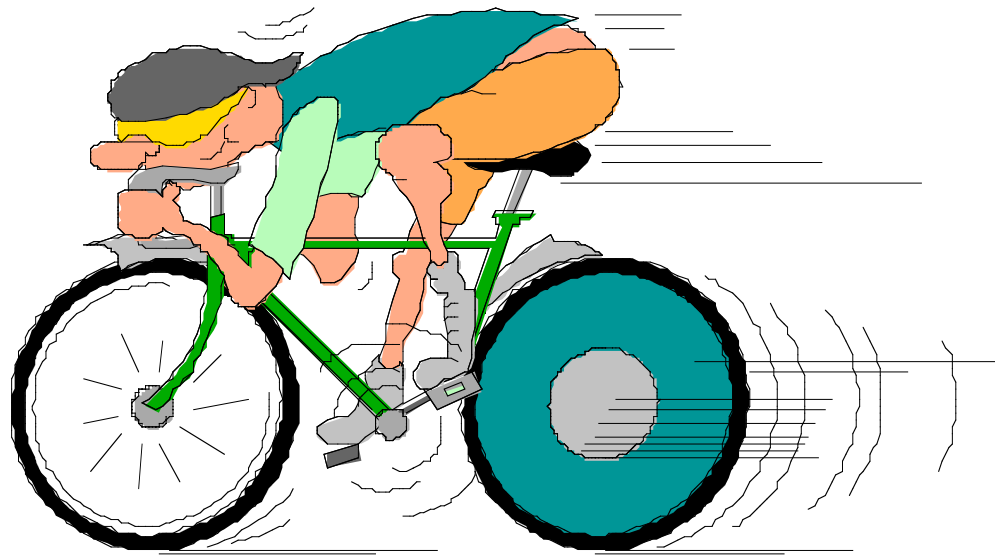


# TALKING TO YOUR TEENAGE CHILDREN ABOUT SEXUALITY



**PARENT PACKAGE**  
13 years of age and older

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(403) 944-7115  
[www.calgaryhealthregion.ca](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca)

## THIS PACKAGE FOR PARENTS OF TEENAGE CHILDREN CONTAINS:

- ☺ Information for you on what parents need to know, such as:
  - the parent's role (pg. 3)
  - what sexuality is (pg. 3)
  - the facts about sexual health education (pg. 4)
  - suggestions for what parents can do (pg. 5)
- ☺ Some questions you can ask yourself about what your family believes (pg. 6)
- ☺ Information about the normal stages of sexual development for children (pg. 7-10)
- ☺ What your children need to know and when they need to know it (pg. 11-12)
- ☺ Tips and strategies for talking comfortably with your teen about sexuality (pg. 13-14)
- ☺ Resource lists and links to gather more information (pg. 15-17)



**This information contained in this package is meant as a guideline only; each child or teen develops and asks questions at their own rate.**

**\*\*Choose the information that fits for you and your family values.\*\***

# PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

## The PARENT'S role...

Parents want to provide the guidance and knowledge their teens need to become responsible and happy adults. Parents, however, are sometimes afraid of talking about sexuality with their teenage children because:

- they are uncomfortable talking about reproductive body parts and functions. For many parents, the topic of sex was not discussed with adults when they were growing up.
- they wonder if talking about sexuality and reproduction will encourage their teens to experiment. The fact is, young people, whose parents discuss all aspects of sexuality with them, tend to delay becoming sexually active, when compared with youth whose parents do not discuss sexuality.
- they are not sure what their teen children already know or need to know.

As parents, you are already teaching your teens many things about sexuality and have been since the day they were born. They learn from:

- the way they are touched by others;
- the way their bodies feel to them;
- what your family believes is okay and not okay to do;
- the words that family members use (and don't use) to refer to parts of the body;
- watching the relationships around them;
- who does what chores, and so on.

They are also picking up a great deal from outside the family whenever they watch television, listen to music, talk with their friends – just live in the world.

