal female sex organ.

Vulva- The external female sex organ. Includes the outer lips and inner lips (what can be seen).

References:

1. Sex Terms. (2015). www.Sexetc.org
2. Sexually Transmitted Diseases. (2015). <http://www.cdc.gov/std/life-stages-populations/adolescents-youngadults.htm>
3. PFLAG. (2015). <http://community.pflag.org/page.aspx?pid=290>
4. Palo Alto Medical Center. (2015). <http://www.pamf.org/parenting-teens/sexuality/talking-about-sex/sex-talk.html>

The mission of EyesOpenIowa is to lead Iowa communities in advocacy, education and collaboration to ensure adolescent sexual health. To learn more and for additional resources please visit www.EyesOpenIowa.org.