



THE
NATIONAL
CAMPAIGN TO
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

Terms of Engagement:

HOW TO INVOLVE PARENTS
IN PROGRAMS
TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

By Karen Troccoli

December 2006



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INTRODUCTION: *Parents Matter*

Programs designed to prevent teen pregnancy are increasingly recognizing the value of involving parents. Many are already working hard to engage busy parents and maintain their participation. This is a most welcome development given that parents can have a significant influence on their children's decisions about sex.

The good news for parents and those that offer programs for parents is that robust research, supplemented by public opinion polling, anecdotal evidence from practitioners working with families, and teens themselves, makes clear that

Who Most Influences Teens' Decisions About Sex?

TEENS (AGED 12-19)

Parents	47%
Friends	18%
Teachers and sex educators	4%
Religious leaders	7%
The media	3%
Siblings	5%
Someone else	10%
Yourself	4%

Source: *With One Voice 2006*, a national survey of adults and teens published by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.²

when it comes to influencing teens' decisions about sex, parents have *not* lost their influence to peers and popular culture. In fact, when asked who influences their decisions about sex the most, teens consistently cite their parents over friends, the media, or siblings.¹ (See box Who most influences teens' decisions about sex).

Knowing they matter should be welcome news to parents, but contemplating “so now what do I do” can be quite daunting. Put another way, even if parents believe they influence their children's decisions about sex, they may still need guidance in how to use their influence in meaningful ways. In order to learn how some programs to prevent teen pregnancy are doing just this, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy—with funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation—convened two small, invitational conferences in 2005. The gatherings provided a forum for teen pregnancy prevention leaders, health department representatives, and others working with youth and families to explore what is known about parental influence on teens' sexual decision-making, share strategies for effectively involving them in programs, and consider what more programs can do to address parents' needs in this area. This publication seeks to summarize the informative discussions from these roundtables as well as provide some additional information on what social science tells us about parental influence.

In short, four common challenges emerged for programs seeking to involve parents: (1) reaching parents, (2) motivating parents to participate and keeping them involved, (3) knowing what to say to parents and how to say it, and (4) paying for programs. Each of these challenges are described in more detail in the following pages, along with corresponding strategies for addressing them. The publication concludes with a summary of key points based on these challenges and strategies, as well as program descriptions and some tips for parents to help their children avoid early pregnancy and parenthood.

Parental Influence and Teens' Decisions About Sex:

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW

- **Relationships:** Overall closeness between parents and their children matters. Teens who are close to their parents and feel supported by them are more likely to postpone sex, have fewer sexual partners, and use contraception more consistently.
- **Conversations:** It's more than "the talk." Parents need to discuss sex, love and relationships with their children in candid and clear ways. Parents should not be reluctant to take a stand on these issues and clearly express that avoiding pregnancy and parenting as a teen is in everyone's best interest.
- **Attitudes and Values:** Teens whose parents are clear about the value of abstinence and/or the dangers of unprotected sex, are more likely to delay having sex and to use contraception when they do become sexually active.
- **Supervision:** Teens whose parents supervise them—though not too strictly—first have sex at later ages, have fewer sexual partners, are more likely to use contraception, and are less likely to get pregnant.
- **Peers:** When it comes to teens' decisions about sex, parents overestimate the influence peers have on their children and underestimate their own influence. Teens consistently say that parents matter most.
- **Family structure:** Teens in single parent families, who have older siblings who are sexually active or are parents, who grow up in abusive families, and those who live in poverty, are at greater risk for teen pregnancy.
- **Awareness:** Many parents are simply not aware that their children have had sex. For example, only about one third of parents of sexually experienced 14-year-olds believe that their child has had sex.

Parental Influence and Teens' Decisions About Sex:

WHAT EVERY PARENT SHOULD KNOW continued

- **Dating:** Parents should keep in mind that two of the most powerful risk factors for early sex and pregnancy are close romantic attachments and age differences between partners of two years or more.

ENGAGING PARENTS IN PROGRAMS: *Challenges and Strategies*

The quantity and quality of research on what works to prevent teen pregnancy has grown in recent years and indicates that a range of programs, from sex and HIV education to those that encourage young people to participate in community service, can delay the onset of sex, increase the use of contraception, and decrease teen pregnancy.³ Other research has shown that many dimensions of parental involvement—such as those noted in the “What Parents Need to Know” box—are associated with positive outcomes for young people.⁴ Simply put, teens who are closely connected to their parents are more likely to delay sexual activity, have lower rates of sexual activity overall, have lower rates of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and childbearing; and to have higher rates of contraceptive use,⁵ than their peers who are not as closely connected to their parents.

