

What's Love Got to Do with It?

Shocking News About Teens & Sex

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Wasn't it shocking to learn from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that more than three million teenage girls have a sexually transmitted infection? That's approximately **1 in 4** teenage girls in this country!

Sexually transmitted infections can have a devastating impact—and not just for young women. CDC found that HPV and Chlamydia have the highest incidence among the teenage girls studied (18% and 4%, respectively). Research has



linked four strains of HPV to cervical cancer, and new studies indicate that HPV is linked to oral and mouth cancers in males. Chlamydia, if untreated, can lead to infertility.

CDC's research makes it more important to better understand what teenage boys

and girls think of as "sex" and how they understand the concept of virginity.

There have been a number of reports that teens increasingly engage in oral or anal sex to "technically" maintain virginity, which has long been associated with vaginal intercourse.

A new Guttmacher Institute study suggests that teens initiate a range of sexual activities around the same time, rather than "graduating" from one to another. Engaging in oral and anal sex is much more common among teens who have already had vaginal intercourse than among those who have not.

All of this information confirms what Planned Parenthood has known for years: Teenagers need to know how to protect themselves from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and they need candid and consistent guidance to make responsible decisions.

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For more information about Planned Parenthood's services and programs, please visit us at www.ppmhv.org

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This presents a real and important challenge for parents, who may see their kids growing up in a very different world than the one they grew up in – six out of ten young people in New York have sex before graduating from high school.

We believe that parents can be their children’s best sex ed teacher, and certainly their most important. But parents often need help talking with their teens – many are really anxious about this responsibility and may feel embarrassed about sex.

“**Sharing your values and helping your kids find sources of truthful and accurate information is an essential part of raising happy and healthy families.**”

A parent may find it less intimidating to begin by thinking about how you might counsel your kids – no matter their age – about love and relationships. After all, we each have experiences of love, romance, intimacy and heartbreak that have enriched our lives and contributed to our choices. How do you want your son or daughter to think about love? What is it like to be in a loving and respectful relationship? What does it mean to be intimate with someone, and how important is that? How do you want them to feel when they experience sex?

Asking yourself these questions may help you connect with your kids about their feelings and relationships. Every day, they are absorbing information about love and sex from what happens in their homes, from their peers, the TV and movies – all of which they will rely on when deciding what love and sex will mean for them.

There are good sources of help available. Planned Parenthood provides regular health screenings and factual and age-appropriate education, including information about abstinence as well as contraception, healthy communication, responsible decision-making, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

Such comprehensive sex education has been proven to delay the onset of intercourse, reduce the frequency of intercourse, decrease the number of sexual partners, and increase condom and contraceptive use when a person does become sexually active.

We all want our teens to be safe. Sharing your values and helping your kids find sources of truthful and accurate information is an essential part of raising happy and healthy families.

I urge you to think about how you want your kids to think about love and sex, and talk with them – even if they are now adults. It’s never too late.

Clare Coleman
President & CEO