The Basics
What Parents Need to Know
WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PARENTS IS HELPING THEIR TEENS STAY HEALTHY.

Parents Can Make a Difference

Parents play a very important role in helping teens stay healthy. Having sex too early can lead to negative health outcomes for your teen. Here are some facts to help think about your teen and sex.

TEENS ARE SEXUALLY ACTIVE
• Most parents are not aware that their teens are sexually active.
• Many teens start having sex between the ages of 11 and 14.
• The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that 46 percent of teens in high school have had sex.

HEALTH RISKS FROM HAVING SEX TOO EARLY
Unintended pregnancy
• About 50 percent of minority youth report getting pregnant before the age of 20—twice the national average.
• Many teen pregnancies result in birth which creates financial and social hardships on families.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS
• Almost half of all STI infections are among youth ages 15 to 24.
• African Americans and Latinos bear the largest health burden of HIV/AIDS.

School Dropout
• Teen parenthood is the leading cause of school dropout among adolescent girls.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!
• Studies show that parents who talk with their kids about not having sex lessen the chances of these negative things happening.
Your Teen’s World: How Teens Make Decisions About Sex

Although some teens are concerned with health consequences from having sex, most teens make decisions about sex based on social reasons. Too often parents don’t discuss the social reasons.

WHY DO TEENS CHOOSE TO HAVE SEX?

• “If I had sex, I would feel more grown up.”
• “I think I would enjoy the way it feels.”
• “Having sex would make me happy.”
• “I think having sex would make me more popular at school.”
• “More girls/boys would like me if I had sex.”
• “I believe in having sex if I truly love the other person.”
• “It’s okay if I have sex because a lot of kids at my school are doing it.”
• “Sex will make me feel closer to my boyfriend/girlfriend.”

WHY DO TEENS CHOOSE NOT TO HAVE SEX?

• “I’m not having sex because my parents would be upset.”
• “Having sex would interfere with school and the future.”
• “I don’t want to have sex because I think it will give me a bad reputation.”
• “I’m not going to have sex because I want to wait until I’m married.”
• “I think that having sex right now would be morally wrong.”
• “I won’t have sex because I think that my boyfriend/girlfriend would lose respect for me.”

Parents should be sure to talk about these issues!
Addressing Your Concerns: Overcoming Barriers of Talking About Sex

*Teens overwhelmingly state that they care about their parents' approval when making big decisions like whether or not to have sex.*

*Parents have expressed the following concerns about talking to their teens about sex.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I say won't make a difference.</td>
<td><strong>What you say really can make a difference.</strong> Parents can have a major impact on their teen’s behavior and the decisions their teen makes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talking to my teen will lead to them having sex.</td>
<td><strong>Talk to your teen about sex.</strong> Studies show that talking to your teen about not having sex decreases the chances of your teen having sex and increases healthy choices.</td>
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<td>I’m too embarrassed to talk about it and I don’t know what to say.</td>
<td><strong>Practice talking.</strong> Many parents feel embarrassed or nervous talking about sex. This is normal. Try practicing on your own or with a friend first to get more comfortable. Review the pointers in <em>Families Talking Together.</em></td>
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<td>I had sex as a teen and I don’t know how to address that with my teen.</td>
<td><strong>Be Truthful.</strong> If you had sex as a teen don’t be afraid to admit it but be sure to tell your teen why it was a mistake.</td>
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<td>My teen gets enough information from friends at school, they don’t need to hear it from me. My teen says he/she knows it all.</td>
<td><strong>Parents need to talk.</strong> Studies show that kids don’t get enough information at school about not having sex. Many of your teen’s friends probably have incorrect information about sex, and the teens who say they know it all actually do not. Do not let this stop you from talking!</td>
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A Real Life Story: Victor & Maria

Maria is a 14-year-old girl and is regularly dating Victor, 17 years old. Victor and Maria care about each other very much and call their relationship serious. Maria’s mother doesn’t approve of their relationship, but does not enforce any rules to prevent them from spending time together. Maria’s mother does not keep track of who her daughter invites over or her afterschool activities because she believes that Maria is old enough to take care of herself. Victor’s parents rely on him to take care of his younger siblings, but have not set clear rules when he is out of the house.

Maria really cares for Victor and feels that having sex will show him how much she loves him. Victor is getting tired of feeling like he is missing out by not having sex. Maria feels very close to Victor and trusts that he would never let anything bad happen to her. Maria and Victor both feel that if they have sex they will be more grown-up and closer to each other. One night when Victor’s parents aren’t home, Maria and Victor decide to have sex. A month later, Maria discovers she is pregnant. Maria decides to keep the baby.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
- Parents did not set clear expectations about sexual activity.
- Lack of monitoring and supervision.
- Age difference between Maria and Victor is more than two years.
- Too serious of a relationship.
- Teen Belief: “I’m mature enough for a sexual relationship.”
- Teen Belief: “I believe in having sex if I truly love the other person.”
- Teen Belief: “I will feel closer to my boyfriend/girlfriend if we have sex.”

HOW COULD PARENTS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
- Setting clear rules and expectations about not engaging in sexual activity.
- Keeping track of where your teen is, who he/she is with and what he/she is doing.
- Discouraging dating older teens.
- Encouraging friendships rather than serious dating relationships.
- Parent Approach: “If you are mature enough to have sex, are you also mature enough to be a parent? There is no way to be completely certain that a pregnancy will not happen should you decide to have sex.”
- Parent Approach: “Sex can be a special way of sharing love with someone. But you should be liked whether or not you have sex. Let’s think of other ways of sharing love without having sex.”
COMMUNICATION: “TALKING THE TALK”
- **Choose a time** when there is no upcoming activity and you and your teen aren’t thinking about doing something else.
- **Choose a place** to talk that is free of distractions and interruptions.
- **Convey trust.** Let your teen know that you always have their best interest at heart.

**Tips for Talking**
- **Use a direct approach.** “Miguel, there is something I want to talk about with you that has been on my mind a lot lately. Is this a good time to talk?”
- **Remind your teen of an event.** “Sara, remember that show we saw on TV where that girl decided to have sex with her boyfriend? I’ve been thinking about that and I’d like to talk with you about it.”
- **Ask your teen for advice.** “Juan, I have a friend who’s upset because she found out her daughter is having sex. She asked me for advice and I wanted to find out what you think I should tell her.”

MONITORING & SUPERVISION: “HELPING YOUR TEEN GROW UP”
- **Set clear expectations.** Make sure your teen knows the rules and what is expected of them. Studies show that most teens are not clear about what their parents want.
- **Follow Through.** If your teen breaks rules or agreements, talk about it. You don’t want it to happen again.
- **Be Accessible and Consistent.** Let your teen know that his or her life is your #1 priority. Check in regularly, appeal to common goals, and be consistent.

**Tips for Discipline**
- **Cool off first.** Don’t discipline when you’re angry.
- **Punish in private.** It is humiliating for teens to be punished in front of others. When it happens they really resent it—and you.
- **State your reasons.** Make sure your teen understands why he or she is being punished.
- **Make sure the punishment fits the “crime.”**
- **Follow through.** Don’t make threats that you won’t carry out. Follow through but be flexible and fair.
QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP: “CAN WE GET ALONG?”

Quality relationships require:
• **Respect** between two people.
• **Consideration** for the other person’s feelings.
• **Trust** between two people.
• **Concern** for the other person’s feelings.
• **Understanding** what the other person is like, what they want, and their likes and dislikes.

**Tips for good relationships**
• **Keep in touch.** Touch base with your teen regularly, even when things are going smoothly.
• **Spend time together.** Even if it’s just a walk together, your teen will notice that you’re making the time.
• **Be thoughtful.** Remember special days. It doesn’t have to be with a gift—just let them know you remembered.
• **Recognize special efforts.** Praise your teen!
• **Say you care.** Make it a habit.
• **Be supportive.** When your teen has a bad day, offer a shoulder to lean on.

Ways Your Teen Can Say “No” To Having Sex Too Early

• “It’s just not for me.”
• “We are too young for that responsibility.”
• “I have future goals that are more important than having sex right now.”
• “I don’t feel like it.”
• “Why are you trying so hard when I have told you no?”
• “My mom would be really upset.”
• “I might get sick or pregnant.”
• “It’s against my religion.”
• “NO.”