



How do I talk to teens about their first sexual experience?

WHAT IS YOUR CHILD GOING THROUGH?

Different reasons lead young people to have sex during adolescence: out of love for their partner, out of curiosity, because their friends are having sex, just to be someone who has done it, or because they want to. Love is often the reason that girls give for having sex for the first time, while curiosity is more often the reason that boys give.

Some young people report that they haven't yet had the opportunity: they're waiting to meet the right person or they've chosen to abstain.

Having sex for the first time can lead to different fears: fear it will hurt, fear of pregnancy, fear of a sexually transmitted infection (STI), fear of being laughed at, fear of not being good enough, fear of not having enough time, etc.

Young people may also feel pressure to have sex. This pressure will be greater if they believe they're the only ones who haven't done it yet. The media (the Internet, TV and magazines), friends, and the person's boyfriend or girlfriend can contribute to this pressure.



Did you know?

By the age of 17, one out of two young people have not yet had their first sexual encounter.

Things that kids might be wondering

- What happens when you have sex for the first time? Does it hurt?
- How do you know when you're ready?
- I haven't had sex yet: am I normal?
- How can I convince my parents to let my boyfriend sleep over at our house?
- I want to have sex: how can I make sure my girlfriend is ready too?

As a parent, it's normal for you to feel uncomfortable discussing sex with your child. Some parents wrongly believe that they have to talk about their own experiences or know every detail of their teen's sex life. Young people can also have these same fears. Above all, it's important to give them tools to ensure that their first sexual experience is a positive one, and this should be done before they become sexually active.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT?

Tell your child what you want their first sexual experience to be like

What you want for your child should be based on your values and experiences. If you express what you want for them (e.g., a shared feeling of love, respect, protected sex, a stable relationship, etc.) and what you don't want them to go through (e.g., pressure, a fear of pregnancy, regret, etc.), they will understand your concerns. However, what they want for their first sexual experience may not necessarily be what you want.



Help teens recognize when they are ready to have sex

Without requiring your child to respond, you can ask the following questions: What would your reasons be for having sex? Because you want to? Would you do it for you or for someone else? Do you know how to get condoms? Have you thought about using a method of contraception to avoid pregnancy?

Watch out for any pressure they may be experiencing

Do they think that other people their age have already had sex? What do their friends think about people who haven't had sex? Do they feel obligated to behave in a certain way to be accepted by their friends? What kind of images are they getting from the media about sex?

There are many ways to talk to your child about sex. All parents need to figure out how they are most comfortable discussing the subject. You have to trust yourself.

Tips

Reassure children when it comes to their concerns about sex. They need to know that you are there to listen and to answer their questions, no matter what their sexual orientation.

Stress that sex isn't the only way to show you love someone. Paying attention to the other person, finding out what's going on with them, or being nice to them are also signs of love.

Show the importance of gradually starting the sexual relationship. Having sex is above all a relationship with another person that involves a great deal of respect. By learning about themselves and learning about their partner, young people will find it easier to communicate, share their fears, and negotiate condom use with the other person.

WHAT CAN HELP YOU?

Book for teens

ROBERT, Jocelyne. *Full sexuel: la vie amoureuse des adolescents*, Les Éditions de l'Homme, 2002.

Book for parents

COPPER-ROYER, Béatrice. *Premiers émois, premières amours: quelle place pour les parents?*, Les Éditions Albin Michel, 2007.

Web site

www.sexualityandu.ca

Do you need a professional resource?

Call Info-Santé at 811 or the parent help line at 1-800-361-5085.