

Spotlighting Teen Issues

**for
Teens**

Talking About Sex

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When you have questions about sex, it is normal to feel awkward about asking them. We all have questions about sex. Your questions could be based on curiosity or fear or just plain anticipation! You may know some people your own age who think they have all the answers about sex. They don't. In fact, it is much better to get your information from parent or other adult. It's not always easy to talk with your parents about the personal things, but they really are one of your best source for factual information. Even though they may not know the answers to all your questions, they probably know where to find correct answers.



Remember, many parents did not have much sexuality education themselves, so talking about sex may be hard for them, too. One way to begin is to ask your parents what their parents taught them about sexuality. That conversation can open up a lot of different topics and help you understand your parent's viewpoint. Also, if you are watching a TV show or a movie together and sex, pregnancy or abortion come up, try engaging your parents in a conversation about the issues of concern to you. Say something like, "Wow, those two characters had sex only after one date. What do you think about that?"

What is Sexuality?

This may seem like a dumb question. However, sexuality is more than having sexual intercourse. It's not about what you do; it is about who you are and how you live. You are a sexual person from your birth until your death. Sexuality is how you feel about your body; how you feel as a boy or girl, man or woman; the way you dress, move and speak; the way you act; and how you feel about other people. Your sexuality is a natural and healthy part of who you are.

Talking about sex doesn't mean that you have to start having sex. In fact, many teens choose to wait until they are adults before they start a sexual relationship. Sexual intercourse can produce a baby, and that is one good reason not to have sex until you are older. A female can get pregnant the very first time she has sexual intercourse, or she may have intercourse many times and not get pregnant. She can also get pregnant any time sperm is around the vagina. In addition, there are diseases that can be spread by touching genitals. They are called sexually transmitted diseases.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

STDs include a number of different diseases that are all spread via sexual contact. Teens taking part in any kind of sexual activity involving the penis, vagina, anus, and/or mouth are at high risk for getting one or more of these diseases (e.g. gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV, chlamydia, genital

warts (HPV), trichomoniasis and herpes). It's important to know that

- Having an STD makes it much easier to become infected with HIV
- STDs can have serious health effects (both short-term and long-term)
- Sexually active teens are at highest risk for getting STDs
- You can have an STD and not have any symptoms — so if you think you might have one, it is very important to see a doctor

How Do You Get HIV?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is a deadly disease, and there is no cure. It is very important to remember that you cannot tell whether another person is infected with HIV. People with HIV may look and feel healthy and may not even know that they have been infected. But, an HIV-positive person can infect a sexual partner, whether that partner is heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Because HIV is a very fragile virus, it is hard to become infected unless you put yourself at risk. You can protect yourself by

- Never having any type of unprotected sexual intercourse — anal, oral or vaginal
- Never sharing needles or syringes for using drugs (including steroids)
- Never sharing needles for ear piercing or tattooing

Teens' Sexual Rights

You have the right to

- Accurate information about sexuality and HIV/AIDS
- Stop being physical or sexual with a partner at any point
- Say no to an unwanted touch of any kind
- Make decisions about sexuality in your own time
- Express your sexuality safely, without risk of pregnancy or STDs, including HIV/AIDS
- Not be pressured into being physical or sexual
- Not express your sexuality unless you want to

Sexual Abuse

If an older/stronger person touches your genitals (private parts, any part of your body covered by your bathing suit), that is sexual abuse. Both males and females can be sexually abused. It is not your fault if someone touches you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable.

When a person is forced or coerced into having unwanted sex with another person, we call it rape. When

this happens on a date or with a person you know, it is called date rape or acquaintance rape.

No one should have to face sexual abuse alone. If this happens or has happened to you, it is important that you tell someone close to you or a trusted adult. Call either of the numbers listed below, and you will be able to speak with someone you can trust, whose job it is to help you.

Numbers to call:

National Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-4-A-CHILD
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)
1-800-656-HOPE

For More Information

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Sexually Transmitted Diseases at <http://www.cdc.gov/node.do?id/0900f3ec80009a98>
HIV/AIDS Among Youth at <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/youth.htm>

Body Health Resources Corp. The Impact of Parent-Teen Communication on Adolescent Sexual Behavior.
<http://www.thebody.com/siecus/parents.html>

Troubledwith, a Web site of the Focus on the Family Institute
<http://www.troubledwith.com>

References

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Haffner, Debra W. (2001). *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens - From Middle School to High School and Beyond*. New York, NY: New Market Press.

Harris, Robie H. (2001). *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health*. Cambridge, MASS: Candlewick Press.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Survey at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/yrbss/>

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