Bright Futures Parent Handout
Early Adolescent Visits

Here are some suggestions from Bright Futures experts that may be of value to your family.

PHYSICAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Your Growing and Changing Child

- Talk with your child about how her body is changing with puberty.
- Encourage your child to brush his teeth twice a day and floss once a day.
- Help your child get to the dentist twice a year.
- Serve healthy food and eat together as a family often.
- Encourage your child to get 1 hour of vigorous physical activity every day.
- Help your child limit screen time (TV, video games, or computer) to 2 hours a day, not including homework time.
- Praise your child when she does something well, not just when she looks good.

RISK REDUCTION

Healthy Behavior Choices

- Help your child find fun, safe things to do.
- Make sure your child knows how you feel about alcohol and drug use.
- Consider a plan to make sure your child or his friends cannot get alcohol or prescription drugs in your home.
- Talk about relationships, sex, and values.
- Encourage your child not to have sex.
- If you are uncomfortable talking about puberty or sexual pressures with your child, please ask me or others you trust for reliable information that can help you.
- Use clear and consistent rules and discipline with your child.
- Be a role model for healthy behavior choices.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Feeling Happy

- Encourage your child to think through problems herself with your support.
- Help your child figure out healthy ways to deal with stress.
- Spend time with your child.
- Know your child's friends and their parents, where your child is, and what he is doing at all times.
- Show your child how to use talk to share feelings and handle disputes.
- If you are concerned that your child is sad, depressed, nervous, irritable, hopeless, or angry, talk with me.

SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCE

School and Friends

- Check in with your child's teacher about her grades on tests and attend back-to-school events and parent-teacher conferences if possible.
- Talk with your child as she takes over responsibility for schoolwork.
- Help your child with organizing time, if he needs it.
- Encourage reading.
- Help your child find activities she is really interested in, besides schoolwork.
- Help your child find and try activities that help others.
- Give your child the chance to make more of his own decisions as he grows older.

VIOLENCE AND INJURY PREVENTION

Violence and Injuries

- Make sure everyone always wears a seat belt in the car.
- Do not allow your child to ride ATVs.
- Make sure your child knows how to get help if he is feeling unsafe.
- Remove guns from your home. If you must keep a gun in your home, make sure it is unloaded and locked with ammunition locked in a separate place.
- Help your child figure out nonviolent ways to handle anger or fear.

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prevention and health promotion for infants, children, adolescents, and their families™

American Academy of Pediatrics

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Tips for Parents of Adolescents

Adolescence is the time between childhood and adulthood when your daughter or son will go through many physical and emotional changes. It begins with puberty which, for girls, usually starts between 8 and 13 years of age, and for boys, between 10 to 14 years of age.

Though these years can be difficult, it can also be a rewarding time watching your teen make the transition into an independent, caring, and responsible adult.

The American Academy of Pediatrics offers the following tips to help you and your teen navigate adolescence. *Teen* will be the term used in this publication when referring to adolescent, teenager, preteen, and tween.

1. **Spend *family* time with your teen.** Although many teens may seem more interested in friends, this does not mean they are not interested in family.
2. **Spend time *alone* with your teen.** Even if your teen does not want time alone with you, remind him or her often that you are always available to listen or talk. One way to make yourself available is to offer rides; a great opportunity to talk (if the radio isn't too loud).
3. **When your teen talks**
   - Pay attention.
   - Watch, as well as listen.
   - Try not to interrupt.
   - Ask for further details if you don't understand.
   - If you don't have time to listen, set a time that will be good for both of you.
4. **Respect your teen.** It's OK to disagree with your teen, but disagree respectfully, not insultingly. Don't dismiss his or her feelings or opinions as silly or senseless. You may not always be able to help when your teen is upset about something, but it is important to say, "I want to understand," or "Help me understand."
5. **When rules are needed, set and enforce them.** Don't be afraid to be unpopular for a day or two. Believe it or not, teens see setting limits as a form of caring.
6. **Try not to get upset if your teen makes mistakes.** This will help your teen take responsibility for his or her actions. Remember to offer guidance when necessary. Direct the discussion toward solutions. For example, saying, "I get upset when I find clothes all over the floor," is much better than, "You're a slob."