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Initiatives to prevent teen pregnancy are increasingly trying to capitalize on the power of parental influence by involving parents and other adults in their programs. However, few reviews of effective reproductive health programs for adolescents have focused on parental involvement as a factor in program effectiveness⁶ and many programs have been reluctant to engage parents simply because they believe they are unreachable. Despite these obstacles, emerging research, coupled with anecdotal evidence from practitioners involved in prevention programs, offer valuable insights on what is working to get parents involved in efforts to prevent teen pregnancy.

Roles Adults Can Play

Parents can play various roles in the lives of teenagers—their own children and those of others. The examples that follow, while not mutually exclusive, provide a useful framework for programs.

PARENTS AS PARENTS

Teens who are closely connected to their parents are far less likely to become pregnant than those whose relationship with their parents is not as strong. It is also important to recognize that parents are not a proxy for mothers—both moms and dads have a role to play in helping model good behavior and help their children make good decisions about sex.

ADULT ROLE MODELS

Research suggests that strong, positive relationships between teens and caring adults—not just parents—can influence whether young people become pregnant or cause a pregnancy. Children without good relationships with their parents often seek adult guidance from a relative, family friend, or coach. In some instances, children may simply feel more comfortable confiding in someone other than a parent about sensitive topics such as sex. In fact, as parent expert Dr. Michael Resnick noted, teens who cannot talk with their own parents are most likely to talk with their best friends' parents. Bottom line: adults don't have to be parents to teens to influence them in matters of relationships and sex.

ADVOCATES

Adult influence can also expand from the “micro” to the “macro.” That is, once they understand their impact, adults have the opportunity to more broadly influence programs and policies that affect adolescents. “Engage parents as parents first before they become advocates,” advised Joanne Alba, Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Oregon. “Teaching them how to be advocates for themselves and their own families and then broadening the scope of how they can take action as advocates works well.”

TRAINERS

Involved parents often beget other involved parents. Using positive peer pressure—encouraging parents who already support a particular program to draw in other parents—can be an effective strategy for broadening the base of parent involvement. By using a “train the trainer” model, programs can teach parents how to instruct others in skills such as talking with their own children or being advocates on key issues.

Challenge:
REACHING PARENTS

Connecting with parents in the first place can be more challenging than expected. Parents have a number of competing demands on their time and attention. Parents also hold varying levels of awareness and concern about teen pregnancy.

Strategies:
GO WHERE THE PARENTS ARE/SPREAD THE WORD
THROUGH MANY CHANNELS/
HAVE PARENTS RECRUIT PARENTS

Go Where Parents Are

If parents don't come to a program, the program must go to them. Going to where parents *already* tend to congregate such as churches, schools—even non-traditional places like barber shops—is one effective strategy. The *South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy* (SCCPTP) responded to requests from the faith community in the state for help in addressing teen pregnancy and related issues with their congregations. Many parents, for example, wanted specific guidance on how to talk with their children about responsible sexual behavior. Rather than creating a new parent program, SCCPTP used existing curricula with faith-based perspectives to train faith leaders on how best to discuss these issues, enabling them, in turn, to reach parents directly. “This has been a terrific way for us to reach parents and to build partnerships with a community that we hadn't collaborated with much previously,” explained Gwen Baker, Director of Education, SCCPTP.

Plain Talk is another program that has successfully gone directly to where parents are. The program trains adults to be peer educators—“walkers and talkers”—who go into communities to meet with parents to discuss communicating with teens about reproductive health issues. One key activity for the walkers and talkers is “Home Health Parties,” where small groups of adults gather in a neighbor's house to get information and learn communication skills. “Because *Plain Talk* is a community-level communication program, it is essential that we go into neighborhoods where our target audience is to engage with them. And it works,” says Tammi Fleming, Senior Program Officer, *Public/Private Ventures*.

Spread the Word Through Many Channels

Of course, many parents may not get involved in programs designed for them simply because they do not know the program exists. But letting parents know about the availability of your program is easier said than done—it takes time and creativity. As marketers say, it takes multiple exposures to a product before someone buys it. Using a range of outlets—from the media, health fairs, to children’s sporting events and other community programs—increases the likelihood of connecting with parents.

Moreover, program practitioners report that staff are sometimes hesitant to advertise programs too broadly due to concern that offering a “teen sex program” will generate negative attention. “This should not be an impediment to getting the word out to parents,” said Barb Flis, Founder of *Parent Action for Healthy Kids*. “Program hosts need to not be afraid to say this is important.”

Have Parents Recruit Parents

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Asking parents who are already involved in a program to help draw others in can work well. Explains Lisa Armistead, Associate Professor at Georgia State University, “Asking parents what they want and giving it to them will make them fans of the program and lead to them spreading the word to other parents. This is a great way to expand your parent base.” For instance, *Plain Talk* “sells” itself to adults as soon as it enters a community by:

- involving participants in community mapping—community residents themselves gathering data about their own community’s beliefs, norms, and practices,
- acting as “walkers and talkers”/peer educators—community volunteers who speak to other residents in their communities about the importance of adults talking with teens about sexuality and of sharing accurate information with teens, and
- hosting home health parties—a sort of sexual health Tupperware party designed to educate parents and adults about sexual issues and to help them understand the importance of communicating with their children and other adolescents in the community about sex and related issues. These parties have the added benefit of drawing in additional adults.

“Having parents out there as the face of *Plain Talk* is a wonderful way to translate our intentions to others and draw them in,” explained Tammi Fleming of *Public/Private Ventures*.

Don't Forget the Dads

In their efforts to engage parents, program leaders should keep in mind that reaching dads is important too. While studies have shown that both parents can influence teens' decisions about sex, fathers may be particularly well suited to model good behavior for and talk with boys. Still, few programs focused on preventing teen pregnancy target fathers because they assume they either are not available or not interested. Such assumptions may discourage those fathers who would like to become involved in a program from doing so. Outreach strategies should target places men tend to frequent as well, such as sporting events and gyms.

Challenge:

MOTIVATING PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN PROGRAMS

Even parents who may be familiar with a program and inclined to support it may hesitate to get involved. Barriers to participating in parent programs range from logistical challenges, such as transportation and time demands, to skepticism about whether the program can really deliver what it promises.

Strategies:

USE INCENTIVES/ REMEMBER HOW PERSUASIVE KIDS CAN BE/ LOGISTICS, LOGISTICS, LOGISTICS

Use Incentives

Some programs use incentives—both financial and otherwise—to entice parents to participate and/or to sustain their involvement. The *CAS-Carrera* program, for example, holds raffles at many of their parent events, and provides hot meals, transportation, and child care as well. Lee Chambers, Coordinator of the *Men2B*

program, noted that the program pays \$100 to those who complete all 12 hours of the training program. Other programs offer stipends to increase participation in program evaluation. One example is *Parents Matter!* which pays parents each time they participate in the program assessment.

Of course, there are incentives for parents to participate that go beyond the financial. For example, many programs leaders say that getting parents involved in the planning of a program serves as a real motivator for them to attend and stay active. By asking parents directly what they hope to learn and accomplish, programs are more likely to secure their involvement.

Remember How Persuasive Kids Can Be

Parents interact with other parents when they congregate at child-focused activities. The decision by parents about whether to attend a particular event is often driven largely by their own child's interests. With this in mind, programs sometimes enlist the children they serve to be ambassadors to their parents. By hosting events such as fairs or picnics, which children will want to attend, they can count on parents coming as well. A potential additional benefit is reaching even more kids. As Cyndie Carioli, Coordinator of Community Programming, *Mercy Hospital Community Programming* explained, “many teens in our program have younger siblings. When they come along to our events, we have the opportunity to connect with them while they're still young and, hopefully, can stay connected so they'll phase into our program down the road.”

Other programs capitalize on the likelihood that parents will attend activities in which their children are participating. Some *Teen Outreach Programs*, for example, sponsor “Family Night Out” events where student participants make presentations to their parents showcasing the volunteer activities they completed during the program.

Logistics, Logistics, Logistics

Even the most well-intentioned programs will go underutilized if they are not easily accessible to parents. Indeed, logistical barriers—such as transportation, childcare, and work conflicts—can undermine all other efforts to draw parents into programs. To reduce those barriers, programs have taken steps such as offering childcare; ensuring the program is offered at times that do not conflict with work

hours, such as evenings and weekends; and making sure the location is accessible by public transportation even if that means changing meeting sites.

Challenge:

KNOWING WHAT TO SAY TO PARENTS AND HOW TO SAY IT

It is reasonable to assume that parents who participate in a program to prevent teen pregnancy want information about the topic. After all, people vote with their feet. Even so, it is important to keep in mind the following: 1) Not all parents want the same kind of information; and 2) *How* information is provided is often just as important as *what* information is provided.

