



# Let's Talk – Tips for Parents

## ***1. THINK AHEAD - Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes.***

Communicating with your children about sex, love, and relationships is often more successful when you are certain in your own mind about these issues. To help clarify your attitudes and values, think about the following kinds of questions:

- What do you really think about school-aged teenagers being sexually active-perhaps even becoming parents?
- Who is responsible for setting sexual limits in a relationship and how is that done, realistically?
- Were you sexually active as a teenager and how do you feel about that now? If you're married - were you sexually active before you were married? What do you think you should tell your children about these issues?
- What do you think about encouraging teenagers to not have sex?
- What do you think about teenagers using birth control or condoms?

## ***2. Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific.***

- Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents.
- Age-appropriate conversations about relationships and intimacy should begin early in a child's life and continue through adolescence. Resist the idea that there should be just one conversation about all this - you know, "the talk." The truth is that parents and kids should be talking about sex and love all along. This applies to *both* sons and daughters and to *both* mothers and fathers.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS...

## ***3. Here are the kinds of questions kids say they want to discuss:***

*Answer each of the following-*

- How do I know if I'm in love?
- Will sex bring me closer to my girlfriend/boyfriend?
- How will I know when I'm ready to have sex? Should I wait until marriage?
- Will having sex make me popular?
- How do I tell my boyfriend that I don't want to have sex without losing him or hurting his feelings?
- What do I do about the pressure to have sex?
- How does birth control work? Are some methods better than others? Are they safe?
- Can you get pregnant the first time?

**4. In addition to being an "askable parent," be a parent with a point of view.**

***Tell your children what you think for example:***

- I think kids in high school are too young to have sex, especially given today's risks.
- Our family's religion says that sex should be an expression of love within marriage.
- Finding yourself in a sexually charged situation is not unusual; you need to think about how you'll handle it *in advance*. Have a plan. Will you say "no"? Will you use contraception? How will you negotiate all this?
- It's okay to think about sex and to feel sexual desire. Everybody does! But it's not okay to get pregnant/get somebody pregnant as a teenager.
- (For boys) Having a baby doesn't make you a man. Being able to wait and acting responsibly does.
- (For girls) You don't have to have sex to keep a boyfriend. If sex is the price of a close relationship, find someone else.

Talking about sex does *not* encourage them to become sexually active.

And remember, too, that your own behavior should match your words.

**5. Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents.**

Establish rules, curfews, and standards of expected behavior.

- Where are they when they go out with friends?
- Are there adults around who are in charge?
- Check-up on them

Supervising and monitoring your kids' whereabouts doesn't make you a nag; it makes you a parent.

**6. Know your children's friends and their families.**

Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teenagers become friends with kids whose families share your values. Some parents of teens even arrange to meet with the parents of their children's friends to establish common rules and expectations.

**5. Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating.**

Group activities among young people are fine and often fun, but allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Let your child know about your strong feelings about this throughout childhood.

**6. Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is. And don't allow your son to develop an intense relationship with a girl much younger than he is.**

**Rule: 2 years or older**

Older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl-sometimes they even have money and a car to boot!

***7. Help your teenagers to have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.***

- The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their future appears bright.
- Help them set meaningful goals for the future, talking to them about what it takes to make future plans come true, and helping them reach their goals.

***8. Let your kids know that you value education highly.***

- Encourage your children to take school seriously and set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood.

***9. Know what your kids are watching, reading, and listening to***

- The media (television, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, the Internet) are chock full of material sending the wrong messages.
- Encourage your kids to think: ask them what they think about the programs they watch and the music they listen to.

***10. These first nine tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age.***

Spend time with your children engaged in activities that suit their ages and interests, not just yours.

Shared experiences build a "bank account" of affection and trust that forms the basis for future communication with them about specific topics, including sexual behavior.

**WHAT DO YOU DO TO HAVE FUN WITH YOUR CHILDREN?**

**A final note: it's never too late to improve a relationship with a child or teenager. Don't underestimate the great need that children feel--at all ages--for a close relationship with their parents and for their parents' guidance, approval, and support.**