



DON'T PANIC:

Talking with Your High
Schooler about Healthy
Relationships and Sexuality



RESPONSE
FOR TEENS

JCFS
CHICAGO

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Welcome to this Guide!

We know that talking about sex and relationships can be uncomfortable and intimidating. At JCFS Response for Teens we believe that an open attitude about human sexuality sets the stage for healthy relationships and sexual expression.

We hope this guide will provide you with some basic information and simple tools so that you can provide your child with information that expresses your family's values and helps them make healthy choices and to have healthy, loving, and satisfying relationships in their future.

MYTH: If parents/caregivers talk about sex and relationships with their young people, it will lead to their teens engaging in sexual activity at an early age.

REALITY: Research suggests that teens who report talking with their parents/caregivers about sex are more likely to delay having sex and to use condoms when they do have sex.

MYTH: All young people dread talking to their parents/caregivers about sex and relationships.

REALITY: You are more influential in your young people's lives than you realize. They need your guidance to sort through the mixed messages they get from pop culture and their friends.

Communicating with your young person about sex and relationships shouldn't be one, big dreaded "The Talk." Instead, we encourage you to have many small conversations as a way of engaging your young person and showing them that you care. This can keep the door open for them to come to you as they grapple with new experiences.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Response for Teens believes that people of all identities need and deserve sexual health education that reflects them. Language is an important tool for keeping the door to communication open between you and your child. Young people of all identities need to see themselves reflected in discussions about sexual health and relationships. "Inclusive language" means that we will refer to people in ways that don't leave anyone out. For example, we talk about people with vulvas and ovaries, and people with penises and testicles. You may choose to use male/female, but remember to keep an open mind about your own child. By using the inclusive language modeled in this guide, you will be affirming and supporting your child in who they are. Your acceptance will help them make healthier choices.

ACCURATE TERMINOLOGY

When we use made-up names or slang terms for anatomy, we send the message that these parts of our bodies are shameful or embarrassing. By using accurate language to describe anatomy and sexual acts, Response for Teens hopes to help you take the shame and secrecy out of talking about sexual health.

You are your child's most important teacher. While we encourage you to use this guide, we also hope that you infuse it with your family and cultural values.

Each section of this guide will provide you with concrete information—What to Know—and some tips on What to Do/Starting the Conversation with your High Schooler. Hyperlinks within the pages will bring you to resources in English; on the **Resources** page you will find resources in your language.

Talking about Sex with Your Young Person

Many parents dread having to talk about sex and relationships but talking about these aspects of health are important throughout your child's life. Other parts of this guide address specific elements of sexual health and relationships but here are some general tips for using teachable moments to get started with your child.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

- **Be prepared.** We have provided a list of **resources**— websites, books and videos that will strengthen your knowledge and support these conversations.
- **You do not have to be an expert.** If you don't know the answer to something, don't be afraid to admit it!
- **LISTEN** to what your child has to say. Make sure your body language shows you are open.
- **Be curious.** "I'm wondering what have you heard about...?" or, "Would you like to know about....?"
- **S.O.Y.** is a great way to begin a conversation. "**S**ome teens might be having sex. **O**thers may not. **Y**ou might be figuring out what you feel comfortable with."
- **Think about your values.** What's important to you? Love, kindness, listening, planning for the future? How do these beliefs translate into relationships and sexuality?
- **Find Moments in the Margins.** TV, magazines, social media, and the news provide regular opportunities to start conversations about difficult topics with your children. You can ask:
 - "What would you do if someone you were dating started acting like that character on this TV show?" or What do you think about...?"

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Avoid scare tactics.** Emphasize the importance of using protection to stay safe and care for the safety of their partner.
- **Be sure to include the positive elements of sex** – pleasure and connection – while you focus on consent.
- **Your young person may not want to engage.** That's OK! The more you're willing to talk about sex and relationships, the more likely they'll to come to you when they need to.
- **If your young person identifies as LGBTQ+** they may be confused or be afraid to talk to you about it. To fully support them educate yourself as best you can.
- **They might ask you.** Don't jump to conclusions about why they're asking. Keep your answers simple and explain new words that they might not know.
- **Don't make assumptions** about your child's romantic or sexual interests. They may be very far from interest in sex and dating, or closer than you think. They may not know what kind of person they're attracted to or if they're attracted to any kind of person at all, so use inclusive language as often as possible.
- **Challenge the media!** A report from the National Center for Health Statistics found that only about *half* of U.S. teens have had sex by age 18. But TV, movies, and social media make it seem like *every* teen is ready to have sex. Share this information with your child when you watch a tv show or hear a lyric in a song.

A SPECIAL NOTE ON PORNOGRAPHY

Pornography isn't real sex. Many young people will see it— whether by accident or by seeking it out – and it can give a false, and sometimes disturbing idea of how people have sex. It is essential to talk about pornography so you can make sure that it doesn't have negative consequences for your child's future relationships.