   Be willing to negotiate and compromise. This will teach problem solving in a healthy way. Remember to choose your battles. Let go of the little things that may not be worth a big fight.
7. **Criticize a behavior, not an attitude.** For example, instead of saying, "You're late. That's so irresponsible. And I don't like your attitude," try saying, "I worry about your safety when you're late. I trust you, but when I don't hear from you and don't know where you are, I wonder whether something bad has happened to you. What can we do together to help you get home on time and make sure I know where you are or when you're going to be late?"
8. **Mix criticism with praise.** Your teen needs to know how you feel when he or she is not doing what you want him or her to do. Be sure to mix in positive feedback with this criticism. For example, "I'm proud that you are able to hold a job and get your homework done. I would like to see you use some of that energy to help do the dishes after meals."
9. **Let your teen be a teen.** Give your teen some leeway with regard to clothes, hairstyle, etc. Many teens go through a rebellious period in which they want to express themselves in ways that are different from their parents. However, be aware of the messages and ratings of the music, movies, and video games to which your teen is exposed.
10. **Be a parent first, not a friend.** Your teen's separation from you as a parent is a normal part of development. Don't take it personally.
11. **Don't be afraid to share mistakes you've made as a parent or as a teen.**
12. **Talk with your pediatrician** if you need advice on how to talk with or get along with your teen.

Common questions

The following are answers to questions from parents of teens. The information applies to both daughters *and* sons.

Dieting and body image

"My daughter is always trying new diets. How can I help her lose weight safely?"

Many teens, especially girls, resort to extreme measures to lose weight because they want to look like the thin and attractive role models they see in magazines, on TV, and in the movies.

Be aware of any diet or exercise program your daughter is following. Be watchful of how much weight she loses and make sure the diet program is healthy. Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa can be very dangerous. If you suspect your daughter has an eating disorder, talk with her doctor right away.

Many diets are unhealthy for teens because they do not have the nutritional value that bodies need during puberty. If your daughter wants to lose weight, urge her to increase physical activity and to take weight off slowly. Let her eat according to her own appetite, but make sure she gets enough fats, carbohydrates, protein, and calcium.

Tips for a healthy diet

- Limit fast-food meals. Discuss the options available at fast-food restaurants and help your teen find a healthy, balanced diet. Fat should not come from junk food but from healthier foods such as low-fat cheese or low-fat yogurt.
- Keep the household supply of junk food such as candy, cookies, and potato chips to a minimum.
- Stock up on low-fat healthy items for snacking such as fruit, raw vegetables, whole-grain crackers, and low-fat yogurt. Encourage eating fruits and vegetables as snacks.
- Check with your teen's doctor about the proper amounts of calories, fat, protein, and carbohydrates for your teen.
- As a parent, model good eating habits. Make mealtime family time (5 times per week or more)—eating meals together helps with communication and reduces teen risk-taking.

If your daughter decides to become a vegetarian, make certain she follows a healthy vegetarian diet. She may need to see her doctor or a nutritionist to ensure that she is getting enough fat, calories, protein, and calcium.

If your teen (like many teens) is unhappy with the way she looks, encourage healthy exercise. Physical activity will stop hunger pangs, create a positive self-image, and take away the "blahs." If she wants to train with weights, she should check with her doctor, as well as a trainer, coach, or physical education teacher.

Help create a positive self-image by praising her wonderful qualities and focusing less on her appearance. Set a good example by making exercise and eating right a part of your daily routine also.

Dating and sex education

"With all the sex on TV, how can I teach my son to wait until he is ready?"

There are constant pressures for your teen to have sex. These pressures may come from the movies, TV, music, magazines, and peers. Teens are naturally curious about sex. This is completely normal and healthy. Talk with your son to understand his feelings and views about sex. Start early and provide him with access to information that is accurate and appropriate. Delaying sexual involvement could be the most important decision he makes.

Drugs

"I am afraid some of my daughter's friends have offered her drugs. How can I help her make the right decision?"

Your daughter may be interested in using drugs other than tobacco and alcohol, including marijuana and cocaine, to fit in or as a way to deal with peer pressure. Try to help build her self-confidence or self-esteem. Ask her also about any concerns and problems she is facing and help her learn how to deal with strong emotions and cope with stress in ways that are healthy. For instance, encourage her to participate in leisure and outside activities with teens who don't drink and use drugs.

Talking with your teen about sex

Before your teen becomes sexually active, make sure you discuss the following topics:

- **Medical and physical risks.** Risks include unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis B, syphilis, herpes, HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), and human papillomavirus (HPV—the virus that causes genital warts and leads to cervical cancer).
- **Emotional risks.** Teens who have sex before they are emotionally ready may regret the decision when they are older or feel guilty, frightened, or ashamed from the experience. Your teen should ask him or herself, "Am I ready to have sex?" or "What will happen after I have sex?"
- **Promoting safer sex.** Anyone who is sexually active needs to be aware of how to prevent unintended pregnancies, as well as how to protect against STIs. Condoms should always be used *along with a* second method of contraception to prevent pregnancy and reduce the risk of STIs.
- **Setting limits.** Make sure your teen has thought about what his or her sexual limits are *before* dating begins.

Most importantly, let your teen know that he or she can talk with you and his or her doctor about dating and relationships. Offer your guidance throughout this important stage in your teen's life.

Smoking and tobacco

"My daughter smokes behind my back. How do I convince her to quit?"

Smoking can turn into a lifelong addiction that can be extremely hard to break. Discuss with your teen some of the more undesirable effects of smoking, including bad breath, stained teeth, wrinkles, a long-term cough, and decreased athletic performance. Long-term use can also lead to serious health problems like emphysema and cancer.

Chew or *snuff* can also lead to nicotine addiction and causes the same health problems as smoking cigarettes. In addition, mouth wounds or sores can form and may not heal easily. Smokeless tobacco can also lead to cancer.

If you suspect your daughter is smoking or using smokeless tobacco and you need advice, talk with her doctor. Schedule a visit with her doctor when you and your daughter can discuss the risks associated with smoking and the best ways to quit before it becomes a lifelong habit.

If you smoke...quit

If you or someone else in the household smokes, now is a good time to quit. Watching a parent struggle through the process of quitting can be a powerful message for a teen who is thinking about starting. It also shows that you care about your health, as well as your teen's.

Alcohol

"I know my son drinks once in a while, but it's just beer. Why should I worry?"

Alcohol is the most socially accepted drug in our society, and also one of the most abused and destructive. Even small amounts of alcohol can impair judgment, provoke risky and violent behavior, and slow down reaction time. An intoxicated teen (or anyone else) behind the wheel of a car makes it a lethal weapon. Alcohol-related car crashes are the leading cause of death for young adults aged 15 to 24 years.

Though it's illegal for people younger than 21 years to drink, we all know that most teens are not strangers to alcohol. Many of them are introduced to alcohol during childhood. If you choose to use alcohol in your home, be aware of the example you set for your teen. The following suggestions may help:

- Having a drink should never be shown as a way to cope with problems.
- Don't drink in unsafe conditions—for example, driving the car, mowing the lawn, and using the stove.
- Don't encourage your teen to drink or to join you in having a drink.
- Do not allow your children to drink alcohol before they reach the legal age and teach them never, ever to drink and drive.
- Never make jokes about getting drunk; make sure that your children understand that it is neither funny nor acceptable.
- Show your children that there are many ways to have fun without alcohol. Happy occasions and special events don't have to include drinking.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

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Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development

Early Adolescence (12 - 14 years old)

Developmental Milestones

Early adolescence is a time of many physical, mental, emotional, and social changes. Hormones change as puberty begins. Boys grow facial and pubic hair and their voices deepen. Girls grow pubic hair and breasts, and start menstruating. They might be worried about these changes and how they are looked at by others. This will also be a time when your teenager might face peer pressure to use alcohol, tobacco products, and drugs, and to have sex. Other challenges can be eating disorders, depression, and family problems.

