

Parents, Make the time to talk



The Crisis Pregnancy Agency has produced this supplement to help parents and older teenagers communicate openly about relationships and sex.

All young people have the right to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and education. Over 90% of the Irish population support sex education for young people on a range of topics, including sexual intercourse, safer sex and sexually transmitted infections.

By ensuring that young people have comprehensive sexuality education, age appropriate information and open channels of communication, it is possible to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make informed choices now and in the future.

Evidence shows that young people who have experienced open communication with parents or a caring adult – such as a teacher or counsellor – are better prepared to communicate honestly and openly about sexuality, emotions and fears, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour.

Mary Harney T.D.
Minister for Health and Children



But my teenager won't talk to me. How do I even begin?

Doing things together can be a great way to connect with your teenager. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. Walking together or driving somewhere can be a good opportunity to talk. You are alone and won't be interrupted. Teenagers may feel more comfortable talking in a general way about relationships at first. You could start by asking them general questions about their classmates or friends.



A minority of teenagers have sex before 17. Most wait until they are 17 or older to have sex for the first time.

Young people who find it easy to talk to their parents about sex are more likely to use contraception the first time they have sex.

If a young woman has sex before 17 she is 70% more likely to experience a crisis pregnancy than those who become sexually active at a later stage.

Did you know?

If your son or daughter has sex before 17, they are twice as likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection in their lifetime.

Over 45% of young women cannot identify the time of the month when they are most likely to become pregnant.

Two thirds of young men and almost half of young women do not find it easy to talk with their parents about sex.

These findings have been taken from the Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships (2006), a nationally representative study commissioned by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and the Department of Health and Children.



If you think that your teenager is under pressure to become sexually active ask them to consider these issues:



Peer Pressure

Teenagers are very concerned with how they are viewed, not just by their friends, but also by their wider peer group and are willing to do things that they think will make them fit-in with this group.

Boys often feel under pressure from their peer group (boys and girls) to appear macho and ready for sex at all times. Boys also feel pressure from their friends to have sex. Having sex for the first time usually makes them feel proud, grown-up or relieved that they won't be slagged by their friends. Curiosity and peer pressure are the main reasons why young men have sex for the first time.

Girls feel that they are expected to have a good reputation, but at the same time they feel under pressure from boys and their peers to have sex. Girls tend to be interested in having a special relationship with someone. For girls who become sexually active in their teenage years, it can be more about pleasing their partner than themselves.

Alcohol, Drugs and Risky Sexual Behaviour

Young people say that alcohol increases sexual desire and makes them feel more confident with the opposite sex. This means that they may do something that they later regret. If you think that your teenager is drinking alcohol or taking drugs make sure that they know the risks, including the legal risks. Drinking alcohol and taking drugs can make people:

- Take more risks than they usually would
- Do things that they may regret
- Get pressured into doing things that they don't want to do
- Have difficulty looking after themselves
- Less likely to use contraception if they are sexually active
- Have difficulty using condoms
- Forget what happened



- Would someone who really loved and cared for you put you under pressure to do something that you don't want to do or weren't ready for yet?
- What's the harm in waiting? What would happen if you decided to wait for another year?
- If your boyfriend/girlfriend broke it off with you because you were not ready to have sex with them, did they really care for you to begin with?
- Do you want to put yourself in a position where you may be worried about being pregnant or having a sexually transmitted infection?
- Everyone says that you'll remember your 'first time' forever. What do you want to remember when you look back?
- Do you want to have sex because you got carried away?
- Do you want to have sex because you were drunk?
- Do you want to have sex because you are being put under pressure?
- Or do you want it to be with someone you really like, in a caring relationship?

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Keep the door open. Let your teenager know you are always there to talk to.

If your teenager asks a question – stop what you are doing and listen to what they have to say.

Let them know you have noticed their feelings without trying to change how they feel.

Introduce the topic, bring up issues - this shows that you are interested.

Be honest when talking about relationships and sex.

Use humour where you can and be sensitive to their feelings.