WHAT TO DO:

- Open with curiosity: Have you ever seen pornography online or from friends?
- If they've seen porn, ask them if there's anything they are curious about or anything that was confusing.
- Porn is full of misinformation – about how real people look and what they do. Be prepared to explain how it is different from real sex and relationships.
- Compare it to something they might understand – you do not learn to drive from watching *Fast & Furious*; you should not try to learn about sex from watching porn.



Adolescent Development

While people think of middle school as the years of growth, the journey from 14-18 is full of changes as well. The teen who you drop off at school freshman year is not the same one who walks across the stage at graduation.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Part of the work of being a teenager is to develop values, begin thinking about their long-term future, and determine what makes a good partner. Teens may roll their eyes at you, disagree with you, and push boundaries, but they are also watching you for clues about your values. Having open, clear discussions about what you value and modeling positive behavior is key at this stage in their lives.

While many of the social and emotional changes that a young person experiences are influenced by brain development and hormones, they are also influenced by social and cultural expectations about what it means to “be a man” and what it means to “be a woman.” However, no one person ever fits neatly into these definitions. Now, more than ever, young people are striving to be their unique selves, and for some the expectations to fit a strict definition can be harmful. It is important to see the changes that your young person is experiencing, validate what they are going through, and support them.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Your child will continue to grow and mature physically and may start to focus more on cultivating an attractive physical appearance. They may begin working out or changing their eating habits. Make sure they are making healthy choices and getting sleep.

For transgender, non-binary, and gender diverse young people, physical changes of puberty may have been troubling.

Older teens are figuring out how to feel at home in their body (gender congruence).

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Many teens will experience sexual and sensual feelings and may desire to be physically intimate with others in some way. This is very new territory for them making it exciting, and sometimes scary.

Please don’t panic! Physical intimacy can mean just wanting to be physically close to someone they like, holding hands, or kissing. Some people may feel pressure to engage in more intimate sexual behaviors; that’s why *your relationship with your young person, and your ability to communicate with them, is so important!* Communicating with your young person can help them make healthier decisions and delay sexual activity.

Access to social media and other media outlets give teens ample material to compare themselves to society’s “ideals” – the images of people who are held up as beautiful, handsome, or sexy. The flood of media images and the increased desire to be attractive can lead teens to make impulsive decisions regarding relationships and sexual activity. However, the good news is that as a supportive adult, you have the opportunity to help them navigate this time in their lives through open discussion. **Remember, having an adult that supports them is a key protective factor for young people.**

The information in this chart shows some **typical developmental changes** of middle adolescence (15-18-year-olds), **what behavior you might see**, and **how you might support your young person**. It is important not to assume anything about your youth’s gender identity or sexual orientation. Other sections of the guide will explore more ways to support your young person.

What’s Going On?	What You Might See/Hear	What You Can Do/Starting the Conversation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued physical growth and change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-consciousness, self-critical. More time tending to appearance. Hiding physical signs of development if their body isn’t congruent with their gender identity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Straightforward discussion of body image and healthy choices. Listening to understand. Help find positive coping strategies for negative feelings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusting to sexual feelings and a maturing body. Greater emphasis on romantic and sexual relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desire for more privacy. Interest in dating and relationships. Seeking information about sex or viewing sexual content. Experimenting with relationships and sexual activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for privacy. Discuss what makes a relationship healthy and what does not. Give them books and materials. See if they have any questions. Include all possible relationship pairings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved ability to reflect and plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talks about the near future; discusses goals. Self-expression through art or journals; ability to express emotions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use goals and responsibilities as a way to talk about delaying potential risky activities like sex. Offer to talk about emotions. Encourage your teen to problem solve.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased search for independence. Defining who they are. Worry about being judged by others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk-taking. Friendships may change. “Trying on” new looks, habits, hobbies. Worry that no one understands them. May question your authority or disobey you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow them to disagree with you but remain respectful. Encourage them to explore new interests. Communicate about internet and social media use. Help them to focus on what they can do, not just how they look. Acknowledge peer pressure and problem-solve together.

Gender Identity and Sexuality

Teens are wondering, “Who am I?” Discovering their own sexual orientation and gender identity are part of the answer to that question. This can be scary because fitting in and peer acceptance are so important at this age. Teens face pressure from peers and society and need unconditional love and support from parents/caregivers to make healthy decisions.

It may seem strange, but science now shows us that sex and gender are more complicated than many of us were taught. Everyone has a gender identity and sexual orientation. Talking about these topics with your child will show them that you believe all people deserve respect and compassion.

SEX & SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

Sex refers to people’s biology – their external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormonal make-up. “Sex assigned at birth” refers to the labeling of a person as “male” or “female” by looking at their external genitals. Sometimes a baby may have genitals that don’t easily fit into the typical male or female categories; this is called intersex. Some health care providers will decide to assign intersex babies as male or as female. However, we now know that there are more than two clearly-defined biological sexes. Remembering this fact when talking to your children is an important way to emphasize respect for all bodies.

GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity is a person’s innermost sense of being a boy or a girl, or something in between—or outside of—those genders. There are many gender identities. Gender identity is different than sex because gender doesn’t have to do with a person’s body parts, it’s about how someone feels on the inside. Sometimes gender identity can correspond with sex assigned at birth and sometimes it can differ.

SOME LANGUAGE USED TO DESCRIBE GENDER IDENTITY:

Cisgender: Someone whose sex assigned at birth (male or female) matches their gender, or how they identify (boy or girl). For example, a person assigned female at birth who identifies as a girl is a *cisgender girl*.

Transgender: Someone whose sex assigned at birth differs from their gender. For example, a person assigned female at birth who identifies as a girl is a transgender boy.

Non-Binary: Someone whose gender identity doesn’t fit into simple categories like boy/man or girl/woman.

Pronouns are a small but important way to support someone’s right to self-identify. Examples of pronouns include He/Him, She/Her, They/Their.

Misgendering means referring to someone using language (especially pronouns) that does not correctly reflect their gender identity. This often happens when people use appearance to determine gender identity.

GENDER EXPRESSION

Gender expression is the way that people show and express their gender to the world. This is sometimes based on stereotypes and is usually conveyed through mannerisms, clothing, hairstyles, activities they enjoy, and how they talk. A few examples considered *masculine* gender expression are wearing a suit and tie, having facial hair, or playing with trucks. Some examples considered *feminine* gender expression are wearing makeup, wearing dresses, and taking dance classes. What is considered “masculine” or “feminine” is defined by society and culture and changes over time.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

There are two different types of attraction: physical and emotional. It is common for people to experience both, but it’s possible to experience one but not the other.

- **Physical attraction**, or sexual attraction, is when someone finds the way a person looks to be attractive or sexually desirable.
- **Emotional attraction**, or romantic attraction, is finding another person’s personality attractive.

Some people only experience physical or romantic attraction towards people of one gender. Some people are attracted to multiple genders. And some people aren’t attracted to anyone! Who someone is physically and/or emotionally attracted to describes their **sexual orientation**. Some examples of sexual orientations include:

- **Gay:** A man who is attracted to other men.
- **Lesbian:** A woman who is attracted to other women.
- **Straight:** A person who is attracted to the opposite gender.
- **Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to multiple genders.
- **Asexual:** A person who does not experience physical attraction toward anyone.

WHAT TO DO / START THE CONVERSATION:

- Try not to make assumptions about your child’s identity.
- Look for *Moments in the Margins* – use TV, celebrities, or current events to ask your child what they think.
 - Ask your child what they know about gender and sexual orientation – they might educate you!
 - Wonder aloud: “I wonder how it might feel to be treated differently because of your gender identity.”
 - Express your disapproval of slurs or jokes based on gender or sexual orientation when you encounter them.
- Use your pronouns when you meet your child’s friends. It sends the message that you are open and accepting.
- Use gender inclusive language.
 - Ex. “dating someone” vs. “boyfriend/girlfriend”

MORE TO CONSIDER:

- People’s gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are not connected. For example, it is mistake to assume that a boy who wears makeup is gay, or that a girl who prefers suits over dresses is lesbian.
- Do not label other people’s identities for them; let them decide for themselves.

IF YOUR CHILD COMES OUT AS LGBTQIA+:

- **Do not assume this is a phase** but allow your child to evolve. It’s important for you to affirm your child’s identity *now* and to communicate to them that you will accept them even if their identity shifts over time.
- It’s extremely important that young people have a **trusted adult** in their life who they can turn to if they are questioning their identity. According to a [study](#) by the Trevor Project, LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult in their life are 40% less likely to attempt suicide.
- **Protect your child’s privacy**; let them decide who to tell.

Healthy Relationships: Boundaries, Consent, and Red Flags

As your young person moves through their teenage years, they are more and more likely to be interested in romantic relationships. Some, but not all, may also be interested in exploring sexual relationships. Some may never be interested in traditional romance.

Wherever your young person lands, having conversations about how they deserve to be treated and how to treat others will help them have healthier, more fulfilling relationships as they grow and mature.

In older adolescents, as relationships may get more serious, these lessons are critical. Helping your young person learn about **boundaries** and **consent** before they begin dating can give them tools to have healthy relationships throughout their lives. However, it is never too late to start the discussion with your teen.

Many of us were taught to be polite and simply ignore behavior we don't like. We have the opportunity to advocate for our children so they have it better and do better.

In simple terms,

- **Boundaries** are personal limits of what a person likes and doesn't like or finds uncomfortable.
- **Consent** is getting permission, so you treat people the way they want to be treated.

SOME EXAMPLES OF BOUNDARIES INCLUDE,

- **Material** – lending or asking for money; sharing possessions.

- **Physical** – control over one's body. Deciding who gets to touch, hug, or kiss you.
- **Mental** – expressing thoughts and opinions. The right to disagree.
- **Emotional** – private thoughts and feelings.