At this age, teens make more of their own choices about friends, sports, studying, and school. They become more independent, with their own personality and interests. Some changes younger teens go through are:

Emotional/Social Changes

- More concern about body image, looks, and clothes.
- Focus on self, going back and forth between high expectations and lack of confidence.
- Moodiness
- More interest in and influence by peer group.
- Less affection shown toward parents. May sometimes seem rude or short-tempered.
- Anxiety from more challenging school work.
- Eating problems sometimes start at this age. For information on healthy eating and exercise for children and teenagers, visit http://kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/.

Mental/Cognitive Changes

- More ability for complex thought.
- Better able to express feelings through talking.
- A stronger sense of right and wrong.
- Many teens sometimes feel sad or depressed. Depression can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug use, unsafe sex, and other problems. For more information on adolescent mental health, visit http://www.nimh.nih.gov/healthinformation/depchildmenu.cfm.

(Adapted with permission from Bright Futures: Green M, Palfrey JS, editors. Bright Futures Family Tip Sheets: Early Adolescence. Arlington (VA): National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health, 2001. Other sources: American Academy of Child and Family Psychiatry and the American Academy of Pediatrics)

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Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development

Trust is important for teenagers. Even as she develops independence, she will need to know she has your support. At the same time, she will need you to respect her need for privacy.

- Be honest and direct with your teenager when talking about sensitive subjects such as drugs, drinking, smoking, and sex.
- Encourage your teenager to get exercise. He or she might join a team or take up an individual sport. Helping with household tasks such as mowing the lawn, walking the dog, or washing the car also keeps your teen active.
- Meal time is very important for families. Eating together helps teenagers make better choices about the foods they eat, promotes healthy weight, and gives your family time to talk to each other.
- Meet and get to know your teenager's friends.
- Show an interest in your teenager's school life.
- Help your teenager make healthy choices while encouraging him to make his own decisions.
- Respect your teenager's opinions and take into account her thoughts and feelings. It is important that she knows you are listening to her.

Safety First

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 12 to 14 year olds. Injuries from sports and other activities are also common.

- Make sure your teenager knows about the importance of wearing seatbelts. Visit the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for more information.
- Encourage your teenager to wear a helmet when riding a bike, motorcycle, or all-terrain vehicle.
- Talk with your teenager about the dangers of drugs, drinking, smoking, and risky sexual activity. Ask him what he knows and thinks about these issues, and share your thoughts and feelings with him. Listen to what she says and answer her questions honestly and directly.
- Talk with your teenager about the importance of having friends who are interested in positive activities. Encourage him to avoid peers who pressure him to make unhealthy choices.
- Know where your teenager is and whether an adult is present. Make plans with her for when she will call you, where you can find her, and what time you expect her home.
- Set clear rules for your teenager when he is home alone. Talk about such issues as having friends at the house; how to handle unsafe situations (emergencies, fire, drugs, sex, etc.) and homework or household tasks to complete.

A pdf of this document for reprinting is available free of charge from http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/child/earlyadolescence.htm

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Illustration by Damon Butler and Billy Nuñez, age 16

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN: TIPS FOR PARENTS

BE AN INVOLVED PARENT

- Show interest in your teenager's activities and friends.
- Talk openly, honestly, and respectfully with your teenager.
- Set clear limits and expectations.
- Know what's going on at school and after school.
- Teach your teenager how to safely avoid violence.

Teenagers are no longer children, but they are not yet adults. While teenagers are developing more independent thoughts, feelings, and values, it is only natural for them to question their parents' rules, beliefs, and expectations. During this time of change, parents often worry about their teenager's safety.

Encourage independence while teaching safety.

As teenagers are testing their new independent roles, it's not an easy time for parents. But if teens don't get love, security, and a feeling of safety from their family, they might look elsewhere, even toward friends who are a bad influence, such as gang members. One of the best ways parents can help their teenagers stay safe is to teach them how to avoid violence.

Talking with your teen is one of the most important things you can do to help keep your child safe.

KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON

It's important to understand some of the typical behaviors and feelings of teenagers, even if your teenager thinks you don't!

Teens are very interested in:

- New ways of doing things.
- The present, with little interest in the future. With maturity, the future becomes more important.

Teens often:

- Feel awkward and believe they don't fit in.
- Behave childishly when stressed.

Teens want:

- Role models for themselves.
- To be capable and needed.

SET CLEAR LIMITS AND EXPECTATIONS

Talk about limits to which you can both agree:

- Homework completion and school progress
- How many nights out each week, and how late
- After-school activities or jobs
- Allowance or money
- Safety in and around motor vehicles

Clearly communicate any change in the original limits.

You have specific reasons for deciding to change what was agreed to. You aren't simply giving up because your teen didn't follow the rules.

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

Good communication—talking and listening—with your teenager may be the most important part of your relationship.

Since teens are forming their own identity and testing limits, some conversations may lead to

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disagreements and become uncomfortable. Your goal is to have open, respectful, and honest conversations. Teens need to feel loved and that their point of view is respected, even when you disagree.

Positive communication gives teenagers a chance to:

- Learn how to talk honestly and respectfully with others, even when they disagree.
- Feel more confident in discussing their needs and feelings.
- Know that a positive attitude can keep them safe and out of fights.

Make a habit of talking about whatever makes your teen happy.
No matter what your teen's interest—sports, music, clothing, TV, video games, friends, school—ask questions and learn what's going on.

Try to eat together whenever possible.
Mealtimes are good times to talk and listen.

Answer questions directly and honestly.

If you have made a mistake, admit it.
"I'm sorry" are very powerful words for a teenager to hear from parents.

Notice your teen's feelings.
"You seem upset about your relationship with _____."

Be aware of your own reactions and emotions.
Teenagers are great at saying or doing things that annoy their parents. Take time to think about your responses and decisions to your teen's requests.

Offer your opinion without lecturing or judging.
Know that you may hear something with which you disagree. Avoid statements like, "That's stupid." or "You're wrong." Try saying, "I hear you, but this is how I see it..."

Give all of your attention.
If the phone rings, don't answer it. It also is difficult to talk while doing other things, like watching TV.

Offer assistance.
"Is there something I can do to help?"

WHEN TALKING IS DIFFICULT

Yelling, threatening, blaming, and name-calling can only make matters worse. Sometimes teens just don't want to talk with their parents.

Consider helping your teen find other caring adults who share your values. It may be easier to hear advice from one of these other adults.

KEEPING YOUR TEEN SAFE

Know where your child is after school.
The most common time for teenagers to get into trouble is between 2:00 and 6:00 PM. If not supervised, this is often when teens fight, use drugs, and have sex.

Talk with your child about carrying a weapon.
Carrying a weapon makes people feel bold, leading to foolish behaviors. Carrying a weapon gives a false sense of protection and makes your teen less safe.

Teach your child that it takes more courage to walk away from a fight than to fight.
Most young people hurt in fights have been fighting with someone they know. Teach your child how to resolve problems without fighting. Your example is the best way for your child to learn this.

Let your teen know that it is more important to know how to walk away from a fight than how to win one, and that it is possible to stand up for yourself without fighting.

IF YOUR TEEN GETS INTO A FIGHT

Often teenagers who get into a fight are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes fighting is the only choice they know.

Talk about what happened:

- Find out what caused the fight. This helps avoid future fights. Did it start with an argument? An insult? Was it revenge? Did it result from being robbed? Getting jumped?
- Listen to the whole story. Try not to interrupt, scold, judge, or problem solve. Just listen.

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- Being hurt in a fight can be scary and embarrassing. It's important to pay attention to your teen's feelings.

Find out if the fight is over:

- Help resolve the problem. "Are you still afraid? Are you thinking of getting even? Do you think the other person is looking for revenge?"
- Involve your teen in finding a solution. "What else could you have done besides fight? Is there someone else who can help you and _____ find a solution to this problem?"

