

A decorative border of stylized floral and vine motifs in a dark brown color frames the entire page. The motifs include leaves, berries, and circular floral designs.

Mothering Matters

Parenting in Switzerland

UNDERSTANDING AND
SURVIVING THE
TEEN YEARS

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TEEN SEXUALITY

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When it comes to the topics of sex and sexuality, it is crucial to communicate directly with your teens. One way to start is by asking them how much they know already. Teens may know a lot about the topic, but the question is, how much of their knowledge is correct? The more you, yourself, know before you open the discussion, the better. Therefore, make sure you do your homework beforehand by reading up on STI (sexually transmitted infections) as well as different forms of contraception.

Do remember that there will be times when you will not know all the answers to all the questions. The most important thing, however, is to listen to your teen and help her or him to find answers even when you don't have them. Learn together!

For many teens, the subject of sex can be overwhelming. They may feel there is too much to think about, to worry about, and so much that can go wrong. Whether teens are sexually active or not, knowing the facts about what sex is, and what it is not, is critical. Remember that "knowledge is power," and

realize this statement applies to each of us, regardless of age and the type of knowledge.

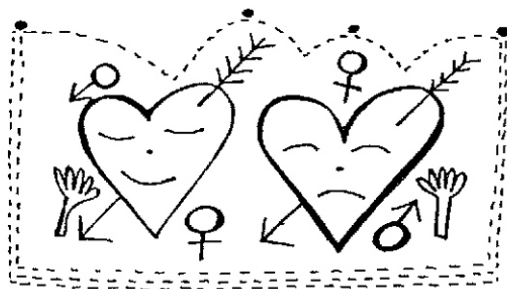
Here are some of the key messages that ought to be communicated:

Sex is...

- ❖ both physical and emotional in nature
- ❖ risky due to the potential for: pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection, broken heart or bruised ego, feeling let down and disappointed when it is over
- ❖ a milestone; you only get one chance to lose your virginity
- ❖ sensitive; be sure that the timing is right for you and your partner
- ❖ not to be taken lightly or treated as recreation
- ❖ best when it is a personal expression of caring between two people

Sex is NOT...

- ❖ a way to make somebody love you or make a commitment to you
- ❖ a test of your love for your partner
- ❖ a measure of how mature or grown up you are



- ❖ a good way to get back at your parents or assert your independence
- ❖ a leisure activity
- ❖ always fun or enjoyable -- sometimes one will wonder if it was really worth it

Parents need to reinforce with teens that when they have sex for the wrong reasons, they can potentially hurt themselves!

More Messages:

- ❖ Effective birth control is a must!
- ❖ The only protection against STIs for sexually active people is a barrier method like a condom. This is a **Safe Sex Must** even if something else is used for birth control.
- ❖ Oral sex is still sex, and some STIs, including HIV and AIDS, can be transmitted orally. A barrier method, like a condom or dental dam, must be used for this type of sex as well.
- ❖ If a partner is under the age of consent, intoxicated or under the influence of drugs, pressured or threatened in any way, or asks to stop at any point, one CANNOT legally engage in sex. Any or all of these scenarios could result in your being charged with rape.
- ❖ One can get pregnant or contract an STI the very first time she or he has sex, even if protection is used. It is always a risk.
- ❖ Birth control and STI protection must be used properly to be effective. Missed pills and doubled-up condoms are the most common misuse of birth control and can result in pregnancy or STI transmission.

- ❖ Sexually transmitted infections often have no symptoms, so if unprotected sex has occurred, both partners must be encouraged to get tested.
- ❖ There is no right or wrong way to have intercourse, but if it hurts, or if it doesn't feel right emotionally, it should be stopped right away.

The Sex Checklist

Teens need to be aware that "safer sex" can be hard to adhere to in the heat of the moment. Safer sex is the practice by which one reduces contact with a partner's bodily fluids during sexual activity, thereby reducing the risk of sexually transmitted infection. Make sure your teens understand that if they love themselves, and are mature enough to have sex, then they MUST be sure to protect themselves and offer their partner(s) no alternative but to have safer sex.

If they are going to have sex they must have:

- ❖ a willing partner who is legally able to consent to sex
- ❖ effective and properly used birth control
- ❖ STI protection, a male or female condom
- ❖ realistic expectations about what having sex will mean for them
- ❖ a safe place to engage in sex
- ❖ the maturity to understand that sex has emotional and physical consequences
- ❖ respect and trust between them and their partner



Alternatives to Sex

Let them know the alternatives. Also, tell them not to be fooled into thinking that oral and anal sex are not “real” sex. They bear the same emotional impact, and are as risky if not more risky with regard to STI. There are, however, many alternatives one can engage in if they feel unready or unwilling to “go all the way.”

- ❖ kissing
- ❖ petting/stroking
- ❖ masturbation
- ❖ stimulating a partner with their hands
- ❖ simulating sex while fully clothed

The First Time

Let teens know that even when they know the facts and are prepared to protect themselves, the first time they decide to have sex can be a very emotional and confusing event. Losing one’s virginity is momentous, an event which will always be remembered. Encourage them not to waste this moment by just “getting it over with,” but rather to try and wait until they feel right, and have great trust in their partner. †



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