WHAT TO KNOW

Make sure your teen knows that no one should belittle them, coerce them, or pressure them to do anything they don't want to do. Sometimes peer pressure can make it difficult for your teen to determine what they really want to do. Remind them to focus on whether the action will make them feel good about themselves.

Your teen should also understand all the components of **consent!** **Planned Parenthood** has a useful tool for understanding consent:

- F Freely given.** No one should be pressured, coerced, or threatened to do what another person wants. This includes not being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Someone cannot legally give consent if they are under the influence.
- R Reversible.** You get to change your mind. Without fear of repercussions or rejection.
- I Informed.** Informed consent means partners should share their STI status and whether they have other sexual partners. It also means being informed about what exactly you're consenting to.
- E Enthusiastic.** A quiet, hesitant "ok..." is not a "yes!" There are many reasons why someone might say yes when they don't really want to. If they are unsure about how their partner is feeling, they should stop and check in.
- S Specific.** Just because someone consents to one activity, doesn't mean they've consented to all activities. Before sexual activity escalates, there must be verbal consent.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Encouraging healthy boundaries and helping your teen understand consent will help them establish and develop healthy relationships. Unfortunately, young people—whose brains and social-emotional skills are still developing—can make decisions that are not healthy.

Help your teen understand the components of healthy relationships, and the warning signs for those that are not.

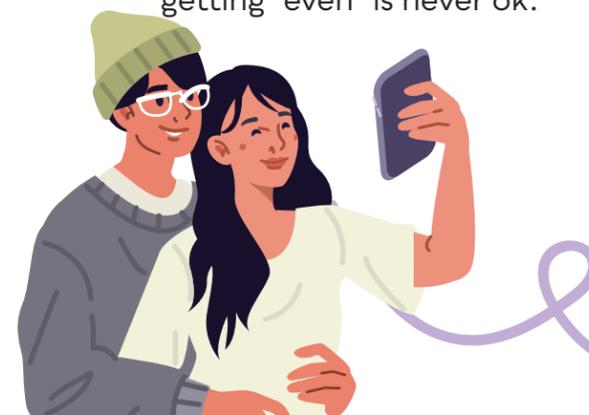
Healthy relationships include,

- Personal space
- Equality
- Healthy conflict
- Open communication
- Trust
- Honesty
- Kindness, fun

Ask your high schooler for examples of what each of these characteristics might look or sound like in a romantic or sexual relationship.

Remind them that these characteristics are just as important in a good friendship as they are in sexual or romantic relationship.

Ending a relationship can be extremely hard in high school. Validate their feelings of loss and hurt but remind them that getting "even" is never ok.



START THE CONVERSATION

- **Moments in the Margins:** in the car, after a TV show, when you observe friends interacting.
 - When a relationship issue is on TV, ask, "What did you think of how the character handled that situation? Why do you think they acted that way? What would you have done differently?"
 - Look for instances in music or TV when consent is absent.
 - Discuss news stories about sexual harassment. Ask your teen their opinion.
- Use open-ended questions to help your teen think about boundaries and relationships:
 - What do you think you would do if your romantic partner was pressuring you to be sexual?
 - What do you think are the most important qualities in a relationship?
 - Why do you think people get into, or stay in, violent relationships?
- In romantic relationships one person may have more power than the other. This may be based on income, race, gender, or age.
 - Ask your teen where they've seen power imbalances in relationships. On TV? With friends?
 - What makes a power imbalance unhealthy?
- Talk about how to show they are interested in someone. While they might be overwhelmed by feelings of attraction and excitement, they still have to respect others.
- Provide them with some phrases that might be helpful when confronted with a situation that makes them uncomfortable. "I like you, but I'm not interested in _____." "I'd rather hang out with a group than alone. It's more fun!"
- Handling rejection is just as important – when someone says or signals anything other than "yes," respect their boundaries!

MORE TO CONSIDER

- Encourage your young person to trust their gut. If something doesn't feel quite right, it probably isn't.
- Allow your young person to say "no" to you. It's good practice.
- They don't need to defend their boundaries. A simple "no" with a brief explanation of what boundary is being crossed is plenty. Ex: "Please don't touch me."
- Parents, too should apologize when you cross your child's boundaries. You are modeling good communication.
- Set a positive example of healthy boundary setting in your own life!

SHOULD YOU WORRY?

Unhealthy and abusive relationships take many forms. Your teen may not experience physical abuse, but that doesn't necessarily mean that their relationship is healthy. Abuse can be not only physical, but also sexual, emotional, verbal, financial, or technological.

The key component in an abusive relationship is a **power imbalance**. One person has power over the other, whether due to age, social status, gender, sexual orientation, race, financial status, experience, or physical strength, and they use that power to control their partner. Being abused is never your teen's fault.

If you notice some of these traits in your teen's relationship, it may be a sign of an unhealthy, or even abusive, relationship.

