

Teen Chat

A Guide to Discussing Healthy Relationships



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Wait. Think. Talk.



“Decisions about sex and relationships may be the most important decisions you’ll ever make, so think before you act.”



**Wait.
Think.
Talk.**

What is a Healthy Relationship?

- ✓ Communication: sharing thoughts, beliefs, and feelings.
- ✓ Mutual respect makes a relationship strong. It's a two-way street!
- ✓ Spending time together helps form a permanent bond.
- ✓ Caring, trust, and the desire to help each other grow.

WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING FOR?

- ✓ Someone who “gets” you.
- ✓ Someone who respects your boundaries and choices.
- ✓ Someone who knows how to show affection without having sex.
- ✓ Someone who sets goals and works to achieve them.
- ✓ Someone who enjoys spending time with your friends.



Sex does not have to be part of a healthy relationship.

- ✓ Sex can make relationships and dating more complicated.
- ✓ Sexual feelings can be pretty strong, so make sure your brain is engaged!
- ✓ There are emotional consequences to having sex, like broken hearts when you break up.
- ✓ Sex is not love and love is not sex. Learn the difference!
- ✓ Passion is not love, and infatuation is not love. Love grows over time and involves really knowing a person, respecting that person and—this is very important—knowing that person respects you. (Two-way respect is very important in every relationship.)



What should I know about Romantic Relationships?

They're great! And... only in the movies do good relationships develop overnight. Real relationships take time; and sex is not what makes a romantic relationship work.

Only a creep will say: "If you care about me, you'll have sex with me." Ditch the creep.



Communication and relationships. Be a better listener:

- ✓ *Be interested and attentive.* Forget about the telephone, the television, and whatever else you were doing—just listen!
- ✓ *Don't interrupt.* Sometimes we want to jump into the conversation with an opinion or a solution before letting the person finish talking.
- ✓ *Watch for nonverbal messages.* Posture, eye contact, energy level—these can all be clues to the other person's true feelings.
- ✓ *Ask open-ended questions.* Use questions to keep the conversation going. Avoid asking yes/no questions that may close communication.
- ✓ *Follow-up.* Try to remember and ask about issues or events you talked about a day or two earlier.

Goal Setting for Relationships and Life:

You'll know you are ready for a relationship when you have a concrete set of goals for the future:

- ✓ Decide what you want to do after you graduate from high school. College, work, etc.
- ✓ Look for summer programs and internships. Volunteer in your community.
- ✓ Join an after-school activity like band, the choir, or a sports team.
- ✓ Join a community- or faith-based organization.



Three great goals: Education. Marriage. Children.

Many teens include one or more of these three as goals: Education, Marriage, and Children.

Think the order that you do these in doesn't matter? Think again.



Success Sequence: “First Things First” Matters

It's an old saying: “First things first.” But sometimes old sayings, no matter how old, make a lot of sense. It's very true when it comes to the big steps you will take in your life.

As you mature, three of the biggest steps are

1. Getting an education
2. Getting married
3. Having children

In this day and age, lots of people do lots of mixing and matching of these three steps. Some people have children before they get married. Some people get married before finishing their education. Some people have children before they get an education. Doing it this way isn't “wrong,” and lots of people who make these choices are very successful. But it certainly can make life more challenging, and make it more challenging to achieve success.

The fact of the matter is, you are more likely to achieve your goals if you get your education first, then get married, and then have children. And keep in mind that having sex before marriage can get in the way of achieving your goals. For example, half of all new sexually transmitted diseases happen to teens and young adults, and some of these can cause infertility or cancer. Waiting to have sex until you get married can help you stay focused on yourself and your goals.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has published “Making a Love Connection: Teen Relationships, Pregnancy, and Marriage.” The authors, Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and Marline Pearson, show through research that the “success sequence”—education, then marriage, and then children—really does make it easier to reach your goals. Plus, you know what? It can also make sex better. That's right, married couples have more frequent and more satisfying sex.

So whatever education you need to pursue your dreams, get it done first. And then consider marriage and children.

Kids and Marriage: Perception versus Reality

Sometimes, reality is not what people think is true. That's certainly the case when it comes to what many teens think about children and marriage.

For example, most teen girls think it's okay to have a child without getting married. And about half of all unmarried teen girls who have a baby think the chances are good they will end up marrying the father of their baby. The reality is very different. Only one in twelve unmarried teen mothers is actually married to their baby's father one year after birth. And research shows that an unmarried teen mother is less likely to finish her education and more likely to be poor at some point.

Another example is living together and having children. Two out of three teens think it's okay to live with someone outside of marriage. But that can raise some real issues once babies are involved. Did you know that among couples who have had one child, two times as many unmarried couples have broken up as compared to married couples after five years?

Only you can decide what's best for your life. But knowing reality—as opposed to common perception—will help you make the healthiest and most productive choice.

Education First.

- ✓ More educated men and women are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce than those with less education.

Marriage and/or having children is an expensive decision, so you probably want to get an education while you can still afford it. Have you checked out the cost of diapers lately?



“What Should I Know If I Decide Not To Have Sex?”

You are not alone. Just over half of all high school students decide not to have sex.

Ask yourself these questions before making up your mind:

- ✓ Am I willing to risk sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS?
- ✓ Am I willing to risk getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant?
- ✓ Am I ready and able to support a child on my own?
- ✓ Can I handle the emotions and conflict I may feel?
- ✓ Will my decision hurt others—my parents, my friends?