Start by asking your teenager what they already know.

Let your teenager know how you feel, what your values are.

Talk about everything, not just relationships and sex. Ask their opinions or their friends' opinions on different issues.

Test Yourself (and your teenager)

1. What is the age of consent for sexual intercourse?
a. 16 b. 19 c. 17 d. 18

2. If you talk to your children about relationships and sex, it will decrease the likelihood that they will:
a. Have a crisis pregnancy b. Get a sexually transmitted infection
c. Have sex before 17 d. All of the above

3. In a regular 28 day cycle, a woman is most likely to become pregnant?
a. During her period b. In the middle of her cycle
c. One week before her period is due

4. You can get pregnant or contract a sexually transmitted infection the first time you have sex. True or False?
a. True b. False

5. The 'withdrawal method' protects against unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection. True or False?
a. True b. False

6. You cannot get a sexually transmitted infection from oral sex or anal sex. True or False?
a. True b. False

7. Young people are more likely to use contraception the first time they have sex when:
a. They are drunk b. They are in love
c. They have an open, communicative relationship with their parents about relationships and sex

8. What do condoms help protect against?
a. Becoming pregnant b. Chlamydia c. HIV
d. Gonorrhoea e. All of the above

9. What does the pill protect against?
a. Chlamydia b. Gonorrhoea
c. HIV d. Becoming pregnant

10. How long after having sexual intercourse is the emergency contraception pill ('morning after pill') effective?
a. 4 hours b. 48 hours c. 72 hours d. 5 days

11. Do you always know when you've got a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?
a. Yes b. No

12. Young people who are sexually active but want to avoid pregnancy and STIs should use the 'Double Dutch' method of contraception. Double Dutch means:
a. Using two methods of contraception at the same time (eg. Condoms and the Pill)
b. Using two condoms when you have sex

13. What gives absolute protection from both STIs and unplanned pregnancy?
a. Condoms b. Having sex with someone you know
c. The Pill d. Abstinence from sex

14. True or False – Talking to your teenagers about sex makes it more likely that they will become sexually active?
a. True b. False

15. 90% of young people use contraception consistently. The most common reason cited by young people who do not use contraception when they have sex is:
a. They do not realise that they should use contraception
b. They were drinking alcohol/taking drugs
c. They wanted to become pregnant

Okay, so what should I tell them about contraception?

You know your child best and it is up to you to decide whether or not to talk with them about contraception. Remember, teenagers receive and believe a lot of incorrect information about contraception. If you think that your child is sexually active, or under pressure to be sexually active, you may find these tips useful.

she needs to know about contraception and condoms, even if they say they do!

1. Educate yourself about contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Visit www.thinkcontraception.ie or ask your GP or pharmacist for information leaflets.

4. Talk with your teenager about what you have learned about contraception. Talk about the factors that can make the pill ineffective. For sexually active young people, using condoms as well as the oral contraceptive pill (Double Dutch) is the best way to prevent unplanned pregnancy and STIs.

2. Carefully explain your own feelings and values about sexual intercourse.

5. Discuss alcohol and its effect on your mind and body. The primary reason why under-25 year olds don't use contraception is that they were drinking alcohol or taking drugs.

3. Listen carefully and avoid making assumptions. Do not assume that your teenager knows everything he/

6. Talk to your teenager about where they can go to access contraception.

Emergency Contraception

Emergency Contraception (the 'morning after pill') is an important secondary method of contraception. It can be used to prevent a pregnancy when the first method of contraception (condoms or the pill) may have failed or where no contraception has been used. It can be taken to prevent pregnancy up to 72 hours after intercourse, but is most effective when taken within 24 hours. Emergency Contraception needs to be prescribed by a GP, and is widely available in pharmacies.