- **Intensity** – extreme feelings and overwhelming, obsessive behavior such as needing to be in constant contact.
- **Possessiveness** – jealousy that causes them to control who your teen sees, what they do, or who they talk to.
- **Manipulation** – controls your teen's decisions, actions, or emotions, sometimes in a subtle or passive-aggressive way that makes it difficult to spot. Your teen may feel

like they are dependent on the relationship for support, money or acceptance.

- **Isolation** – keeps your teen away from their friends or family, asking them or forcing them to choose between the relationship and their friends.
- **Sabotage** – purposefully ruins your teen's reputation, success or achievements.
- **Belittling** – does and says things to make your teen feel bad about themselves.
- **Guilt** – makes your teen feel like it is their responsibility to keep them happy; blames your teen for things that are out of their control.
- **Volatility** – unpredictable, aggressive reactions that make your teen feel intimidated or unsafe.
- **Deflecting responsibility** – blames your teen for their actions, makes excuses for unhealthy behavior.
- **Betrayal** – shares private information with others; cheats, breaks trust.

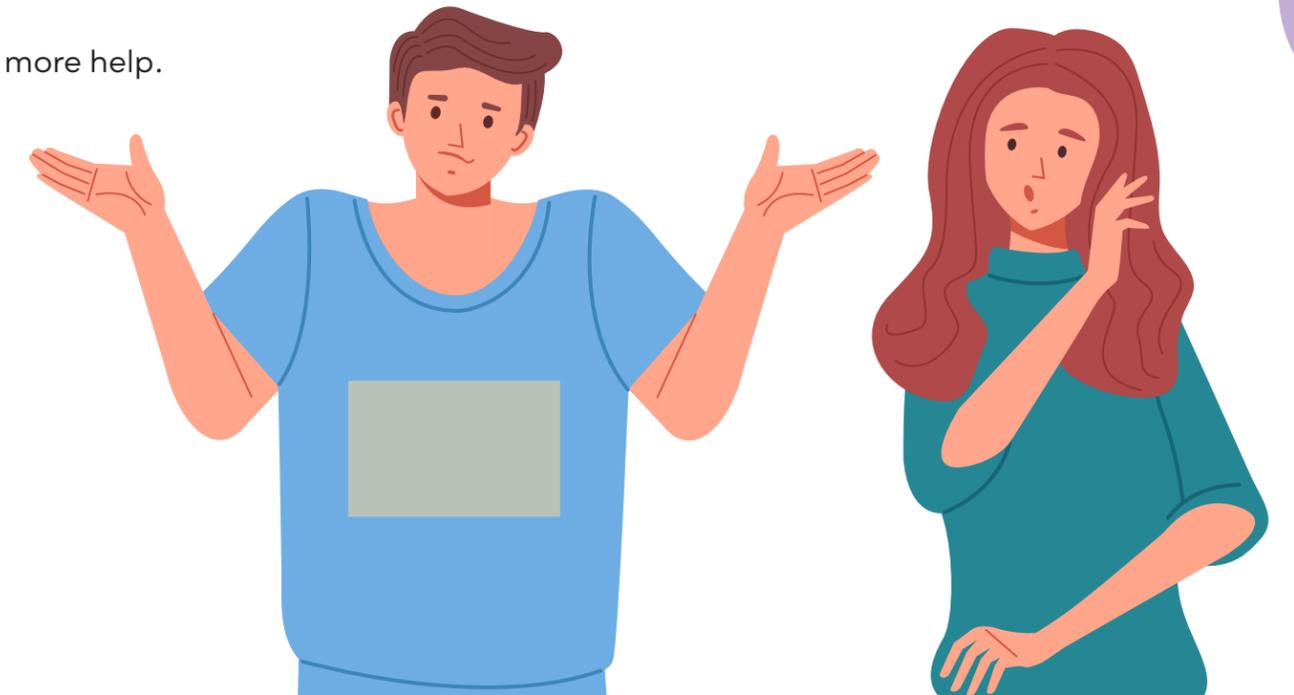
Getting out of an abusive relationship can be especially difficult for teens because they may go to the same school as their abuser or are in the same circles of friends, making it hard to get away from them.

START THE CONVERSATION

Suspecting that your child may be involved in an unhealthy relationship can be frightening. You may not know what to do, or fear that you will do the wrong thing. Here are some ways to support your young person.

- Remind your young person that you love them. Remind them that their safety and well-being is your number one priority.
- Listen, don't judge. Let your teen know that they will not be punished if they share this information with you; your goal is to help and support them. They must be able to trust that this is true.
- Keep your opinions of their partner out of the conversation—it may make your teen shut down.
- Don't prevent them from seeing their partner. This may make them more likely to do so in secrecy which can be more dangerous.
- Allow them to make up their own mind. They are already experiencing control from their partner; let them know you will not also control them.

Please see our **Resources** section for more help.



Abstinence and Methods of Protection

Almost all people will eventually become sexually active. When people do choose to engage in sexual activity, it's important that they know how to communicate with their partner about protecting themselves. When we talk about birth control pills or condoms in the same way we talk about any aspect of health, we dispel some of the secrecy that surrounds sex. Giving factual information about sex and protection **does not** encourage young people to have sex. It helps teach them how to make smart and healthy choices for their body.