## What SEXUALITY is...

Sexuality is not just sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Sexuality has to do with:

- being female or male, and how females and males are alike and different in the way they look and act;
- how we view our bodies and our relationships with each other;
- how we grow and change over the years;
- who we are as women and men (girls and boys); and
- how we reproduce.

Sexuality (our feelings and behaviours) is an important part of being human and **healthy** sexuality is an important part of a person's overall health and well being.

**Sexual Health Education** is key to providing children and youth with the knowledge and skills the need to ensure healthy sexual development.

## **Some FACTS about Sexual Health Education...**

- 📖 In 2000 a national survey revealed that nearly half of Canadian youth aged 15-19 are sexually active.<sup>1</sup>
- 📖 In Canada it is estimated that 7.1% of males and 5.5% of females aged 15 to 24 experience their first sexual intercourse before the age of 15.<sup>2</sup>
- 📖 Canadian youth have stated that friends, siblings, and media sources are the most common sources of sexual health information.<sup>3</sup>
- 📖 In a 2000 survey of Albertans, 88% believed that more prevention messages were needed to prevent further spread of HIV.<sup>4</sup>
- 📖 In the Calgary Region (1999), 82% of parents with children aged 2-9 and 90% of parents with children aged 10-17, reported occasionally or often talking with their children about relationships and sexuality.<sup>5</sup>
- 📖 In a series of surveys of Canadians, 85% of parents and 89% of adolescents agreed that sexual health education should be provided in the schools.<sup>6</sup>
- 📖 In the Netherlands (one of the countries with the lowest teen pregnancy rates), strategies that have helped reduce teen pregnancy include sexuality education, open discussion of human sexuality in the mass media, easier access to contraceptives, education programs and active participation of parents and teens in such programs.<sup>7</sup>
- 📖 Evaluations of comprehensive sexual health education programs reveal that they result in postponement of first sexual intercourse, decreases in the number of partners, and significant increases in condom use.<sup>8</sup>
- 📖 Sexual Health Education is based on a hierarchy of preferred sexual behaviour. Abstinence from sexual activity for teenagers is preferred because it is the only method that ensures freedom from negative sexual health consequences. Postponement of initial sexual activity, adherence to one sexual partner and protected sexual intercourse are sequentially offered as the next best alternatives.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bibby, R. (2001). Canada's Teens: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow.

<sup>2</sup> CRHA (1998). Health of the Calgary Region, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Journal of Public Health (Jan-Feb, 2001). Completing the Picture: Adolescents Talk About What's Missing in Sexual Health Services.

<sup>4</sup> AB Health and Wellness (2000). HIV/Hepatitis C Issues in AB: The 2000 Survey of Adults, pp. 18, 20.

<sup>5</sup> CRHA Population Health (1998). Parents Survey.

<sup>6</sup> SIECCAN Resource Document (1998). Common Questions about Sexual Health Education (cited from 1996 Canadian studies).

<sup>7</sup> Health Reports (Winter, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Health Canada (April 1998). STD Epi Update-Oral contraceptive and Condom Use. Online: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/bah/epi/std511\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpb/lcdc/bah/epi/std511_e.html)

<sup>9</sup> CRHA Policy Position (1996). Overview of Services, Education, p. A-10-1.

## **What PARENTS can do...**

- ☺ Provide correct information. Studies show that young people tend to obtain most of their information (or misinformation) about sexuality from friends.

- ☺ Answer questions honestly. Tell your teenage children what they want to know.
- ☺ Start conversations. Some teens never ask about sexuality.
- ☺ Share your beliefs, concerns and values. Your teens need to know where you stand.
- ☺ Help your teenage children make good decisions and stand by their decisions.
- ☺ Become familiar with the sexual health curriculum at your teen's school and build on those topics.