Develop a safety plan for the future:

- Change routes to avoid known threats. "Is there another way that you can get home? Can you leave home or school at a different time? Try not to travel alone."
- Guard against robbery. "Always know what's going on around you, especially if you are wearing new clothes or flashy jewelry. It may be better to just hand it over. Things can be replaced; you can't."
- Seek a safe place when being followed. "Walk or run into a store, police or fire station, or any other public building. Tell them it's an emergency and ask to use the phone to call for a ride. Or, go to a friend's home and get inside quickly."

WHEN YOUR TEEN MAY NEED HELP

Your teen may need help if you notice any of the following warning signs:

- Not talking, or a change in communication style
- Feeling down most of the time—losing interest in friends or activities
- Change in school performance, skipping school, or maybe even dropping out
- Trouble with the law

If you or your teenager needs help, please contact your pediatrician.

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Graphic design and illustrations by Artists For Humanity, a non profit arts and entrepreneurship program for Boston teens.

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2001-JN-FX-0011 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Some information in this handout has been adapted with permission from the Massachusetts Medical Society's "Street Violence: Your Child Has Been Hurt—What You Can Do" Parent Education Card, Copyright 2000.

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Illustration by
Billy Nuñez, age 16

FRIENDS ARE IMPORTANT: TIPS FOR PARENTS

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

As your child is making new friends and spending more time with them, you can:

- Get to know these friends and their parents.
- Communicate expectations about friendships in a clear and open way.
- Help your child connect to school and the larger community.

Friendships are important, but your guidance and monitoring of activities are needed for your child to be safe and successful.

Friendships take on new meaning and importance as your child grows. Young people make and break friendships, explore the world around them, and begin to figure out who they want to be.

Friends will become more important to your child during this time. Friends help teach:

- Communication skills
- Self-confidence
- A sense of self

FRIENDS ARE SPECIAL

Friendships are some of your child's most important relationships. Close friendships involve intense feelings, learning how to trust, learning to criticize with honesty, and feeling secure outside of the family.

Friends help define personality and independence. Friendships teach young people how to deal with their own complex feelings and those of others.

With more friends and a wider range of interests and activities, your child may begin to spend less time at home.

By knowing your child's close friends, you will learn a lot about your child.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDS

- Talk with them on the phone.
- Meet them at neighborhood or school events.
- Find out what they and your child do together.

Let your child know that friends are welcome in your home.

- Review "house rules" with your child prior to the visit.
- Let your child, the friend, and the friend's family know that an adult will be there.
- Know what's going on by seeing, hearing, and talking with them about what they are doing. Be informed, but keep a low profile.

Follow guidelines for when your child is invited to a friend's home.

- Find out about the friend's "house rules" and who else will be at home, like parents, another adult, brothers, or sisters.
- Ask about what they plan to do during the visit.
- Talk with your child about things that are important to you: no guns, violent TV and video games, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Take this time to review behaviors that are healthy and those that are dangerous.
- Be sure to have the telephone number of where your child can be reached. If you want to call, go ahead and pick up the phone.
- If there is a change of plans, you need to be told.

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GET TO KNOW OTHER PARENTS

- Talk with them on the phone.
- Meet them at neighborhood or school events.
- Greet them when dropping your child off at their home.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

School-aged children need and want more independence. Good communication, with clear expectations, helps parents and children trust that what is going on is safe.

To communicate clearly and openly with your child,

- Make clear and consistent rules.
- Speak in a firm and loving voice.
- Agree on rules, like curfew time, and enforce the agreed-upon consequences when a rule is broken.
- Know where and with whom your child is spending time.

When plans change—and they will—let your child know that you need to be contacted for approval of any changes.

Staying in Touch

- If your child has a cell phone or pager, talk about its proper use.
- For emergencies, your child needs to know, and have written down, your home, work, and cell phone numbers.
- Have a back up plan. If you cannot be reached, your child also needs the contact information for an adult relative, neighbor, or family friend who can be called.

PROMOTE A SENSE OF BELONGING

Young people often do best when they belong to a group.