Share your values with your child. You can say something like, "While I hope you to wait a little longer to have sex, it's important for you to have this knowledge so that you know how to stay safe." This will let your child know where you stand AND that you are there to help.

All young people need to learn about abstinence, non-barrier methods, and barrier methods, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

WHAT TO KNOW

Abstinence

Abstinence means not engaging in any sexual activity involving someone else's genitals (vaginal, anal, oral, or using hands) and is the most effective way to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancy. Someone can choose to be abstinent for any amount of time; it could a few months, years, until marriage, or forever! People can also choose to be abstinent at any point in their life, even if they've had sex before. Being abstinent is a personal and healthy choice that someone might make for cultural, religious, or other reasons. You may

prefer that your child practice abstinence. Help your child understand your values by explaining why this is important to you. However, your teenager may choose to become sexually active. You may be upset, but you can still help them stay healthy.

PROTECTION FROM PREGNANCY AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

If people choose to have sex, there are many options to stay safe.

Non-Barrier Methods

Non-barrier methods are for anyone with ovaries and include medications (like "the pill") and devices (like the IUD) that prevent pregnancy. They do not provide any protection against STIs. Non-barrier methods can also be used to regulate or lighten periods, lessen menstrual cramps, and treat acne. Non-barrier methods can only be accessed by visiting a doctor or clinic.

Emergency Contraception

Emergency contraception is used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, if a condom breaks, or in cases of sexual assault. There are two types of emergency contraception: pills and the copper IUD. The pills are available over the counter at drug stores, and the IUD can be inserted by a health professional at many sexual health clinics or doctor's offices. These must occur within a short time after the unprotected sex.

Barrier Methods

Barrier methods of contraception like condoms, latex dams, and latex gloves are used to prevent pregnancy and STIs. Barriers prevent the fluids of one person from getting into the body of another person. They can be purchased over the counter at places like drug stores and grocery stores and are often free at health centers and clinics.

WHAT TO DO / START THE CONVERSATION

- When you think of abstinence, what do you really mean? Abstinence from any and all touching? Abstinence for all time? Until a certain age? Ask your child what it means to them, and also share what you think.
- Be mindful of how you discuss abstinence so that your child doesn't feel ashamed of what they choose to do with their body, but rather feels empowered to make the healthiest decision for their body.
- **Remember the Moments in the Margins**
 - Popular culture, advertising, and news can help make conversations about abstinence, sex, and protection easier. If a TV show has teenagers who are having sex or talking about sex, you can ask your teen if they talked about protection, or how the characters decided they were ready.
 - Passing the contraception section while walking through the drug store, grocery store, or gas station can create a good conversation starter. Even if they roll their eyes, you showed you are open to the conversation.
- Respect your young person's privacy and boundaries. If you ask them a direct, personal question such as, "are you having sex?" they might shut down.

MORE TO CONSIDER:

- Reflect on your values around sex and contraception. What messages do you really want to give?
- There are double standards that exist between genders about the ideas of sex, abstinence, and virginity -- boys are often praised for having sex, whereas girls are encouraged to remain abstinent and are criticized if they "lose their virginity." How do these differences impact discussions of staying safe?
- In Illinois, minors between the ages of 12 and 17 can consent to medical treatment for STIs or to receive contraceptives. To find information about the laws in your state, [view this chart](#).
- Minors of any age may purchase over-the-counter protection such as condoms.



Sexually Transmitted Infections

One important aspect of keeping your young person safe is eliminating the shame and fear around **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)**. While no one wants an STI, contracting one does not make someone “dirty” or a bad person. STIs are more common than most people realize. According to the Centers for Disease Control, people ages 15-24 get STIs more than any other age group. Talking about STIs *before* your young person is sexually active will help them make safer decisions in the future. By discussing STI prevention like any other illness, you also help your young person feel more comfortable in talking to partners and getting help if they need it.

You may want to talk with your young person about what happens when they go to a clinic or doctor to be tested for STIs. Helping your child know what to expect and how to find a teen-friendly clinic will help them advocate for themselves and their partners in the future.

Testing for different STIs is available at walk-in clinics and many drug stores.

WHAT TO KNOW:

- **STIs** are transmitted through sex or intimate skin-to-skin contact.
- Like other infections STIs can be treated, and some can be completely cured with medication. However, left untreated, some can damage our health.
- Most STIs can be prevented by using a latex condom or latex square every time someone has vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- You **CANNOT** tell if someone has an STI by looking. Some STIs have almost no symptoms. **Regular testing** is the only way to tell.
- Talking about STIs and getting tested are important parts of communication in a healthy relationship.
- In Illinois, young people over 12 years old have the right to confidential STI testing and treatment without the consent of a parent/guardian. If they need to get tested, they may ask for your help, ask another adult, or go alone.
- STI tests vary, depending on the STI being tested. It might involve a urine sample, vaginal or anal swab, blood draw, and/or mouth swab. If they test positive for any STIs, the provider can give them prescriptions for medication necessary for their treatment and may ask for names of sexual partners.

