

## **Sex Talk Tips for Parents with Teens**

You want to be wise and prepared when you talk to your teen. Here are 4 tips that can help. They are easy to remember because they spell "WISE."

**"W" is for Welcome.** Your teen needs to know that you care and look forward to talking to them. He or she needs to feel secure talking to you. No one enjoys dinner, activities, or conversations that are tense. Your teen is more likely to talk and listen if neither of you is angry or upset. If your teen feels calm and supported, it is a lot easier for both of you to talk about things like sex, peer pressure, setting goals, building relationships, preparing for marriage, and being a parent.

So how do you create a supportive, safe environment so you can talk? First, you must show respect for each other. Second, your teen needs to be able to trust you. If you want your teen to make good choices, you have to be honest and reliable and expect the same from your teen. Third, you have to be available. You have to be there when your teen wants to talk - in the morning, after school and at dinnertime. Studies show that teens who eat 5 or more meals together with their parents during the week make healthier choices. (9) Take time to discuss news and television shows with sexual themes. Take opportunities to discuss peer pressure, teen pregnancy and STDs and what's happening in your community.

**"I" is for Interest.** Show your interest by asking questions in a comfortable order and style. If you ask your teen, "Do you think there is a lot of pressure to have sex at your school?" they are more likely to open up and talk to you than if you warn, "You'd better not be having sex!"

Adults generally introduce topics gently when they are talking to other adults. But sometimes they are not as gentle with their own children. Here are a few important guidelines to help you talk with your teen:

- Start with a general question or observation.
- Let your teen be the expert on his or her world.
- Ask about peer pressure.
- Ask how you can help

For example, ask your teen:

1. "Is there someone you really like?"
2. "What kinds of things do you do together?"
3. "Are you ever alone together?"
4. "Have you ever felt pressured or wanted to have sex?"
5. "If you've felt pressured or wanted to have sex, how did you handle that?"

**"S" is for Support Good Goals.** If your teen son or daughter has hope for the future they are more likely to make better choices. Do you know if your teen has goals? Do you know what they are? Ask them about their goals for marriage, family and a career. Ask them about their goals for jobs now and in the future and what their plans are to prepare for them. Then listen.

Share your hopes and values. Goals, values and beliefs are important to teens. They are some of the most powerful reasons for the sexual choices they make. You should direct and guide your teen to develop the values of honesty, responsibility and caring. Remember, values about education, marriage and trust are more easily "caught" than "taught." You and your behavior are the most valuable "values" educator!

Another part of goals and values for many families is their religious or spiritual base. If your family is involved with a church, mosque, synagogue or other faith organization, encourage your teen to participate. Teens who are actively involved in a religious organization, who study their faith and pray or worship are less likely to use drugs or begin early sexual activity. ([10](#),[11](#)) Share your family's values with your teen and encourage service to others and the community.

**"E" is for Encourage, Educate and Empower.** Educate and encourage your teen to make healthy decisions. When topics come up about sex, don't think that you need to know all the answers. Be honest when you don't and offer to help find the facts.

If you made poor sexual decisions when you were young, that shouldn't keep you from guiding your teen to healthier decisions. Many of today's parents were teens when they began having sex. Now we know more about STDs, the limits of condom protection and the consequences of sex at an early age. Parents who want better choices for their child must model good choices in their own lives.

Effective parents not only teach and encourage their teens, but they also set high expectations for them. And they clearly communicate those expectations. If you let your teen know that you believe in their ability to make healthy choices like waiting to have sex, they are more likely to.

House rules are a good way to let your teen know what you expect. They should be clear, fair and consistently followed. Your teen may complain about the rules, but don't give in. House rules protect and encourage. And even though most teens won't admit it, they like to have rules that are enforced. Rules give structure to their lives and help them feel cared for and secure.

- Encourage supervised group activities. Know and support the groups that your teen participates in.
- Set an age for dating. Be clear that there will be no dating in the early teens.
- Make it clear that your teen will not date anyone more than two years older or younger than they are.
- Make sure that your teen is not spending a lot of time in unsupervised situations. After-school jobs, sports, and tutoring are positive ways to ensure that your teen is safe and productive during the after-school hours.
- Tell your teen they can't entertain a boyfriend or girlfriend in personal space or their bedroom. "First sex" often happens at home in an unsupervised area of the house.
- Set clear guidelines for your teen's outings: Where will you be? What will you be doing? Who will you be with? When will you be home? How can I reach you?
- Be available to pick up your teen if they call when they are in an uncomfortable or threatening environment or situation.

- Set rules for what your teen son or daughter can listen to, read and watch. Consider keeping the TV and computer in a public area of the home so you'll know what your teen is watching.
- Be available to talk with your teen daily. Good communication supports good decisions.

<http://www.4parents.gov/talktips/>