



Dear Parent or Guardian,

Welcome to the teen years! Adolescence brings many changes for your child — physically, emotionally, and mentally. It is our goal to help you both navigate these years successfully. This packet provides helpful information about our teen-specific services and resources that we hope you and your teen find useful.

To help you best take care of your teenager we offer these services:

Education

We offer education regarding topics such as peer pressure, puberty, healthy decision making, emotional health, dating and relationships, sexual health, and substance abuse. We strive to create an environment in which your teen is comfortable talking to us about whatever is on their mind.

Relationship Building

Most of our providers will meet with you and your teen, then spend some time alone with your teen. This encourages your teen to take responsibility for their health and to develop a relationship with their provider. It also provides an opportunity to discuss sensitive or uncomfortable topics. Please be assured, we encourage teens to speak with their parent or guardian about any serious concerns they may have shared with us during the visit.

Confidentiality

Many states, including Maine, have laws that protect a teen's right to speak confidentially with a healthcare provider about sensitive topics, such as reproductive health, mental health, and substance use. Confidentiality means that if a teenager tells us something that falls under a covered area, we cannot discuss the details of the conversation with anyone, including parents or school. If your provider feels your teen is in danger, he or she will always involve you. Confidentiality is one cornerstone of our ability to successfully care for teens.

As your teen approaches 18, we will begin discussion about transitioning to an adult provider. Typically, this happens at age eighteen and once your teen has graduated from high school, but each teen is different, and we will make a plan that works best for them.

We are honored to be taking care of your teenager. Thank you for bringing us along on this ride.

InterMed Pediatrics



Teen Health Services and One-On-One Time with A Healthcare Provider

— An Infobrief for Parents —

The teen years are an important time of growth and development. Teens need regular medical care to ensure they receive recommended health services that help keep them safe and healthy. Having a healthcare provider (e.g., a doctor or nurse practitioner) they trust and can talk to is important, particularly when it comes to topics such as mental and sexual health, substance use, and safety from bullying. Parents can help create that trusting relationship by allowing their teen one-on-one time with their healthcare provider.

Why is one-on-one time with a healthcare provider important?

As adolescents develop and take greater responsibility for their lives, it makes sense for them to be more engaged in their own health care. Current guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that providers begin having one-on-one time, commonly referred to as “time alone”, with young people as early as age 11.¹

Providers who spend one-on-one time with teens early on help establish this practice as a routine part of care, and provide teens with regular opportunities to raise any concerns in an open manner.² Ensuring teens have a chance to discuss sensitive issues, such as relationship concerns or depression, can increase their satisfaction with medical care and receipt of preventive health services.^{3,4} A recent report from AAP encourages providers to have one-on-one time with teens in order to provide accurate and comprehensive sex education, including personalized information on risks and prevention strategies.⁵

Do teens get one-on-one time with healthcare providers?

Research suggests that not enough teens get one-on-one with their providers. One study found that only 38% of teens 15-17 years old had one-on-one time with a provider during a clinic visit in the prior year.⁶ Another study found that out of 144 medical visits attended by a parent, just 68% involved time alone between the provider and teen.³



What parents can do:

Prepare yourself

Talk with the healthcare provider about when to begin giving your teen more autonomy with their health care, and when you can expect the provider to ask for time to discuss your teen's health privately. Initially, the provider may ask you to step out of the room for a short period of time, with the time lengthening as your teen gets older and more comfortable with taking responsibility.

Prepare your teen

Check in with your teen prior to beginning this process. Ask if he or she will be comfortable talking to the provider alone. As they get older, give your teen a heads up that you will be stepping out of the room and encourage them to think about what they would like to discuss with their provider during that time. As your teen gets older, you may want to ask them whether they want you to come into the exam room at all.

Work with your teen's provider

Working together as a team, you and the provider can ensure that your teen has the opportunity to discuss openly with both of you issues that may be concerning.

Talk with your teen

Have regular conversations with your teen about health-related topics, including healthy relationships, mental health, and the prevention of HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy. These discussions will help to reinforce and build your teen's confidence to talk openly with a provider whether or not you are in the room.

