



# The Media Project

A Program of Advocates for Youth

## Parent-Child Communication: Helping Teens Make Healthy Decisions about Sex

### DEVELOPMENT

A majority of parents want their children to know about sex, birth control, and preventing STDs, especially HIV. And a majority of children want to learn about these same topics from their parents. So what's the problem? Embarrassment and fear on both sides are keeping these two important groups from talking to each other even though they desperately need and want to!

### PRE-PRODUCTION: WHEN PARENTS SAY "HELP!" RESPOND WITH STORIES ABOUT ...

- Sex and reproduction
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS
- Contraception
- Sexual identity
- Healthy relationships
- Positive body image
- Peer pressure.

### WRITING THE WRONGS

- Half of all mothers of sexually active teenagers mistakenly believe that their children are still virgins.
- More teens say they would prefer to get information about birth control from their parents than those who say they would prefer to get information from health centers, classes, hospitals, private doctors, television, or friends. But, about half have *never* talked with a parent about condoms or other birth control methods.
- 3 out of 5 teens say that "the average teen" does *not* have enough information about how to use birth control and almost half say teens don't know enough about where to get birth control.
- Only 54% of students reported discussing HIV with their parents.
- 83% of teens don't talk to their parents about sex because they're "worried about their parent's reaction."
- Many parents say they look to television to show them how to talk to their kids about sex.

### WRITING THE RIGHTS

- Adolescents who reported feeling connected to parents and family are more likely than other teens to delay initiating sexual intercourse.
- Teens whose parents are warm and firm achieve more in school and report less depression and anxiety.
- When mothers discussed condom use before teens initiated sexual intercourse, youth were three times more likely to use condoms after becoming sexually active.
- Teens who reported previous discussions of sexuality with parents were seven times more likely to feel able to communicate with a partner about HIV/AIDS.
- When parents make consistent efforts to know their teen's friends and whereabouts, young people report fewer sexual partners, less sex and more use of birth control.

- Researchers have not found that sex education increases the risk of early sexual activity.
- Discussing HIV with parents decreases the likelihood that teens will engage in unprotected sexual intercourse.

## WHAT'S THE BIG PRODUCTION? SCRIPTING "THE TALK" WITH SEXUALLY ACTIVE TEENS

*"I can't tell my mom I'm having sex ... she'll freak."*

**Educate yourself about the specifics of contraception and STDs, including condoms and emergency contraception. Give teens permission to confide in other adults if they're too uncomfortable to talk to you.**

83% of teens don't talk to their parents about sex because they're "worried about their parent's reaction."

*"I know my kid and s/he isn't having sex."*

**Explain your own feelings and values, then LISTEN.**

Most parents talk to their teens about sexuality in a way that denies teens the opportunity to discuss their own thoughts and feelings.

*"I heard if a girl's on the pill you can't get HIV."*

**Avoid the assumption that teens know everything ... then arm them with information and discuss why it is better to plan than to be "swept away."**

67% of teens get their information from peers ... and it's often not very accurate.

*"If I have a condom, s/he'll think I'm a skank!"*

**Encourage teens to take equal responsibility with a partner for using condoms and birth control.**

Teens that have frequent conversations with their parents are more consistent users of contraception when they become sexually active.

*"If I don't do it, s/he'll dump me."*

**Discuss sexual coercion and dating violence. Help teens avoid or get away from uncomfortable sexual situations.**

24% of teen girls describe their first time as "voluntary but unwanted." They weren't raped, but did feel pressured to have sex.

## THE WRAP

- Parents talking to their children is our best defense against unwanted teenage pregnancies, STDs, and HIV/AIDS.
- When parents make consistent efforts to know their teen's friends and whereabouts, young people report fewer sexual partners, less sex, and more consistent use of birth control.
- Positive communication between parents and children helps young people make healthy decisions about sex.
- Teens whose parents are warm and firm achieve more in school.
- **It takes a village, plus the village's TV shows, to raise a child.**

## REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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