

Parent-child communication and connectedness

A variety of factors play a role in a teen's ability to make responsible, healthy decisions about sex. Parent-child connectedness is a "super protective" factor in the prevention of teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV. In fact, parent child connectedness is documented as a protective factor for over 30 different adolescent health outcomes.

Communication versus connectedness¹

Parent-child communication and parent-child connectedness are not the same thing. While communication is important, it is only one aspect of parent-child connectedness.

What is parent-child connectedness?¹

Parent-child connectedness is characterized by a positive, emotional bond between parent and child. This bond consists of three key elements:

- **Quality:** the act of parenting or care giving, not simply the presence of or time spent with parents.
- **Mutual:** bond experienced by both the parent and the child.
- **Sustained:** connectedness that develops over time, and does not exist as a "one shot deal."

Parents need to know that they do not have to plan elaborate events to connect with their teens: 5 to 10 minutes of one-on-one time each day can have a powerful effect!



For more information on parent-child connectedness:
Advocates for Youth – <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org>
ETR Associates – <http://www.etr.org/recapp>
National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy – <http://www.teenpregnancy.org>

About the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy:

The Campaign is a private, not-for-profit organization committed to reducing the incidence of teen pregnancy in South Carolina through the provision of education, technical assistance, public awareness, advocacy and research.

References:

- 1) Rolleri, L. and Bean, S. (2005). *Parent-Child Connectedness: Paving the Way for Parents to Communicate Effectively with Their Teens*. Santa Cruz, CA: ETR Associates.
- 2) *Unlocking the Secret: A Parent's Guide to Communicating with Your Kids*. New York: Not Me, Not Now.
- 3) Albert, B. (2004) *With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.
- 4) *Talking Back: What Teens Want Adults to Know about Teen Pregnancy*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

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To request additional copies of this publication:

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tips for providers

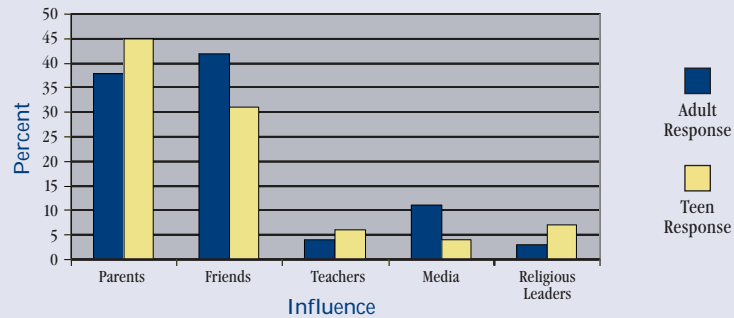


*strategies for involving parents
in teen pregnancy prevention*

Parents underestimate their influence

A 2005 poll of parents and teens showed that parents greatly underestimate their influence on teen sexual behavior.³

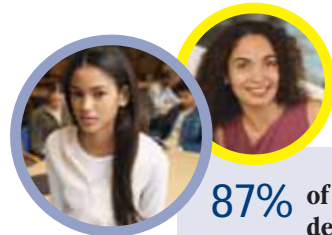
Who influences teens' decisions about sex?



Teens listen — talk with them

Young people really do want to hear from their parents about sex, love, relationships and values. Here's what teens are saying:⁴

- Show us why teen pregnancy is such a bad idea. Help us understand why teen pregnancy can get in the way of reaching our goals.
- Show us what good, responsible relationships look like. We are influenced as much by what you do as by what you say.
- Talk to us honestly about sex, love and relationships.
- Telling us not to have sex is not enough. Explain why you feel that way (if you do), and ask us what we think.
- Even if we don't ask, we still have questions. If we don't start the conversation (about sex, love relationships) you should.
- Whether we're having sex or not, we need to be prepared. We need honest and helpful information about saying no and about using protection.
- Pay attention to us before we get into trouble.
- We really care what you think, even if we don't always act like it.



87% of teens agree that it would be easier for them to delay sex and prevent teen pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents, but

40% of teens report they have not had such a conversation!

Connecting parents and teens

Young people have many questions about sex, love and relationships. Most parents believe that talking to teens about sex, love and relationships is important but many do not know what to say or when to say it. Each day young people are bombarded with information about sex, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS, and related issues in many ways, especially through peers and the media – and without parents often have nowhere to turn for answers.

7 behaviors of parent child connectedness

Let parents know they do not have to be experts. Forming an open bond between parent and child is often more important than the information shared. Work with parents (and teens) to create and maintain parent-child connectedness.¹

Parents should:

- 1) Provide basic needs (housing, nutrition, health care)
- 2) Work to build and maintain trust
- 3) Demonstrate love, care and affection
- 4) Share in activities with their teens
- 5) Communicate with their teens
- 6) Work to prevent, negotiate and resolve conflicts
 - Establish expectations
 - Monitor children
 - Discipline children effectively
 - Provide positive reinforcement
- 7) Create and maintain structure in their child's life:

What can providers do?

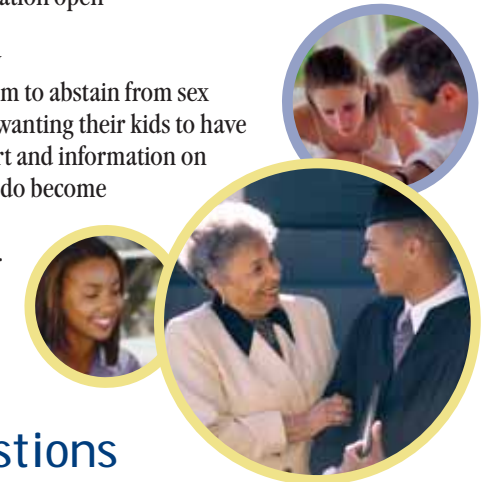
Providers are in an excellent position to weave parent-child connectedness into their work because they have regular access to both teens and parents. *Parents need help!*

Help parents to:

- Understand how young people develop
- Encourage teens to talk, share feelings and engage in conversation
- Understand their parenting style and how it affects connectedness
- Listen actively as a way to build trust with their teens
- Listen actively as a way to provide emotional support to their teens
- Provide positive reinforcement of teens' good behaviors.

Encourage parents to:^{2, 4}

- Keep the lines of communication open
- Start communicating early
- Respect their child's privacy
- Tell their kids they want them to abstain from sex
- Share their reasons for not wanting their kids to have sex, but also provide support and information on birth control for when they do become sexually active
- Acknowledge peer pressure.



Program Suggestions

- ▶ Use learning activities that encourage parents to see teens' point of view – role plays, skits, interviews, etc.
- ▶ Offer parent and family skills training – active listening, assertive communication, discipline, conflict negotiation, etc.
- ▶ Include fun activities for families to work together and communicate – sporting events, dinners, community service projects.
- ▶ Give teens homework that asks them to interview their parents and share their values and opinions.

Source: *Rolleri and Bean (2005)*