Strategies:

TUNE INTO THE “WHAT”/ THINK THROUGH THE “HOW”

Tune into the “What”

Remind parents that when it comes to their children’s decisions about sex, the overwhelming weight of research evidence suggests they matter. Despite what they might believe, parents influence teens’ decisions about sex more than peers, teachers, religious leaders, or even the media. What parents need in order to harness that influence can vary. For instance, some may need specific information on sex education/reproductive health; others may want information about talking specifically with their sons; still others may wonder how to articulate their own values about sex and relationships; and some may be concerned about how to compete with messages delivered by other sources such as media (see box, Media: Friend or Foe?). Many practitioners stress that one of the most valuable things programs can do is help parents identify their own values about sex and how to communicate them. For example, get parents to ask themselves the following questions: Were you sexually active as a teen and how do you feel about that now? What do you think about encouraging teens to delay sex? What about contraception? Who should be responsible for setting sexual limits in a relationship? Find ways to ask parents what they want to know and then incorporate those elements into educational plans. This can be done through focus groups, setting up parent advisory councils for the program, or even informal surveys/questionnaires. According to

Adrianna Vargas, Program Director, *Parent Information Network's Program*, Rhode Island Department of Health, their program has benefited by including parent consultants who work at the health department “because they wear the hats of consumer and parent and provide valuable feedback.”

Think Through the “How”

Once program information has been developed it must be accessible in terms of reach and content. Ideally, written materials can be made available in hard copy and on the web and translated into Spanish or other languages if needed. If public service announcements are developed, they should run in markets (television, radio, neighborhoods) where the parents reside and on stations that they watch/listen to (consider, for example, what radio station parents listen to when commuting to and from work). Also, because the level of participation among parents may differ—some may be willing to read materials, while others may be more willing to attend a workshop, for example—offering a continuum of activities can result in greater participation.

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Program materials/information should be reading-level appropriate and sensitive to cultural norms and traditions. Indeed, cultural influences can heavily influence how parents view topics such as teen sex and childbearing and messages and approaches to communicating with parents about them should be tailored accordingly. For instance, Maria Salas, who works with *Plain Talk*, explained that when hosting home health programs in the Latino community she learned that it doesn't work to just pull out an anatomy book and start talking about health. “In that culture the words for body parts are considered bad. You have to find a way to introduce them as a normal part of discussions about sex and then move on to the teaching.” It is also useful to consider generational differences. By and large, today's parents and grandparents had different cultural counterforces than teens have today, so giving them context is important. Also, “in the ‘olden days’ it wasn't a two-way conversation,” explained Pamela Weddington, Vice President of Communications, *MEE Productions*. “Back then, parents talked and kids listened. Today, if we want parents to engage in more of a dialogue with their children, we have to explain why and how to do that.”

Finally, make sure program staff can connect with and support parents through high quality training. The more the parents can relate to the facilitators, trainers

or instructors, the more likely they are to participate in the program and stay with it. Good rapport and mutual respect go a long way to keeping parents interested and involved in a program.

Media: Foe or Friend?

Many parents view the media as a powerful force in setting “sexual scripts” for teenagers. At the same time, about three-quarters of teens and adults believe media can be used as a conversation starter for important discussions about sex and relationships. That is why programs should consider using the media as the hook they need to engage parents. Both positive and negative messages in the media can be used by parents as discussion starters to talk to their kids about making responsible decisions about relationships and sex.

Like it or not, media consumes a huge portion of kids’ lives. Children aged 8-18 spend approximately 44 hours per week consuming media, and 68% report having a television in their bedroom.⁸ One study found that black youth from low-income families spend more time with media than they do at school, with family, and at church combined.⁹ But even though teens cite the media as their *primary* source of information about sex, they still insist that parents are the most *influential* source¹⁰. Programs can give parents guidance on how to take advantage of this. As Bill Albert, of the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy* explained, “Simply saying ‘Turn that crap off’ is not an effective strategy. Parents should consider watching television with their children and then talk about what they thought of the characters’ relationships, the decisions the characters made about sex, or other issues raised.” This same notion applies to other forms of media, including music. Hip Hop music, for example, includes many strong and negative messages about sex and relationships, and does so in a language that often resonates with kids. As Ivan Juzang, President of *MEE Productions* explains, “We have to use even the media we don’t like because it reflects the lingo of youth. We need to tell parents to get familiar with what their kids are hearing and give a voice to the important, positive opinions and ideas that often get drowned-out.”

Challenge:

PAYING FOR PROGRAMS

The challenge of securing and sustaining funding for programs to prevent teen pregnancy is not limited to those focused on parental engagement. But because precious little evaluation research on program effectiveness has focused on parent involvement elements, programs that involve parents have a particularly difficult task of demonstrating that parent components are making a difference. This paucity of evaluation research makes the case for funding parent programs all the more difficult.

