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**Parents of Sophomores, Brookline High School, Jan 18, 2012**

**Let's Be Honest: Communication in families that keeps kids healthy**

**Ice Breaker:** Raise Your Hand if this has ever been true for you.

- Fell in love with someone and ignored their faults or things that bothered you about them
- Was attracted to someone just because you found them “physically appealing”
- Done something against your better judgment
- Kept information or a situation from someone you were involved with for fear of them being mad, thinking less of you etc
- Had a behavior come back to haunt you
- Judged a situation or a person and later found out you were wrong
- Lied or exaggerated about a sexual experience
- Changed your mind about how you felt toward someone
- Trusted someone with a secret and later found out they had told someone else
- Avoided talking with a partner about a serious or important issue because of discomfort or embarrassment

It's important to remember these happen from human behavior and emotion, which is something we all share, teens and parents alike. We want to support ongoing conversations, not end them before we get started. True for this group too. When someone says something, we need to respect each other's differences.

Brief contract for tonight: accept each other, listen to others, not pass judgments, respect diversity of parenting, confidentiality, OK to feel embarrassed and self-conscious – our kids do too!

We all want our kids to be healthy, make safe informed decisions about their bodies, relationships and sexual health. Sexual health matters!

**Relationships** are the key to talking to your teens about sexuality especially in this age range where they become the focus of most adolescents. A recent study of teen behaviors by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, found that guys from ages 15-22, about 2/3 say that they would rather have a girlfriend and no sex compared to 1/3 who prefer sex and no girlfriend.

- *Definition of **Healthy Sexuality**, World Health Organization: “Sexual health is the state of physical, emotional mental and social well- being related to sexuality: is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction and infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive, respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained the sexual rights of all persons must be respected protected and fulfilled”*

- We know that what teens talk about is freedom, independence, experimentation all of which can be the signature of teen behavior and therefore, mark their relationships with parents and others.
- Yet remember, they do need our input, guidance, and listening with a non-judgmental attitude. Agree to disagree is very crucial here. Parents can make a link between freedom and independence to responsibility and healthy choices.
- Research shows that talking about sex doesn't encourage sexual behavior.
- 80% of teens say that it would be much easier for teens to delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have open, honest conversations with their parents
- 46% of teens say that parents most influence their decisions about sex. Just 20% say friends most influence their decisions. (National Campaign)
- We know they need to hear from us and want to even if it is in very indirect way. Yet, this is not an easy conversation - they won't say, yes yes let's talk about this! So, how do we have conversations with our kids about all the issues that are important to us? One way to structure or frame your concerns is keeping in mind four themes (rights, values, self-esteem, facts.)
  - Also use "Range of Perspective" – some people believe and do (example), and others believe and do (example)

### **TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WHEN TALKING WITH TEENS ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY**

- 1. Sexuality is not just about sex.** Sexuality is about gender, reproduction and sexual activity, but includes much more. Sexuality is also about feelings, attitudes, intimacy, caring, messages about being male and female, body image and sexual orientation.
- 2. Know that children and teens want to hear from their parents.** How to talk to them depends on you, your partner and their personalities. There is no "one" way to do it. Both parents can get involved.
- 3. Be connected with their world.** Be curious about their interests (music, TV, sports, etc.) and know their friends. Ask them where they learned this/what did they hear about this? Stay on top of the media- good external topics for conversation. Most teens say they are compelled into thinking about relationships, sex, and pregnancy when they are portrayed on MTV or in the media by some celebrity. Use that experiences to discuss values but don't interrupt in the middle of a show or movie to make public service announcements!
- 4. Affirm them.** Complimenting and affirming them helps foster positive self-esteem and will help them to open up to you. Kids who feel good about themselves engage in less risky behavior.
- 5. Talk less, listen more. Find out what they are really asking.** Ask questions which open the door for discussion (e.g. When do you think a person is ready to be a parent?) Validate their questions and really listen without judging when they answer. Start on a positive note by giving a compliment. Be an askable parent.
- 6. Choose the right times.** Use teachable moments. Talk to them while they are in the car, having a snack, etc. not when they are on the run or engaged in an activity like homework. Respect their confidentiality - unless behavior is at risk. Remember, you live in a small community!