“When I Decide Not To Have Sex, How Do I Stick To My Decision?”

- ✓ Don't be afraid to *take a stand* about your decision.
- ✓ Find friends that support your decision to wait.
- ✓ Support your friends in their decision to wait.
- ✓ Talk to your parents and your friends about *your goals* and what seems right for you.
- ✓ Seek out classes that can teach you about healthy relationships.
- ✓ Try to *avoid situations* where sexual feelings become too strong. “Stopping” is much harder once you get hot and heavy.
- ✓ If you and your boyfriend or girlfriend can't agree about your decision to wait, find someone whose beliefs are closer to your own.

Some of your peers might try to talk you into having sex.

Some things that you can say:

- ✓ “I like you a lot, but I’m just not ready to have sex.”
- ✓ “I don’t feel like I have to give you a reason for not having sex. It’s just my decision.”
- ✓ “If you really loved me, you wouldn’t pressure me to have sex.”
- ✓ “Are you crazy? Do you want to get pregnant or get a disease? Not me.”



NAME _____

SUBJECT _____

DATE _____ HOUR _____

QUIZTRON
FORM 71004

ANSWERS ON PAGE 21

FEED THIS DIRECTION ↑

QUESTION 1:

Which condition(s) can be caused by an STD?

- (A) Pelvic inflammatory disease
- (B) Infertility
- (C) Pain
- (D) Cancer
- (E) Death
- (F) All of the above

QUESTION 2:

How much do you know about STDs? (True or False)

- (T) (F) Many STDs don't have symptoms.
- (T) (F) You usually can't tell by looking at someone if they have an STD.
- (T) (F) STDs can cause serious, life-long problems and sometimes death.
- (T) (F) STDs can be transmitted orally.
- (T) (F) The only way to be sure whether someone has an STD is by testing.

“What if I Decide to Have Sex?”

You have to live with the consequences of your decision.

- ✓ Talk with your parents. Ask them questions. Learning about their values around sex can help you make good decisions.
- ✓ Go to a doctor or nurse to talk about your decision. You need to be regularly screened for STDs. Sexually transmitted diseases are common among sexually active teens.
- ✓ If you are female, you need to be regularly screened for pregnancy. Pregnancy can happen the first time you have sex. Using contraception reduces, but does not eliminate, the chances of getting pregnant or getting an STD.
- ✓ Make sure that you don't slip into an abusive relationship. Almost one in three teenagers report they have been the victim of dating violence. Sexual coercion and dating violence are never okay.

“What If I Already Had Sex? Is It Too Late To Start Over?”

It's never too late to
make healthy choices.
You are worth it!!!



Here are tips to help you
with your decision:

- ✓ Make your decision to start over and stick to it.
- ✓ Value yourself and stick to your decision.
- ✓ Avoid situations that make it hard for you to stick to your decision.
- ✓ Communicate your goals to your friends.
- ✓ Ask your parents to teach you what they know about healthy relationships.

“Where Can I Get Information To Help Me Decide to Wait ?”

Talk to someone who cares about you. Ask your parents, an older brother or sister, other family members, or an adult (teacher, faith leader, doctor, nurse) you feel will listen and give you good advice.

Most importantly, talk to your parents about healthy relationships and about waiting to have sex. They can teach you a lot, as long as you reach out to them.

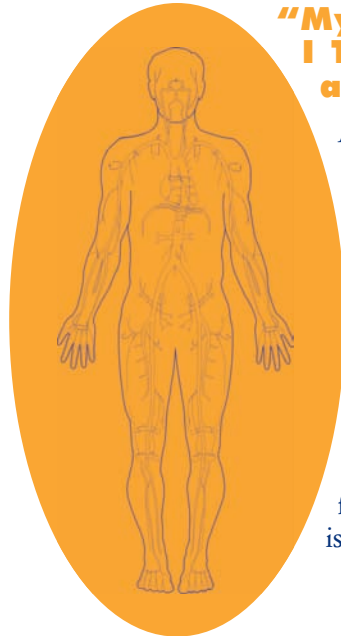


“My Parents? How Do I Talk to My Parents about Sex?”

Ask them.

Something’s holding you back? Maybe you’re too embarrassed? Guess what—your parent(s) probably feel embarrassed too! But they **DO** care, and they **DO** want to talk to you.

Someone has to take the first step. That someone is you.



Here are some approaches for talking to your parents:

- ✓ *Look for opportunities to start a conversation. Use a TV show, a book, or an article as a starting point.*
- ✓ *Start out with less awkward questions and work your way up to the complicated ones.*
- ✓ *Ask about your parents' teenage years. What choices did they make? Do they regret any of their choices?*

Once you've got a discussion going, you can steer it toward your own concerns about healthy relationships. Possible examples:

- ✓ *One of my friends had a baby, and now the baby's father wants nothing to do with her. What can I say to her when I see her next?*
- ✓ *What's so great about marriage anyway?*
- ✓ *Waiting to have sex seems kind of hard. How do I say "No" to someone who is pressuring me to go farther than I want to?*

Now give it a try. Parents have so much to offer.

Answers to questions asked earlier:

Question: Which condition(s) can be caused by an STD?

Answer: **F** All of the above

Question: How much do you know about STDs? (Answer True or False)

Answer: **T** All are true





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