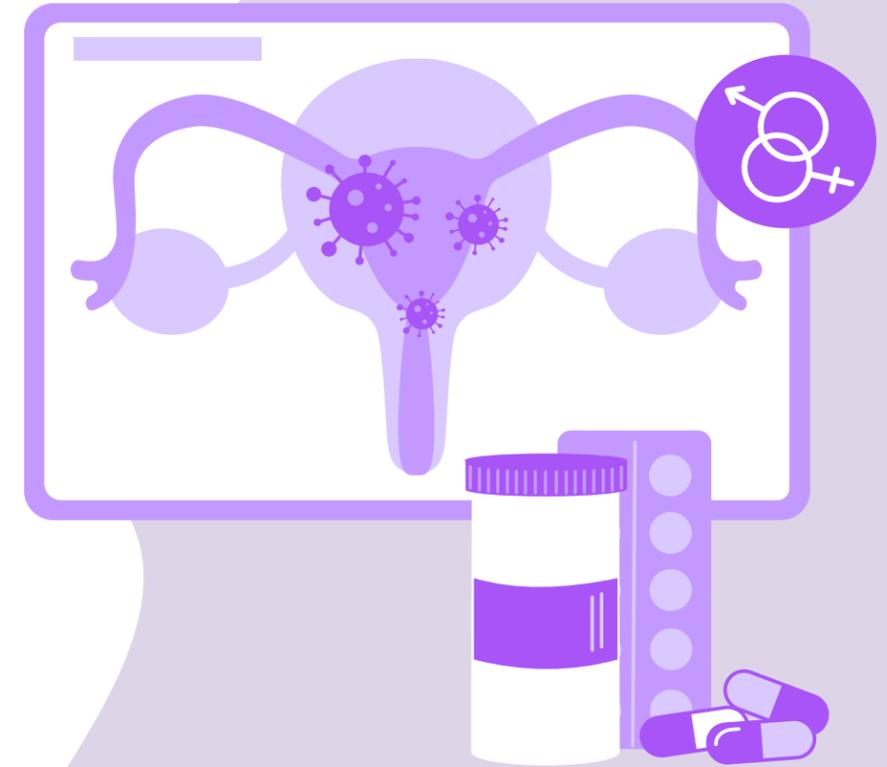
WHAT TO DO / STARTING THE CONVERSATION:

Talking about STIs might seem intimidating, but there are a few key moments when you can bring up the topic:

- Encourage your teen to feel comfortable asking their doctor questions about sex.
- Ask them what they know or what they have heard about STIs.
- **Moments in the Margins:**
 - When TV or music addresses sex, ask your teen, “What are some things that people need to think about before they engage in sexual activity?”
 - While in the car or taking a walk wonder aloud, “I wonder why 15-24 year-olds account for more than half of new STI infections.”
- As you continue to talk about healthy relationships and communication, remember that talking about STIs is an important part! Help them think about and practice communicating with a partner. Ex: “We should both be tested so that we are both safe.”

MORE TO CONSIDER:

- If your teen contracts an STI, it is essential to talk to them without judgement.
- When treated properly, people with **non-curable STIs** go on to live full, healthy lives with partners and children, if they want. For example, some treatments for HIV (**PEP and PrEP**) have decreased the incidence of transmission between partners.



Keep the Door Open

As a caregiver you, want to raise healthy, happy children. But it's not always easy.

We are more likely to *react* when we are caught off guard, worried, or distracted. When we *respond*, we nurture the relationship with our young person so they will reach out to us when they need it most.

Here are some general tips for responding instead of reacting:

- Pause. Take a breath.
- Be the calm duck on the pond even if you are frantically “paddling” under the surface!
- Are you reacting emotionally? What are you reacting to?
- Saying something like, “Tell me more,” instead of, “What?!” will signal to your young person that you are concerned and interested.
- Really listen and ask questions – be curious!
- Try not to respond to the attitude or the eye rolling.
- If they come to you with a problem ask them, “What would you tell a friend?”
- Identify other safe adults your child can go to.
- It's OK to say you're uncomfortable or that you don't have all the answers.
- Be open to learning together.

MORE TO KNOW

- Set boundaries that grow with your child. Think about social media use, curfew, giving them more choices.
- Try creating behavior agreements together instead of assigning hardline rules.
- Discuss your values as a family.
- Encourage risk-taking that is individual to your child (trying out for a team or speaking up in class).
- Help them to feel confident about their culture, racial, ethnic, or gender identity.

MOMENTS IN THE MARGINS

Instead of one lecture, find opportunities to have smaller conversations with your teen.

- The car is a private space where your teen doesn't have to look at you but can hear what you have to say. Song lyrics during radio play also offer good entry points into conversations.
- Texting may be more comfortable than talking. While it may seem impersonal, it is an easy way to give your child the opportunity to talk without pressure.
- Use TV shows, movies, or social media to start conversations.



