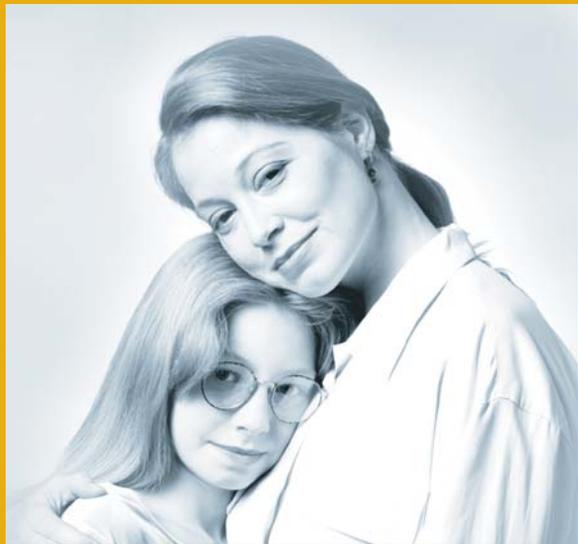


Abstinence, or not having sex, may be what parents think is best, but it is not the message that teenagers get from television, the movies, music, commercials, and most of their friends.

Because many of the things teenagers see and hear encourage them to have sex, it is important for parents to tell their kids that waiting to have sex can be a good thing.



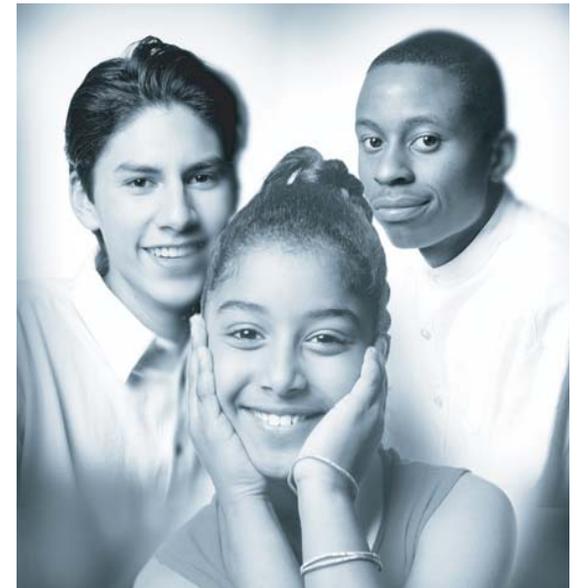
Helpful Hints

- Start talking to your teenager before they are in a serious relationship or even before they start dating. Talk to them again once they start dating.
- Be honest about how you feel and why you feel that way. Be specific about what you don't want your teenager to do and what you think is okay (let them know how you feel about kissing, sexual touching, intercourse, etc.). Explain that it is okay to have feelings about sex but that they don't have to act on those feelings.
- Explain to your teenager why you think they should wait to have sex.
- If your teenager does have sex, you can still encourage them to not have sex, but make sure they know about birth control and safe sex. Some teenagers decide to wait to have sex again after they have already had sex.
- Talk to your teenager about pregnancy, STDs and HIV. Once they know about these things, it may make them want to wait to have sex. Studies show that giving teenagers the correct information about safe sex and birth control does not increase their chances of having sex.
- Listen to what your teenager has to say, but be clear and firm when you talk. Stay calm and don't argue or interrupt until they are finished talking.
- Don't make fun of your teenager or what they say. Ask what their goals are and explain how the effects of having unprotected sex could get in the way of their goals.
- Make sure your teenager knows that you respect the way they feel and think even though you might not agree. Trust them to make the right choices about having sex.
- Don't criticize your teenager's favorite movies, TV shows, or music. You are not trying to change their taste but to help them think about the decisions they make.
- Be patient with your teenager. If they aren't ready to talk to you, try again some other time.
- Be ready to talk more than once because this is a subject that will come up lots of times. And make sure that there is another adult your teenager can talk to in case they are not comfortable talking to you.



For help or more information,
call your local health department
or the **Info Connection** toll-free at
1-800-545-1098

Talking *with* Your Teenager *about* Abstinence



Why you need to talk

Talking about abstinence with your teenager is important because it gives you a chance to tell them your values and ideas about love and sex. Talking about this with your teenager also shows that you think they are smart enough to make the right decision about having sex or not having sex. This will make future talks with them easier.

Talking about abstinence may be hard for you. You may be embarrassed to talk about sex. Most parents do not have a lot of experience talking about sex. You may be afraid that your teen will rebel against your family's values and beliefs.

Your teen may be afraid to talk to you. He or she may fear that you will think they are having sex if they ask questions. But even if it is hard for you to talk about it, you need to talk to your teen because it is the only way to let them know how you feel.

Don't assume anything about your teenager and sex. Talk to them. Many parents assume their teenager will not have sex until marriage and then they are surprised when an unplanned pregnancy happens. Other parents assume their teen will have sex and there is nothing they can do about it. Many times, teens don't want to have sex, but need their parents' help to say no to sex until they are older.

Talking with your teenager

Getting started is usually the hardest part. It is easier if you can think of a way to bring up the subject with your teenager first. Plan to talk at a quiet, calm time. Good times to do this are when you are doing something together like washing dishes, taking a walk, driving in a car, or working

in the yard. You should also talk with your teenager about the subject whenever you can, even if it is not when you had planned. You may see or hear something on television, movies, or the news that may help you bring up the subject with them.

Plan what you want to say to your teenager before you get started. Practice saying out loud to yourself or to a friend. Use a tape recorder and listen to what you are saying. Think about what your teen would say.

Things your teenager needs to know:

- **Having sex is more about feelings than about what their bodies do.** Waiting to have sex lets them become true friends and can keep them from getting hurt.
- **Not having sex is the only sure way to avoid pregnancy or to keep from getting sexually transmitted diseases (STD) like HIV.** Also, young women who have sex early or who have many partners, are more likely to get cervical cancer as adults.
- **Real life isn't like what they see on television or in the movies.** Those things don't usually talk about the bad things that could happen, like unplanned pregnancy, STD or getting hurt.
- **Make sure that your teenager knows that the decision to have sex or not have sex is up to them and not anyone else.** They can choose not to have sex if they want.
- **Explain to your teenager that waiting to have sex is more healthy than having sex,** and that part of growing up is learning how to make the right decisions and how to take care of yourself.

Helping them choose not to have sex

- **Help your teen explain how they feel and what they want.** Let them know that their friends may try to put them down if they choose not to have sex. Help your teen think about what they will say if they get pressured about sex.
- **Your teenager should learn how to avoid people and places that will make it hard to say no to sex.** Dating someone older will make it harder to say no. Using drugs or alcohol can also make it harder to say no to sex.
- **You should help your teenager learn how to make decisions.** This will make them feel like they are more in control of their own lives. To make good decisions, your teenager needs to:
 1. See that there is a decision to make.
 2. Figure out the different choices.
 3. Look at the good points and bad points of each choice.
 4. Think about what will result from each choice.
 5. Make the decision that is right for them.

