

Talking With Youth About Abstinence

Fact Sheet

Most parents think that pre-marital sexual abstinence is the best choice for adolescents. But adolescents do not get this message from the rest of the world. Movies, ads, peers, music, television all seem to say, "Just do it!" Adolescents need to hear from their parents and other caring adults to balance this. They need to hear that abstaining from pre-marital sex has many benefits.

Tips for Parents to Talk with Adolescents About Sex

Establish communication – Let them know it's natural to have sexual feelings, but they don't have to act on them. Tell them that you are concerned about their health and their future but that you trust them to make healthy choices with solid information. Be available for questions and two-way discussion.

Talk to them early – Start talking to your children early before he/she is in a serious relationship. Speak in a non-judgmental manner and let them know you love them.

Issues affecting decision making – Give them tips for avoiding sexual pressure such as when their on a date or are with someone older. Let them know alcohol and other drugs may make it harder to assertively say no.

Potential emotional consequences – **Make** sure your adolescent knows that too early sexual activity is not just a physical act. Strong emotions are attached to the experience and can be damaging. Participants may be left feeling used or abandoned after a relationship ends.

Benefits of abstinence – **Physical** benefits include protection from pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (STD), including HIV. Females who have sex early are more likely to get cervical cancer as adults.

Media's misinformation – **Explain** the media's perspective on sex. Sex is shown frequently but with little discussion of potential outcomes such as unplanned pregnancy, STDs or getting hurt feelings.

Sex is a choice – **Adolescents** need to know that sex is a choice. Adolescents can make a conscious choice not to have sex. It isn't something that just happens. Talk to them about making good decisions.

Helping them plan for their future – **Help** them plan for their future by discussing their goals, plans, and potential consequences of too early sex. Let them know they may also speak with another responsible adult such as a relative, a physician, a school or spiritual counselor.

Facts About Too Early Sex

Abstinence is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and other associated health problems. Sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological effects: regret; worry about pregnancy, disease, future plans; guilt; loss of self respect; feeling used or betrayed; and disinterest in other activities. Bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents and society.

Infants of teen mothers have a higher incidence of illness, low birth weight and infant mortality. Adolescent pregnancy and child rearing have a significant impact on an adolescent's achievement of social and economic independence. Children of teen mothers are at a greater risk of abuse and neglect and are more likely to drop out of school or become teen parents themselves.

Almost 4 million of the 15 million new cases of STDs in the U.S. each year occur in adolescents.

The majority of chlamydia and gonorrhea cases occur in people aged 15 to 24. About one-half of all new HIV infections in the U.S. are among people under age 25, and the majority is infected through sexual behavior.

Teen parenting is associated with the failure to complete high school and initiating a cycle of poverty for mothers. For example, less than 1/3 of teens who begin a family before age 18 ever complete high school.

Some Facts about Tennessee Youth

- Adolescent pregnancy rates are decreasing in Tennessee but continue to be too high. In 2006, 4,378 girls or 13.7% per 1,000 girls aged 10–17 became pregnant.
- Tennessee's adolescent pregnancy rate for females 10–17 per 1,000 dropped from 25.6 per 1,000 girls aged 10–17 in 1991 to 13.7 in 2006.
- Although the pregnancy rate is dropping in Tennessee, there is still a disparity between the pregnancy rates of black females and white females. In 2006, the rate for white females per 1,000 females aged 10–17 was 10.9%. The pregnancy rate for black females per 1,000 females aged 10–17 was 23.6%.

Additional Sources for Information

Tennessee Abstinence Hotline
1-800-521-TEEN (8336)

National Campaign to Prevent
Teen Pregnancy
<http://www.teenpregnancy.org/>

Abstinence Clearinghouse
<http://www.abstinence.net/>

The Medical Institute for Sexual Health
<http://www.medinstitute.org/>