Resources

TALKING ABOUT SEX

Adults:

Websites:

[Planned Parenthood](#)
[CDC - “Teen Health Services and One-On-One Time with A Healthcare Provider”](#)

Apps:

[The SAHM App - THRIVE](#)

Videos:

[Amaze.org - “The #AskableParent Guide to Porn”](#)
[Planned Parenthood - “Parenting Tips: A Tool for Talking About Sex”](#)
[Lurie Children’s Hospital, “Never Fear” Talks](#)

Youth:

Websites:

[Amaze](#)

Apps:

[Real Talk](#)

ANATOMY

Websites:

[Planned Parenthood](#)
[InterACT – Intersex faq page](#)

LGBTQIA+

Adults:

Websites:

[Gender Spectrum - Parenting Resources](#)
[GLSEN - “Pronoun Guide”](#)
[Teen Vogue - Intersex People](#)

Youth:

Websites:

[The Trevor Project - LGBTQ Youth Resources](#)
[GLSEN - “Coming Out”](#)
[Gender Spectrum - “Learn and Connect: Youth”](#)

Videos:

[Amaze.org - “Gender Identity: Being Female, Male, Transgender or Genderfluid”](#)
[Amaze.org - “What is Sexual Orientation? LGBTQ+”](#)

ABSTINENCE & PROTECTION

Adults:

Websites:

[ICAN! - “Birth Control Options”](#)
[Planned Parenthood - “Emergency Contraception”](#)
[Planned Parenthood - “Condom”](#)

Youth:

Websites:

[TeenSource - “Birth Control”](#)
[Planned Parenthood - Condoms](#)

Videos:

[Amaze.org - “What Is Abstinence?”](#)
[Amaze.org - “What Should You Do If You’ve Had Unprotected Sex?”](#)
[Amaze.org - “Condoms: How to Use Them Effectively”](#)

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

Adults:

[CDC Fact Sheets](#)
[HPV Vaccine video](#)

Youth

Videos:

[Amaze.org - “STD Prevention Beyond Condoms”](#)
[Amaze.org - “STD Testing: Planned Parenthood’s Roo Chatbot Answers Your Questions”](#)

BOUNDARIES & CONSENT RESOURCES

Websites:

[Child Mind- ” How to talk to kids about consent and boundaries”](#)
[Love is Respect - “What Are My Boundaries?”](#)

Videos:

[Amaze.org - “Maybe Doesn’t Mean Yes”](#)
[Psych2Go - “5 Reasons to Set Healthy Boundaries with Toxic People”](#)
[Amaze.org - “Healthy v. Unhealthy Relationships”](#)

SEX & SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES

Adults:

Websites:

[Common Sense Media - “Talking About ‘Sexting’”](#)
[Internet Safety 101](#)

Youth:

Videos:

[Amaze.org - “Sexting: What Should You Do?”](#)
[NetSmartz](#)
[Common Sense Media - “Teen Voices: Sexting, Relationships, and Risks”](#)

Spanish Resources

[Amaze videos in Spanish](#)

SEX TALKS

[Planned Parenthood](#)

ANATOMY & PUBERTY

[Amaze.org](#)

LGBTQIA+

GLAAD

[Amaze.org - “Explicando la orientación sexual: lesbiana, gay, heterosexual y bisexual”](#)
[Somos Familia](#)

ABSTINENCE/PROTECTION

[ICAN \(Select “Spanish” at bottom\)](#)

[Planned Parenthood](#)

[Options](#)

[Amaze.org - “Anticonceptivos: condones, píldora y parche”](#)

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

[CDC Adolescents and testing](#)

[CDC Fact Sheets](#)

BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

[Planned Parenthood](#)

[Love Is Respect](#)

SEX AND SOCIAL MEDIA

[Common Sense Media](#)

[NetSmartz](#)

[Amaze.org - “Pornografía: ¿realidad o ficción?”](#)

[Amaze.org - “Sexteando: ¿Qué debes hacer?”](#)

Arabic Resources

CONTRACEPTION

[Planned Parenthood](#)
[Video from Family Planning Victoria](#)

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION

[Healthy Living](#)
[HPV Vaccine](#)
[HVP explanation video](#)

BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

[Respect Ends Gender Violence](#)

RELATIONSHIPS AND TEEN DATING VIOLENCE

[UCLA Health](#)

LGBTQIA+

[UCLA Health](#)

ONLINE SAFETY

[eSafety](#)
[Childnet](#)
[iKeepSafe](#)

Urdu Resources

ANATOMY/ PUBERTY

[Menstruation](#)

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

[FDA Fact Sheet](#)
[All Good](#)

CONTRACEPTION

[Video](#)
[Choices](#)
[Condoms](#)

BOUNDARIES AND CONSENT

[Teaching Respect to stop gender violence Relationships and Teen Dating Violence](#)

LGBTQIA+

[UCLA Health](#)

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**RESPONSE
FOR TEENS**



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