

What is Sexual Health?

Sexual health is

- a state of physical, emotional, mental & social well-being related to sexuality; NOT just the absence of disease or dysfunction ,
- requiring a positive and respectful approach to sexuality & sexual relationships,
- the ability to have pleasurable & safe experiences, free of coercion, discrimination & violence.

For sexual health to be maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

In South Asian cultures, the messaging teens receive at home is overwhelmingly "don't have sex", "don't talk about sex" or "sex is for marriage". While we all have our individual values regarding sex, with this limited conversation parents give the message that "sex is shameful" or "don't tell me about it" - which can lead teens having an unhealthy negativity towards sex, gathering dubious information online or from unreliable resources, and/or not having an open line of communication.

Promoting Sex Positivity

- **Don't Shame:** lead with facts , leaving no subject as taboo, to best prepare your teen to make informed choices about their body
- **Use Correct Terms for Anatomy:** discard terms like "shame shame" , "susu," "peepee" or "down there": even smaller children can use correct language which can help keep them safer.
- **Value Autonomy:** prepare kids to make decisions instead of seeking to control actions.
- **Reinforce Consent:** respecting & understanding consent for themselves and for others.
- **Model Tolerance & Respect:** reinforce an understanding of diversity, show respect for others regardless of gender identity or sexuality.

Signs of Dating Violence

- **Extreme Mood Swings:** Fluctuations are normal in teens, but extreme changes in mood may indicate a serious problem. Screaming one moment and being remote the next may be a sign of dating violence.
- **Isolation:** Does a teen try to keep their partner away from others Is a teen withdrawn & antisocial? Possessiveness, controlling behavior, isolation can indicate abusive relationships.
- **Physical Harm:** Unexplained physical injuries are a red flag for abusive relationships. An abuser may have scraped knuckles or defensive wounds. A victim may hide a black eye or bruises with makeup or baggy clothes.
- **Bad Grades:** Dealing with abuse can make it difficult to focus. When grades suffer for no apparent reason, it may be a sign of abuse.
- **Sexual Activity:** Sex may be part of a healthy teenage relationship. However, many times teens are not mature enough to have sex. When teens are having sex because they want control or fear the consequences of saying no, it could indicate abuse.

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Talking About Sex & Consent with Teens

A Guide for Parents



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STOP THE SILENCE

Consent

Two main learning points for teenagers would be

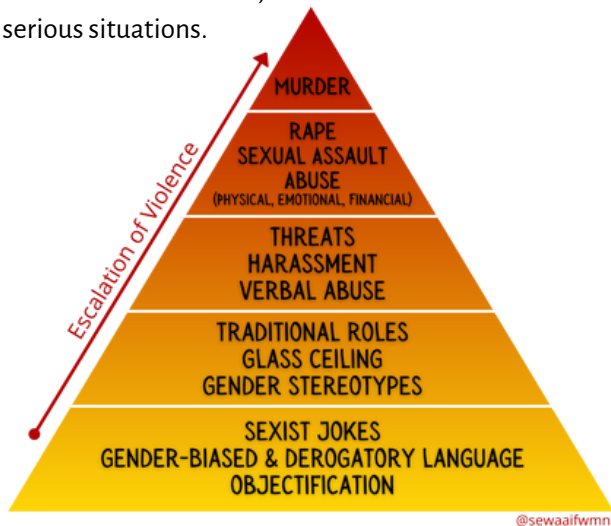
- Respecting the consent of other people
- Establishing their own boundaries towards sex and relationships.

It's critical children know that consent is also about enthusiastic yeses, paying attention to the body language of others, and must be voluntary, affirmative and conscious. This education starts well before they're making decisions about sex.

When teens know their values and limits, they can make decisions with greater confidence and less contradiction. Making a safe space to talk openly about what they do and don't want in these areas, and ways to communicate those with partners, helps them to be prepared.

Sexual Assault

It's important for your teen to understand that no one has the right to force a sexual act on another person against his or her will, regardless of what they wear, if they drink/do drugs, if they have had a sexual encounter previously, etc. No always means no. Also necessary is understanding that often-minimized incidences of jokes & derogatory language, contribute to a culture of violence, and can escalate into more serious situations.



Discussion Topics

- Discuss boundaries on where they can go, how long they should be away and instruct them to check in with you periodically. Advise them to communicate with you if plans change.
- Discuss the importance of a buddy system when they are out places.
- Help them identify safe spaces within places they regularly visit or hang out.
- Talk about what they should do to stay safer whenever they are home alone.
- Stay connected to what is happening in their world, peer groups and settings outside of the home. Show genuine interest and hold space to help support their problem solving of challenging situations that come up.
- Talk about what to do if someone ever offers them money or an easy job.
- Discuss substance use and its effects on decision making. Help them think through ways to stay safer in situations if drugs or alcohol are present. Develop a shame-free strategy for when, who and how to contact if a situation escalates and they need an out.
- Talk about safety in the context of romantic, intimate and sexual relationships. Ensure they know the features of healthy versus unhealthy relationships and who to talk to for support or emergency help.
- Frame safety rules as part of being a responsible and mature person. Let them know that you want to support their freedom and healthy risk taking, but that you also are there to help them stay safer.
- Ask and keep asking the tough questions: have they or their friends experienced harrassment, groping, rape, etc. What would they do if they did?

learn more: @sexpositive_families
sexpositivefamilies.com

Safe Sex

Creating openness is what will keep teens feeling safe to return to you as a trusted, shame-free resource. The goal would be to reduce risk rather than use fear as a strategy to influence decision making.

Start the conversation with "Let's talk about ways to stay safer when you choose to have sex."

Help them think ahead about contraceptive options, barrier methods (like condoms), sexually transmitted infections, consent, pleasure, and how to talk about all of these areas with a partner. The goal is to prepare, not scare, them.

Questions to ask:

- Do you know how to use a condom?
- Have you heard about the HPV vaccine?
- Let's discuss birth control options with your doctor.
- Are there concerns you have about sexually transmitted diseases?
- Do you ever feel pressure to engage in sexual activity?
- Do you know about the helplines to call if you or anyone else is being forced?
- Do you feel comfortable asking a partner to wear a condom or about an STD test?
- What are some different ways you can say NO?
- What are the non-verbal cues other people might give you if they are uncomfortable?
- What do you think constitutes a healthy relationship?