



Toolkit for Teens

Tip Sheet #5: Talking about Your Sexual Relationship

Talking about sex can be uncomfortable, difficult and awkward – especially as a teenager when you may be having thoughts about sex for the first time. Having positive, open conversations about sex is very important, especially during this time of your life when you may be having some anxiety around certain questions and topics related to sex. This Tip Sheet offers some suggestions about how you may go about having conversations about healthy sexuality within your relationship.

- 1. Let's talk about sex.** The “birds and the bees” conversation is often thought to be a dreadful conversation between parents/teachers and children/students about sex. Yes, this conversation is necessary, but can look different in the context of different relationships. It's important to set aside time to talk about sex with your partner as well as someone you trust. It's also important to be clear about your values around sex – are you a person who is comfortable with sexual activity at this point in your life or would you rather wait until a later date? What does having sex with someone mean for you? What are your views about sex – is it a good or bad thing? These are questions you should process openly with a trusted adult and with your partner, too.
- 2. Discuss boundaries openly with ongoing conversations.** For teenagers, sex can be a very new, exciting, and sometimes fearful topic to talk about. Remember, all of these new feelings are normal and expected. With that being said, it's important to discuss sexual boundaries with your partner about what you are comfortable with as it relates to sexual activity. Perhaps you're comfortable with kissing and touching, but not comfortable with oral sex or vaginal intercourse. Be clear with your partner about what your boundaries are up front in order to avoid a problems later down the road.
- 3. Caring for your sexual health.** Given that sex may be a very new experience for you, it's important to think about your sexual health. Discussing ways in which you and your partner can be safe during sex, such as discussing protection options for example, are critical in ensuring your safety with your partner. Other items to discuss may include birth control, STI testing, and being exclusive with your partner. For questions related to your sexual health, feel free to talk to your primary care doctor or another trusted individual who can answer your questions and provide guidance to promoting healthy sexual activity in your relationship.
- 4. Dealing with peer pressure.** When it comes to things like sex, peer pressure can play a big part in your decision to have or not have sex. During this time as a teenager, your peers will be constantly comparing their experiences with one another and this can cause additional pressure on your decision. It's difficult to say “no” to peer pressure when it's so important to fit in with your peers. However, deciding to have sex when you're not ready or don't feel comfortable could be devastating. As mentioned before, be sure to be clear and open with your partner about your boundaries around sex, including what you're ready and not ready for at this time in your life.
- 5. Take time to know yourself, your partner, and your relationship.** Together with your partner, work toward defining the type of sexual relationship that you desire. Your sexual relationship can be a fulfilling aspect of your relationship. On the other hand, sex is a common source of arguments and distress for many couples. Your relationship will be strengthened by reflecting on your own attitudes and preferences related to sexuality, learning about your partner's views, and co-creating a sexual relationship that is fulfilling for you both.