

Talking With Your Preteen About Sexuality

Preteen children continue to define their values, beliefs and knowledge about sexuality.

- Giving accurate facts and openly discussing their questions and concerns can help teens and preteens develop healthy and responsible sexual attitudes.

Preteens are like newspaper reporters.

- They want to know about everything — what, when, where, how, and why. Encourage your children to come to you for accurate information rather than relying on friends, jokes, graffiti, television and popular music.



Understanding Your Young Adolescent's Concerns

Preteens and young teens are:

- **concerned about their own bodies** — how their body works and how it compares with their friends.
- **busy with social development.** This is a time of becoming increasingly independent from parents and more sensitive to peers. Preteens are concerned with how they fit in with their friends and what their peers think of them.
- **becoming aware of and interested in the opposite sex.**
- **concerned with, “Am I normal”?** The wide range of physical development among peers increases this concern.
- **developing interest in the importance of physical appearance and personal grooming.**
- **interested in sexual anatomy, sexual vocabulary and sexual behavior.**
- **It's OK to be uncomfortable.** It helps to practice talking. Talk to yourself in front of a mirror, or discuss sexuality with your partner or a friend.

How Can Parents Help?

Parents may find that talking with their preteens and young teens about sex is embarrassing or uncomfortable. Here are some suggestions to help you talk with your child.

Know your facts.

Teens having sex before age 15 are more likely than other teens to:

- Have unprotected sex
- Have many sexual partners
- Be intoxicated while having sex
- Get a sexually transmitted disease.

Because they are just beginning to learn about emotional intimacy, young teens are more likely to have sex with someone they do not know well than with a relationship partner. Read a reliable book about reproduction. If your child asks a question you don't know, you can look it up together. Consult the SIECUS Parent's Area at www.siecus.org/parent.

Use television as a springboard for discussion with your child.

- It may be easier for both of you to discuss issues involving television characters.

Listen to your child's questions.

- Then respond, "I'm glad you asked. What do you think?" This opens the door for discussion. You will discover what your child already knows, and you can correct any inaccurate information.

Don't always wait for your child to ask.

- Look for ways to initiate a discussion or invite a question.

Be prepared to discuss a topic more than once.

- As your child develops, he or she will want to check out information with you.

Encourage your child to come to you for information.

- You can encourage your child verbally and with the "body language" you use when listening to your child.

Don't be afraid to say, "I'm just learning to be comfortable talking about this. My parents never talked with me about this."

What does your preteen/teen need to know?

Preteens and young teens need to know what to expect during puberty.

Both boys and girls need information about how both sexes develop and the timing of these changes.

They need reassurance that they are normal — that young people develop at different times and rates.



Young adolescents need to know about reproduction.

- They are interested in how pregnancy occurs, the birth process, twins, and many other topics.

Both girls and boys need to know about major changes they will experience menstruation and nocturnal emissions (or wet dreams).

- Girls need positive, detailed explanations of what to expect during menstruation, and how menstruation relates to pregnancy. Boys need reassurance that wet dreams are normal.

Many children are concerned about masturbation.

- You may want to explain that some children masturbate and some do not. This is a personal choice, but masturbation is not harmful to your health.

Your child needs to know about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

- Although children are learning about AIDS and STDs in school, parents have a very important job in helping their children really understand AIDS and STDs and how serious they are. One of the most important things you can do is to ***make your values about sex clear to your children.***

Education is our most important weapon in the battle against AIDS and STDs.

- You can do your part by helping your children shape their values.

Teens who postpone sexual activity

Your attitude and values play a powerful role in shaping your teenager's behavior.

- Studies show that the strongest link with the intention not to be sexually active is a teenagers' own values — "It would be against my values to have sex while I am a teenager." Their values are heavily influenced by their parents.
- Teens' religious beliefs also play a role. Teens (especially girls) with strong religious views are less likely to have sex than less religious teens.



Frequent and early dating are connected with early sexual experience.

- Those preteens most likely to say they expect to become sexually active are those who date most often.

The more a young person senses that his or her parents think teenage sex is inappropriate, the more he or she also views teenage sex as inappropriate.

- Similarly, teens who believe their friends disapprove of teen sex tend to hold the same opinion. Though teens may believe that "everybody's doing it," the truth is that more teens talk about it than become sexually active.



Most important of all —

- Your child needs to know that he or she is valued and can come to you for information and to talk about all of his/her concerns and feelings.

Have a good month!

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Suggested citation: Nelson, P.T. Talking with your preteen about sexuality (2012) in Families Matter! A Series for Parents of School-Age Youth. Newark, DE: Cooperative Extension, University of Delaware.

REV0712

