



Talking About Sex with Teens



Feeling a little tongue-tied broaching the subject of sex with your teen? Learn how to get your conversation off the ground.

Let's Talk About Sex

Do We Have to Talk?

Even though studies show that 80 percent of parents feel responsible for their kids' sexual education, few actually sit down and talk about it. One study reveals that 19 percent of kids get information about sex from their parents, while 81 percent are educated by their friends! With stats like these, it's no wonder that teens suffer from so many misconceptions about sex.

Why do we parents fail to talk about the birds and the bees? Let's face it -- the subject makes us feel awkward and anxious. It also forces us to face the fact that our teens have become active sexual beings.

To make matters worse, most of us grew up with parents who wouldn't or couldn't talk to us about sex. We haven't had parenting models for discussing this sensitive issue with our kids. Well, it's time to break the cycle. In order for your kids to make responsible, safe decisions about sex, they're going to need vital information from you. We can help you tackle this tricky topic.

Finding the Words

Does the thought of talking about sex with your teen give you the jitters? Take heart. It's okay to confess this to your child. Most kids are just as uncomfortable as we are. If the idea of one, "big talk" makes you more nervous, consider having several continuing discussions. Do your best to start talking before your adolescent's hormones start to rage.

Since teens are bombarded with and influenced by the consensual, rarely-protected sex occurring on TV ("Party of Five" or "Dawson's Creek"), in the movies ("Titanic"), and in the lyrics of popular music, try using the media to launch your talk. It's a far more effective approach.

For example, ask your teen if she thought that Julia and Ned from "Party of Five" should have had sex. Once you open up lines of communication, you can bring up unsafe and unwise sex, abstinence, and the consequences of sex with a mere acquaintance.

When the Pressure Is On

Today's teens become sexually active considerably earlier than teens from past generations. The everpresent media portrayals of sex between teens are shown as risk-free, normal, and a way to gain popularity: "Hey, if everybody's having sex, why not me?"

Ask your kids if many kids their age feel pressured to have sex. Who do they think applies the most pressure? Is it TV? Peers? Boyfriends or girlfriends?



Teens also pressure each other to have sex: "If you really loved me you'd have sex with me. Do you want to be the only virgin in high school?" Acquaintance (date) rape is a growing problem among teenagers. Your teen needs to know that "NO always means NO" and that nobody has the right to pressure him or her in any way to have sex. You might also mention that teens are more apt to have sex when they are drinking or using drugs.

To broach the subject of homosexuality and bisexuality, ask your teen how he thinks his peers feel about different sexual preferences. As a parent, you should know that many teens become confused about their own preferences as they search for their sexual identity. Teenagers who become troubled about their confusion or gender preferences are at an increased risk for committing suicide. Almost one-third of all suicides are committed by gay kids.

By the same token, your teen needs to know that it's normal to experience an attraction to someone of the same sex or both sexes. Sexual attraction and confusion about sexual identity doesn't automatically mean that a person is gay or bisexual. If your teen is gay or bisexual, they must know that these sexual preferences will never cause you to love him or her less.

Wrapping Up

Remember that informal sex talks with your teen shouldn't center on "sexual plumbing" facts and scare tactics. Your talks should focus more on the emotional and social factors of teenage sex and sexuality, as well as your own values regarding sex within a committed, caring, and mature relationship.

Don't be put off by your teen's attempts to shut down your overtures. Many adolescents have told me that even though they acted embarrassed and uninterested in their parents' efforts to engage them in sexual discussions, they appreciated their parents' concerns and efforts to guide them in this confusing area. Several teens acknowledged that their parents' advice saved them from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unwanted pregnancies.

Talking to Our Sons about Sex and Limits

It's difficult enough to talk about sex with our kids, so it may add to your discomfort when I say that you need to talk to them about date rape too. Boys need to know when sex is consensual and when it's not. Because when it's not and sex happens, it's rape.

Adolescents are going to experiment with their sexuality. And although their urges are normal and natural, we must teach our boys to be responsible about their urges.

Be Clear About Date Rape

Be straight with your boys about sex. They can take it. Kids constantly receive powerful, confusing messages about sex on TV, in ads, music, and videos. Next time you're watching TV with your son and there's a casual sex scenario, (which should afford you plenty of opportunities!) dads can use the media to remind their sons that "getting some" doesn't make a boy a man.

I have counseled many boys who initiated sexual advances not because they wanted to, but because their girlfriends or dates wanted them to. Sometimes, boys think that they'd be considered "queer" or "unmanly" if they didn't "get some." And many girls think they're losers if boys don't want to have sex with them!

Boys may make the mistake of assuming that girls are under some kind of obligation to say no at least once or twice before they "give in"--it's part of the game. Boys have also told me many times that their dates have said "No!" although their bodies were saying a very loud "Yes!"

Using Codes

Suggest to your sons that they establish "sex codes" or "stop sex codes" with their girlfriends and dates. Codes will help them stop sex from going too far when they aren't exactly thinking rationally. You can sell the idea to your son by telling him he can still be romantic when he introduces the idea to the girl. As long as he's not being presumptuous about what she'll do with him physically, she will be impressed that he respects her enough to introduce the code.

Tell your boys they can say: "Okay, Brenda, if we're messing around and you feel you want to stop, pinch my neck real hard. Or say, 'Bob--enough' or 'you're hurting me.' And Brenda, if I feel like we're going too far, I will take both of your hands in mine and squeeze them and pull myself away from you. Those will be our signals that mean we have to stop."

Trusting kids to work out these signals when they're in the heat of passion and high on alcohol or drugs is expecting the impossible. Advise your sons to avoid sexual activity when there's mind and body-altering substances around.

It's our responsibility as parents to help our sons understand the seriousness of date rape. Having this kind of conversation is the best way to start.

How to Deal with your Daughter's Sexuality

We all have a very difficult time thinking of our teenagers as sexual beings but they are indeed in the midst of extraordinary sexual awakenings and are facing external pressures to become sexually experienced. We must be guided by that knowledge so as not to treat their sexual thoughts and feelings as unusual or bad.

We can't literally prevent our kids from having sex, doing drugs, or acting irresponsibly in any number of ways. We can, however, communicate our beliefs and values regarding sex in a way that is caring and not condemning or judgmental. Kids at this age are faced with attempting to create an identity that will be accepted by their peers; their sexual identity is a big part of that process.

Don't just give your daughter rules and limits about sex, tell her what you believe. Discussing how you feel sex can be part of a healthy relationship. Let her have her say and don't condemn her for having different ideas on this subject. Shaming her or grounding her will only shut off your connection. Lots of teens are woefully ignorant about sex, even though they want you to believe they know it all. You need to communicate sexual facts to your daughter so she has the knowledge to prevent disease and pregnancy.

These are the toughest conversations for parents to have with their kids but they must take place. Remember, your daughter may currently be making unwise decisions regarding sex, but that doesn't make her a bad kid. She needs you more than ever now, even though she will tell you to leave her alone about this. Don't be afraid to enlist the help of any family or friends whom she respects to help you with this situation.

<http://life.familyeducation.com/sex/teen/34505.html>