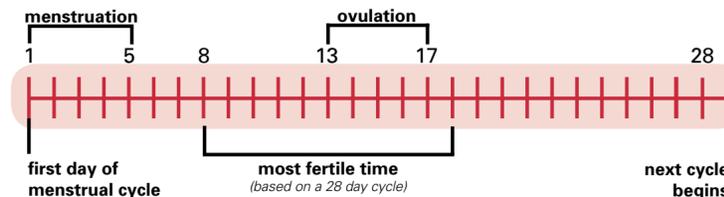


Abstinence
Only total abstinence from all sexual contact offers 100% protection from pregnancy and STIs.

Fertility Awareness

Ovulation (release of an egg) occurs 12-16 days before the onset of a woman's next period. This is the most fertile time of her menstrual cycle. The length of the menstrual cycle can vary from 21-40 days, but ovulation always occurs 12-16 days before the onset of the next period. The egg can survive for 24 hours. This knowledge can only be used to prevent a pregnancy if a woman has a regular cycle, if she is aware of other signs of ovulation and if she is aware of other factors that can affect ovulation, such as stress, travel or sickness.

A man is fertile from adolescents throughout his whole life. When a man ejaculates during sexual intercourse, approximately 350,000 million sperm are transferred into the woman's body. Sperm can last in a woman's body for between 5 and 7 days. This means that if a woman has sex between 5-7 days before ovulation, or on any of the four days she may ovulate, she can become pregnant. So women are most fertile between 7 and 10 days each month.



Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

STIs are increasing in Ireland, especially among young people. Some STIs, such as genital warts or pubic lice have very noticeable symptoms, such as irritation, rashes or lumps around the genitals or anus.

untreated, it may cause infertility.

Other STIs, such as Chlamydia, can have no symptoms. If your teenager has unprotected sex with someone, make sure that they get checked out by your GP or an STI clinic. Chlamydia is increasing in Ireland, especially among young sexually active people. If Chlamydia is

If your teenager is sexually active, they can contract STIs, including HIV, from unprotected vaginal, anal and oral intercourse. Contrary to what some teenagers believe, hormonal contraception, such as the pill, does not protect against STIs.

Ensure that your teenager is aware that STIs are increasing in Ireland and that they are at risk of contracting an STI if they have sex without using a condom.

Ask the Experts

Dr. Tony Humphreys

Q. If I talk to my children about sex, will I be encouraging them to do it?

A. "Innocence does not equal ignorance. Keeping children ignorant of their bodies and of the nature of physical and emotional attraction to another is a recipe for disaster. All the evidence indicates that when parents don't talk to their children on these matters they are more likely to engage in sexual activities at an earlier stage. Before speaking with children, it is important that you feel comfortable and at ease with the subject. It is frequently the case that parents themselves need to talk to somebody, to a fellow parent, family friend, teacher, counsellor or GP on sexual matters before they are ready to talk to their children. It is important in talking about sexuality that the child's thoughts and feelings about it are broached and that sexuality is presented as a physical, emotional, social and spiritual experience."

Q. I have tried to bring this subject up with my teenager, but they are not interested. What else can I do?

A. "Generally speaking, where there has been an ease around physical and emotional closeness and sexual conversation with the family, talking to a child about sex evolves naturally from that stable family relationship. When your teenager expresses lack of interest there may be deeper emotional issues that require attention or it may be that his/her lack of interest springs from them sensing your embarrassment. In the kindest and firmest way possible let him or her know that it is your responsibility as a parent to ensure that they have a mature knowledge of how strong and pleasurable the sexual drive is and how a responsible response to this strong drive is absolutely necessary for their own and another's physical, sexual, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing."

For more articles by Dr Tony Humphreys, visit www.tonyhumphreys.ie

National Parents' Council (Primary)



Q. Doesn't my teenager get taught this in school?

A. "All schools are required to teach Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) from Junior Infants to Sixth Year as part of a wider programme called Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)."

"A recent survey found that while two thirds of schools are implementing the RSE programme to a high/moderate level, 10% are not teaching it at all. Teenagers report that although they get biological information at school they do not get enough information on dealing with sexual feelings and emotions. Parents can support what is happening in schools by helping their children to discuss these issues. To see the RSE parent information booklet 'Going Forward Together' go to www.sphe.ie and click on the parent link."

