



5 DEVELOPING SAFE, RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

Five Good Reasons to Talk with Your Teen

The media, popular culture, and peer pressure have the power to influence young people's behavior and attitudes about relationships, sexuality and how to treat others. Too often, these influences are negative and can put youth at risk of being harmed or harming others.

Parents and other caring adults need to talk with young people about how to develop respectful relationships and how to protect themselves from abusive people. Here are five good reasons to start the conversation:



In a world of nonstop information and communication, young people need guidance from adults.

Today's children spend an unprecedented amount of time on and offline, communicating with others and consuming unfiltered information and entertainment.

American children age 8-18 are now using various forms of media from 6-11 hours every day. In addition to TV and watching movies, 95% of youth (12-17 yrs.) are online daily and 80% of them use social media. Seventy-seven percent (77%) also use smart phones and, on average, send and receive 1800 text messages a month. (1)

Sharing your knowledge and values with your teen or preteen will help them become smarter, safer, and more in control as they navigate today's ever-changing digital world.



Teens are at risk of being abused or of abusing others. Regular adult/youth communication and guidance can help reduce those risks.

One in three adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner. (2) Youth 12-19 years old experience the highest rates of sexual victimization and those 16-19 years old are three and a half times more likely than the general population to experience rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault. (3, 4)

Teens are also at risk for committing sexual offenses. About 25% of all sexual offenders (over 95% male) known to law enforcement are under the age of 18. Also, half of adult sex offenders report committing their first sexual offense prior to age 18. (5, 6)

These statistics underscore the vital need to intervene early in the lives of teens and pre-teens to protect them from abuse or from being abusive to others. Boys, in particular, need positive adult role models to guide them as they learn how to develop healthy relationships. See the “Conversation Guides on Dating Abuse” here and “Healthy Relationships” here.



Online sexual predators have increased access to young people. We need to talk to our kids about how to protect themselves.

A national survey (7) involving 10-17 year-olds found that 1 in 7 received a sexual solicitation or approach* over the Internet in the last year. Approximately 1 in 25 youth received an aggressive sexual solicitation in which the sender asked to meet them somewhere, called them on the phone, or sent them regular e-mails, money, or gifts. See the “Online Safety Conversation Guide” here.

*requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or to give personal sexual information that were - whether wanted or not - made by an adult.



Pop culture and the media often glamorize violence and focus on overly sexualized views of women and girls. These messages, if left unchallenged, can undermine the healthy development of youth.

According to the National Television Violence Study, by age 18, the average young person will have viewed an estimated 200,000 acts of violence on television alone. (8) Over 60% of these acts portray interpersonal violence, much of it presented in an entertaining or glamorized manner. (8,9)

In addition to routine exposure to violent media, today’s youth are introduced to sexually explicit content through TV, movies, video games, music, and the Internet. Here, women and girls are often reduced to sexual objects. Pornography, a multi-billion dollar industry in the US, is now just a click away for the average teen.

Frequent exposure to negative depictions of sexuality and women, coupled with sensationalized violence, can be harmful to impressionable youth who are developing their sexual identity and learning how to navigate relationships.



Research shows that many teens and pre-teens want to talk with their parents about important topics

In a national research study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, 56% of youth age 12-15 reported that they learned “a lot” from a parent about issues such as sex, alcohol, discrimination, drugs, and violence. (10)

Another study published in the Journal of Adolescent Health findings indicated that youth often want to discuss topics such as sexual health and relationships with their parents and consider them their preferred source of information. (11)

In a survey commissioned by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, teens reported that parents most influence their decisions about sex (38% of the time) more than peers (22%), the media (9%), and teachers and educators (4%). Also, nearly 9 out of 10 (87%) young people surveyed said that it would be much easier for teens to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents. (12)

It’s clear our young people need and want to talk to adults about important issues. Why not start talking with your teen or pre-teen today?

(1) Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Teens-and-social-media.aspx> ; <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Teens-and-smartphones.aspx>

(2) Davis, Antoinette, MPH. 2008. Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence among Teens. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency Focus. http://www.nccdcrc.org/nccd/pubs/2008_focus_teen_dating_violence.pdf.

(3) Truman, Jennifer and Rand, Michael. 2010. Criminal Victimization, 2009. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv09.pdf>

(4) Rennison, Callie M. August 2000. Criminal victimization 1999: Changes 1998-00 with trends 1993-99. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S Department of Justice.

(5) Synder, H. (2000). Sexual assault of young children as reported to law enforcement: Victim, incident, and offender characteristics. US Department of Justice.

(6) Snipe, R. et al. “Recidivism in Young Adulthood, Adolescent Sexual Offenders Grown Up,” 25 Criminal Justice & Behavior, 109,117, (1998).

(7) David Finkelhor, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Janis Wolak. 2006. Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation’s Youth: Five Years Later. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

(8) Hunton AC, Donnerstein E, Fairchild H, et al. Big World. Small Screen. The Role of Television in American Society. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press;1992

(9) University of California, Center for Communication and Social Policy. National Television Violence Study, III. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 1998

(10) Kaiser Family Foundation, Nickoelodeon, and Children Now. Talking with Kids about Tough Issues: a National Survey of parents and Kids. Menlo Park, California. The Foundation, 2001.

(11) Hacker Ka et al. Listening to youth: teen perspectives on pregnancy prevention. Journal of Adolescent Health 2000; 26: 279- 288

(12) Albert, B. (2012). With One Voice 2012: America’s Adults and Teens sound Off About Teen Pregnancy. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy