

Teenagers often don't know as much about sex and sexuality as you might think. Most teenagers get information from their friends, books, magazines, TV or the Internet. Some parents also believe talking to their teenagers about sex will make them want to rush out and try it, but research shows this isn't the case.

A recent Victorian study of nearly four thousand teenagers concluded that talking to your teenager about the 'facts of life' is far more likely to prevent teen pregnancy or unsafe sex.

Talking to your teenager about sex

Many parents are reluctant to discuss the topic of sex with their teenagers. You may feel strongly about teenagers not having sex but it is important that they are informed about sexual issues. Don't put off talking to your teen about sex. If you're embarrassed about discussing sex, say so. Your teenager will appreciate your honesty.

Some teenagers will also be embarrassed about talking about sex with their parents. Don't force the issue.

Methods of contraception

- ◆ The combined contraceptive pill, when taken correctly is a very effective form of contraception, although it does not prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- ◆ Condoms are a good method of contraception as they also protect your teenager from STI's.
- ◆ Saying no is an excellent method of contraception but your teen must know how to say no, want to and have a caring and respectful partner.
- ◆ Diaphragms, inserted into the vagina, act as a barrier and can protect against some STI's but can be quite difficult for young women to use, especially first time users.

teenagers

more than just the birds and the bees

It's important to respect your teenager's feelings and their privacy as well.

Find out what personal development programs are run at your teenager's school as this can be a great opportunity for discussion in your house.

Sometimes, even just having books or pamphlets around is a good way to initiate conversation.

Talking about contraception

Your teenager may or may not tell you if they have become sexually active. Discussing it openly with them is helpful (even if it is difficult for you), and offering to make an appointment for the doctor will often open the way for a more honest discussion.

Although you may feel that your teenager is too young for sex, the fact remains that if they have become sexually active then they will need your help to make the appropriate decisions about contraception and safe sex. This is just as important for boys as it is for girls.



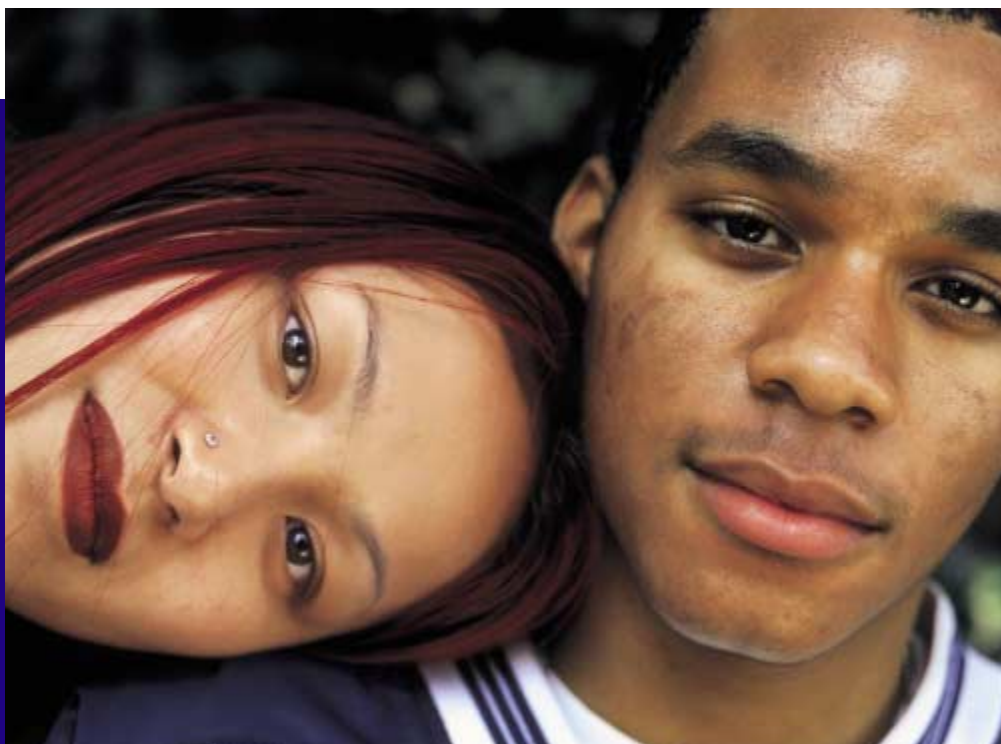
- ◆ IUDs (intra-uterine-devices) are not suitable for teenagers.
- ◆ Natural fertility methods involve not having sex when a woman is fertile. These are usually unsuitable for teenagers due to their irregular periods and the commitment required by both partners.
- ◆ Other methods of contraception include the emergency contraceptive pill and the 3 monthly depo provera injection which are both very effective.
- ◆ **Any method of contraception should also be discussed with your GP or a FPA Health (Family Planning Centre).**