7. **Be prepared.** Learn about the sexuality education being taught in your school system, faith communities and identify resources that are available such as websites, books, and professionals. Let your kids know of these and know they may be ready to get that info. before they are comfortable talking to you. Don't assume they know more than what they hear from others. Confirm accurate information. Correct inaccuracies. Most teens say they know how to all about protection and not getting pregnant. Yet they don't - many think two condoms are better than one, that you can't get someone pregnant while she is having her period or if she is hasn't had sex yet. Pills don't protect from STIs.
8. **It is never too late.** Starting early and talking often is great but it is never too late to begin the dialogue. Conversations about sexuality should be ongoing. Not the big talk like when many of us grew up. It's not a one-time talk, it's a lifetime conversation.
9. **Be honest.** Communicate your feelings and **values** honestly. If you feel your child should wait to become sexually active, tell him/her in a positive, compassionate way. Don't expect to have all the answers. Admit when you don't know and be willing to seek answers together. It is OK to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. Choose what to say about your own past but don't lie. Remember that they are trying to figure out what they want.
10. **Be a responsible adult.** You are their primary sexuality educators. Respect your child's right to have accurate and honest information about sexuality. Providing them with information will enable them to be good decision makers.

## **SOME SEX/SEXUAL BEHAVIOR/TOPICS THAT WE SHOULD BE TALKING ABOUT:**

Kids think more people are doing it (drugs, alcohol, sex) than actually are. Most young teenagers are not having sex – only 48% of all teens 15-19 and only 13% of teens under 15 have had vaginal intercourse.

### **Oral Sex – Friends with Benefits,**

- All this applies to same sex partners as well. It's important to be inclusive. Asking, are they healthy or not is key to assessment (more than specific act itself)
- 1 in 5 young teens report having had oral sex. Research suggests they view it differently
- 3<sup>rd</sup> base used to be touching below the waist; oral sex is the new 3<sup>rd</sup> base
- Teens report that oral sex allows them to feel as if they haven't had sex yet; they think they are safe against pregnancy; it's a myth to think they are safe from STIs; girls report feeling power and control giving oral sex and having friends with benefits
- Parents can help teens ask themselves, are these healthy relationships? May be more the key to successful conversation than judging their appropriateness as sexual behavior. Two different examples. –
  - 9 grade girl goes to party- crush on senior- drinks to feel cool, wants this boy to like her- what makes this unsafe and not healthy- too young, desire to please, not equal players.
  - Two close friends- college age- not really romantic- have something to drink- decide to experiment- use birth control- talk about it the consequences of their behavior- can they still be friends. -
- Relationship sheet in handouts further clarifies issues of equality and power and control in dating relationships- look through this lens when talking about

relationships and about specific sexual behaviors as they get older, in addition to adding your values.

- EQUITY in sexual RELATIONSHIPS- TALK TO BOTH OUR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN Issues of **consent**- teach both our men and women. No and maybe means no, and if saying yes it is still ok to change one's mind at any point. People who are drunk, unconscious cannot consent to anything!

### **Sexing - Use and abuse of the media**

- 39% of all teens have sent or posted sexually suggestive messages
- Need to bring reality back into it. Computers, cell phones have the same rules as life and relationships and the same consequences, therefore naked pics sent on a phone are child pornography. Warning to students about its lack of confidentiality, consequences with reputation, jobs, embarrassment. Use concrete example of standing naked in front of boyfriend with 20 of his friends or going to a job interview holding beer can.
- [www.thatsnotcool.com](http://www.thatsnotcool.com) - cyber bullying, stalking on Internet etc.

