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# PARENTS AND TEENS TALK ABOUT SEXUALITY: A NATIONAL SURVEY

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## Overview

For Let's Talk Month 2014, Planned Parenthood and New York University's Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,663 pairs of parents and their children, aged 9-21. The survey, conducted in July 2014 by GfK Custom Research, LLC, investigated how parents and children in the same households communicate about sex and sexuality, health, and relationships.

## Key Findings

**Most parents are talking about topics of sexuality and relationships with their children, and they are starting early.**

- 8 out of 10 young people and their parents reported they had talked about sexuality.
- Of those parents who had talked to their child about sexuality, nearly half reported beginning by age 10, and 80% had started talking by age 13.
- Parents reported that they began talking early with their 9-14-year-old children about similarities and differences between boys and girls, how to deal with peer pressure, puberty, and how to stay safe online. As a result, over 80% of parents overall reported talking to their children about these topics.
- Parents of teens and young adults ages 15-21 reported they've talked about birth control methods, STD prevention, healthy relationships, and not pressuring anyone for sex.
- African-American, Hispanic, and white parents were all equally likely to report they'd talked to their children about sexuality.
- Parents reported having conversations more frequently on most sexual health topics than their children.

**Parents of older children don't always keep talking, and they leave out important topics in the teen and young adult years.**

- Over 20% of parents reported they'd never talked with their 15-21-year-old about strategies for saying no to sex, birth control methods, or where to get accurate sexual health information.
- Over 30% of parents reported they'd never talked with their 15-21-year-old about where to get reproductive health care services.
- Relative to other topics, parents of young people ages 15-21 aren't talking frequently enough about how to stay safe online, where to get reliable sexual health information and reproductive health care services, strategies for saying no to sex, how to deal with peer pressure, and sexual orientation.

**Parents are not being clear enough when they talk with their children.**

- The majority of parents (61%) reported wanting young people to wait to have sex until they are ready to handle the responsibilities that come from having a sexual relationship — far more than supported waiting until marriage (45%). However only 52% of parents reported ever talking about these values with their child.

**Parents don't always know when their teens become sexually active.**

- Among teens and young adults 15-21 who reported having vaginal sex, 91% of their parents knew. However, among those who reported having oral sex, only 40% of their parents knew.
- Young people agreed that their parents know what is going on in their lives and that they don't purposefully hide a lot from them.

**Both parents and children do not think that embarrassment is a barrier to talking about sex with one another.**

- We asked parents and children about potential barriers that could get in the way of talking about sexuality, such as:
  - Children being too young
  - Worry about embarrassment
  - Preferring to rely on sex education in schools
  - Not knowing enough information
  - Believing the other parent should take care of conversations
- Both parents and children disagreed that these were barriers.

**Parents overwhelmingly support sex education in schools.**

- Over 90% of parents reported that they believe it is important to have sex education in both middle and high school.
- Parents reported they believe sex education should include a wide variety of topics including birth control, STDs, healthy vs. unhealthy relationships, abstinence, and sexual orientation.