Adapted from: 1. Association for Sexuality Education and Training (ASSET). (1993). *Sexuality begins at home* (Brochure). Oak Harbour, WA: Author. 2. Sex Education Coalition. (1992). *Tips for parents* (Brochure). Silver Spring, MD: Author.



The following page of information was adapted from: Sex Education Coalition (1992). *Tips for parents* (Brochure). Silver Spring, MD: Author.

# WHAT ARE YOUR FAMILY BELIEFS?

As a parent, you hope that your child will always make good choices that are based on the values that your family shares. An important part of discussing sexuality with your children is sharing with them what you believe. YOU are an extremely important person in your child's life. Ask yourself:

- Does your child actually know what you believe?
- Have you really discussed your values about sexuality as a family?

The following chart may provide you with some things to think and talk about as a family.

When you have a family discussion, remember to:

- Choose a quiet time when nobody is feeling rushed
- Treat each other with respect
- Really listen to each family member
- Be honest
- Share the reasons for the things you believe

## WHAT DOES YOUR FAMILY BELIEVE?

<p><b>Gender</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean to be male/female?</li> <li>• How are males/females different? Alike?</li> <li>• How are males/females "supposed" to act?</li> <li>• Is there a double standard for males/females? Should there be?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Appearance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is attractive?</li> <li>• Do people have to be young to be attractive?</li> <li>• What messages do you give in the way you dress?</li> <li>• How do these messages affect your relationships with other people?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes a good relationship?</li> <li>• How are relationships different? (boyfriend, parent, child, business)</li> <li>• How should people show affection?</li> <li>• How can people resolve disagreements?</li> </ul>
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## WHAT DOES YOUR FAMILY BELIEVE?

<p><b>The Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What makes a family?</li> <li>• What rules does your family have about privacy?</li> <li>• What responsibilities does each family member have?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sexual Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What attitudes do people have about: talking about sexuality? sexual slang? physical affection?</b></li> <li>• Why do people often laugh and make jokes about sexuality?</li> <li>• What is sexual harassment?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Life Choices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do people think about teens and: sexual behavior? abortion? contraception? homosexuality? choices in adulthood? (single, married, parenthood)</li> </ul>
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## WHAT DOES YOUR FAMILY BELIEVE?

# YOUR TEEN'S DEVELOPMENT

## *General Information for 13 Years of Age and Older*

- The period of adolescence is marked not only by physical changes, but also by important behavioural changes. A new significance is attached to sexual expression and awakening.

### **Physical**

- Continues to experience body changes related to puberty. On average, boys develop about two years later than girls.
- Menstruation or sperm production has or will occur; most girls menstruate by age 16, most boys are capable of ejaculation by age 15.

### **Sexual**

- Greater interest in sexuality, teen experiences sexual fantasies as a way of preparing for and understanding of their sexual roles.
- Teens tend to be greatly influenced by peer groups.
- Starts to become interested in or develops romantic relationships.
- May have sexual attraction or experience with someone of the same sex. This is not necessarily an indication of a same-sex orientation.
- May masturbate.
- May experience frequent mood swings.

### **Developmental**

- Strong need and desire to assert independence; child may rebel against parents.
- Becomes more aware of physical appearance: sometimes appears vain, at other times very self-critical.
- Becomes capable of thought that considers all possibilities in a given situation.
- Has a tendency to be involved in abstract matters, sometimes losing touch with reality. May regard thoughts and feelings as unique or special,

sometimes developing a feeling of immortality, and feel that nothing bad will happen to them; “It just can’t happen to me.”

- Limited ability to perceive the future. Therefore, talking about consequences years ahead will not be effective unless it is somehow made relevant in the **here and now**.
- Often experiences *Personal Fable*: “I am alone, no one understands me, and I am unique. No one else is experiencing or has ever experienced what I am going through”.
- Tends to experiment, try out different roles and search for “self”.
- Starts to define personal values using family, peer, and societal values as a guide.
- Has a need for a supportive environment and for parents to be understanding.
- The teen is moving rapidly to adulthood. It is a time of re-evaluation. The teen needs to establish independence from his/her family and peers, to be able to relate to the opposite sex, prepare for a career and finally start to establish a workable and meaningful philosophy of life.

