

TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

Both teens and parents might worry that talking about sex will be difficult.

I would feel awkward talking to my mom.

How do I start a conversation with them so they feel comfortable talking with me about it?

- My parents will yell at me, punish me, or shut down the conversation.
- If I ask questions, my parents will think I'm having (risky) sex.
- My parents won't take me seriously.
- My parents won't explain *why* they believe what they do or *why* they have certain expectations for me.



- I don't know what to say.
- I've never had this conversation before, even with my own parents.
- I don't have all the answers.
- This is an important conversation that I should have with my teen in one sitting.
- If my teen doesn't talk much, that means I'm not getting through to them.
- If I talk to my teen about sex or contraception, they will think it's ok to have sex.

But these conversations are really important. And they don't have to be scary.



Teens want to talk with parents, guardians, or other trusted adults about relationships, sex, and other difficult topics.



Teens report that their parents influence their decisions about relationships and sex — even more than their peers do.



Parents can help promote their teens' health and help them avoid risky sexual behaviors.

I would be lying if I said I felt comfortable talking to him about sex, but I have to do it.



How to have effective conversations with teens:

PREPARE

- Know your beliefs and what has shaped them — such as advice from medical experts, cultural values, religion, or research — and be ready to clearly communicate them.
- Learn where to find trusted information and advice. You could consult with your child's pediatrician, a friend, or locate credible written or electronic resources.
- Think about trusted resources your teen can turn to for information such as other trusted adults, a pediatrician, or resources you approve.
- Understand that talking about sex will not encourage your teen to have sex.

FOCUS ON *HOW* YOU COMMUNICATE

- Above all else, stay calm. Overreacting if a teen is already engaging in risky behavior may make them hesitate to share with you in the future.
- Acknowledge your teen's feelings.
- Maintain boundaries you set.
- Listen to your teen. Put down your phone and make eye contact.
- Talk and share with them. They want to know what you experienced as a teen.
- Keep it conversational and don't interrupt. Lecturing can shut down the conversation.



I wish my mom would listen to what I have to say too and not just talk.



I wish I had an open conversation with my mother the way my daughter has with me. I try to give my daughter what I didn't have.

FOCUS ON *WHAT* YOU SAY

- It's ok if you don't have all of the answers. Say you'll get back to your teen, or work with them to find the answers.
- Use trusted resources to share facts and debunk myths.
- Provide specific details. Rather than saying, "be careful," which may not be clear to your teen, you could instead describe two different ways of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.
- Know the risks of early dating and sex, and talk through what they are and how they will impact your teen's life goals and cultural and religious values.
- Stress safety above all else.
- Don't assume your teen is engaging in behaviors they ask about.

IDENTIFY *WHEN* IS THE BEST TIME TO HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS

- Talk to them about sex and relationships early and often. Short but frequent conversations are best.
- Use real-life events such as what is happening in your community, the news, or other media as opportunities to have conversations about sex and relationships.
- Identify calm opportunities to have conversations about sex and relationships such as in the car, after watching a TV show with your teen about teen relationships, or by text.

If my daughter gives me a small opportunity to share my thoughts, I take the opportunity.



RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
[Talking with Your Teens about Sex: Going Beyond "the Talk"](#)
Parent and Guardian Resources: [Help your teen make healthy choices about sex](#)

Mayo Clinic
[Sex education: Talking to your teen about sex](#)

Office of Population Affairs
[Communicating Resources for Families](#)
[Healthy Parent-Child Relationships](#)

Additional resources for Native families
[Talking is Power: Tools for Parents \(Healthy Native Youth\)](#)
[We R Native](#)
[Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#)

REFERENCES

Parent and teen quotes used throughout this document have been adapted from actual quotes in the following publications:

Guzman, L., Golub, E., Caal, S., Hickman, S., & Ramos, M. (2013, November). Let's (not) talk about sex: Communication and teen pregnancy prevention within Hispanic families. *Child Trends*, Publication #2013-50. <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2013-50LetsNotTalkAboutSex.pdf>

Holman, A., & Kellas, J. K. (2018). "Say something instead of nothing": Adolescents' perceptions of memorable conversations about sex-related topics with their parents. *Communication Monographs*, 85(3), 357-379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2018.1426870>

Moore, K. A., Manlove, J., Walker, K., & Guzman, L. (2013). Reducing teen childbearing among Latinos: An innovative anti-poverty strategy. *Child Trends*, Publication #2013-55. <https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2013-55Reducing-Teen-Childbearing-Among-Latinos1.pdf>