### **Protection Methods**

- At some point, parents should have a conversation about what teens should consider/need to know about consequences of sexual behavior. This should take into account both risk for pregnancy and STIs. Parents can share their values, "I hope you will practice abstinence come to me before you start, but if you decide otherwise or when you really feel ready - you need to know about safe sex."
- Statistics show that 48% of teens by the time they finish HS will have had sexual intercourse.
- Parents do not need to be the expert of birth control - here again, just be the askable, the teachable parent with resources. Chart in handouts.
- More than 3 million unintended pregnancies occur every year in US often due to no contraception or inconsistent or incorrect use
- First time users –say they're not going to have sex but aren't prepared when they do. Direct consequences of not having comprehensive sex ed which does acknowledge desires and what to do if—just say no does not work.
- Hormonal, barrier, methods
- Barrier - importance of condoms (female condom, male condom) Offer protection against STIs and easy and accessible to get! Not a commitment to long term use or side effects
  - Female condom doesn't have stats on what % of women's use them but are more popular than they used to be. They are a bit harder to use, to find, and more expensive than a male condom. Advantages are that it puts woman in charge of her protection, polyurethane conducts heat for added sensation, gives additional protection to vulva from STIs
- Hormonal methods-
- Pills, patch, nuva ring, depo shot - lot less hormones than 10-20 years ago - lots of choices. Some rely less on memory
- Emergency Contraception - not to be confused with medical abortion
  - (Plan B) can prevent pregnancy after unprotected vaginal intercourse; must be started within 5 days, the sooner the better. Reduces the risk of

- pregnancy by 75-89% when the first dose taken within 72 hours. If fertilized egg is implanted in uterus, doesn't work. Two doses.
- In MA, available over the counter for women 17 and older, or prescription if younger than 17.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections

- By age 24, one in three sexually active people will have an STI (US is among highest rates in world)
- 1 in 4 sexually active teens - New study by CDC – 1 in 4 women btwn ages 14-19 have one or more STIs, 1 in 2 AA women.
- A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM
- We use infection not disease mainly to stress the fact that they are often asymptomatic and therefore highly contagious
- Why do STIs spread? Social stigma of discussing; not using condoms; not getting tested; not communicating with partners
- Viral – like cold no cure treat symptoms. Bacteria - can be cured like strep as opposed to viral sore throat
- Chlamydia the most frequently reported bacterial infection; 3 million infected every year. Silent disease;  $\frac{3}{4}$  women and  $\frac{1}{2}$  men have no symptoms. Reproductive damage. Pelvic Inflammatory Disease
- NOT A MORAL ISSUE- it can happen to anyone

## HPV and Gardasil

- Human papilloma virus; most common STI virus in US
- 40 types; most don't cause symptoms and go away on their own
- Can cause cervical cancer in women
- Can cause genital warts; no cure, but can be treated
- **Gardasil new vaccine** –. Can prevent most genital warts and most cases of cervical cancer. Protects against the 2 types that cause about 70% of cervical cancer and 2 types that cause about 90% of genital warts. 3 doses; 2 months, 6 months. Before first sexual contact. Already infected, won't prevent.

## Drugs and Alcohol

- Loosens inhibitions, can result in unplanned and unprotected sexual activity whether it is consensual or not
- Discussion of alcohol use and drugs should have already taken place- Mixing them is the most dangerous thing to do; no warning signs; coma; death
- Drinking games are dangerous; downing shots; alcohol level goes up rapidly before sensing effects; girls are less tolerant due to body weight, size, and empty stomachs. Talk to them about knowing how much they can drink once they are and examples taking precautions (eating before going out, beer vs. hard liquor decide what your body can tolerate etc.)

- If family history of alcoholism, they should know that and be taught about their genetic predisposition
- Remind them that it is illegal until 21. Never leave a drink unattended, pour yourself, don't take from punch bowl, tamper-proof bottles, be aware of mixed drinks, don't leave a friend alone at party

**Closing Activity**

Think of one important topic from today and think about a conversation starter, with your value message, that you could have with your teen about this topic.