

Do you know if your child is thinking about or having sex?



Q. As a teacher in a local public high school, I fret everyday when I see the sexual behaviors amongst students as they travel the hallways. These behaviors include but are not limited to groping, kissing, hugging and grinding. I don't think many parents realize how much their children know and are doing concerning sex. This is especially true during the time that school is out and parents are not home! What can parents do?

A. These are challenging times that we all live in. It used to be that parents worried about teen pregnancy. However, today the worries include pregnancy at earlier ages, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual bullying, and significant peer pressure to engage in sex, emotional and psychological injuries, sexting and sexual harassment at school and online within social networks! The age of peeking at sex has also come down so that it is not uncommon to hear of 10 year old children engaging in sexual behavior or becoming pregnant. The increase is most likely due to a combination of different influences ranging from the changing of social norms, more relaxed and liberal attitudes toward sex, the prevalence of sex in the media, the decreasing importance of religion in society, the fact that people are getting married when older and the increasingly easy access to various methods of birth control. As reported by ***The Quinnipiac Chronicle***, October 19, 2011.

The Incidence of Sex Among Tweens and Teens!

Almost all Americans have premarital sex, says a report published in the **USA Today** issue of December, 2006 that analyzed federal data over time and suggested programs focusing on sexual abstinence until marriage may be unrealistic. Have we really given up on abstinence? The study, which used statistics from the 1982, 1988, 1995 and 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, asked about 40,000 people ages

15 - 44

about their sexual behavior and traced the trends in premarital sex back to the 1950s. Of those interviewed in 2002, 95% reported they had had premarital sex; 93% said they did so by age 30. Among women born in the 1940s, nearly nine in 10 did. At the same time, people are waiting longer to marry; the 2005 data shows median age at first marriage is just over 25 for women and 27 for men.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), majority of teens and young adults engage in sex. In 1999, more than half of all high school students reported being sexually active. The number of high school students reporting that they have had multiple sex partners increases with age, from 33 percent of female and 45 percent of male, 9th graders (freshmen) have increased to 66 percent of female and 64 percent of male. A study released by the CDC in 1997, found that nearly 80 percent of college students 18 to 24 years of age have had sexual intercourse.

When, How and Where?

So we know unfortunately that they are having sex on a large scale. That does not mean that as parents or teachers that we should give up! Kids who are active in extracurricular events like sports, dance, boys and girls clubs, karate and who are raised with a moral sense or religious sense of identification tend to put off sex until later. But that's no guarantee. The prime time for youth to have sex is during free periods at school, while skipping school and the few hours that they are home alone before parents get home from work. Don't be fooled. They are creative and will do it right under your nose. One teen I knew confessed to her mother that she was sexually active at church! Others sneak into a friend's house or tell their parents they are going

to a friend's house and go somewhere else. Other favorites include camps, malls, movie theatres, and cars. Don't forget under the steps in middle and high schools. Our job is to lessen the chance and occurrence as much as we can. That means being involved and keeping tabs on your kids.

What is Sexting?

'Sexting' is the practice of sending and receiving sexual images on a mobile phone.

A recent study at the University of Melbourne, Australia, reported on *September 30, 2011* one of the first academic investigations into 'sexting' from a young person's perspective (in Australia). The findings were presented to the 2011 Australasian Sexual Health Conference in Canberra. Ms. Shelley Walker from the Primary Care Research Unit in the Department of General Practice at the University of Melbourne said the study not only highlighted the pressure young people experience to engage in sexting, it also revealed the importance of their voice in understanding and developing responses to prevent and deal with the problem. The qualitative study involved individual interviews with 33 young people (15 male and 18 female) aged 15 – 20 years. Preliminary findings reveal young people believe a highly sexualized media culture bombard young people with sexualized images and create pressure to engage in sexting. Young people discuss the pressure boys place on each other to have girls' photos on their phones and computers. They believe if boys refrain from engaging in such an activity, they will be labeled 'gay' or could be ostracized from the peer group. Both genders talk about the pressure girls experience from boyfriends or strangers to reciprocate on exchanging sexual images. Some young women talked about the expectation (or more subtle pressure) to be involved in sexting, simply as a result of having viewed images of girls they know.

Both young men and women talked about being sent or shown images or videos, sometimes of people they knew or of pornography without actually having agreed to look at it first. Ms Walker said 'sexting' is a rapidly changing problem as young people keep up with new technologies such as using video and Internet via mobile phones.

The Australian Communication & Media Authority reported in 2010 that around 90 percent of young people aged 15-17 owned mobile phones.

They Think Oral Sex is Harmless!

Remember, the youth do not always apply logic. They are often 'in the moment' thinkers. Some are convinced that oral sex is safe because it avoids pregnancy. There is a commonly held belief among many lay people that oral sex carries little or no risk. In fact, some consider oral sex a safer sex alternative. But the truth is, like any other sexual activity, oral sex carries the risk of transmitting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Visit <http://aids.about.com/od/tipsforsafersex/qt/safeoral.htm> for safety tips!

article in December, 2010 reports that teens who take virginity pledges are just as likely to have sex as teens that don't make such promises -- and they're less likely to practice safe sex to prevent disease or pregnancy, a new study finds. This study was conducted at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Check out the full article. <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Healthday/story?id=6541666&page=1>

What's the Solution?

The solution is education and parental guidance and intervention. You can't be with your kids 24/7. However you can tighten the noose. Here are some tips for parents:

1. Have open lines of communication
2. Start opening lines of communication
3. Share your experiences as a teen so they know you understand
4. Teach them about delayed gratification
5. Have a curfew
6. Know where they are at all times
7. Call their phones to check up on them
8. Call the house phone so you know they are at home
9. Have their friends phone numbers
10. Know their friends
11. Get to know their parents too
12. Talk to other parents before sleepovers as some are more lenient than you are
13. Set parental controls on TVs and computers
14. Monitor computer and phone use
15. Arrange to pick them up after school or put them in an afternoon program at school
16. Teach them about the dangers of sex, STDs and teen pregnancy
17. Constantly remind them about the dangers
18. Ask questions
19. Be there
20. Don't be afraid to take away privileges and electronics for breaking agreements and curfew
21. Call the house phone every 1/2 hour so they have to answer
22. Have the talk early; don't wait till 13. Start at 9 or 10 years old and slowly build up in details as they get older
23. Call and make sure they are where they say they are
24. Show up unannounced every now and then to see if they are where they say they are and to make them think twice not knowing if you would show up

Good Luck!

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