

Parent-Child Communication

Many parents freeze when they are faced with talking to their children about sex.¹ Many teens prefer to talk to their parents rather than doctors about sex. It can feel awkward, but you can help your child make healthy choices. They need you, and if you are not talking to them, somebody else will. Think about what you want them to know.

Why should you talk to your child about sex?

- ▶ Teens who feel connected to their home and families wait to have sex.²
- ▶ Teens whose parents talk to them about condoms are more likely to use them.³
- ▶ Teens who said they talked to their parents about sex are more likely to use contraception.⁴
- ▶ Teens who have talks with their parents about sex are more likely to have talks with their partners about sex.⁵
- ▶ Teens whose parent talk to them about their sexual orientation have lower risk for STIs, including HIV.⁶

It's not just what you say, but how you say it. Healthy communication means:

- ▶ Openness to all topics and ideas.
- ▶ Each party talks and also listens.
- ▶ Being warm and caring.
- ▶ Trying not to fight.



↳ Tips for Talking with Your Teen

- ☑ Even if your teen does not want to talk, let them know there is an open door if and when they do.
- ☑ Many teens are afraid that they will disappoint their parents. Praise your teen's healthy choices. This may lessen these fears.
- ☑ If your teen comes to talk to you about something, as scary as it may be, do not run away or simply tell them not to have sex. This may be perceived as uncaring or discomfort and can set the stage for how they think you will respond every time.
- ☑ Make the most of 'learning moments'. Learning moments are when something you and your child see can be used as a chance to start a talk. For example:
 - ▶ When you and your child see a sex scene in a movie or on television, or when you see a sexual advertisement
 - ▶ When a young person or adult you both know gets pregnant.

¹The Media Project, a project of Advocates for Youth. Parent-Child Communication: Helping Teens Make Healthy Decisions about Sex. 2002.

²Resnick, MD et al. Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, JAMA; 1997; 278:823-32.

³Miller, KS et al. Patterns of Condom Use Among Adolescents: The Impact of Mother-Adolescent Communication. American Journal of Public Health 1998; 88: 1542-44.

⁴Hacker, KA et al. Listening to Youth: Teen Perspectives on Pregnancy Prevention. Journal of Adolescent Health 2000; 26: 279-88.

⁵Whitaker, DJ et al. Teenage Partners' Communication About Sexual Risk and Condom Use: The Importance of Parent-Teenager Discussions. Family Planning Perspectives; 1999; 31(3): 117-21.

⁶Ryan C. Supportive families, healthy children: Helping families with lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender children. 2009; San Francisco, CA: Marian Wright Edelman Institute, SF State University.