Be supportive

When your teen's provider asks you to step out of the room, you can signal that you appreciate them taking the time to speak with your teen alone. Being supportive can reassure your teen and empower them to take more responsibility for his or her own health care. It also makes it easier for the provider to continue to seek out time alone with your teen at future visits.

Take action

If your teen's provider does not ask you to step out of the room, you can suggest that you do so. Let the provider know you think it is important that your teen and the provider have time alone to talk about their health and well-being.

Look for opportunities

There is usually more time at annual check-ups to allow your teen and providers to have time alone. However, you can look for opportunities to offer to step out of the room during urgent care visits, as well.

Seek out resources

Some resources include CDC's factsheet "[Talking to Your Teen about Sex: Going Beyond the Talk](#)" and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine's app [THRIVE](#), which can help you begin a dialogue with your teen on important health topics.

References

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The Developing Brain

Let's give all young people the opportunity to reach their potential

The brain is built like a house, constructed over time. While people are born with the blueprint for a developed brain, experiences and relationships determine how well the brain gets built.

A healthy brain is key to the ability to learn, handle stress, and build positive relationships. Together we can build a better foundation for stronger brains.



THE BLUEPRINT

All young people were born with a blueprint and a specific timeline for construction. The way the brain is constructed allows for plenty of room for growth. By design young people have flexible curious brains that make them able to learn a lot, but this design also makes them vulnerable to risky situations.

A young person's reward center develops by about age 13 and is stimulated by exciting and risky experiences.

The part of the brain controlling judgment and reason doesn't fully develop until age 25.

Young people are also very sensitive to stress. Because the frontal lobe is not developed, they can't access reason to control their emotions and manage their stress.



Young people are looking for new experiences but do not yet have the ability to fully understand all the consequences of their actions. This explains why they have a hard time making healthy decisions.

SUBSTANCE USE DISRUPTS CONSTRUCTION

Just like bad weather and broken materials can make a building less sturdy, alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs can impact how well the brain is built.

Alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs, create permanent changes in the brain's reward center. The earlier a young person starts using these substances the more vulnerable they are to addiction.

Alcohol makes safe decision-making more difficult for young people because it blocks the part of the brain that controls judgment, which is still developing.

Prescription drugs work with the brain to treat medical problems when taken correctly. Taking more than prescribed or in the wrong way can lead to addiction.

Marijuana may be used by young people to help decrease stress and anxiety, however early use decreases the body's natural ability to calm and relax.



BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Strong, supportive relationships with an adult- such as grandparents, aunts, coaches, or neighbors- provide a young person with much needed support for ensuring sturdy brain architecture and the ability to make good decisions.

Talk less, ask more:

When you are interacting with your young person, try to do less of the talking. Ask questions to discover more about what they value. Strong connections are developed when you learn about what truly matters to, and what motivates, your young person.

Remember the importance of friends:

When we tell a young people they can't go to a place where alcohol and drugs might be available, we may be taking away what they value most right now- hanging out with their friends. Work with your young person on phrases to use when refusing drugs and alcohol and practice the phrases with them.

Coping mechanisms:

Young people experience stress but don't yet have the skills to manage it in a healthy way. Comfort them through stressful situations. Then, when your young person is ready, work with them on ways to calm themselves in the next stressful moment and ways to prevent stressful situations from becoming overwhelming in the future.

As connections grow with a young person, and relationships become more meaningful, you are building a more solid, sturdy foundation for brain architecture.



SUPPORTING THE TRANSITION TO A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

Starting a school year can be an exciting time full of new activities, new learning and new friends. It can also bring on new worries for young people and for you as the parent or caregiver, especially as they start to try out their independence. Know that your greatest tool during this transition time is the relationship you have built with your child. Here are some conversation starters to help you address some of the new challenges:

Learn about brain development

"Your brain is still developing so alcohol, marijuana, and nicotine can harm healthy growth."

The earlier a young person starts using substances, the more likely they are to become addicted.

Stay connected

"What worries you most about this big transition? And what is exciting about it?"

