

Talking to Your Teenager
ABOUT SEXUALITY
Ages 13-18



THIS BOOKLET FOR PARENTS EXPLAINS:

- The meaning of sexuality.
- The stages of sexual development and what to expect.
- The parent's role in providing knowledge and guidance about sexual health.
- How to discuss sexuality with teens.
- The Four Point Plan. This plan is designed to help guide parents when their teen has questions about sexuality.
- Where to find more information.

This information is meant to serve as a guideline only. Each child or teen develops and asks questions at their own pace. Choose the information that best fits you and the values of your family.



WHAT IS SEXUALITY?

The term sexuality does not refer only to sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Sexuality involves the mind and body as a whole, not just the genitals. Sexuality is shaped by a person's values, attitudes, behaviours, physical appearance, emotions, personality and spirituality, as well as all the ways in which one has been socialized. Sexuality is an important part of a person's overall health and well-being. Sexual health education is key to providing teens with the knowledge they need to ensure their healthy development.

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT - WHAT TO EXPECT

Preteens, age 9 to 12:

- May begin to experience the changes associated with puberty.
- May become more modest and want privacy.
- May experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies.
- May develop crushes on friends, older teens, teachers and celebrities among others.
- Romantic feelings may be directed towards other people.
- May take part in sexual exploration with peers.
- May masturbate to orgasm.
- May have to make decisions about sex and drug use.

Teens, age 13 to 18:

- Complete the changes of puberty. On average, boys develop about two years later than girls.
- Place great value on independence.
- Become more aware of physical appearance.
- Experience increased sexual feelings.
- May be more influenced by peer groups. Peer acceptance continues to be very important.

- May become interested in or develop romantic relationships.
- May desire physical closeness with a partner.
- May face peer pressure to be sexually active whether or not they feel ready.
- May favour romantic relationships over close friendships.
- May make choices which could lead to pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE?

Parents want to provide the knowledge and guidance teens need to become responsible and secure adults. However, some parents may be uncomfortable talking about sexuality with their teen because:

- Parents may be hesitant to talk about reproductive body parts and functions, especially if the topic was not discussed when they were growing up.
- Parents may wonder if talking about sexuality will encourage their teens to experiment. In fact, young people whose parents discuss all aspects of sexuality tend to delay becoming sexually active, when compared with youth whose parents do not discuss the issue.
- Parents may not be sure what their teen already knows or needs to know.

These factors may cause some parents to remain silent on the subject of sexuality. However, teens say their parents are their biggest influence in their decisions about sex. Teens who report having open and honest conversations with their parents about sex are more likely to delay sexual activity, have fewer partners, and use condoms and other contraceptives when they do have sex.

The reality is that you are continually teaching your teen many things about sexuality and have been since the day they were born.

Teens learn from the way they are touched by others, the way they feel about their own bodies and what their family believes is okay and not okay to do. Teens quickly pick up on the words that family members use (and don't use) to refer to body parts, gender and other terminology used when referring to sexual health.

Teens also learn a great deal from sources outside the family, such as the media, the Internet, other relationships, friends, and their own life experiences.



WAYS TO HELP YOUR TEENAGER GROW UP SEXUALLY HEALTHY

Parents hope their teens will make positive choices, based on the values that their family shares. You can help your teen make these decisions, since you are an extremely important influence in your teen's life. To do so, it's important to talk about your family values and beliefs when discussing sexuality.

You should start by asking yourself:

- Does my teen actually know what I believe?
- Have I honestly discussed our family's values about sexuality?

You may want to have a family discussion to talk about some of these issues. A few suggestions include:

- Choose a quiet time when no one is feeling rushed.
- Treat each other with respect.
- Really listen to each family member.
- Be honest.
- Share the reasons for your beliefs and personal values.

More tips to help your teen grow up sexually healthy

- Encourage your teen to feel good about themselves and their bodies.
- Help your teen express their feelings.
- Be patient and prepared to hear the information your teen is willing to share.
- Discuss the components of a healthy relationship.
- Help your teen build communication and assertiveness skills to resist peer pressure.