Strategies:

EVALUTE/CONSIDER UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

Evaluate:

As research continues to demonstrate the influence parents have in helping shape their children's decisions about sex, interest in evaluating parent-focused programs has increased. This has led to more evaluations of programs, in general, and the relative effectiveness of the parental involvement component of the program, in particular. For instance, *RTI International* and *Child Trends, Inc.* have partnered on a literature review of parent involvement strategies. Specifically, the review examines evidenced-based parent involvement strategies in programs serving adolescents and a review of program reports from Title X and Title XX providers about these strategies. Preliminary results include insights about what works to involve parents as well as what kinds of involvement strategies have the greatest effects on teens' sexual behavior.¹¹ To add to this growing collection of evidence, program leaders should include evaluation as a core component of their initiatives.

Consider Unusual Suspects:

Securing initial funding and money to sustain established programs can be challenging. Common sources of funding include public funds from federal and state programs (Title V, Title X, Title XX, and others) and private funds from national, state, or local foundations. Some programs have managed to draw funds from unusual sources such as universities, hospitals, and local community organizations and businesses. Others have partnered with academic centers, including universities, to conduct evaluations.

Summing it up

CONVINCE PARENTS THAT THEY MATTER

As one father succinctly explains, “Parents have power. I want my kids to respect me, not fear me, because I have this power.” This father seems to be the exception. Most parents underestimate the influence they have on their children’s decisions about sex. Until parents believe that their influence has not been trumped by popular culture or their children’s peers, programs will be hard pressed to get parents to participate at all. Therefore, it is imperative that programs begin at the beginning and underscore parent potential before turning to how best to use it. Workshops, materials, and other information dissemination strategies should include this message upfront. Many organizations and websites offer fact sheets, brochures and other succinct summaries of the value of parent involvement that can be adapted or incorporated into existing programs (e.g. www.teenpregnancy.org; www.Plaintalk.org).

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FIND OUT WHAT PARENTS WANT AND HOW THEY WANT TO RECEIVE IT

Parents are not a homogenous group, nor do they have homogenous views about adolescent reproductive health issues. Although all want to ensure their children make healthy, informed decisions about sex and relationships, parents may differ in what messages they think are appropriate, which will best resonate, and how to communicate them to their children. Practitioners stress the value of knowing parents—their culture, reading level, gathering places, etc—before deciding on the best outreach strategies, activities, and materials for them. One way to build that foundation is involving parents in the development and maintenance of the program through advisory boards, questionnaires, and the like. As one parent explained, “we need information that speaks to us, not that forces us to do things differently.”

SERVE IT UP

Engaging parents and maintaining the connection takes creativity, flexibility, patience, and a long-term commitment. There are myriad competitors for parents' time and attention, so programs need strategies for making themselves visible, accessible, and desirable to their "customers." This is true whether the program wants to involve parents as parents, advocates, trainers or in any combination of those roles. It is also important to make the information accessible and prominent. As one mother said, "sometimes we need information, but other times we're overwhelmed with it and just need help figuring out how to use it."

EVALUATE, EVALUATE, EVALUATE

Solid research underscores the positive influence that close parent-child relationships have on reducing risky behavior among teens, including early sexual activity. While many programs are capitalizing on that information by building parent-involvement components into their programs, few are including evaluation plans to measure their success. There are two primary reasons why it is in the best interest of programs and program leaders to undertake a serious evaluation of their efforts. First, assessments can help a program determine whether the strategies it is using to engage parents are working and, if not, point to ways they can improve. Only by evaluating a particular program can program providers be able to make a solid case for doing more of the same or recalibrating. Second, a solid program evaluation that documents a program's success offers substantial leverage for fund raising to expand and/or sustain programs.

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THE MEDIA

Finally, a word about the media is in order given that parents view it as such a formidable foe in their efforts to influence their children's thinking about sex and relationships. The general sense of parents is that in media-land, everyone is doing everything with everyone and at a very early age. As a general matter, the media is not filled with stories noting that rates of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and births among teens have declined significantly since the early 1990s. Programs can help parents separate fact from fiction and find ways to communicate the facts in tandem with their own values. Because media is here to stay, parents should be encouraged to become familiar with what their children are consuming so they can zero in on what they most feel the need to counter. Programs can then help them retool so they can use their media literacy to their advantage. "You can't ignore teens' reality. You have to incorporate it into your conversations with them," explained one parent.

Endnotes

- 1 See for example: Miller, B. (1998). *Families matter: A research synthesis of family influences on adolescent pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Blum, R.W. & Rinehart, P.M. (1998). *Reducing the risk: Connections that make a difference in the lives of youth*. Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, MN.
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APPENDIX ONE: *Tips for Parents*

What can parents do to help their children avoid too-early pregnancy and parenthood? Here are a few practical, research-based tips for parents developed by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Many of these tips will seem familiar because they articulate what parents already know from experience — like the importance of maintaining strong, close relationships with their children, setting clear expectations for them, and talking with them about important matters.

