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Helpful Hints for Parents About Teens, Dating, and Sex©

There are many new and wonderful experiences that teens often can't wait to delve into. For parents, this season of parenting brings excitement for our kids as well as fear about what they are getting themselves into. Dating and Sex is certainly in this category.

There are a lot of understandable questions about this topic...so here we go.

When do you start talking to your kids about sex, contraception, and STD's?

An important thing to remember is that these topics are best handled in a series of conversations, rather than one big talk. It would be best to start conversations about the body, caring for it, not abusing it, not letting others abuse it, etc very early on...this sets the context for continuing talks about the body. Talking to your child about sex before puberty is imperative, with continuing talks adding to the information you've shared. It is also great to start the conversation asking them what they know.

"Have you ever wondered how babies get inside the mommy's tummy?"
(obviously for a younger child)

"What have you heard about STD's?"

"What kind of stories have you heard at school about sex?"

"How far do you think it's OK to go on a date?"

"What would you do if a boy/girl wanted to go farther physically that you were comfortable?"

"How will you know on the inside that you're being pushed to go farther than you're ready?"

Starting with questions is very important, because it gives you important information about what they know and where they are in their thinking process. This will clue you into misinformation they might have, so that you can gently correct it.

How do you bring up the issue of contraception?

Ideally you would bring it up in a series of conversations you have with your teen. After explaining the biology of sex, as well as your own convictions about where sex fits in the life of a relationship, it would be natural to explain how sex does not have to necessarily result in pregnancy. Pregnancy can be avoided through abstinence, and the chances can be lessened by contraception, which tries to make sure the egg and the sperm do not connect. This can be done by preventing the egg from being present (birth control pills), or the sperm not making it to the egg through condoms, spermicidal, etc.

Since teens do not tend to play out the results of their actions to the end, they need us to help them do so...and this could occur in another one of these conversations. When a person decides to be active sexually, they are also signing up for the possibility of lots of other outcomes, such as:

- Pregnancy
- STD's
- Regret when and if the relationship ends
- Possible lowered chance of becoming pregnant at a later date when desired
- Gossip

Sex is an adult activity, not a recreational sport to be decided in the moment. As their parents, we need to help them think through this decision, as we do the other important decisions in their life.

Other things your teens need to know:

- Differentiate between dating and sex. Dating does not have to include sex.
- Accurate information about STD's (most teens do not know that STD's can be transmitted by oral sex).
- They need to decide where their own line is regarding sexual activity. Trying to decide this in the middle of a passionate moment, or when experiencing sexual pressure from a date is not a wise move.
- They need help paying attention to their own internal world, and their intuition when they feel unsafe or uncomfortable in a situation.
- They need help coming up with an exit plan when they feel uncomfortable or unsafe, so as not to be caught in an unwanted situation.
- They need to be able to set limits, stand up for themselves and say, "no".

Things you need to know:

- The part of a person's brain that controls planning, impulse control, and foreseeing consequences is not fully developed until age 25. Therefore, a teen's ability to think through their decisions, especially in such an emotionally and physically charged area as their budding sexuality is not as developed as they think. They need you to help them think through decisions.
- They need accurate information...otherwise most of their information comes from their peers and is probably riddled with inaccuracies.
- It is best to take a "coaching" approach talking to your teens about this and other issues rather than a lecture format. One works, and helps your teen develop the ability to things through issues (coaching) and the other style (lecture) causes kids to shut down and not accept your influence. For more about coaching your teens, check out my CD, "Coaching Your Kids/Teens Through Life" at www.KimFredrickson.com
- It is understandable to be tempted to ignore the issue and hope your kids will be OK. Don't give into this temptation. Instead, get educated and be brave enough to have these important conversations with your teens. Teens whose parents talk to them about dating/sex, are better prepared and happier.
- The important backdrop is establishing a close relationship with your teen, preferably from way back. Sometimes we can panic about things like dating/sex and come down hard on the rules...without having a strong connected relationship. So, work on listening, spending time, being encouraging, as well as setting guidelines for dating. When a close relationship is in place, teens will be much more likely to take in your influence and advice about dating/sex.
- Try to be calm and in control of your responses. Overreacting, panicking, and controlling responses will just result in them shutting down and not sharing...and you want to keep the lines of communication open. It is important during these conversations to keep yourself as steady and non-reactive as possible. The bigger picture here is keeping the lines of communication open and to keep them feeling safe to share with you. Try some deep breathing, and

coach yourself to stay centered...and bite your lip to keep from saying something reactive out of fear. Even though it's easy to be scared of what they are getting into, we need to stay the grown-up and keep ourselves centered. For a free article to help you with this, go to www.EncouragingRelationships.com and download (under the articles tab) my free article, "*Encouraging Myself in Parenting My Teenager*".

- Don't go through this time alone...get support and input from other parents at your teen's school, your church or synagogue, or neighborhood parents groups. It helps to get ideas, support, and empathy from other parents who understand the challenges you are facing.

Helpful Books

Boundaries with Teens by John Townsend

Talking to Your Kids About Sex: How to Have a Lifetime of Age-Appropriate Conversations with Your Children About Healthy Sexuality
by Mark Laaser

How to Talk with Your Child About Sex: It's Best to Start Early, But It's Never Too Late – A Step by Step Guide for Parents by Linda and Richard Eyre

Why Do They Act That Way? by David Walsh

I hope this has been helpful. Parenting is challenging, Your teens need you...You can do it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

© Kim Fredrickson, M.S., Marriage and Family Therapist (CA MFC 22635) and Life, Parent, and Relationship Coach is the author of many popular CD's and articles that will help you build **Encouraging Relationships** in your life. To learn more about Kim and sign up for more FREE Relationships Tips like these, visit her site at <http://www.EncouragingRelationships.com>.

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