Talking about feelings isn't always easy. Use day-to-day conversations to practice so it will be easier when concerns become more complicated.

Set expectations

"I want you to wait until your brain is developed before using alcohol, marijuana, or nicotine."

By setting realistically high expectations, you let them know you believe in them which builds their confidence to make healthy decisions.

Have a restorative response

"What do you think you need to do to make things right?"

If your child doesn't meet your expectations, holding them accountable while providing support builds their ability to meet expectations in the future.

Connect with other parents

"Let me call the parents and make sure they will be home."

Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Work together.

Give your child concrete strategies

"If you're ever in a tough situation, use me as your excuse to leave."

Teens can make good decisions when they have the right tools. Help your young person come up with a plan for how they might respond when they find themselves in a risky situation.

the
Opportunity
Alliance
Public Health Program

For more information contact
prevention@opportunityalliance.org



MAINE
PREVENTION
SERVICES

Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services





VAPING & E-CIGARETTES

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THESE DEVICES AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOUTH

WHAT ARE THEY?

They are often called e-cigs, vape pens, hookah pens, mods, juals, or tanks.

These devices may look like colorful or metallic pens, flashlights, bottles, or traditional cigarettes.

No matter what the name or design, they all use battery power to heat up a liquid that often contains nicotine and other chemicals, which turns into vapor and is then inhaled.

These liquids come in sweet and fruity flavors that are likely to be attractive to youth.



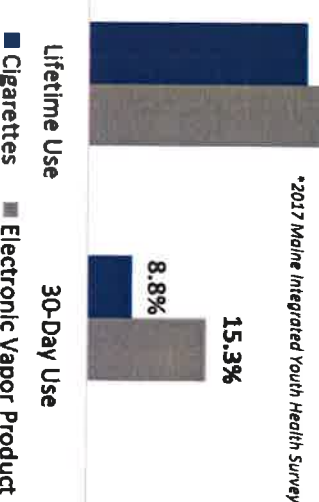
WHAT'S THE RISK?

These devices:

- > Often contain highly addictive nicotine, which is harmful to the developing brain
- > Still not regulated by the FDA and have not been proven to be a safe alternative to cigarettes
- > Can be used to "smoke" marijuana with little or no scent

33.2% Vapor product use far exceeds traditional cigarette use among Maine high school students

*2017 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Stay informed and provide accurate information on these devices and the risks to others.

Encourage your local school, work site, or community to include these devices in their tobacco use policies as prohibited items.

For more information, contact:

The Public Health Program at the
Opportunity Alliance
prevention@opportunityalliance.org



MARIJUANA: THE LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED

PARENTS, HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THAT TO YOUR TEEN?

We know teen marijuana use is a problem, but explaining why to youth can be challenging. Here are some ways to connect the research with your concerns about teen marijuana use.

STEP 1

HOW YOU MIGHT START THE CONVERSATION

I'M CONCERNED ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE USING MARIJUANA BECAUSE IT MAY LEAD TO PROBLEMS WITH...

LATELY I'VE BEEN NOTICING THAT YOU HAVE BEEN HAVING PROBLEMS WITH... WHICH CONCERNS ME.

Brain Development

Mental Health

School Performance

Decision Making

Addiction

STEP 2

PICK ONE OF THESE AS A REASON FOR BEING CONCERNED

Marijuana use can make it harder for teens to remember information, keep up in class and learn new skills.

On the one hand, teen marijuana use may cause depression or anxiety. On the other hand, teens may use marijuana to cope with these conditions.

Marijuana use can make school more difficult, or students who are having a hard time in school may use marijuana to deal with that difficulty. Together, they lead to a higher likelihood of dropout.

Marijuana use makes it harder for people to make good decisions.

Teens who smoke marijuana regularly may not be able to stop. They are much more likely to become addicted to marijuana than an adult.

