

Tips on Talking to Your Teen about Sex

(Found in *Give Teens a Break!*)

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- If you sense you have a communication line open to them on *all* issues, they will approach you about *sex*. If, however, you have demonstrated a bias or an authoritarian communication style, they won't discuss their sexual concerns with you. Thus, teens need to sense that they can talk to you, as parents, about *anything*.
- Listen more than talk. Do effective listening. Echo what you hear so your teen will know you are listening and not editing their words and intent.
- Don't become an alarmist about the content of the "sex talk." Don't assume because your teen is talking to you about sex they are having sex or thinking about having it. Don't jump to conclusions. Be patient.
- Don't lecture! Give short, accurate, and direct information. Be honest in your comments, because they will sense any dishonesty as attempts to scare or alarm them away from sexual thoughts or actions.
- No matter what your teen's views are on sexual matters, respect their opinions. You may clearly express your views and values, but without expecting your teen to embrace them. Give them time to absorb what you expressed. Also, parents need to digest what their teens have expressed.
- Give your teen assurance that sexual thought, feelings, and confusion in these issues are normal. Their questions, opinions, and feelings are respected by you as normal interests.
- If you don't know the answers to their questions, admit it. Tell them you will try to find the information and pass it on to them, or better yet, work together to gain information, such as on the Internet or at the library. If you don't know something, don't guess or feel you should know as a parent.
- There may be many opportunities when your teen may share with you about a friend of theirs who is pregnant, has a sexually transmitted disease, was sexually harassed, or a television program, etc; "teachable moments," you may call them.
- Always give the option to your teen (when you sense some reluctance on their part to discuss things with you) to talk to another person, and decide who that person might be. Don't feel offended if your teen would rather discuss their concerns with someone else whom you both respect.
- Always tell your teen that you value their sharing with you. Remind them that they can address any topic with you. If your teen desires the conversation with you to remain confidential, honor that confidentiality. There may be a situation where you believe you

must consult with your spouse or some other trusted individual.
Your youngster should be made aware of this possible contingency.
Be honest, be real. State what you think and feel, but mostly listen.