

## **Tips For Talking To Your Child About Sex, Drugs and Alcohol** -Adapted from Drugfree.org

- 1. Talk early and talk often about sex.** “Teens are thinking about sex from early adolescence and they’re very nervous about it,” explains Elizabeth Schroeder, EdD, MSW, Executive Director of Answer, a national sexuality education organization based at Rutgers University. “They get a lot of misinformation about sex and what it’s supposed to be like. And as a result, they think that if they take drugs or drink, that’s going to make them feel less nervous.”
- 2. Take a moment.** What if your teen asks a question that shocks you? Dr. Schroeder suggests saying, “‘You know, that’s a great question.’ or ‘I gotta tell you, I’m not sure if you’re being serious right now but I need a minute.’” Then regain your composure and return to the conversation. Have a plan for answering personal questions from your teen like: “How old were you when you first had sex?” and “Have you ever used drugs?”
- 3. Be the source of accurate information.** Beyond many school health classes, teens have lots of questions about drugs, pregnancy, condoms, abstinence, and oral sex. Do research and invite your teen to research with you.
- 4. Explain the consequences.** Since teen brains aren’t wired yet for consequential thinking and impulse control, it’s important to have frank discussions with your teens about the ramifications of unprotected sex and the importance of using condoms to prevent the spread of STDs, HIV, and unwanted pregnancy.
- 5. Help your child figure out what’s right and wrong.** Teens need—and want—limits. When it comes to things like sexuality, drugs and alcohol, they want to know what the rules and consequences are.
- 6. Use teachable moments.** Watch TV shows (like “16 and Pregnant,” “Teen Mom,” “Jersey Shore” and “Greek”), movies, commercials, magazine ads and the news with your teen and ask “What did you think about that?” “What did you notice about how these characters interacted?” “What did you think about the decisions they made?” For us, one of the best ways to talk about a number of heavy topics was to take a drive—that way we weren’t face-to-face.
- 7. Explain yourself.** Teens need to hear your rationale and why you feel the way you do. One approach is to talk about sex, drugs and alcohol in the context of your family’s values and beliefs.
- 8. Talk about “sexting.”** Texting sexual images and messages is more prevalent than you may think.
- 9. Remember how you felt.** I know when I started puberty I had many thoughts, feelings and questions that weren’t discussed in my family. Things like body changes, feelings of attraction, acne, weight gain, emotional confusion and the desire to push your parents away. I wanted to help my daughters avoid that confusion. I wanted them to understand early on that puberty is a hardwired, biological change that happens to all humans so they become interested in sex for the purposes of procreation. It’s natural to have impulses and feelings that are part and parcel to puberty. Teens don’t have control over these feelings and impulses, but they do have control over whether they act on them.
- 10. Persevere.** Dr. Schroeder warns that your teenager may not want to talk—he or she may shrug and walk away. “Adolescents are supposed to behave in that way when inside what they’re really saying is ‘Keep talking to me about this. I need to know what you think. I’m trying to figure this out for myself as a teenager and if I don’t get messages from you, then I’m not going to know how to do this,’” she explains.