RESEARCH

RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA USE ON TEENS

Regular teen marijuana use has been linked to persistent problems with attention, learning, memory and ability to quickly take in information.¹

- Teen Marijuana use can trigger mental health problems.²
- Teens who smoke marijuana weekly have double the risk of depression or anxiety.^{3,4}
- Teens who smoke weekly are three times more likely than non-users to have suicidal thoughts.⁴

Teen marijuana use has been linked to higher rates of dropping out of school.⁵

Marijuana use more than doubles a driver's risk of being in a car accident.⁶

1 in 11 adults who use marijuana will become addicted, but the risk of addiction increase to 1 in 6 for those who start using in their teens.⁷

WHATEVER HAPPENS WITH LEGALIZATION, IT WILL NEVER BE A GOOD IDEA FOR TEENS TO USE MARIJUANA. WHY? ANY OF THESE MESSAGES WILL DO.

CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE | HOW DO WE SUPPORT WELLNESS FOR TEENS?

Being a teenager can be difficult. Creating opportunities, supporting teens and setting expectations will help to prevent problem drug use. Here are some ideas for supporting your teen to make healthy decisions.

STEP 1

HOW YOU MIGHT START THE CONVERSATION

I AM PROUD OF YOU FOR _____
I AM CONCERNED ABOUT YOU BECAUSE _____
HOW CAN WE WORK ON THIS TOGETHER?

IT'S MY JOB TO KEEP YOU SAFE. I EXPECT THAT YOU WILL NOT USE MARIJUANA AND THERE WILL BE CONSEQUENCES IF YOU DO.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT YOU TO BE HEALTHY?

The Opportunity Alliance
Public Health Program

STEP 2

WHAT YOU MIGHT DO

Check in often. Listening is the most important part of the check-in.

Nurture

Parenting that combines discipline with lots of warmth and responsiveness best encourages healthy decision-making in teens.¹⁰

Have clear and consistent rules about marijuana use

Structure

Teens who know their parents disapprove of marijuana use are less likely to use the drug.⁸ Teens with parents consistently enforcing rules around drugs and alcohol are less likely to use.⁹

Encourage your teen to be physically active every day.

Physical Activity

Physical activity improves mood, motivation, attention, and helps regulate brain chemistry. People who are physically active have lower levels of depression.¹¹

Help your teen get enough sleep on a regular basis.

Sleep

Many studies link better sleep quality and optimal sleep duration with improved academic performance.¹²

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MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR PARENTS OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS

MENTAL HEALTH ONLINE RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

- **THRIVE:** Developed by the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, this app provides parents with a resource to help adolescents increase ownership over their own health, including mental health. www.adolescenthealth.org/About-SAHM/Healthy-Student-App-Info.aspx
- **Center for Young Women's Health and Young Men's Health:** These websites provide information targeted at parents of adolescents, including guides on how to support children suffering from depression and eating disorders. <http://youngwomenshealth.org/parents/> and <http://youngmenshealthsite.org/parents/>
- **Children's Mental Health Ontario:** This website offers brochures for parents in a variety of languages on common mental health disorders affecting youth. www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/parents/signs_disorders.php
- **Headspace:** This website from Australia has a wealth of resources and videos for parents and caregivers of young adults age 12-25 years who have mental health concerns. <http://headspace.org.au/family/>
- **HealthyChildren.Org:** Sponsored by the American Academy of Pediatrics, this website provides a wide-range of resources for parents of teens and young adults. <https://www.healthychildren.org>
- **Jed Foundation:** Promoting emotional health and prevent suicide among college students, this website provides resources, including **Transition Year**, that are designed to help parents recognize the signs of a mental health problems and help their child's transition to college. <http://www.jedfoundation.org/parents>
- **Kelty Mental Health Resource Center:** Numerous resources for parents and caregivers can be found at this website including a resource library and family toolkit. <http://keltymentalhealth.ca/family>
- **National Institute of Mental Health:** Working to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses, **NIMA's website** provides guides and brochures directed at parents. <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>
- **Teen Health:** This website helps parents care for their child's ups and downs, from dealing with divorce to preparing for new siblings. Also provides information on how to understand your child's behavior, whether it's toddler tantrums or teenage depression. <http://teenshealth.org/parent/emotions/>
- **Teen Mental Health:** Geared towards teenagers, this website provides learning tools on a variety of mental illnesses, videos, and resources for parents and caregivers. <http://teenmentalhealth.org/care/parents/>

