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## *Topics to Talk About: Sex and Sexuality*

*Guidelines for Parents from the American Academy of Pediatrics*

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers these tips to help parents talk to teens about sexuality.

**Resisting pressure to have sex:** Teens face a lot of peer pressure to have sex. If your teenager is not ready to have sex, he or she may feel left out. Help him or her understand that many teenagers decide to wait to have sex.

**Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and how to prevent them:** Teenagers need to know that having sex exposes them to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases. Your teen should also know that AIDS is an important cause of death in young people, aged 15 to 24. The only sure way to prevent STDs is not to have sex. Explain to your teen that if he or she chooses to have sex, using a latex condom every time is the only proven way to lower the risk of getting STDs. Be sure to explain that even condoms do not eliminate the risk.

**Birth Control:** Even if you have made it clear that you would prefer that your teenager wait to have sex, your teen still needs basic information about birth control. Both girls and boys need to know about birth control. Your teen may decide to have sex despite your wishes. Without birth control information, an unplanned pregnancy might result. Be sure to explain that birth control pills, shots (Depo- Provera), patches (Ortho Evra), and internal devices (diaphragms, cervical caps, IUD's) only prevent pregnancy. They do not protect against sexually transmitted diseases. Only latex condoms decrease the risk of STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Both condoms and another reliable birth control method need to be used each time.

**Acquaintance (date) rape:** Acquaintance rape is a serious problem for teens. It happens when a person your teenager knows (for example, a date, friend, or neighbor) forces him or her to have sex. Make sure your teenager understands that "no always means no". Discuss with your teen that avoiding drugs and alcohol may make date rape less likely to happen.

**Forms of sexuality (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality):** This is a difficult topic for many parents. However, your teen probably has many questions about the different forms human sexuality can take. Many young people go through a stage when they wonder, "Am I gay? It often happens when a teenager realizes that he is attracted to a friend of the same sex, or that he has a crush on a teacher of the same sex. This is normal and does not mean your teenager is gay or bisexual. Sexual identity may not be firmly set until adulthood. You should also let your teen know that if he is gay or bisexual, you will not reject him.

**Masturbation:** Masturbation is a topic few people feel comfortable discussing. But it is a normal and healthy part of human sexuality. Discuss this in terms of your values.