## **Development in *Early Adolescence***

### **Females 11-13 years old and Males 12-14 years old**

#### **Physical**

- Start of growth spurt.
- Great changes in body appearance.

#### **Sexual**

- Same sex friendships become very important.
- Peer group is very influential (it is used as a source of comparison for behavior, dress, “what is in”, and “what is out”).
- Interest in the opposite sex is more social than sexual.
- Curious about love and sex.

#### **Developmental**

- Thinks in concrete, rather than abstract terms.

- Present rather than future oriented; considers immediate rather than long-term consequences.

## **Development in *Middle Adolescence***

### **Females 13-14 Years old and Males 14-17 years old**

#### **Physical**

- Growth continues, but not as fast.
- Females begin to menstruate.
- Males begin to ejaculate.

#### **Sexual**

- Peer acceptance continues to be very important.
- Establishing greater independence can be a time of conflict because of wanting security and support, but freedom at the same time.
- There is a new desire for sexual experiences and feelings that accompany the sex drive; these are initiated by body hormones.
- Dating relationships are typically short-term.
- There is more experimentation than involvement in opposite-sex relationships.

#### **Developmental**

- Capable of more abstract thinking, more future oriented.
- In periods of stress, there is a return to more concrete thinking.

## **Development in *Late Adolescence***

### **Females and Males 15- 19 years old**

#### **Physical**

- Physical changes have stabilized.

#### **Sexual**

- Conformity to peer group is less important.

- Relationships with parents are more of an adult exchange.
- Physical desire for sexual play and intimacy increases.
- Dating relationships have a deeper involvement, with genuine concern for one's partner.

### **Developmental**

- There is an improved ability to think abstractly, to consider possible solutions to a problem, and to predict cause and affect relationships.
- Future plans are starting to hold importance and be put in place.

Source: Alberta Health. (1995). *Talking about sexuality with children*.

## WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW... AND WHEN THEY NEED TO KNOW IT

### **Children in Grades 1- 3 (*The Bathroom Humour Types*) Need to Know:**

- the names for genitals – penis, testicles, scrotum, anus, vulva, labia, vagina, clitoris, uterus, ovaries;
- the scientific words: urine, stool, bladder, urethra (tube draining the bladder);
- that reproduction happens when a man's sperm joins a woman's ovum by sexual intercourse;
- that a baby grows in the uterus and is born through the vagina;
- the difference between the digestive and reproductive systems;
- everything about menstrual periods and nocturnal emissions as clean and healthy processes;
- basic information about body changes at puberty; and
- not to pick up used condoms.

### **Children in Grades 4- 7 (*The Gross-Me-Outers*) Need to Know:**

- all of the above information, plus;
- all about body changes at puberty;
- basic information about STI and pregnancy;
- how to question and critique the distorted, popular, commercialized views of the "perfect body";
- how to talk about the ways that sexuality is portrayed in the media through television, movies, magazines, music videos and even some computer games;
- how sexuality is exaggerated in pornography and the participants are exploited; and
- that a teenager does not *have* to be sexually active.

This may be your last chance to talk! As children enter the teenage years they generally turn to their friends for answers and information. Work on becoming an 'askable' parent who will be there when they need you. At this age they still have a million questions in their minds that they won't ask aloud. They may have questions about gay/lesbian relationships. You can watch television or movies together and use opportunities when they present themselves to discuss the way that sexuality is expressed. Use teachable moments when they present themselves. Car rides present great opportunities and times to talk. When you are watching TV together or listening to songs with sexual lyrics, discuss these topics as they arise. Leave literature around. Talk about "body science" rather than sex.