MENTAL HEALTH NETWORKS

- **Balanced Mind Parent Network:** This network guides families raising children and teens with mood disorders to the answers, support, and stability they seek. <http://www.thebalancedmind.org/>
- **Children and Adults with ADHD:** CHADD provides education, advocacy, and support for those affected by ADHD, including resources for parents and caregivers. <http://www.chadd.org/>
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** By providing resources for family members/caregivers, this website helps parents care for children with mental illness, care for themselves, prepare for a crisis, and prevent suicide. <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Family-Members-and-Caregivers>
- **National Eating Disorder Association:** NEDA offers resources to find help and support through their Parent, Family, and Friends Network. www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/family-and-friends

- **National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health:** This organization focuses on the issues of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs and their families. www.ffcmh.org/
- **What Works 4 U:** By sharing information and learning from others on what treatments are working for them, parents are able to help improve mental health treatment for their children. <http://whatworks4u.org/>

MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT GUIDES

- **Antipsychotic Medicines for Children and Teens: A Review of the Research for Parents and Caregivers:** This guide discusses the benefits and side effects of using antipsychotic medicines to treat psychiatric conditions in children. Available from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality at <http://1.usa.gov/1NSaWle>
- **Family Guide for Coming to Terms with A Loved One’s Eating Disorder Diagnosis:** Intended to help families come to terms with the diagnosis, this series of guides informs families of the facts and treatment options. Available from Families Empowered and Supporting Treatment of Eating Disorders at <http://www.feast-ed.org/?page=DiagnosisGuide>
- **How to Help Your Child: A Parent’s Guide to OCD:** Targeted at parents whose child has been diagnosed or exhibiting symptoms of OCD, this guide helps parents understand the illness and cope with a child’s behavior, as well as provides insights about finding effective therapy and taking a proactive role in treatment. Available from Beyond OCD at www.ocdeducationstation.org/ocd-guides/
- **Parent’s Guide to Getting Good Care:** Parents are taken through the steps in finding the best professional for their child, and the most appropriate treatment. Available from Child Mind Institute at www.childmind.org/en/parents-gulde-getting-good-care/
- **Parents Medication Guides for ADHD, Bipolar, and Depression:** These three parent medication guides are available to help parents learn about effective treatments for children and adolescents with various mental health disorders. Available from the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at <http://www.parentsmedguide.org/>
- **Treatment Options for ADHD in Children and Teens: A Review of Research for Parents and Caregivers:** This guide discusses the benefits and risks of the different types of treatment for ADHD, and helps parents talk to doctors. Available from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality at <http://1.usa.gov/1Pd3RFm>
- **Youth Violence: Electronic Media and Youth Violence:** This guide focuses on the phenomena of electronic aggression (harassment or bullying that occurs through online and messaging platforms). It provides strategies for addressing the issue with teens. Available from the CDC at www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pub/ea-brief.html

TREATMENT SERVICES LOCATOR

- **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:** Providing resources specifically for families, this website includes a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Finder. http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resources/CAP_Finder.aspx
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** SAMHSA provides information on mental health services and treatment centers using a service locator. <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Seven tips to **IMPROVE YOUR SLEEP**

Sleep helps our bodies rest and recover from the day's activities. A few simple steps can help improve the quality of your sleep.

- Establish a sleep schedule. Go to bed at the same time each night and rise at the same time each morning. This includes weekends.
- A nighttime routine helps alert your body that it's time to sleep. Dim the lights and try a hot bath, light yoga, meditation, deep breathing, or easy stretches.
- Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and at a comfortable temperature. Remove televisions from the bedroom and turn off electronic devices, such as computers, tablets, video games, and smart phones.
- If you're still awake 20 minutes after turning off the lights, get up and do something calming.
- Engage in physical activity during the day. Exercise can help you sleep better (but not right before bedtime).
- If you must take a nap during the day, limit it to an hour or less, and do it before 3 pm.
- Eat right. A healthy, balanced diet will help you to sleep well. Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.

