

Statistics:

- In 2005, 47 percent of high school students reported having had sexual intercourse, and 14 percent of high school students reported having had four or more sex partners during their life.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2005*

- In 2002, 55 percent of males and 54 percent of females, ages 15 to 19 years, reported that they had engaged in oral sex with someone of the opposite sex.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2005*

- Forty percent of teenage girls reported that they have experienced personal pressure about sex and relationships.

— *Henry J. Kaiser Foundation, 2003*

- Of the 19 million new sexually transmitted diseases diagnosed annually in the United States, almost half of them are among teenagers and young adults, ages 15 to 24 years.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2006*

- In 2003, teenage girls, ages 15 to 19 years, gave birth to approximately 414,580 babies.

— *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2005*

Recommendations to parents and guardians:

- Seize the moment. When a TV program or music video raises issues about responsible sexual behavior, use it as a springboard for discussion.

- Keep it low-key. Don't pressure your child to talk about sex. Simply broach the subject when you are alone with your child.

- Be honest and share your parental values. If you are uncomfortable, say so—but explain that it is important to keep talking. If you do not know the answers to your child's questions, offer to find the answers or research them together.

- Be direct. Clearly state your feelings about specific issues, such as sexual intercourse. Present the risks objectively, including sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy.

- Consider your child's point of view. Don't lecture your child or rely on scare tactics to discourage sexual activity. Instead, listen carefully and encourage dialogue.

- Invite more discussion. Let your child know that it's acceptable to talk with you about sex whenever he or she has questions or concerns.

- Be prepared for questions like these:

- “How will I know I'm ready for sex?”

Peer pressure, curiosity and loneliness steer some teenagers into sexual activity. Remind your child that it's okay to wait.

- “What if my boyfriend or girlfriend wants to have sex—but I don't?” Explain that no one should have sex out of a sense of obligation or fear. Any form of forced sex is rape, whether the perpetrator is a stranger or someone your child has been dating. Emphasize that alcohol and drugs impair judgment and reduce inhibitions.

- “What if I'm questioning my sexual orientation?” Help your child understand that he or she is just beginning to explore sexual attraction. These feelings may change as time goes on. Above all, however, let your child know that you love him or her unconditionally. Praise your child for sharing his or her feelings.

— *The Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, from an article on Sex Education: Talking to your teen about sex, 2005, www.mayoclinic.com*

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Where to go for more information on teen sexuality:

- www.cdc.gov – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency protecting the health and safety of all Americans and providing essential human services.
- www.kff.org – the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is a private foundation focusing on the major health care issues facing the nation and providing facts and analysis for policymakers, the media, the health care community, and the general public.
- www.mayoclinic.com – the Mayo Clinic is a not-for-profit medical practice dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of virtually every type of complex illness.

- www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/teensexual-health.html – MedlinePlus brings together authoritative information from the National Library of Medicine, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and other government agencies and health-related organizations on the latest health news.

The AMA Alliance, Inc. is a national health advocacy network committed to promoting better health. The Stop America's Violence Everywhere (SAVE) program assists victims of abuse, teaches children about bullies and conflict resolution and educates the public about child health and safety. All resources, including health-focused coloring books and bookmarks for children, are available at

www.amaalliance.org.

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