

BeWell Connected

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

TIPS FOR STARTING THIS IMPORTANT CONVERSATION WITH YOUR TEEN

ALMOST HALF OF TEENS AGES 15-19 HAVE HAD SEX.

Experts agree that it is important for parents to talk to their kids about sex and sexuality. Even if it doesn't always seem like they're listening, teenagers often say that their parents influence their decisions about sex. Researchers have found that teens that have good conversations with their parents about sex are more likely to wait to have sex, have fewer partners, and use condoms and other forms of birth control when they do have sex. However, just because it's important, doesn't mean that talking to your teens about sex is easy! Here are some suggestions for talking to your teenager:

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AN EXPERT

Many parents never learned about sex or sexuality in school or at home when they were growing up. The good news is that today, there are lots of resources available to help guide you through these conversations, including some listed on the next page. Even if you don't have all the answers, you can still have a meaningful conversation with your teen. You can share with them your values on sexuality, relationships, and respect, and give them resources for answering their other questions. As BeWell/BridgeUP Parent Board member Cheryl M. says, "Teens today are smart enough to use the Internet and social media to get information about sex, so it's important for us as parents to initiate these conversations, too."

DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOUR TEEN HAS QUESTIONS

It's best to be proactive, and start having conversations about sex before your teen asks questions. This will help them have the information they need to make healthy decisions. It will also help them feel more comfortable asking questions in the future.

LOOK FOR "TEACHABLE MOMENTS" TO SHARE YOUR VALUES

BeWell/BridgeUP Parent Board member Natasha F. has put this tip into action. She says, "When you sit and watch TV with your kids, certain scenarios related to sex or other things come up. It's helpful to talk about these things right there and then, when they come up."

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

Keep your teens talking by asking them questions they can't answer in just a word. BeWell/BridgeUP Parent Board member Celeste P. says, "A lot of times we ask kids how their day was, but getting them to open up means going the extra mile. Ask them what happened that was interesting, and if your kid is going through something, maybe they will open up." Make sure you're listening, too, and avoid interrupting, blaming, or making negative comparisons.

REMAND YOURSELF IT'S OK TO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE

It's normal to feel awkward or uncomfortable talking with your teen about sex and sexuality. However, as BeWell/BridgeUP Parent Board member Lourdes C. reminds us, "Now is when they really need a lot of guidance."



MYTH:
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FACT:
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ASK DR. C.

Dear Dr. C.,

I have always been close to my oldest son, Jonathan, but since he started high school it has been harder and harder to connect with him. He used to tell me about his day at school, his friends, and his problems, but now he barely speaks to me. What's going on?

-Talking to Myself?

Dear Talking to Myself,

Adolescence can be a tricky time for both teenagers and their parents. It can be hard to accept that your son no longer wants to share many parts of his life with you. The good news is that this is completely normal.

Until a few years ago, you were one of the biggest parts of Jonathan's life. However, when he started high school he became more independent. One way teenagers show their independence is by not sharing as much with their parents. Jonathan may also be

hesitant to talk to you because he doesn't want you to try to solve his problems for him, which is something parents often do without realizing it. He may also be worried that what he tells you would make you mad, or that you just wouldn't understand what he's going through.

My recommendation for you is to do your best to let Jonathan know that you are there to support him, and willing to listen whenever he is ready to talk. This means truly listening, rather than trying to fix things for him, and doing your best not to react negatively when he does talk to you. You can also help him to identify other trusted adults that share your values that he can talk to if necessary. Make sure you are also taking care of yourself, since parenting a teenager is not an easy job!

Dr. Cohall is board-certified in both Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine. He is a Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics at the Columbia University Medical Center. In addition to supervising health services at several clinics, he has a private practice in Adolescent/Young Adult medicine at NY Presbyterian Hospital.

WHAT TEENS WANT THEIR PARENTS TO KNOW ABOUT TALKING ABOUT SEX

TALK TO US HONESTLY ABOUT LOVE, SEX, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Just because we're young, doesn't mean we can't fall in love, or that we're not interested in sex. Don't think that giving us information about sex and birth control will encourage us to have sex.

TELLING US NOT TO HAVE SEX IS NOT ENOUGH

Explain why you feel that way and ask what we think, without lecturing us. And remember that whether we're having sex or not, we need to know how to protect ourselves from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

IF WE ASK ABOUT SEX OR BIRTH CONTROL, DON'T ASSUME WE ARE HAVING SEX

We may just be curious, or want to talk to someone we trust.

SOMETIMES, ALL IT TAKES TO NOT HAVE SEX IS NOT HAVING THE OPPORTUNITY

Often we have sex because there's nothing else to do. Help us to stay busy after school and on weekends, doing activities with other teens and with adult supervision.

WE REALLY CARE WHAT YOU THINK, EVEN IF WE DON'T ALWAYS ACT LIKE IT

Adapted from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.



RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Find information at <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn>, or talk directly to a health educator by texting "PPNOW" to 774636 (PPINFO).

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

Visit <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home>.

THRIVE APP TO EMPOWER PARENTS

Get more information and download at <http://www.adolescenthealth.org/About-SAHM/Healthy-Student-App-Info.aspx>