

FACT SHEET

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PARENTS TALK TO THEIR TEENAGER ABOUT SEXUALITY

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Adolescent Sexuality

Adolescence is a turbulent time for most boys and girls. Change is so rapid that the young teenager often feels fragmented, wanting adult privileges, and yet behaving childlike. Parents, too, find this a difficult time.

Ironically, teenagers need information and guidance about sexuality at a time when they are least likely to admit that need. Why should parents be concerned about their teenager's understanding of sexuality? The facts are clear and alarming:

- The highest divorce rate in the United States today is among teenagers.
- More than 50 percent of the marriages of high school girls occur when the girl is pregnant.
- More than one million teenagers become pregnant in the United States annually.
- Venereal disease has escalated among teenagers, and many do not know where to go for diagnosis and treatment. Some do not know that they have it.
- Adolescents are having sexual relations earlier and more frequently today than in previous generations.

The Parent's Role

Parents and children have a special relationship. Information and attitudes from parents can be especially meaningful and more likely to be integrated into a child's character than education from other sources.

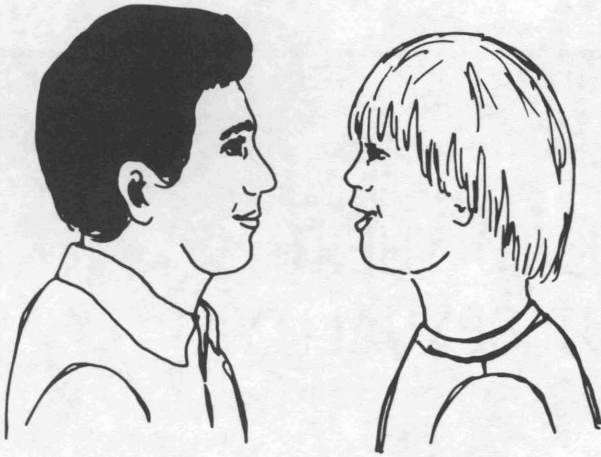
There is a need to educate parents about their role in adolescent sexuality because too often the parent's embarrassment or lack of knowledge may prevent meaningful communication. Unhealthy attitudes may develop in the adolescent, leading to sex-related problems in his or her relationships with other adolescents.

Two common ideas held by parents are:

- *If parents provide information on sexuality to their children, this will lead to sexual activity.* Actually, sexuality cannot be avoided. Even if parents attempt to protect their children from sex-related



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information, they will receive ideas from the media, friends, school experiences, and from impulses and desires from their growth and development that are natural and healthy.

- *Since the rate of premarital sex and pregnancy is already so high, adolescents do not have to be told anything about sex — they know it already.* Ironically, there is a high level of ignorance among the teenagers who are most sexually active. Current research strongly suggests that the lack of knowledge of effective birth control methods does not discourage adolescents from engaging in sex.

Unfortunately, many parents remain silent about sexuality. As difficult as it may be, parents should try to maintain good communication with their teenagers. If a young adolescent cannot trust and turn to his or her parents, to whom can he or she turn? Here are steps to better communication:

- 1) Accept the fact that children *are* interested in sexuality. Not talking about sexuality only increases anxiety and misconceptions.
- 2) Form parent groups. Parents often can teach one another how to talk about sexuality. Sex education for children means sex education for parents first.
- 3) As a parent, study your own attitudes. Are you able to talk about your feelings and needs in your marriage relationship? Are you able to model these feelings and attitudes?
- 4) Be sure you know the facts. Information about venereal disease, birth control, and other related topics is available in current books written for parents and their older children.

- 5) Help the younger child develop healthy attitudes about his or her sexuality. Parents can demonstrate open and loving ways of expressing affection — hugging and holding hands are examples.

Educational Services and Resources Available:

- Local libraries and educational facilities such as high schools, area community colleges, colleges and universities.
- Church programs which facilitate understanding of sexuality at all stages of human development.
- Texas Agricultural Extension Service — county and state offices have materials and programs on parent education.
- Mental health or family service agencies offer counseling services that include sex education counseling.
- Physicians and family doctors provide personal counseling as well as information brochures.
- State Department of Health provides current information on sexual development.

For Additional Information:

Bell, Ruth. *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives*. Random House, 1980.

Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Services, University of Florida. HFS-230. *Sex Education for Your Teen*. Bill Burk. Gainesville: 1979.

Gordon, Sol. *The Sexual Adolescent: Communicating with Teenagers about Sex*. Duxbury Press, 1973.

Block, William. *What Your Child Really Wants to Know about Sex — And Why*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.

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