Speak About It:
Talking to Teens About Sex and Healthy Relationships
Why are we here?

• To start conversations about consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships with students.
• To raise awareness about the realities of sexual and relationship violence in high schools and on college campuses.
• To recognize and respect the wide array of possible sexual identities and choices that exist, and encourage students to make healthy decisions that fit with their personal values, desires, and boundaries.
Goals for Today

• Update parents on the “yes means yes” standard of consent for sexual activity.
• Discuss the unique role that parents play in helping adolescents develop healthy sexuality.
• Outline some of the challenges young people face in developing healthy sexuality today.
• Provide strategies for successful conversations about sexuality and relationships between parents and teens.
Silence is not consent.

yes means yes
When you were your child’s age...

• How did you learn about sex?
• Where did you learn about sex?
• Who talked to you about sex?
• Who *didn’t* talk to you about it?
• Is there anyone you wish had been a resource but wasn’t?
“It would be much easier for teens to postpone sexual activity and avoid pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.”

Source: The National Campaign
“When it comes to your decisions about sex, who is most influential?”

Source: The National Campaign
“If you have had sexual intercourse, do you wish you had waited longer?”

SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED TEEN GIRLS AGE 12-19
67% YES 33% NO

SEXUALLY EXPERIENCED TEEN BOYS AGE 12-19
53% YES 47% NO

Source: The National Campaign
Values-Based Sexuality Education

• Definition: Sexuality education that provides accurate information and encourages students to contextualize it within their own values, beliefs, and personal desires. The goal is to empower people to make healthy, informed choices about sex and relationships that align with their values and contribute to a holistically fulfilling life.

• Everyone’s values, beliefs, and goals are different, so everyone’s sexuality is different—and that’s a wonderful thing!
A few things to keep in mind:

• It’s never too late to start having these conversations.
• It’s not about one big “talk,” it’s about many smaller ones.
• It’s your responsibility as a parent to open up the lines of communication about sexuality.
• It’s not about control, it’s about helping your child develop decision making skills.
• It’s okay not to know everything.
• Sex positive ≠ sex pursuant
Skill #1: Open the Channels

• Show your child what it sounds like when a person speaks openly and honestly about sexuality.
• Your kids are learning from you even when you’re not actively trying to teach them.
• Be calm and confident, even if they (or you!) get flustered.
Skill #2: Ease In

- Discussing the way that sexuality is described in songs, movies, TV shows, books, and other media is a low-stakes way to open the lines of communication.
“Stories and events in TV shows and other media about sex, love, and relationships can be a good way to start conversations with teens about these topics.”

**TEENS AGE 12-19**
- 27% Strongly Agree
- 46% Somewhat Agree
- 16% Somewhat Disagree
- 8% Strongly Disagree
- 73% Agree
- 24% Disagree

**ADULTS**
- 35% Strongly Agree
- 40% Somewhat Agree
- 11% Somewhat Disagree
- 12% Strongly Disagree
- 75% Agree
- 23% Disagree

Source: The National Campaign
Examples of open-ended questions:

• What do you think of this?
• What do you think this singer/actor/writer is trying to say? Do you agree with that message? Why?
• This song/show/movie presents sex in a ____ way. Is that how you see it?
• How do you and your friends think/talk about sex?
Skill #3: Go for the Ride

• Early sexual and romantic relationships feel like a huge deal to people experiencing them. Try to be empathetic, even if it’s “just” a crush.

• Acknowledge that relationships can be difficult.

• Help your child understand that rejection is a part of life and prepare them for the possibility.
Possible signs of dating abuse

• Apologizing and making excuses for a partner’s behavior.
• Losing interest in activities that they usually enjoy.
• Social withdrawal or isolation from friends and family.
• Partner exhibits controlling behavior, such as constant texting or checking in.
• Partner tells your child who they can and can’t spend time with.

Source: breakthecycle.org
Skill #4: Share Your Hopes

• Regardless of our personal values or beliefs about sexuality, we all want our kids to be healthy and safe. Let them know that!

Source: mommysparadise.wordpress.com
“See, none of this is about being a sex expert or knowing everything there is to know about sex. It’s all about the relationship, the interaction, and the openness to say ‘Let’s talk.’

Good luck.”

Source: Al Vernacchio, sexuality educator and author of For Goodness Sex: Changing the Way We Talk to Teens About Sexuality, Values, and Health
Any questions?