- Help your teen learn how to make decisions about relationships and sex. Emphasize that their decisions may have consequences.
- Communicate your family values on sexuality.
- Help your teen develop a personal value system, but recognize that it may be different from your own.
- Discuss the distorted view about sexual relationships that are sometimes shown in the media.
- Respect your teen's need for privacy. Show that you are interested without demanding intimate details. Teens need to know that you trust and respect them.
- Discuss the meaning of consent as being "freely giving ones approval without being pressured, threatened or forced."

TIPS FOR DISCUSSING SEXUALITY WITH YOUR TEEN

- Accept the role of sex educator. Most young people want their parents to provide them with information about sex and sexuality but aren't sure how to start the conversation.
- Become knowledgeable about sex and sexuality, but don't think you have to be an expert! Often you and your teen can find the answers together.
- Accept that it may be awkward and embarrassing to talk to your teen about sex—and then do it anyway.
- Often when we talk with our teens about sex, we only talk about the dangers and consequences of sexual behavior. Our teens need to hear from us as loving adults about the pleasures of sexuality.

- Along with facts, talk about feelings, relationships, and how other people can be affected.
- Answer questions directly, honestly, and without judgement. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and tell them you'll find out and get back to them. Then do it!
- Take advantage of those moments that arise when you can share your views. For example, you can do this when watching T.V., reading the newspaper or a magazine, or while listening to the radio.
- Communicate your values honestly and expect them to be challenged. Teenagers want to be independent and have their own identities.
- Accept that you can't control all of your teen's actions. Promote their ability to take responsibility for their actions and expect that they will make mistakes. Teens learn and grow through failure and mistakes.
- Recognize that you may not understand what your teen is experiencing. Talk with other parents, teens and teachers or call the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit to speak with a Public Health Nurse.
- Stress that, except for not having sex (abstaining), latex and polyurethane condoms are the only methods that offer reliable protection from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.
- Discuss using condoms, as well as other methods to protect against both STIs and unplanned pregnancies. Teens need to know that contraceptive methods such as birth control pills and the Patch, don't protect against STIs. Teens need

to know that they can contract STIs, including HIV, from unprotected vaginal, anal or oral intercourse. Consider making condoms available in your home.

- Teach them to appreciate the bodies they have been given, to be sure they understand what their bodies can do and how to keep them healthy.
- Ensure there are resources in your home where your teen can get accurate information. If youth have access to age appropriate books, they will probably read them even if they won't talk to you. If you recommend books, videos or websites to your teen, make sure you preview them first to ensure they are appropriate.

THE FOUR POINT PLAN

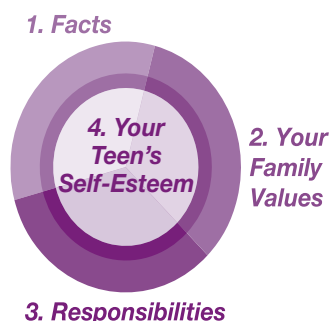
This plan can help you respond to questions your teen might have about sexuality. When answering questions, try to use the following four points:

1. Facts:

- Give truthful information.
- Find out the facts together if you need more information.

2. Values:

- Share what you believe in and what is important to you.
- Practise what you believe in and be a positive role model.



3. Responsibility:

- Let teens know what you expect of them.
- Allow your teen to think and talk about how they feel.
- Help your teen understand and accept the consequences of their decisions and actions.

4. Self-Esteem:

- Help your teen feel good about themselves.
- Treat your teen with respect, and they will learn to respect themselves and others.
- Encourage your teen to follow through with their own decisions even when their friends disagree.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Language is a powerful tool to help build a healthy self-esteem.
- Help your teen learn from mistakes by asking them to identify: what happened, would they make the same decision again and why or why not.



For more information, call 1-800-660-5853 or visit www.healthunit.org

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