Let your teenager know that you understand they have sexual feelings but they don't need to have sex to prove they are adults.



For more information

- ◆ Parent Line: **13 2055**
- ◆ FPA Healthline (formerly Family Planning): **1300 658 886** statewide
- ◆ Outreach (Info and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth): www.also.org.au/outreach/
- ◆ Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service
4.00pm – midnight, 7 days
Phone: 02 9207 2800
Freecall: 1800 805 379
- ◆ P-FLAG (A resource site for Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays): www.pflag.org.au/
- ◆ 2010 – Support for Gay & Lesbian Youth
10.00am – 6.00pm, Mon – Fri
Phone and fax: 02 9552 6130
Freecall: 1800 65 2010



Teenage sexuality

Adolescence is a confusing time in many ways. For some young people this may be a time when they start to question their sexual orientation.

It's not unusual for teenagers to go through a stage of being attracted to the same sex. For many teenagers, this is a passing phase. For others, this may be the beginning of realising that they're homosexual.

It's generally accepted that a person's sexual orientation is out of their control, in other words, you can't 'cure' someone of their sexual orientation.

It is important parents are supportive of their teenagers no matter what their sexual orientation.

Like any issue involving you and your teenager, good communication is the key. If you can acknowledge your own feelings and beliefs and respect those of your teenager, even if you don't agree with them, you can open the way for a more positive relationship.

Talking about sex won't hurt children, or encourage them to experiment, but it does help to protect them.

Encouraging **healthy attitudes** and **behaviours** towards sex

- ◆ Be open and honest. If you're uncomfortable about an issue tell your teenager. If you're unsure what to say or how to answer a question, tell them that you'll see what you can find out.
- ◆ Discuss your own values and beliefs about sexuality. But make sure you talk about your experiences positively.
- ◆ Reassure them that what they're feeling is absolutely normal and we all go through it.
- ◆ Discuss "What if..." scenarios with your teenager, such as "What would you do if a boy was pressuring you to have sex?"
- ◆ Respect their privacy.
- ◆ Be available. Let them know you will guide and support them. Be careful not to pressure them into telling you everything – only what they want to share with you.
- ◆ Make sure your teenager has accurate information about contraception and safe sex practices.
- ◆ Young people who talk with their families about sexuality and relationships are less likely to practice sex in unwise, unsafe or destructive ways.
- ◆ If your teenager is not asking questions about sex, it doesn't mean you're in the clear. It means it's up to you to initiate the discussion.

facts on teens and sex

- ◆ In Australia the average age boys and girls have their first sexual experience is 16.
- ◆ Of 1,324 teenagers who had fallen pregnant, two-thirds said they were unprepared for their first encounter and 18 % felt they were pressured or forced into it.
- ◆ 45% of pregnant teenagers said that at some stage they had sex when they did not want to, mostly to please their partner or because they "had no choice".
- ◆ 84% of teenage girls felt confident they could say no to sex, 15% did not.
- ◆ 20% of girls had intercourse before their 15th birthday and almost 40% before turning 16.
- ◆ Only one in three teenagers falling pregnant had spoken to their mothers about when to have sex and fewer than one in ten had discussed it with their fathers. Those who had discussed it tended to have a later sexual initiation and less unwanted sex.

Source: 1997 La Trobe University study conducted by Australian National University Demographer Ann Evans