## **Adolescents in Grades 7 to 12 (*The People Who Don't Know What They Don't Know*) Should Have:**

- all of the above information, plus;
- information about the correct use of contraceptives, and their potential failure;
- information about emergency contraception;
- detailed information about STI and safer sex;
- knowledge about the connection between alcohol, drugs and adolescent decision-making including sexual activity;
- the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships;
- practice with negotiation skills, refusal skills, relationship skills e.g. how to break out of a relationship; and
- information about what to expect when they visit a doctor.

Source: Hickling, M. (1996). *More speaking of sex*. Northstone Publishing: Kelowna, BC.

# TIPS FOR DISCUSSING SEXUALITY WITH YOUR TEEN

- Accept the task of sex educator.  
*Most young people want information about sex and sexuality from parents.*
- Become knowledgeable about sex and sexuality.  
*There are many books and other useful resources to help you, see pg. 14 for some ideas*
- Accept that it may be awkward and embarrassing to talk to your child about sex – and then do it anyway.  
*If you can tell your child that you are embarrassed, your child will relate to your feelings and be more accepting of the message.*
- Along with facts, talk about feelings, relationships, and how other people are affected by them.  
*This will help children become more caring and less likely to experience regret.*
- Acknowledge that you are starting these discussions late or that you are changing your views on something.  
*Children are forgiving. They will appreciate your willingness to admit a mistake and they will learn a valuable lesson for when they make mistakes.*
- Be sure there are resources in your home where your children can get correct information.  
*If children have access to age appropriate books, they will read them even if they won't talk to you. There are some good videos and web-sites too. But beware! Some may not be suitable or may not match your family's beliefs.*
- Answer questions directly, honestly, and without judgement.  
*If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and tell them you'll find out and get back to them. Then do just that. You can also search for and find the answer together.*
- Take advantage of those moments that arise when you can share your views.  
*You can do this when watching television or reading the newspaper.*
- Try not to talk down to your child.  
*This may be tough, but we can at least listen and show respect for their viewpoints. For example saying, "you're stupid" is not respectful.*

- Communicate your values honestly – and expect them to be challenged.  
*Teenagers want to be independent and have their own identities. We want that too, but we must continue to say what we believe and to model it in our own lives.*
- Maintain and communicate your values.  
*You have every right to maintain your values. If you object to your child having sex, as their parent you still set the rules. Continue to keep the communication open as tough as it may be for you.*
- Recognize you can't control all your teen's actions.  
*Anger and threats don't work. They only make teens secretive and create conflict. Instead, we can promote them taking responsibility for their own actions.*
- Recognize that you may not understand what your teen is going through.  
*The world is different now. Remember how strong peer pressure can be. Talk with other parents, teens and teachers about their similar experiences.*
- Express your appreciation of how tough it is to be a teen.  
*They need to hear about the good decisions and actions they make. Give them a hug and spend quality time together.*
- Try not to deliver ultimatums.  
*We need to maintain flexibility. Give assurance that we may not approve of their actions but we will not abandon them and will love them unconditionally.*
- Recognize that teenagers are tough on adult relationships – If you are in one, take good care of you and your partner's bond.  
*Talk with your partner and reach an agreement about how to handle difficult situations and avoid taking different sides.*
- Help your teenager to set goals and create and a life plan according to their ideals.  
*Parents can do this by spending time with their teen, offering varied experiences, and helping them establish short and long term goals.*

Source: Warren, A. & Wiedenkiller, J. (1999). Everybody's Doing it! Viking Penguin.

## FINDING RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

This information is intended to assist you in finding agencies or organizations within your community that can help support you in raising a sexually healthy child. There are many different resources available, but it is important to choose the ones that follow your family's beliefs and values.

### Things to Think About

You may want to ask some questions to determine if an agency integrates a philosophy that provides a high quality of service and education that is appropriate for the age of your child, comprehensive, sensitive to your cultural beliefs and values, and respectful of individual choices and rights.

