



## LET'S TALK MONTH

OCTOBER 2009

### Preventing Teen Pregnancy: Talking to youth about sex and relationships

Adults may find it hard to believe, but youth want to hear from their parents about their opinions on the issues of sex and relationships. In a survey conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *With One Voice 2007*, results from questions relating to what teens and adults believe about communicating, regarding sex and relationships were very revealing. Some of the findings from this survey are provided on page two of this document. A full review of the survey may be found at the website [www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org).

Survey results revealed that youth want to hear from their parents about their feelings on relationships and sex.

However, for many reasons, parents often postpone talking with their children about these issues. Oftentimes parents feel uncomfortable and embarrassed

about the topics – and worry they might not know how to answer the questions their children ask.

Equipped with the knowledge that youth want to discuss these important issues with their parents—it is important for parents to have the skills and comfort level to engage in helpful and meaningful conversations.

Because children and youth need honest and straightforward information from their parents - the following tips are provided to help parents open the lines of communication about sex and relationships. For more information about these tips visit [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org) "Parents' Center".

Adolescence is a time of significant changes—both emotionally and physically. As youth navigate these exciting, and sometimes turbulent years, adults and parents who have an understanding of the underlying reasons for many adolescent behaviors—both positive and negative—are better equipped to help the youth in their care emerge from adolescence as strong and healthy young adults.

Other information provided in this supplement will help parents of adolescents understand the tasks of adolescent development (pg 3) and the stages of healthy adolescent development (pg 4). This information is from a resource developed by the Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health.

#### RESOURCES:

[www.acptp.org](http://www.acptp.org)  
[www.adph.org/schoolhealth](http://www.adph.org/schoolhealth)  
[www.konopka.umn.edu](http://www.konopka.umn.edu)

#### Tips for talking to youth about sex and relationships

\*Start early\*

\*Understand the question\*

\*Communicate important values\*

\*Learn and use the correct terms\*

\*It is okay to not have all the answers – just follow up later\*

\*Respect your teen's ability to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various options\*

\*Don't make assumptions about a teen being sexually experienced or inexperienced\*

\*Answer when asked\*

\*Talk honestly\*

\*Remember how you felt when you were a teen\*

\*Engage in mutually respectful conversations\*

With One Voice  
*A survey by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen  
 and Unplanned Pregnancy (excerpts)*

**1. When it comes to decisions about sex “who is more influential”?**

<u>Teens:</u>	<u>Adults:</u>
31% - Parents	43% - Friends
23% - Self (10% in 2007 survey)	24% - Parents
18% - Friends	13% - Media
7% - Media	6% - Themselves
5% - Religious Leaders	4% - Someone Else, Siblings
4% - Siblings, Someone Else, Don't Know	3% - Don't Know, Teachers and Educators
	1% - Religious Leaders

*Responses from teens and adults differ—teens believe their parents are most influential—parents think their teens are listening to their friends!*

**2. Do you wish you were getting more information about abstinence, more information about birth control or protection, or more information about both?**

<u>Teens:</u>	<u>Adults:</u>
37% - Both	73% - Both
33% - Get Enough	11% -Abstinence
12% - Don't Know	8% - Get Enough
8% - Birth Control or Protection	8% - Birth Control or Protection
7% - Abstinence	1% - Don't Know
2% - Refused	

*Overwhelmingly, adults want teens to get information about both abstinence and birth control or protection!*

**3 Suppose a parent or adult tells you the following: “I don’t want you to have sex. In fact, not having sex is the only certain way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. But, if you do end up having sex, be certain to use birth control or protection.” Does this message encourage sexual activity?**

<u>Teens:</u>	<u>Adults:</u>
75% - No	64% - No
21% - Yes	30% -Yes
4% - Don't know	6% - Don't Know

*Teens and adults agree—a message about abstinence and use of birth control does not encourage sexual activity!*



Schedule a parent workshop or  
 community forum on the topic of  
 teen pregnancy prevention

**Alabama Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy**  
 \*334-265-8004\*

**Adolescent and School Health Program**  
 \*334-206-5050\*

Presentations may be tailored to community specifics and  
 customized to address local youth issues.



**TASK 1: *Adjust to sexually maturing bodies and feelings***

Teens are faced with adjusting to bodies that as much as double in size and that acquire sexual characteristics, as well as learning to manage the accompanying biological changes and sexual feelings and to engage in healthy sexual behaviors. Their task also includes establishing a sexual identity and developing the skills for romantic relationships.

**TASK 2: *Develop and apply abstract thinking skills***

Teens typically undergo profound changes in their way of thinking during adolescence, allowing them more effectively to understand and coordinate abstract ideas, to think about possibilities, to try out hypotheses, to think ahead, to think about thinking, and to construct philosophies.

**TASK 3: *Develop and apply a more complex level of perspective taking***

Teens typically acquire a powerful new ability to understand human relationships, in which, having learned to “put themselves in another person’s shoes,” they learn to take into account both their perspective and another person’s at the same time, and to use this new ability in resolving problems and conflicts in relationships.