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Visit www.teenpregnancy.org for more helpful information for parents.

1) **Be clear about your own sexual attitudes and values.**

Communicating with your children about sex, love, and relationships is often more successful when you are certain in your own mind about these issues. To help clarify your attitudes and values, think about the following kinds of questions:

- What do you really think about school-aged teenagers being sexually active — perhaps even becoming parents?
- Who is [should be] responsible for setting sexual limits in a relationship and how is that done, realistically?
- Were you sexually active as a teenager and how do you feel about that now? Were you sexually active before you were married? What do such reflections lead you to say to your own children about these issues?

- What do you think about encouraging teenagers to abstain from sex?
- What do you think about teenagers using contraception?

2) **Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific.**

Initiate the conversation, and make sure that it is honest, open, and respectful. If you can't think of how to start the discussion, consider using situations shown on television or in movies as conversation starters. Tell them candidly and confidently what you think and *why* you take these positions. If you're not sure about some issues, tell them that, too. Be sure to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture. Ask them what *they* think and what they know so you can correct misconceptions. Ask what, if anything, worries them.

Age-appropriate conversations about relationships and intimacy should begin early in a child's life and continue through adolescence. Resist "the talk," make it an 18-year conversation. All kids need a lot of communication, guidance, and information about these issues, even if they sometimes don't appear to be interested in what you have to say. And if you have regular conversations, you won't worry so much about making a mistake or saying something not quite right, because you'll always be able to talk again.

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Don't let your lack of technical information make you shy. Kids need as much help in understanding the *context and meaning* of sex as they do in understanding how all the body parts work. Discuss the difference between love and sex. And remember to talk about the reasons that kids find sex interesting and enticing; discussing only dangers and diseases often misses many of the issues on teenagers' minds.

3) **Be a parent with opinions.**

In addition to being an "askable parent," be a parent with a point of view. Tell your children what you think. Don't be reluctant to say such things as:

- Because sex should be associated with commitment, I think high school age teens are simply too young to have sex.

- When you eventually do have sex, always use protection until you are ready to have a child.
- Our family's values and/or religion say that sex should be an expression of love within marriage. I expect you to wait.
- Finding yourself in a sexually charged situation is not unusual; you need to think about how you'll handle it *in advance*. Have a plan. Will you say "no"? Will you use contraception? How will you negotiate all this?
- It's okay to think about sex and feel sexual desire; everybody does. But it doesn't mean you have to act on these feelings.
- One of the many reasons I'm concerned about drinking and drug use is that they are often linked to unprotected sex.
- Having a baby doesn't make you a man. Being able to wait and acting responsibly does.
- You don't have to have sex to keep a partner. If sex is the price of a close relationship, find someone else.

4) Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents.

Establish rules, curfews, and standards of expected behavior, preferably through open family discussions. If your children get out of school at 3 pm and you don't get home from work until 6 pm, who is responsible for making certain that your children are not only safe during those hours, but also engaged in useful activities? Where are they when they go out with friends? Are there adults around who are in charge? Supervising and monitoring your children's whereabouts doesn't make you a nag; it makes you a parent.

5) Know your children's friends and their families.

Clearly, friends have a strong influence on each other. Meet with the parents of your children's friends so that you can get to know them and establish common rules and expectations. It is easier to enforce a curfew that all your child's friends share rather than one that makes him or her different — but even if your views don't match those of other parents, hold fast to your convictions. Welcome your children's friends into your home and get to know them.

6) Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating.

Allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Instead, support group activities. Make your strong feelings about this known early on — don't wait until your young teen proposes a plan that differs from your preferences in this area. Otherwise, he or she will think you just don't like the particular person or invitation.

7) Take a strong stand against your child dating someone older.

Try setting a limit of no more than a 2- (or at most 3-) year age difference. Though older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl, the power differences between younger girls and older boys or men can lead girls into risky situations, including unwanted sex and sex with no protection. Young boys with older girls brings similar risks.

8) Talk to your sons as well as your daughters.

The nearly 800,000 teen girls who get pregnant each year don't do it alone. Boys need to know that teen pregnancy has serious consequences for them, too. We need to talk with boys — not just girls — about consequences, responsibility, sex, love, and values.

9) Help your teenagers have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.

The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their future appears bright. This means helping them set meaningful goals for the future, talking to them about what it takes to make future plans come true, and helping them reach their goals. Explain how becoming pregnant — or causing pregnancy — can derail the best of plans.

10) Let your children know that you value education highly.

Encourage your child to take school seriously and set high expectations about school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can lead to teenage parenthood. Monitor your children's grades and discuss them together. Meet with teachers and principals, guidance counselors, and coaches. Limit the number of hours your teenager gives to part-time jobs (20 hours per week should

be the maximum) so that there is enough time and energy left to focus on school. Know about homework assignments and support your child in getting them done. Volunteer at the school, if possible.