What is the right amount of sleep for me?

The amount of sleep that's right for your body changes as you age:

6–12 years	9–12 hours per 24 hours
13–18 years	8–10 hours per 24 hours
18–60 years	7 or more hours per night

Sleep quality

The quality of your sleep also contributes to your health and well-being. Signs of poor sleep quality include feeling tired even after getting enough sleep, repeatedly waking up during the night, and experiencing symptoms of sleep disorders, such as snoring or gasping for air. Speak with your provider if you have questions or concerns.



How to Connect with Your Teen about Smart & Safe Media Use

Teens have grown up surrounded by a steady flow of media. TV and movies arrive by cable, satellite, streaming, and on demand. Social media, fun apps, and video games are on tablets and smartphones. Texting is as close as their thumbs. Teens may think they know all about today's media, but they may not know enough about viewing and interacting with media safely and wisely.

As a parent, it is your job to talk with your teen about smart and safe media use.

Balancing the Digital World and Real World

Both traditional and social media can enrich a teen's world with knowledge, create awareness of current events, and promote civic and community involvement. Online video platforms such as FaceTime, Skype, and Google Hangout, along with group text messaging and file sharing sites where several people can work on a document simultaneously, allow students to collaborate on school projects and connect with friends and family far away.

If media use is not carefully managed, however, it can quickly get out-of-hand. According to a Common Sense Media report, 1 in 4 adolescents said they are "constantly connected" to the internet. All that time spent on their smartphones and other devices can use up time needed to engage in activities essential for good health—like enough sleep and exercise—and can negatively impact school performance.

"Doze" and Don'ts

Teens need 8-10 hours of sleep a night, and devices and media use can disrupt both the length and the quality of sleep. Discuss how to avoid "device damage" to good sleep hygiene with your teen:

- When using screens in the evening, turn the brightness down, use a blue light filter, and turn them off completely 1 hour before bedtime. The blue light from the TV or mobile screen can interfere with sleep.
- Recharge devices overnight—outside the bedroom. Vibrating and audio alerts from incoming messages can keep teens awake. Despite what your teen may tell you, putting a device on silent isn't enough. Your teen may be tempted to use or check his or her device when he or she should be sleeping. The light given off by devices charging at night can also affect sleep quality.
- Avoid watching scary movies or playing violent games—especially in the evening.

The Obesity Connection

According to a 2016 American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) technical report, "Children and Adolescents and Digital Media," several studies link more screen time with obesity rates. To scale back this unhealthy effect, coach teens to:

- Get at least one hour of exercise each day.
- Not watch TV or use mobile devices at mealtime.

Media and Multitasking

Other times media use should be avoided:

- **Driving.** The National Safety Council estimates more than 1.5 million car accidents are caused by distracted drivers using cell phones each year. And—it's against the law.
- **Walking.** One survey found that 40% of teens have been hit or nearly hit by a car, bike, or motorcycle while walking—often while listening to music, texting, or talking on the phone.
- **Doing homework.** A 2015 research review suggests that multitasking with electronic devices has a negative effect on homework, studying, and grades.

Digitally Distorted Reality

Help your teen understand that images or information on TV, in movies, or shared on social media do not always reflect real life.

- **Body Image.** Media often present unrealistically thin or muscular body images that can contribute to eating disorders or the use of potentially dangerous nutritional supplements.
- **Risky Behavior.** Media may make it seem like everybody is on board with certain risky activities. Consequences such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and substance abuse rarely are shown. In reality, most (59%) of U.S. high school students surveyed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have never had sex, for example, and 2016 National Institute on Drug Abuse data show the rate of teens reporting they had "been drunk" in the past year at historic lows.
- **Violence.** Many violent acts in the media are committed by characters otherwise shown as role models, but viewers rarely see the long-term physical and emotional suffering violence can cause. Presented as entertainment, virtual violence has been shown to increase real-life violence, aggressive thoughts and behavior, and angry feelings. Despite these research findings, according to an AAP policy statement, most people assume they are immune to this effect.
- **Stereotypes.** Harmful stereotypes are less common than they once were in the media, but they still show up. Suggest teens compare images of diverse populations they see in the media with people they know in real life and consider how accurate or inaccurate those images are. Ask how he or she would feel as a victim of discrimination or prejudice.