**TASK 4: *Develop and apply new coping skills (e.g. decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution)***

Related to all these dramatic shifts, teens are involved in acquiring new abilities to think about and plan for the future, to engage in more sophisticated strategies for decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and to moderate their risk taking to serve goals rather than jeopardize them.

**TASK 5: *Identify meaningful moral standards, values, and belief systems***

Building on these changes and resulting skills, teens typically develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice and care, questioning beliefs from childhood and adopting more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide their decisions and behavior.

**TASK 6: *Understand and express more complex emotional experiences***

Also related to these changes are shifts for teens toward an ability to identify and communicate more complex emotions, to understand the emotions of others in more sophisticated ways, and to think about emotions in abstract ways.

**TASK 7: *Form friendships that are mutually close and supportive***

Although youngsters typically have friends throughout childhood, teens generally develop peer relationships that play much more powerful roles in providing support and connection in their lives. They tend to shift from friendships based largely on the sharing of interests and activities to those based on the sharing of ideas and feelings, with the development of mutual trust and understanding.

**TASK 8: *Establish key aspects of identity***

Identity formation is in a sense a lifelong process, but crucial aspects of identity are typically forged at adolescence, including developing an identity that reflects a sense of individuality as well as connection to valued people and groups. Another part of this task is developing a positive identity around gender, physical attributes, sexuality, and ethnicity and, if appropriate, having been adopted, as well as sensitivity to the diversity of groups that make up American society.

**TASK 9: *Meet the demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities***

Teens gradually take on the roles that will be expected of them in adulthood, learning to acquire the skills and manage the multiple demands that will allow them to move into the labor market, as well as to meet expectations regarding commitment to family, community, and citizenship.

**Task 10: *Renegotiate relationships with adults in parenting roles***

Although the task of adolescence has sometimes been described as “separating” from parents and other caregivers, it is more widely seen now as adults and teens working together to negotiate a change in the relationship that accommodates a balance of autonomy and ongoing connection, with the emphasis on each depending in part on the family’s ethnic background.

<i>Stage with Age Range (Approx)</i>	<b>Early Adolescence</b> <i>(ages 10-14 years)</i>	<b>Middle Adolescence</b> <i>ages 15-17 years)</i>	<b>Late Adolescence / Young Adult</b> <i>(ages 18-24 years)</i>
<b>Physical Growth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Puberty: Rapid growth period</li> <li>• Secondary sexual characteristics appear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary sexual characteristics advanced</li> <li>• 95% of adult height reached</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical maturity and reproductive growth leveling off and ending</li> </ul>
<b>Intellectual/ Cognition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete thought dominates "here and now"</li> <li>• Cause-effect relationships underdeveloped</li> <li>• Stronger "self" than "social awareness"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in abstract thought; reverts to concrete thought under stress</li> <li>• Cause-effect relationships better understood</li> <li>• Very self-absorbed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abstract thought established</li> <li>• Future oriented; able to understand, plan and pursue long range goals</li> <li>• Philosophical and idealistic</li> </ul>
<b>Autonomy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge authority, family; anti-parent</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Wide mood swings</li> <li>• Things of childhood rejected</li> <li>• Argumentative and disobedient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict with family predominates due to ambivalence about emerging independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emancipation: -vocational/technical/college and/or work -adult lifestyle</li> </ul>
<b>Body Image</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preoccupation with physical changes and critical of appearance</li> <li>• Anxieties about secondary sexual characteristic changes</li> <li>• Peers used as a standard for normal appearance (comparison of self to peers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less concern about physical changes but increased interest in personal attractiveness</li> <li>• Excessive physical activity alternating with lethargy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually comfortable with body image</li> </ul>
<b>Peer Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serves a developmental purpose</li> <li>• Intense friendship with same sex</li> <li>• Contact with opposite sex in groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong peer allegiances – fad behaviors</li> <li>• Sexual drives emerge and teens begin to explore ability to date and attract a partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decisions/values less influenced by peers</li> <li>• Relates to individuals more than to peer group</li> <li>• Selection of partner based on individual preference</li> </ul>
<b>Identity Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Am I normal?"</li> <li>• Daydreaming</li> <li>• Vocational goals change frequently</li> <li>• Begin to develop own value system</li> <li>• Emerging sexual feelings and sexual exploration</li> <li>• Imaginary audience</li> <li>• Desire for privacy</li> <li>• Magnify own problems: "no one understands"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimentation – sex, drugs, friends, jobs, risk-taking behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue realistic vocational goals with training or career employment</li> <li>• Relate to family as adult</li> <li>• Realizations of own limitations &amp; mortality</li> <li>• Establishment of sexual identity, sexual activity is more common</li> <li>• Establishment of ethical and moral value system</li> <li>• More capable of intimate, complex relationships</li> </ul>