- What is the organization's philosophy and mission?
- What types of services do they offer?
- What type of training do the employees or volunteers receive?
- How are they funded and who are they accountable to?

### Agencies That Support Sexual Health and Education

- The **Sexual and Reproductive Health Program** of the Calgary Health Region has an education team that provides inservices to parents, school and community groups, on many sexual health related topics. The education programs are provided free of charge. To arrange a program, or to request more information on a specific topic, call 944-7115 or through [www.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)
- **Community Health Centers** have Public Health Nurses who are active within their communities and schools. They provide services, as well as information, counselling and referral regarding birth control, STDs, pregnancy options, and pregnancy and parenting. Some Health Centres may also have Family Planning and STD clinics. A listing of Community Health Centers in the Calgary Health Region is found in the pink pages at the front of the telephone directory. More information on services in the Calgary Health Region can be obtained by calling their information line at 943-LINK. Information on other Community/Public Health Units in Alberta's Regional Health Authorities is available by calling 1-800-432-1845, or through [www.erc.calgary.ab.ca](http://www.erc.calgary.ab.ca)
- **Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada** offers services, information and counselling on sexual and reproductive health issues. To find a local affiliate

near you go to [www.ppfc.ca](http://www.ppfc.ca) or call 1-613-241-4474. In Calgary, call 283-8591.

- Your local schools provide sexual health teaching based on Alberta Learning's curriculum. The curriculum can be accessed through [www.learning.gov.ab.ca](http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca)
- Your local community health centre may have a **Community Services Directory** (often available through the library) which will list community organizations, health and social agencies.
- Your community may have a **Family and Community Support Service** (FCSS) that may be able to direct you to other local agencies/resources, or help to set up local partnerships that focus on prevention and enhance social and health well-being. To find out about your communities support services look at the blue pages of your local telephone directory.

## Webliography for Parents

Links to web resources are provided for information only and do not imply an endorsement of views, products, or services. Although our staff regularly reviews these links, we can't be certain that they are 100% credible since their content can be changed at any time.

### **Calgary Health Region** (*Canadian*)

<http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/hlthconn/hctopics.htm>

Information and pamphlets on a variety of sexual health topics and resources.

<http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/chr//srh>

An on-line mailbox for your questions about sexual health topics. Answers are posted within 1-2 weeks.

### **Canadian Health Network** (*Canadian*)

[http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/faq-faq/sexuality\\_reproductive\\_health-sexualite\\_reproduction/8e.html](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca/faq-faq/sexuality_reproductive_health-sexualite_reproduction/8e.html)

Articles about talking with your child/teen about sex, links to many resources, and guidelines for finding credible web sites.

### **Teaching Sexual Health Website** (*Canadian*)

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

A sexual health website, based on Alberta Learning Curriculum, developed for classroom use by teachers. Includes sections for parents and students at all grade levels.

### **Sexuality and U** (*Canadian*)

<http://www.sexualityandu.ca/parents/talk.aspx>

Information about puberty, talking about sex with your child, STI and contraception.

**Kids Health (USA)**

<http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/growth/index.html>

Articles on communication with your teen, puberty and surviving adolescence.

**I Wanna Know (USA)**

<http://www.iwannaknow.org/parents/index.html>

Information on being an “askable” parent, links to teen sites about puberty, STDs, abstinence, decision-making and condom use.

**Inner Learning Online (USA)**

<http://www.innerbody.com>

Colorful anatomy pictures and text.

**Parent Soup (USA)**

<http://www.parentsoup.com/teens>

A general parenting information site with sections on talking with your teen or preteen about sex.

**PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) (Canadian)**

<http://www.pflag.ca>

Information, resources and support for parents of lesbians and gays.

**Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (USA)**

<http://www.etr.org/recapp/practice/edskills200110.htm>

A teacher-based web site, which has a section on teaching students with developmental disabilities that some parents may find useful.

April 2007