Q. I'm too embarrassed to talk to my teenagers about sex - what can I do to make it easier?

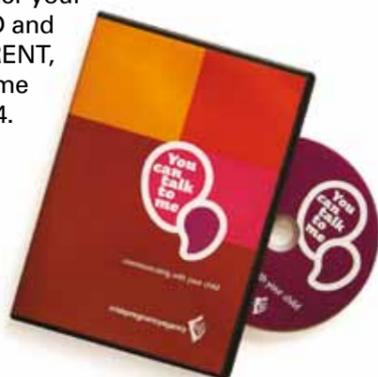
A. "It is important that parents recognise that they have a responsibility to talk to their children about relationships and sex and it is better if young people hear this information from their own parents. Young people need to be able to make responsible choices for themselves in the face of peer pressure. It is a good idea to talk to a fellow parent, family friend, teacher, counsellor or GP about relationships and sex before you talk to your child. There are lots of people that can help you. Also, pick a good time – when you are alone and won't be interrupted, perhaps while driving or walking together. You could start the conversation by asking them what they have covered at school or by asking them about whether their classmates or friends have boyfriends/girlfriends. Ask them to do the quiz on the inside pages of this supplement with you!"

Remember that both Irish and international research shows that when there is an open, honest relationship between parents and their children about relationships and sex, it decreases the chance that they will have sex before 17, which in turn decreases the chance of having a crisis pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection.

Practical Help for Parents

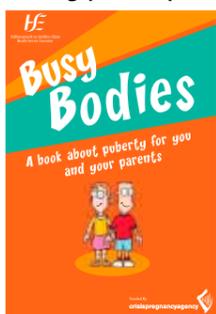
You can talk to me DVD and booklet

was developed to assist parents in communicating with their 11-15 years olds on relationships and sexual health. To order your free copy of this DVD and booklet, freetext PARENT, followed by your name and address to 50444.



Busy Bodies booklet

was developed to provide appropriate information to 5th & 6th class students on the physical and emotional changes that they may experience during puberty. The booklet was developed to help both parents and teachers in the delivery of Relationship & Sexuality Education (RSE) in the home and in school. To order a copy of the booklet, freetext BUSY followed by your name and address to 50444. Schools can order bulk copies of the booklet free of charge, through their local health promotion department.



crisispregnancyagency

Formulating & Implementing a National Strategy



The Crisis Pregnancy Agency is a State agency set up by the Government to develop and implement a national strategy to reduce crisis pregnancy. Visit www.crisispregnancy.ie for details.

+OPTIONS

CRISIS PREGNANCY SERVICES

Positive Options

For a list of free crisis pregnancy counselling services freetext list to 50444 or visit www.positiveoptions.ie



Nobody else is going to do the thinking for you

Think Contraception

Request free copies of the "Think Contraception" information leaflet from info@crisispregnancy.ie
For more information about contraception visit www.thinkcontraception.ie

National Parents' Council (Primary)

Relationship and Sexuality workshops for parents – Do

you find it easy to talk to your children about relationships and sex? Do you know what your children are learning in school in the area of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)? National Parents' Council (Primary) run a programme that helps parents through this important stage of their child's development. The training is on offer to groups of no more than 15 parents, in either 6 x 2½ hour sessions or two full days (either Saturdays or weekdays whatever is suitable for the trainer and the group). If you are interested in the training, please contact the Training and Development Programme of the National Parents' Council (Primary) at 01-8874475 or 01-8874481.



Parentline offers support, guidance, and information on all aspects of being a parent. Visit www.parentline.ie or call 1890 927 277

cluedup parents

Cluedup Parents is a Health Service Executive project, which provides information and support to parents on talking to their children about relationships and sex. Visit www.cluedupparents.org

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To comment on the supplement, freetext COMMENT, followed by your comment to 50444.

The information in this supplement is in no way to be considered medical advice.
Specific medical advice should be obtained from a licensed health practitioner.