

Ways to Influence Your Teen's Sexual Risk Behavior: What Fathers Can Do



Teens sometimes engage in behaviors that increase their risks of illness, injury, and early death. Engaging in sexual risk behaviors—such as having sex at an early age, having more than one sex partner, and not using condoms or other contraceptives—can lead to unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV infection. Teens are influenced by their parents' values, beliefs, and expectations of appropriate behavior. Research has largely focused on mothers. However, recent findings suggest that fathers may parent in ways that differ from mothers, and therefore represent an additional opportunity to support the health and well-being of their teens—separate from the influence of mothers. This fact sheet provides information and guidance for fathers on how to help their teen avoid sexual risk behaviors.

What can you do to help your teen avoid sexual risk behaviors?

As the father of a teen, you can—

1. Monitor and supervise your teen.

- Be well informed about your teen's daily activities, friends, and whereabouts.
- Set up family rules to guide your teen's behavior. You may want to include your teen in discussions about appropriate rules and their enforcement.
- Make sure your teen understands what your expectations are (e.g., time to be home on a school night, age they can go on a date, adult supervision at parties, and no alcoholic beverages or drugs). Check-in regularly to be sure your teen is following the rules.
- Consider positive ways you can encourage your teen to follow the rules.
 - Praise your teen when he or she follows the rules.
 - When your teen breaks a rule, follow through with fair and consistent discipline that makes sense to your teen.

Parental monitoring includes 1) the expectations parents have for their teen's behavior; 2) the actions parents take to keep track of their teen; and 3) the ways parents respond when their teen breaks the rules.

2. Be involved in your teen's life.

- Get to know your teen—what he or she likes and does.
- Spend time with your teen by enjoying shared activities (e.g., going on walks, playing sports, biking, shopping, listening to music, traveling, etc.).
- Take time to listen and gather information about your teen's life. One of the most important ways to connect with your teen is to understand his or her world.

3. Talk with your teen.

- Be available to talk with your teen, and do so regularly.
- Talk about the importance of making healthy decisions.
- Discuss the consequences of risky sexual behavior.
- Encourage your teen to ask you questions; be prepared to give fair and honest answers.
- When your teen shares personal information with you, don't overreact. Your teen is asking for your input and wants to know how you feel. Let your teen know you value his or her opinion, even if it is different from yours.

4. Share your values.

- Be a good role model. Be aware of your own behavior, and show your teen how he or she can be healthy and avoid risks.
- Build a positive relationship with your teen. The emotional closeness of your relationship with your teen, your attitudes toward teen sex, and your level of involvement with your teen can make a difference in reducing your teen's sexual risk behavior.

Adolescence is a time for development and discovery, which can be both positive and challenging. As teens try to find their own identity, they make choices that affect their health, both now and in the future. By following these key practices, you can build a quality relationship with your teen and be a positive influence in helping your son or daughter make healthy decisions and avoid sexual risk behaviors.

Where can you get more information?

- Division of Adolescent and School Health — Adolescent Health page www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/adolescenthealth/index.htm
- The Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health (CLAFH) www.clafh.org
- National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy www.teenpregnancy.org/
- Girl's Health — Parent/Caregiver section www.girlshealth.gov/parents/
- KidsHealth www.kidshealth.org/parent/
- Parents of Teens www.usa.gov/Topics/Parents_Teens.shtml.
- Parents' Sex Ed Center www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=108&Itemid=206
- PBS Parents: Talking With Kids About Health www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/health
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Fatherhood Initiative www.fatherhood.hhs.gov

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