

Who knows *what goes through a* teenager's head?

But you can bet that sex and relationships are quite regular features. And who can blame them? They get enough exposure through TV, magazines, friends and the internet.

With sex becoming an increasingly hot topic, more and more teenage boys and girls are feeling under pressure to have sex earlier, and they're finding it harder to separate the facts from fiction.

In fact, a recent survey found that over a quarter of teenagers feel confused, worried and even scared about sex and relationships, and that most teenagers would like to talk to their mum and dad about it.

And that's great news. Because all the evidence suggests that talking openly to your teenager makes them feel less under pressure to have sex. And that means they're more likely to wait. Talking openly also gives them the confidence to approach the subject with their boyfriends or girlfriends, and practice safe sex when the time comes.

Finding *the right* moment...

86% of parents think that there would be fewer teenage pregnancies if more parents talked to their teenagers about sex and relationships.

Start early

It's never too early to start the conversation about sex and relationships. Helping young children understand their bodies, their feelings and the feelings of others are essential ingredients for open discussions.

Once you get conversations going you just need to continue them as they get older. The thing to remember is that the more they understand, the more likely they are to make the right choices when the time comes. It isn't true that talking about sex and relationships encourages teens to experiment!

Once your child is in secondary school, they'll be going through puberty and picking up misinformation and pressures from other kids. Although they might think everyone is 'doing it', most teenagers don't have sex until they are at least 16, and those that do are more likely to regret it, and are at greater risk of pregnancy and STIs.

This is a great opportunity for you to be their trusted voice. By helping them understand the basics and reassuring them that it's fine to wait, you'll be relieving any pressures they might be feeling.

Finding *the right* words...

The easiest time to talk about sex and relationships is when you're doing everyday things: washing the car, driving somewhere, washing up, watching TV etc.

It's more informal and less embarrassing than sitting down for a big 'talk'. And here's a few ways to get things started:

Use everyday media to approach the subject – TV, radio, magazines, the internet – you won't be short on options, and talking about how the issues affect other people can make it less embarrassing – celebrities can be a good common ground.

Ask other parents and carers about how they answer difficult questions. Trust us, you're not going through this alone.

Find out what relationship and sex education is being taught in school so you can discuss what they thought of the lessons.

Ask what they think about relationships and sex. This is a great way of finding out what they already know and what attitudes they're shaping.

Ask them what they think about waiting to have sex with someone they care about, and who they think should be responsible for contraception and safe sex.

Ask them about what their friends have to say on the subject. It's a way of talking about their feelings and fears indirectly.

Discussing your values with your teenagers will help them to form their own. Remember though, that trying to convince them of what's right and wrong may discourage them from being open. Try to keep the discussion light, encourage them to say what they think and reassure them that you trust them to make the right decisions.

Information for you

Parentline Plus

A national charity providing free, 24-hour help and support. Visit www.parentlineplus.org.uk, www.gotateenager.org.uk or call **0808 800 22 22**

fpa (Family Planning Association)

For more information and help in talking to your teen, visit www.fpa.org.uk or call **0845 122 8690**

Your local pharmacist

They can provide free and confidential advice on your doorstep and signpost you to more specialist advice if you need it.

Information for your teen

RU Thinking?

All the facts about contraception, STIs, abortion and links to other useful sites. The site also provides advice on love, sex and relationships. Visit www.ruthinking.co.uk or call **0800 28 29 30**

Brook

Free and confidential advice on sexual health and contraception for under 25s. Call **0800 0185 023**, send them an online message at www.brook.org.uk, or text **BROOK HELP** to 81222

What they need to know

Contraception

It's really important to talk to your daughter or son about contraception and safe sex. That way, when they do decide to have sex they can make the right choices and not take risks which could lead to an unplanned pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Under the NHS contraception and condoms are free and there are lots of safe and effective methods that are suitable for young people – encourage your teenager to visit their local clinic or GP so they can make a choice that's right for them. And remember, boys need to know about contraception too so they can take joint responsibility.

As well as other forms of contraception, young people should always use a condom as it protects them against the majority of STIs.

A quick guide to different types of contraception:

- 1) Implant: a small rod can be inserted under the skin on the upper part of the arm. It contains the hormone progesterone which temporarily stops ovulation so the woman doesn't release an egg for fertilisation. It lasts for up to three years and is 99% effective.
- 2) Contraceptive injection: contains the hormone progesterone which stops ovulation so the woman doesn't release an egg for fertilisation. There are two types: Depo-Provera (lasts 12 weeks) and Noristerat (lasts 8 weeks), and both are 99% effective.
- 3) Combined pill: small tablet taken daily containing two hormones, oestrogen and progesterone. It stops ovulation so the woman doesn't release an egg for fertilisation and it's 99% effective **if taken correctly**.

Contraception

- 4) Progesterone-only pill/mini pill: small tablet containing progesterone which makes the mucus around the cervix thicker making it difficult for sperm to get into the womb. It needs to be taken daily at specific times and is 99% effective **if taken correctly**.
- 5) Intrauterine device: inserted into the womb by a doctor or nurse, it stops the sperm meeting an egg, and can last between three and ten years depending on the type used.
- 6) Intrauterine system: inserted into the womb by a doctor or nurse, it releases the hormone progesterone, works for five years and is 98-99% effective (depending on the type used).

Other methods include the contraceptive patch (lasts 7 days and is 99% effective) and the diaphragm/cap that is placed in the vagina each time a woman has sex (92-96% effective if used properly). For more information on the many methods of contraception, visit www.brook.org.uk

It can also be difficult for a teenager to visit their GP or clinic. Why not offer to go with your daughter or encourage them to take a friend to support them. Or, if you have a teenage son, suggest he talks to his girlfriend about it and visits a clinic with her.

Emergency (after sex) contraception:

If your teenager has unprotected sex, she can take emergency contraception to prevent a pregnancy. The emergency contraceptive pill (sometimes called the morning-after pill) can be taken up to 72 hours after sex, but is much more effective in the first 24 hours so the sooner it is taken the better. It is available from clinics, GPs and some pharmacies. An emergency IUD can also be fitted up to 5 days after unprotected sex.

For a list of local clinics where your teenagers can get free contraception and condoms, visit www.nhs.uk or www.ruthinking.co.uk

STIs

Chlamydia is the most common STI, with almost one in ten sexually active young people under 25 carrying it. It also has no symptoms in 70% of girls and 50% of boys, so most people don't even know they've got it.

Most STIs are easily treated, but can get serious if ignored. Chlamydia can even lead to infertility.

To get tested for an STI, your teen can contact their nearest NHS Sexual Health or GUM (genito-urinary medicine) clinic by visiting www.nhs.uk, or they can also speak to their local GP or pharmacist.

For detailed information on STIs and how to stay protected, your teen can visit www.condomessentialwear.co.uk

Gay, lesbian and bi-sexual teenagers

Of course it's not always about boys and girls – your son or daughter may be growing up gay, lesbian or bi-sexual and they will also need good sexual health advice.

Homophobic bullying is very common so your teenager will need help and support and again there are many sources of help. Encourage your teenager to ask for help by visiting www.stonewall.org.uk or calling **08000 50 20 20**

Alcohol and drugs

It's also a good idea to talk to them about alcohol. Drinking too much can lead to unplanned and unprotected sex. For more information on alcohol and drugs, both you and your teenager should visit www.talktofrank.com or www.addaction.org.uk

Talking to your teenager about sex and relationships

