



PERSPECTIVES FOR PARENTS

A special edition for parents of middle and high school students, VOL #1 SEP 2011

PARENTS TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT SEX

Beginning Conversation

Talking with a teen is a challenge. Talking to your own teen about sensitive issues such as sex and sexuality can be uncomfortable and at times intimidating. Parents are often afraid of this discussion and teens are often mortified by it. As a result,

these discussions are often postponed until, "the time feels right." Unfortunately, avoiding or postponing talking about sex can result in a discussion coming too late – after a teen has already had

intercourse. Experts tell us that teens who talk to their parents about sex are more likely to delay their first sexual experience and to practice safer sex whenever they do become sexually active. Each year about one million teenage girls become pregnant in the United States and three million teens get a sexually transmitted disease. Since a sexually healthy teen, as well as healthy in all

aspects of health, is important to parents, frank and honest discussions are important. Ironically, teens may appear to dread the sex talk, but many studies show that kids really want to hear about sex from their parents. Maine state data from the 2009 MIYHS Health Survey

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showed 52.7% of high school females and 39.4% of high school males reported that they have talked with their parent(s) or guardian(s) about sex in the last six months.

So... we know we need to do it, but how do we make it happen? First, take some time to explore your own attitudes, values and feelings about sex. You can read books, do some internet research and talk to other parents with teens the same age. Remember, you don't have to know everything – you can always say, "I really am not sure about that. Let me do some research and we can talk about it later." If your teen

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hasn't asked you questions about sex, you may have to start the conversation. Look for opportunities such a TV show, a pregnancy in the family, a reproduction unit in a health class at school or some rumors or talk around school. Use these opportunities so that you can keep a discussion on-going and not a onetime incident. Even talking again about something discussed previously gives an opportunity to answer any questions that you or your teen might have.

Here are some hints to help you talk to teens about sex:

- Try to determine your teen's level of understanding so that your discussion is age appropriate—the needs of a 14 year old can be quite different from those of an 18 year old.
- Encourage your teen to ask questions.
- Keep a calm non-critical and non-judgmental atmosphere.
- Try to keep your sense of humor and don't be afraid to talk about your own discomfort.

- Be open in sharing your values and concern.
- Relate sex to love, intimacy, caring and respect for self and partner.
- Talk about the responsibilities for choices and decisions made.
- Help your teen to consider the pros and cons of their decisions.

There you are... some hints and suggestions to help you begin. Keep in mind that you may not have all the answers, but you want your teen to get information from someone

who cares and wants the very best for them.

Some websites that might be helpful include:

<http://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/guide/talking-to-your-kids-about-sex>

<http://kidshealth.org/>

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

<http://www.iwannaknow.org/>

YOUTH RISK BEHAVIORS

What's happening in Maine?

Every other year in Maine and across the country students are surveyed regarding health risk behaviors. You can view this data at the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey website located at:

www.maine.gov/youthhealthsurvey. At this site you can see state data along with information recorded by county. This information is very useful for us to look at the behaviors of our young and the risks in which they may be engaging.

Taking a look at sexual behaviors, here is some of the percentage information compiled from the survey of high school students, grades 9-12, in 2009 (most recent available). The website also breaks down this information by grade level and by gender:

Question	State Average	Females	Males
Students who have had sexual intercourse:	46.5%	46.2%	46.3%
Students who had sexual intercourse for the 1st time before age 13:	5.6%	3.4%	7.8%
Students who used a condom during last sexual intercourse:	63.6%	59.5%	68.1%
Students who used birth control pills to prevent pregnancy before last sexual intercourse:	63.6%	59.5%	68.1%
Students who drank alcohol or used drugs before last sexual intercourse:	22.5%	18.3%	26.7%
Students who have had oral sex:	48.6%	48.3%	48.6%

New 2011 data will be available soon. Please check website for updates.

CONTACT INFO: HIV Prevention Education Program, Maine Department of Education, 23 State House Station, Augusta, Me 04333-0023 (physical location: 111 Sewall St); Web: <http://www.maine.gov/education/hiv>; Phone: (207) 624-6692, Email: hiv.doe@maine.gov