

# Let's Talk

## Parents and Teens Talk About Sexuality: A National Poll

### Overview

As part of Let's Talk Month 2012, Planned Parenthood Federation of America and *Family Circle* magazine with support from the Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health (CLAFH) at NYU conducted a national survey to explore

- parent-adolescent communication on issues related to sexuality;
- how comfortable parents and teens are discussing sexuality-related topics; and
- whether parents are clearly communicating their expectations about dating and sexuality to their teens.

This poll was conducted in June 2012 by GfK Custom Research, LLC on behalf of Planned Parenthood, *Family Circle* magazine, and CLAFH.

Adolescents aged 15–18 (n=1,046) and one of their parents (n=1,046) completed the survey, for a total of 2,092 people.

### Key Findings

#### Communication Between Parents and Teens

The vast majority of parents and teens talk to each other about sexuality.

- 89.7 percent of parents reported ever talking to their teen about any topics related to sexuality.
  - ✓ Mothers (93.0 percent) were more likely than fathers (85.4 percent) to report ever talking to their teen about any topics related to sexuality.
- 83.5 percent of teens reported ever talking to their parent about any topics related to sexuality.

#### Comfort Level of Communication

Parents are much more comfortable talking about sexuality with their teens than teens are with their parents. Mothers are more comfortable than fathers.

- 49.1 percent of parents reported feeling very comfortable talking to their son/daughter about sexuality.
- Only 17.5 percent of teens reported feeling very comfortable talking to their parents.

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## Frequency of Communication

Parents think they are talking frequently, but teens report their parents are talking less frequently — a discrepancy that is consistent with past research on this topic. Also, teens are less likely to report planning to discuss many of these topics more with their parents in the future.

### *How to Say “No” to Sex*

- 41.8 percent of parents said they have discussed how to say “no” to sex many times with their teens, while only 27.3 percent of teens said they have discussed this many times with their parents.
- 48 percent of parents said they planned to talk to their teens in the future about how to say “no” to sex, compared with only 12.3 percent of teens planning to talk to their parents about the subject.

### *Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships*

- 49.9 percent of parents said they’ve discussed healthy and unhealthy relationships many times with their teens, while only 31.5 percent of teens said they’ve discussed this many times with their parents.
- 59.2 percent of parents said they planned to talk to their teens in the future about healthy and unhealthy relationships, while only 28.8 percent of teens said they planned to talk to their parents about it.

### *Birth Control Methods*

- 29.3 percent of parents said they have discussed birth control methods many times with their teens, while only 23.8 percent of teens said they have discussed this many times with their parents.
- 51.9 percent of parents said they planned to talk to their teens in the future about birth control methods, compared with only 17.7 percent of teens planning to talk to their parents about the subject.
- On average, parents reported talking about birth control methods less frequently than most other topics, such as how to say “no” to sex and healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Overall, for all topics, mothers are more likely to report talking to their teens many times than are fathers.

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## Parental Approval/Disapproval of Dating and Sexual Activity

- Teens know what their parents approve and disapprove of when it comes to dating and sexual behavior.
- Most parents (78.8 percent) reported having done either a very good job or a good job communicating their approval/disapproval of dating and sexual behavior to their teens.
- Most parents strongly disapprove of their teens having oral sex (75.6 percent) or vaginal sex (75.2 percent). Most teens also reported that their parents would strongly disapprove of them having oral sex (76.2 percent) or vaginal sex (74.6 percent).
- There's no double standard — teen girls were only slightly more likely than teen boys to say their parent would disapprove of them dating or having sex.

## Sexual Behavior

- 80.4 percent of teens reported they'd never had vaginal sex, but of those who had, their parents were very likely (81.3 percent) to know that they had.

## Support for Sex Education in Schools

An overwhelming majority of parents (95.7%) and teens (92.9%) reported that it is important sex education is taught in **high schools**. A large majority of parents (93.9%) and teens (88%) also reported that it is important that sex education is taught in **middle schools**.

- Parents support comprehensive sex education in **high school** that includes topics such as sexually transmitted diseases (98.7%), healthy relationships (98.2%), abstinence (95.6%), birth control (94.1%), and sexual orientation (79.1%).
- Parents support comprehensive sex education in **middle school** that includes topics such as sexually transmitted diseases (97.0%), healthy relationships (95.5%), abstinence (93.8%), birth control (78.4%), and sexual orientation (66.4%).