



What Teens Want To Know When You Talk About Sex Advice for Parents... From a Teen's Perspective

Whether parents want to admit it or not, at some point, their teens will start to talk about sex as well as engage in it. Research shows that kids are becoming aware of sex and participating in it at much younger ages:

- 6% of 13 year olds have had sexual intercourse.
- 46% of all high school students have already engaged in sex.
- Half of all teenagers don't believe oral sex is sex.
- 14% of high school students report having already had 4 or more sexual partners.
- 17% of sexually active teens aged 15–19 years report not using any birth control the last time they had sex.
- 20% of teens have sex by age 15.
- 50% of parents to 8th-11th graders were unaware that their teens had started to have sex.
- 1 in every 5 teenage girls will become pregnant during high school;
- 6.7% of girls ages 10-14 will become pregnant
- 34% of all high school students reported being sexually active (meaning they have had sex in the previous 3 months).

Why is it so important that parents talk about sex with their teens? Data suggests that:

- About 32% of teens (ages 15-19) say that they did not receive any formal sex education before reaching age 18 (that included how to say no to sex); of the teens who did receive instruction, about 60% of these teens didn't have any sex education before 10th grade.
- More than 50% of teens ages 10-15 say that if they are considering having sex and/or want guidance on dealing with the pressure to have sex, they would first want to talk to their parents.
- Only 31.7 % of boys and 51.7% of girls (ages 15-17) have discussed contraceptive methods with a parent whereas 75.8% of teen boys and 60.7% of teen girls say that their parents never talked to them about where to get birth control.
- 48% of 15-17 year olds who haven't had sex and 56% of those who have had sex report that they never talked with their parents about how to know when you are ready to have sex.
- 50.1% of teenage moms reported doing nothing to prevent pregnancy.
- 69% of teens 12-19 say that they would find it much easier to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.



What Teens Want To Know When You Talk About Sex (Continued 1)

Advice for Parents... From a Teen's Perspective

Believe it or not, parents have a very important influence on whether or not their teens become pregnant or cause a pregnancy. Although as parents you cannot control your teen's sexual decisions, the quality of your relationships with your teen can truly make a difference. Data suggests that teens who are close to their parents and feel supported by them are more likely to abstain from sex, wait until they are older to begin having sex, have fewer sexual partners and use contraception more consistently. The message - don't wait to talk about sex with your teen. Start these conversations early and repeat them often. This way, your teen will feel more comfortable talking about sex with you.

So, how do you talk about sex with your teen? What should you talk about? The following is what teens say they want to their parents to know when it comes to the sex talk:

Teens do Care

Even if your teen may not behave like it or tell you so, teens really do seem to care about what their parents tell them. So, whether they act like it or not, your teen wants (and needs) your guidance.

They do Need to be Prepared

It is important that you talk about sex, contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) with your teen. If your teen is having sex, he/she needs to have accurate information about how not to become pregnant and catch an STI. Even if your teen is not sexually active, he/she will be at some point in his or her life. Would you rather your teen receive correct information from you or rely on false information/myths from their friends?

Responsible and Honest Relationships

Teens need positive, adult role models. They need to see what dependable relationships look like. When you share activities with your teen and demonstrate parental caring, teens can be positively influenced. The quality of your family life is also associated with teen pregnancy risk. Teens who grow up in abusive families, single-family homes and/or poverty are more likely to be having sex. Focus on cultivating closeness between you and your teen, and teach them ways to behave that could help to prevent hurt feelings or hurting others.

Do More Than Lecture About Abstinence

Although it is important to clearly convey your expectations and values to your teen, teens need more. Research shows that talking about contraception as well as abstinence at the same time doesn't cause confusion or mixed messages. Teens get it, so by having these responsible discussions, you are conveying respect to your teen. You can also use this time to tell your teen how you feel as long as you also listen to what they have to say.

Teen Pregnancy Isn't Good

Less than half of all teens agree that they are getting a clear message that teen pregnancy is wrong. In a recent report, 71% of female teens and 64% of male teenagers agreed or strongly agreed that it is okay for an unmarried female to have a child. Even more alarming, only 58% of female teens and 47% of male teens said that they would be very upset if they got pregnant (or got a partner pregnant). In fact, 14% of the girls and 18% of the boys indicated that they would be pleased if they became pregnant (or caused a pregnancy). Data like this suggest that teens may not agree that teen pregnancy can be problematic -- only 12% of teen boys stated that they didn't want to have sex because they were afraid to get a girl pregnant.



What Teens Want To Know When You Talk About Sex (Continued 2)

Advice for Parents... From a Teen's Perspective

Pay Attention

Know that monitoring and supervising your teen's behavior does make a difference. Pay attention and be involved. Learn who their friends are. Don't falsely believe that you will know when your teen is having sex – most parents don't. Make it a point to routinely express concern and love for your teen and not just wait until your teen misbehaves. Also, pay close attention to your teen if he/she has an older sibling who is having sex; teens in this situation have a greater tendency to engage in sex at an earlier age.

Teens Have Questions

For many teens, thinking about having sex or knowing friends who are engaging in sex can be stressful, overwhelming and scary. It may be the first time that your teen has to consider adult dilemmas, such as showing the responsibility to prevent an unintended pregnancy, deciding if they would be okay with having an abortion or would be comfortable with adoption. Teens are bombarded with sexual peer pressure from friends, the media, books, music, magazines and video games. It is important to talk about sex with them, even if they don't initially ask the questions. Teens need help and guidance in understanding the context and meaning of sex. They may be embarrassed or afraid to come to you for advice, so try to offer it to them instead. Assume they have questions and be the trusted source who can provide the answers.

Don't Assume They're Doing It

When all is said and done, teens need accurate information, so they can make informed decisions. If your teen comes to you asking about information on contraception and sex, don't just presume they are having sex. Most parents are in agreement that they would prefer that their teen remain abstinent, but this doesn't mean that teens won't be curious about sex. Answer your teen's questions without judgment. Remember that abstinence-only sex education doesn't keep teens from having sex. Research shows that only comprehensive sex-ed programs (ones that discuss both abstinence and contraception) result in delayed sexual initiation in teens. So don't fall into the trap of believing that discussing contraception encourages sexual behavior.

Unhealthy Relationships

Teens may need assistance in identifying whether or not they are in an unhealthy or potentially abusive relationship. They may view possession as a sign that their boyfriend/girlfriend loves them so much that he/she always wants to be with them. Data show that teen relationships where there are older partners or differences in race, ethnicity, social economic statuses, etc., tend to be linked with lower contraception use. This is also the case if your teen doesn't know their partner very well. It may be difficult for your teen to negotiate sexual activity and/or contraception use if in an unhealthy relationship. Teens need to be warned about the dangers of cyberspace.

Nobody Really Wants to Talk About Sex

Let's face it, most parents dread having to talk about sex with their teens, and teens don't exactly look forward to the sex talk either. If you begin these discussions when your kids are young, it is easier to just add onto these talks as your children grow. Whenever you do talk about sex, it should be a conversation, not a lecture. Even though you may feel uncomfortable, your teen is probably feeling way more embarrassed, so do everything you can to make them feel comfortable and respected. Encourage your teen to ask questions and discuss their point of view. In any case, the job of a parent is to prepare their children for adulthood. Part of this responsibility is helping your teen to learn how to make safe and smart sexual decisions.