



10 Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy offers these 10 tips for parents:

1. Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes.

It will be much easier for you to talk with your child if you have thought through these questions:

- How do you feel about school-aged teens being sexually active? Becoming parents?
- Who needs to set the sexual limits in a relationship? How is this done?
- Were you sexually active as a teen? How do you feel about that now? Were you sexually active before you were married? How do the answers to these questions affect what you will say to your children?
- How do you feel about encouraging teens to abstain from sex?
- What do you think about teens using contraceptives?



A father and teenage son engaging in a positive conversation.

2. Talk with your children early and often about sex and love. Be specific.

The most important thing you can do is to say the first few words. Be honest and open. Listen carefully to find out what your child already understands. Make your conversations back and forth—two ways.

Talking with your children about sex will not encourage them to become sexually active. Kids need just as much help understanding how relationships work and the meaning of sex as they do in understanding how all the body parts work.

What's the difference between love and sex? Let your children know what you value and believe—and then be sure to be a good role model and “walk the talk.” It's important that your child feel comfortable asking you questions about anything—not just questions about sex. Do your best to be an “askable” parent. Let your children know that they can talk with you about whatever they are thinking or worrying about.



A male and female teen being affectionate.

Kids say they want to discuss these kinds of questions:

- How do I know I'm in love? Will sex bring me closer to my boyfriend?
- How will I know when I'm ready for sex? How will I know when I'm ready to get married?
- Will having sex make me more popular? Will I be more grown-up and be able to do more adult activities?
- How do I tell my girlfriend/boyfriend that I don't want to have sex—without losing him/her or hurting his/her feelings?

- How do I respond when my girlfriend/boyfriend pressures me to have sex?
- What about contraceptives? How do they work? Which are the safest? Which work the best?
- Can you get pregnant the first time?

Be a parent with a point of view. These are the kinds of things you could say to your child.

- I think kids in high school are too young to have sex—especially given the risks of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Whenever you do have sex, always use protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases—until you are ready to have a child.
- In our family, we believe that sex should be an expression of love within marriage.
- Teens today find themselves in many sexually charged situations. Think ahead about how you will handle this. Have a plan. Will you say “no”? Will you use contraceptives? How will you negotiate all this?
- It’s natural and normal to have sexual desires and to think about sex. It is not okay for teens to get pregnant.
- Having a baby doesn’t make a boy into a man or a girl into a woman. People wait until they are ready to take responsibility before having a child.
- Having sex is not the price you should pay for having a close relationship. If it is, find another boyfriend/girlfriend.

3. Supervise and monitor your children’s activities.

Know where your children are at all times. Are they safe? What are they doing? Are they involved in useful activities? If they aren’t with you, are responsible adults supervising them? You may be accused of being too snoopy, but you can help your children understand that parents who care know where their kids are.

4. Know your children’s friends and their families.

Since peers have a strong influence on teens, do your best to help your children choose friends from families with similar values. Welcome your children’s friends into your home, and talk with them regularly. Talk with their parents about curfews, common rules and expectations.

5. Discourage early, frequent and steady dating.

Encourage group activities. Long before your child asks you if he or she can date a certain person, make it clear that one-on-one dating before 16 can lead to trouble. Letting your children know ahead of time will help them see that you are not reacting to a particular person or invitation.

6. Take a strong stand against teens dating people who are significantly older or younger than they are.

Try setting a limit of no more than a 2 - year age difference. Power differences can lead into risky situations—including unwanted and unprotected sex.

7. Help your teens have options for the future that are much more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.

Help them set real, meaningful goals for their future. Talk with them about what they will need to do to reach their goals, and help them reach these goals.

Help them see how becoming a parent can derail the best of plans. For example, childcare expenses can make it almost impossible to afford college.

Help them learn to use their free time in constructive ways—being sure they set aside time to do their homework. Community service can help teach them job skills and can put them in touch with a variety of committed and caring adults.

8. Emphasize how much you value education.

Set high expectations for your child's school performance. If your child is not progressing well in school, intervene early. School failure is one of the key risk factors for teen parenthood. Keep track of your children's grades and meet with teachers. Volunteer at school if you can. Limit teen's after-school jobs to no more than 20 hours per week, so there is ample time for homework—and enough time left over for restful sleep and socializing.

9. Know what your kids are watching, reading and listening to.

Messages about sex sent by the media (TV, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, the Internet) are almost certainly at odds with your values. Be “media literate” about what you and your family are watching and reading. Teach your children to think critically; talk with them about what they are learning from the programs they watch and the music they listen to.

Do not allow televisions in your children's bedrooms. You will probably not be able to fully control what your children see and hear, but you can make your views known, and you can control what happens in your home. Turn off the TV, cancel subscriptions, and be clear about what movies, records and videos are acceptable.

10. Strive for a relationship that is warm and affectionate—firm in discipline and rich in communication.

Emphasize mutual trust and respect.

Express your love, affection and appreciation clearly and often. Hug your kids and tell them how much you love them every day.

Listen carefully to what your children say. Pay attention to what they do.

Spend fun, pleasant time with your children daily, if possible. This is the foundation for your relationship. It is the bank account that will help you through the inevitable rough patches ahead.

Be kind and courteous to your children, and let them know you expect the same in return. Don't compare one child against another. Let each child know he/she is one of a kind—and priceless.

Help them master new skills. Real, enduring self-esteem has to be earned the old-fashioned way— through feeling good about what you do.

Try to have at least one family meal together each day. Use the time together to talk—not to argue.

Know that it's never too late to work on a good relationship with your child. Even though your teen may be acting like she doesn't want to have anything to do with you, those are probably not her real feelings. Children of all ages want a close relationship with their parents, and they yearn for their parents' help, approval and support.




References

Pat Tanner Nelson, Ed.D.

Former Extension Family & Human
Development Specialist

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The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
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