



Let's
Talk
About . . .

What the Research Says About Family Communications and Connections

Research shows that primary caregivers can influence their child's sexual behavior. This may seem like common sense but it is also demonstrated in research studies. This fact sheet provides tips for parents and caregivers to promote their child's health based on research that explores family communication and connections.

FACT:

Children and teens want to talk to their parents and caregivers about sexuality

In a recent survey of 12-19 year olds 53% reported that parents, values and/or religious beliefs influenced their decisions about sex more than friends (8%), the media (2%), or teachers and sex educators (3%). Over two-thirds said it would be much easier for them to postpone sexual activity and avoid pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents. This was true for 79% of 12-14 year olds and 63% of 15-19 year olds.ⁱ

TIP:

Be an "ask-able" parent, initiate conversations and listen.

FACT:

Children and teens who clearly understand their family's values concerning sexuality and relationships are more likely to avoid risk-taking behaviors

Facts are not enough! Children and teens need to understand parent's feelings, values and beliefs about sexuality and relationships. Multiple studies have demonstrated that if a teen's mother had intercourse at an early age, gave birth at an early age, is single and dating, is single and cohabitating, or if an older sister is having intercourse or has given birth at an early age, then the younger teen is more likely to initiate intercourse at a younger age.ⁱⁱ

TIP:

Share and model your values and beliefs about sexuality and relationships.

FACT:**Youth who feel connected to their family are more likely to avoid risk-taking behaviors**

Young people who are strongly “connected” to their parents are more likely to postpone intercourse, have fewer sexual partners, and use contraception consistently.ⁱⁱⁱ In the research connectedness is considered family or parental closeness, warmth, support or responsiveness. In studies, young people who reported feeling a lack of parental warmth, love or caring were also more likely to report emotional distress, lower self-esteem, school problems, drug use, and sexual risk behaviors.^{iv}

TIP:**Spend time with your children engaged in activities that suit their age and interests.**

ⁱ National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2002). With one voice 2002: America’s adults and teens sound off about teen pregnancy. Washington, DC

ⁱⁱ Kirby, D. (2001). Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Washington, DC

ⁱⁱⁱ Miller, B. (1998). Families matter: A research synthesis of family influences on adolescent pregnancy. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

^{iv} Resnick, MD. et al. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: finding from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. JAMA; 278: 823-32.