Digital Citizenship and Media Literacy

- Make sure teens are aware that people may not always be who they say they are online. Warn them that sex offenders often use social networking sites, e-mail, and online gaming to contact and exploit young people.
- Remind them that a platform's privacy settings do not make things actually "private;" images, thoughts, and behavior shared online becomes a part of their digital footprint indefinitely. Never forward a text or photo without asking permission. This includes texting of inappropriate pictures or "sexting." Images on apps like Snapchat, for example, may disappear after viewing but can easily be saved by using a phone's screen shot function.
- Have ongoing talks with your teen about responsible online citizenship. This includes treating others with respect online and offline and avoiding cyberbullying. Let them know to tell a parent, their pediatrician, or other trusted adult if they or others are being bullied, disrespected, attacked, or treated badly online.

Talking with Your Teens about Sex: Going Beyond “the Talk”



Parenting a teen is not always easy. Youth need adults who are there for them—especially parents* who will connect with them, communicate with them, spend time with them, and show a genuine interest in them. Talking with teens about sex-related topics, including healthy relationships and the prevention of HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and pregnancy, is a positive parenting practice that has been widely researched.¹ A number of programs in a variety of settings (e.g., schools, parents’ worksites) have been shown to increase the amount and quality of communication between parents and their teens.²⁻⁴

This fact sheet offers practical actions for parents to help strengthen their efforts to engage positively with their teens and to have meaningful discussions with them about sex. This information complements other available parent resources (see selected list on page 3) by emphasizing the importance of talking with teens about sex *and* healthy relationships.

* In this fact sheet, “parent” refers to the adult primary caregiver(s) of an adolescent’s basic needs. These caregivers could include biological parents, other biological relatives, or non-biological parents.

Does talking with teens about sex make a difference?

- According to teens, the answer is “yes.” In national surveys conducted by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, teens report that their parents have the **greatest influence over their decisions about sex—more than** friends, siblings, or the media. Most teens also say they share their parents’ values about sex, and making decisions about delaying sex would be easier if they could talk openly and honestly with their parents.⁵
- According to many researchers, the answer is “yes.” Studies have shown that teens who report talking with their parents about sex are more likely to delay having sex and to use condoms when they do have sex.⁶ Parents should be aware that the following important aspects of communication can have an impact on teen sexual behavior:⁷
 - what is said
 - how it is said
 - how often it is said
 - how much teens feel cared for, and understood by, their parents

What can parents do?

When parents communicate honestly and openly with their teenage son or daughter about sex, relationships, and the prevention of HIV, STDs, and pregnancy, they can help promote their teen's health and reduce the chances that their teen will engage in behaviors that place them at risk. Following are some actions and approaches parents might take to improve communication with their teen about these challenging, hard-to-discuss health concerns.

■ Stay informed about—

- Where your teen is getting information
- What health messages your teen is learning
- What health messages are factual and medically accurate

Your teen may be getting messages about sex, relationships, and the prevention of HIV, STDs, and pregnancy from a variety of sources, including teachers, friends, health care providers, television, and social media. Some of these messages may be more accurate than others. Don't assume that your teen's health education class includes the information you want your child to know—school-based curricula vary from state to state.

■ Identify unique opportunities to have conversations with your teen, such as

- In the car. The car is a private space where your teen doesn't have to look at you but can hear what you have to say.
- Immediately following a relevant TV show/movie. Characters on TV shows and movies model many behaviors, and certain storylines may provide the opportunity to reinforce positive behavior or discuss the consequences of risky behavior.
- Through text messaging, which may provide an easy, acceptable way to reinforce messages discussed in-person.

■ Have frequent conversations.

Although you may know that having "the talk" with your teen about sex and HIV, STD, and pregnancy prevention is important, having a series of discussions that begin **early, happen often, and continue over time can make more of a difference than a single conversation.**

■ Be relaxed and open.

