



## 10 Tips for Talking to Your Children About Sex

### 1. Use teachable moments to discuss sex.

- Weave the discussion into life experiences related to sex — as you and your children view situations on television or when they share with you something they learned in school.
- Solicit their opinions. Ask them questions about something they've seen on TV, in the movies, in magazines or heard from friends. For instance, if a plot from their favorite television show includes a couple having sex, ask them how they feel about this scene? Do they think the couple is a role model? In real life, what do they think this couple might experience — pregnancy, an STD, hurt feelings?

### 2. Talk honestly about love, sex and relationships.

Help your children handle powerful feelings, such as love, in a safe way. Give them an example of how you may have felt at their age. Discourage them from having sexual relationships. If you believe your child is sexually active, accompany them to visit a healthcare professional, one who agrees with your viewpoints and values, and encourages teens not to have sex.

### 3. Give young people solid information about adolescent sex and the consequences.

Here are some hard-hitting facts they should know, according to Dr. Sulak, director of the Scott & White Worth the Wait<sup>®</sup> program:

- 5% of teens under 17 years of age become pregnant, costing society about \$29 billion per year.
- The most common STDs are human papillomavirus, herpes, chlamydia and gonorrhea. Chlamydia and gonorrhea can cause pelvic inflammatory disease, which can lead to acute and chronic pain, tubal pregnancies and infertility. Human papillomavirus is the cause of almost all abnormal Pap smears and cervical cancer.
- One out of four people newly infected with HIV are under 22 years of age.

### 4. Let teens know there is no such thing as "safe sex."

- Condoms do not cover all areas of the body that can be infected with STDs.
- Condoms can slip off or break during sex.
- There is no scientific data that condoms prevent most STDs (NIH Scientific Panel, July 2001).

### 5. Encourage children to remain connected with family, school and community.

Suggest they get involved in sports, arts or helping others. Discourage early, frequent and steady dating; instead encourage group activities. Kids involved in school activities are less likely to engage in sex. Spend time with your kids. Kids who are connected to their family are much less likely to have sex.

### 6. Emphasize with kids that sexual abuse is wrong and should be reported.

Tell your kids that sexual abuse is when sex occurs without your permission, even if it is with someone you know, including a boyfriend. Do not permit your child to date at a young age and discourage them from having a relationship with anyone older than they are. If your child does date, they should stick to dating someone close to their own age. The hard fact is that in every state, having sexual relations with anyone under the age of consent is against the law.

### 7. Encourage young people to avoid alcohol, drugs and other risky behaviors.

Being sober helps protect them from compromising or dangerous situations that they may later regret. (The Centers for Disease Control [CDC] have classified adolescent sexual activity as a "health risk behavior," along with drugs, alcohol, tobacco use and violence.) Let your children know that if they go to a party and drugs/alcohol are present, they should call you to come pick them up.

### 8. Reinforce that kids do not need to give in to peer pressure.

They should be confident in who they are and the choices they make. Let them know most teenagers are not having sex. (CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007)

### 9. Help your children set goals.

These might include graduating from high school, furthering their education after high school, or finding a job. Teenagers who delay having sexual intercourse have been shown to achieve higher educational levels.

### 10. Work with your children to create a personal plan.

It's much easier for teens to say no to sex, even in the heat of the moment, when they've made a personal pledge to be abstinent. And it's never too late to make that pledge, even if they have been sexually active in the past. Encourage them to set sexual limits and communicate those limits to their friends and dates. Most importantly, do not give them mixed messages. Let them know that you do not want them to have sex and support their decision to be abstinent.