11) Know what your kids are watching, reading, and listening to.

Television, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, and the Internet send many messages about sex: Sex often has no meaning, unplanned pregnancy seldom happens, and few people having sex ever seem to be married or even especially committed to each other. Is this consistent with your expectations and values? If not, it is important to talk with your children about what the media portray, what you think about it, and what your children think about it. If certain programs or movies offend you, say so and explain why. Encourage your kids to think critically: Ask them what they think about the programs they watch and the music they listen to. Watch their favorite shows with them and ask whether the scenarios on TV relate to anything in their lives or their friend's lives. You cannot fully control what your children see and hear, but you can certainly make your views known and control your own home environment by turning off the TV, canceling subscriptions, and placing certain movies off limits.

A final thought...

These tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age. Strive for relationships that are warm in tone, firm in discipline, and rich in communication, and that emphasize mutual trust and respect. There is no single way to create such relationships, but the following habits of the heart can help:

- Express love and affection clearly and often. Hug your children and tell them how much they mean to you. Praise specific accomplishments, but remember that expressions of affection should be offered freely, not just for a particular achievement.
- Listen carefully to what your children say and pay thoughtful attention to what they do.
- Spend time with your children engaged in activities that suit their ages and interests, not just yours. Shared experiences build a “bank account” of affection and trust that forms the basis for future communication with them about many topics, including sexual behavior.
- Be supportive and interested in what interests them. Attend their sports events, learn about their hobbies, be enthusiastic about their achievements, even the little ones, ask them questions that show you care and want to know what is going on in their lives.
- Be courteous and respectful to your children and their friends. Avoid hurtful teasing or ridicule. Don’t compare your teenager with other family members (i.e., why can’t you be like your older sister?). Show that you expect courtesy and respect from them in return.
- Help them to build self-esteem by mastering skills; self-esteem is earned, not given, and one of the best ways to earn it is by doing something well.
- Try to have meals together as a family as often as possible, and use the time for conversation, not confrontation.

APPENDIX TWO: *Programs Mentioned in this Publication*

The following are brief descriptions and contact information for the programs and organizations mentioned in this publication.

Child Trends

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to improving the lives of children by conducting research and providing science-based information to improve the decisions, programs, and policies that affect children and their families. In advancing its mission, Child Trends collects and analyzes data; conducts, synthesizes, and disseminates research; designs and evaluates programs; and develops and tests promising approaches to research in the field. www.childtrends.org

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Children's Aid Society-Carrera Program

The Children's Aid Society–Carrera Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program “uses a holistic approach that aims to empower youth.” The program helps young people to develop personal goals and the desire for a productive future. In addition to developing sexual literacy and educating teens about the consequences of sexual activity, the program also emphasizes the importance of education and employment. Dr. Michael A. Carrera, the founder of the program, sees the sum of all these activities as having a “contraceptive effect,” providing that extra infusion of caring, support, and structure. www.stopteenpregnancy.com

Girls Inc. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy®

Girls Inc. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy is a research-based and evaluated program that provides girls and young women with the skills, insights, values, motivation, and support to postpone sexual activity as well as to use effective protection to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. www.girlsinc.org

Hablando Claro

Hablando Claro (or *Hablando Claro: Con Cariño y Respeto. Plain Talk: With Love and Respect*) is the Plain Talk program in San Diego. Hablando Claro is based in Barrio Logan (otherwise known as Logan Heights), a primarily Latino community made up of people of Mexican heritage. www.plaintalk.org

Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy

The Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy provides statewide leadership to prevent adolescent pregnancy and to promote quality services for pregnant and parenting teens and their children through policy analysis, education, research, and advocacy. www.massteenpregnancy.org

MEE Productions

MEE Productions Inc. was incorporated in 1990, with the goal of developing research-based, market-driven solutions for issues facing urban and low-income populations living in at-risk environments. MEE is an internationally-recognized communications firm that develops socially-responsible, research-based communication strategies targeting urban and ethnic populations of all ages. www.meeproductions.com

Men2B

The Rhode Island Department of Health's Office for Family, Youth & School Success (OFYSS) works with state and community partnerships to connect families and communities with the information and health resources they need to develop healthy, educated children. OFYSS programs work to protect school-aged children and adolescents from poor health outcomes associated with unhealthy physical and cultural environments, with lack of access to health and psychosocial services, and with unhealthy behaviors. The OFYSS manages the Men2B program, which trains men to be effective positive role models for pre-adolescent and adolescent boys. www.rifatherhood.org