Talking about sex, relationships, and the prevention of HIV, STDs, and pregnancy may not always be comfortable or easy, but you can encourage your teen to ask you questions and be prepared to give fair and honest answers. This will keep the door open for both of you to bring up the topic. It's OK to say you're feeling uncomfortable or that you don't have all the answers.

■ Avoid overreacting.

When your teen shares personal information with you, keep in mind that he or she may be asking for your input or wants to know how you feel. Let your teen know that you value his or her opinion, even if it is different from yours.

■ Provide opportunities for conversations between your teen and health care professionals.

By taking your teen to regular, preventive care appointments and allowing time **alone with the provider, you create opportunities for your teen to talk confidentially** with doctors or nurses about health issues that may be of concern, including HIV, STDs, and pregnancy. Be prepared to suggest that you step out of the room for a moment to allow for this special time, as not all health care providers will feel comfortable asking you to leave the room.

What topics should parents discuss with their teens?

It's important that your conversations with your teen not focus just on the consequences of risky sexual behaviors. Many teens receive these messages in health education class or elsewhere. As a parent, you have the opportunity to have discussions with your teen about other related topics. You can

- Talk about healthy, respectful relationships.
- Communicate your own expectations for your teen about relationships and sex.
- Provide factual information about ways to prevent HIV, STDs, and pregnancy (e.g., abstinence, condoms and contraception, and HIV/STD testing).
- Focus on the benefits of protecting oneself from HIV, STDs, and pregnancy.
- Provide information about where your teen can speak with a provider and receive sexual health services, such as HIV/STD testing.

How can parents improve their communication skills?

Various organizations have developed programs to help build parents' skills and improve parent-adolescent communication. These skill-building programs may be implemented in schools, health clinics, community-based settings, and even places where parents work (see Table 1 for selected examples). Parents, educators, health care providers, community-based staff, and employers can work together to promote positive communication between parents and adolescents about sex.

Where can parents get more information?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Positive Parenting Practices
www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/protective/positiveparenting/index.htm
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Teen Pregnancy: Parent and Guardian Resources
www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/parents.htm
- Office of Adolescent Health. Talking with Teens. Teens and Parents Talking
www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/info/parents/get-started/quiz.html
- Advocates for Youth. Parent-child communication: Promoting sexually healthy youth
www.advocatesforyouth.org/the-facts-parent-child-communication
- The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Parent-adolescent communication about sex in Latino families: a guide for practitioners
<https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/parent-adolescent-communication-about-sex-latino-families>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthfinder.gov. Talk to Your Kids about Sex
www.healthfinder.gov/HealthTopics/Category/parenting/healthy-communication-and-relationships/talk-to-your-kids-about-sex

Table 1. Selected^a Programs for Parents to Improve Parent-Adolescent Communication about Sex

What is the program called?	Which parenting practices are addressed?	Who has participated?	Where has the program been implemented?
Parents Matter http://npin.cdc.gov/parentsmatter/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General parent-teen communication • Parent-teen communication about sex • Parental monitoring^b 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American parents and/or guardians of pre-teens 9- to 12-years-old (4th and 5th graders) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-based organizations
Families Talking Together (Linking Lives) www.clafh.org/resources-for-parents/parent-materials/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General parent-teen communication • Parent-teen communication about sex • Parental monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and/or guardians of African American or Latino youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pediatric clinics • Schools
Talking Parents, Healthy Teens www.childtrends.org/?programs=talking-parents-healthy-teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (general and about sex) • Parental monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and/or guardians of 6th to 10th graders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worksites

^a These programs have been evaluated and shown to improve parent-adolescent communication about sex.⁸⁻¹⁰ The selected examples illustrate different audiences of focus, including parents of elementary, middle, and high school students, as well as the variety of settings in which programs can be implemented, including community-based organizations, schools, and worksites.

^b Parental monitoring occurs when parents make a habit of knowing about their teens (e.g., what they are doing, whom they are with, and where they are), setting clear expectations for behavior, and regularly checking in with their teens to be sure these expectations are being met.

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