

# Teens (13–18)

Whether you have a new teen or one who is moving out and on to adulthood, you know that your child will be faced with decisions about sex and sexual behavior. As a parent, it is your job to respect your child for the young adult they are becoming and to guide them toward safe and healthy decisions. Some of the many issues teens face in terms of sexuality include:

- Questions about one's own sexuality, including sexual orientation and gender roles
- When and whether to be sexually active
- The media's influence on sexual decision making
- Peer and/or partner pressure to be sexually active
- Dating, healthy relationships, and sexual violence
- Alcohol and other drug use and its influence on sexual decision making
- Body image and self-esteem issues
- Decisions about contraception and protection from sexually transmitted infections

Luckily, all of this doesn't happen overnight. If you have already started conversations with your child about puberty and sexuality, the topics above won't be so difficult to tackle when they arise.

We've included some information below about national trends in teen sexual behavior. These statistics are not meant to scare you, but to remind you of what is currently happening in the world of your teenager.

The 2001 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Centers for Disease Control) found that:

- 45.6% of high school students in grades 9-12 reported having had sexual intercourse, while 60.5% of twelfth graders reported having had sexual intercourse.
- 14.2% of high school students report having had intercourse with four or more partners, while 21.6% of twelfth graders report doing so.
- Among currently sexually active students, 57.9% reported using condoms during last intercourse.
- Among currently sexually active students, 18.2% reported that either they or their partner was using the birth control pill before last intercourse.
- Among currently sexually active students, 25.6% reported using drugs during last intercourse.

The National Survey of Adolescents and Young Adults: Sexual Health, Knowledge, Attitudes, and Experiences (Kaiser Family Foundation) found that:

- 36% of 15-17 year olds report having had oral sex.
- 24% of 15-17 year olds report having had oral sex to avoid intercourse.

The information teens receive about sex and sexuality comes from all different sources. One thing that research shows clearly is that teens respect and trust information from their parents. Although you can't control the information teens receive from their friends and the media, you can teach your teen to be a critical consumer of such information. Media literacy should be a part of the education you provide at home, including guidelines on television and movie viewing and internet use. The media can be a great discussion starter about difficult topics, including sexuality.

## **Resources**

### **Books:**

Bringing Up Parents: The Teenager's Handbook, by Wardell Pomeroy, PhD.

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives, by Ruth Bell.

Deal With It!. Life as a Gurl, by Esther Drill, Heather McDonald, and Rebecca Odes

Easy for You to Say: Q&As For Teens Living with Chronic Illness or Disability, by Miriam Kaufman, M.D.

Free Your Mind: The Book for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth and their Allies, by Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman.

In Love and In Danger: A Teen's Guide to Breaking Free From Abusive Relationships, by Barrie Levy.

Smart Sex, Jessica Vitkus and Marjorie Ingall, Illustrations by Michiko Stehrenberger

Teen Dads: Rights, Responsibilities, and Joys, by Jeanne Warren Lindsay.

Teenage Guy's Survival Guide: The Real Deal on Girls, Growing Up, and other Guy Stuff, by Jeremy Daldry.

Ten Talks Parents Must Have With Their Children about Sex and Character, by Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D. and Dominic Cappello

"The Go Ask Alice Book of Answers" A Guide to Good Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Health, by Columbia University's Health Education Program

### **Web:**

Advocates for Youth: [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)

Alliance for a Media Literate America: [www.amlainfo.org](http://www.amlainfo.org)

Center for Media Literacy: [www.medialit.org](http://www.medialit.org)

Girls Incorporated: [www.girlsinc.org](http://www.girlsinc.org)

Kids Health: [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

Scarleteen: [www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com)

Sex, Etc.: [www.sxetc.org](http://www.sxetc.org)

Teenwire: [www.teenwire.com](http://www.teenwire.com)