

## HOW TO TALK WITH YOUR TEEN ABOUT THE FACTS OF LIFE

We live in a very sexual world. There are messages about sex all around us –radio and TV, in movies, magazines, and music. Sex is used to sell everything from soap to sports cars. Political and religious leaders have a lot to say about sex, too. So do people in locker rooms, in malls, and in our homes. Our kids hear it all.

But despite all the talk, our kids don't get much useful information.

Many kids become confused and may be pressured into sexual intercourse before they are ready. Too often sexual abuse, sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancy shape their lives.

We want our children to have healthy and rewarding lives. And we all know that teaching them about sex is very important.

### **Why do teens need to know about sexuality?**

Understanding sexuality helps kids cope with their feelings and with peer pressure. It lets them take charge of their lives and have loving relationships. It also helps protect them from sexual abuse – from becoming sexual abusers.

Further, young people who talk openly with their parents about sex are more likely to ask for information and advice. They are also more likely to protect themselves.

### **Is there such a thing as too much information?**

No. Information does not encourage kids to be sexually active. Kids make better decisions about sex when they have all the information they need. If they are told information beyond their ability to understand, they usually just forget about it.

### **What if I'm uncomfortable talking about sex?**

Join the club. Most of us feel that way, and it's not surprising: Many of us were taught that sex is too "dirty" for words. Many of us are afraid that we don't have all the answers. It's hard for some of us to admit our children are sexual. It's even hard for some of us to admit that we are sexual. Many of us fear the normal sexual feelings between our children and ourselves.

But we can still help our kids by being open with them about our feelings. We can start by saying something like, "This is hard for me to talk about. My folks and I never discussed these things. But I want you to have someone to talk with."

Learning about sex is a life-long process that begins at birth. A one-time talk about the "birds and the bees" will not teach the information and values we want them to learn. Let sex and sexuality be part of everyday conversation.

Covering up our feelings or avoiding the issue by waiting for them to reach a certain age or to ask questions makes matters worse. Start the conversations, keep it going, and be open from the beginning. Information about sexuality is as important as food, shelter, and loving care.

*Source: Planned Parenthood of Illinois*

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### PPMSM HEALTH CENTERS

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