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan initiative supported almost entirely by private donations. Its mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. The goal of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by one-third between 2006 and 2015. www.teenpregnancy.org

Parent Action for Healthy Kids

Parent Action for Healthy Kids is designed to help connect parents, communities and schools to improve the health and well-being of children and youth. Barbara Flis, the founder of Parent Action for Health Kids, was appointed by Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm to coordinate the state's *Talk Early and Talk Often* initiative. This program is designed to help parents gain knowledge and skills to talk to their middle school children about abstinence and sexuality.

www.parentactionforhealthykids.org

Parent Advocacy Project – Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Region

Planned Parenthood Health Service's of Southwestern Oregon (PPHSSO) works to identify, train, mobilize, and support Oregon parents to become productive advocates for comprehensive sexuality education. The Parent Advocacy Project is designed to transform adults' thinking about youth and to assist them in being supportive, available, and prepared to communicate with the young people in their lives. www.pphsso.org

Parents Matter! Program

The Parents Matter! Program (PMP) is a community-based family intervention designed to promote positive parenting and effective parent-child communication about sexuality and sexual risk reduction. Its ultimate goal is to reduce sexual risk behavior among adolescents and offers parents instruction and guidance in general parenting skills related to decreased sexual risk behavior among youth. **For more information on the PMP project** see the March 2004 special issue of the *Journal of Child and Family Studies* (Volume 13, Number 1) that was devoted to the PMP.

Plain Talk

Plain Talk is a community-based initiative that was developed in 1993 by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Plain Talk grew from the assumption that increasing adult-teen communication about responsible sexual behavior and improving teens' access to high quality and age appropriate reproductive health care would lead to decreases in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. One of its primary goals is to help adults gain the information and develop the skills they need to communicate effectively with young people about reducing sexual risk-taking. www.plaintalk.org

Public/ Private Ventures Inc

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs, and community initiatives, especially as they affect youth and young adults. In carrying out this mission, P/PV works with philanthropies, the public and business sectors, and nonprofit organizations. www.ppv.org

Rhode Island Parent Information Network

Founded in 1991, the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) is a statewide, charitable, nonprofit organization that extends to every Rhode Island community, the state's major family-serving systems, schools, associations, and agencies. The organization's mission is to inform, educate, support, and empower all families to be equal partners in advocacy for the education, health, and socioeconomic well being of their children and families; and to achieve family-centered systems changes, which are culturally competent and community based. RIPIN offers eleven programs and services to families with children in RI, including families of children with special needs, and serves more than 65,000 Rhode Islanders each year. www.ripin.org

RTI International

RTI is the nation's second largest independent nonprofit research institute. The organization's mission is to improve the human condition by turning knowledge into practice. For more than four decades, RTI International's efforts have earned national and international recognition, and RTI has been credited with achieving major breakthroughs in scientific and social research. Growing from a handful of scientists in central North Carolina in 1959 to more than 2,500 individuals working in 40 countries today, RTI is now one of the premier research institutes in the world. www.rti.org

The South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

The mission of the South Carolina Campaign is to prevent adolescent pregnancy in South Carolina through education, advocacy, technical assistance, public awareness, and research. Among other useful materials, the South Carolina Campaign has published *Tips for Providers: Strategies for Involving Parents in Teen Pregnancy Prevention*. www.teenpregnancysc.org

Teen Outreach Program

The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) is an after-school program for teens whose effectiveness has been proven in over 20 years of operation. TOP is currently being administered in over 400 organizations and schools in the United States, Virgin Islands, and United Kingdom. Based upon the principles of youth development, an approach that provides teens with the necessary supports and opportunities to prepare for successful adulthood and avoid problem behavior, TOP has proven effective in increasing academic success and preventing teen pregnancy and other negative behaviors among program participants.

www.wymancenter.org

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Young Women United

Young Women United is an organizing project created by and for young women of color in Albuquerque. It is designed to build a powerful community of self-identified women of color. Self-respect, respect for each other, and community action are key tools for handling the issues of health and violence that women, teenage women, and girls deal with daily. **For more information, email ywu_albq@yahoo.com**

*Additional Parent Resources Available
From the National Campaign:*

Parent Power:

What Parents Need to Know and Do to Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Ten Tips for Parents To Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy

Talking Back:

What Teens Want Parents to Know About Teen Pregnancy

*10 Tips for Foster Parents to Help Their Foster Youth
Avoid Teen Pregnancy*

www.teenpregnancy.org/parent



THE
NATIONAL
CAMPAIGN TO
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, non-partisan organization supported largely by private donations. The National Campaign's mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. Our goal is to reduce the teen pregnancy rate by one-third between 2006 and 2015.

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