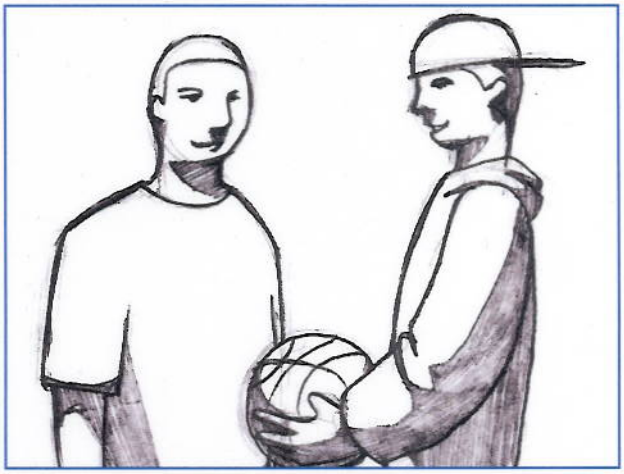
- Help your child use afternoons, weekends, and summers to find activities that will help develop this sense of belonging.
- Many young people are involved with a sports team, after-school music or arts programs, or Boys & Girls Clubs. Others join the youth group of a religious association.
- Support your child during this time of pursuing personal interests and exploring new opportunities. Know that your child's interests are likely to change frequently!

Sports—Besides playing, your child might help coach, be a student manager, become an official, or be a timekeeper. Talk about good sportsmanship.

- Being a good winner and a good loser.
- Keeping a positive attitude.
- Showing respect for players, coaches, officials, and the crowd. Discuss how important it is to set a good example while watching a game or event.

Clubs—Check with the school and local community groups to find out what is offered. You may be surprised to find out how many different programs are available.

- Get involved as a chaperone or adult member.
- Help your child think about the different activities that are available and to make good choices. But allow space for independent exploration. There is a fine balance here. If you become too pushy, your child may pull back and not want to talk with you.



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As your child explores different options, safety is always a concern.
Find out:

- Where will the activity be? Indoors or outdoors? Far from or close to your home?
- How will the activity be supervised? By parents, an older brother or sister, or another adult?
- Is this a structured program or school-sponsored activity?

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteering is a good way for your child to make friends. In turn, the whole community benefits from their talent and energy.

Help your child find ways to give back.
By helping others in the community, young people build self-confidence and learn how to work with others. They can:

- Help younger children learn to read.
- Assist their peers as tutors.
- Help paint a mural or build a playground.

One of the most powerful ways to have an effect on who your child is friends with is when you become involved.
Find community projects that you and your child can work on together. Volunteering may even lead to a paying job!

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This project was supported by Grant No. 2001-JN-FX-0011 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Illustration by Billy Nuñez, age 16

DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION STARTS WITH PARENTS

PREVENTION STARTS WITH PARENTS

As a parent, you have a major impact on your child's decision not to use tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.

- Prevention starts when you start talking with, and listening to, your child.
- Help your child make good choices and good friends.
- Teach your child different ways to say "No!"

Drugs, including tobacco and alcohol, are easily available to children and adolescents. As a parent, you have a major impact on your child's decision not to use drugs.

Most likely, children in grade school have not begun to use alcohol, tobacco, or any other kind of drug. That is why grade school is a good time to start talking about the dangers of drug use. Prepare your child for a time when drugs may be offered.

Drug abuse prevention starts with parents learning how to talk with their children about difficult topics. Then, the programs offered by school, sports, and other groups can support what you have started.

PARENTS ARE POWERFUL

Parents are the strongest influence that children have. There is no guarantee that your child won't use drugs, but drug use is much less likely to happen if you:

- Provide guidance and clear rules about not using drugs.
- Spend time with your child.
- Do not use tobacco or other drugs yourself.

If you do drink, do so in moderation, and never drive after drinking.

What messages do your actions and words send to your child?

Children notice how parents use alcohol, tobacco, and drugs at home, in their social life, and in other relationships. This includes how parents deal with strong feelings, emotions, stress, and even minor aches and pains.

Having a designated driver sends a very important message to children—safety and responsibility.

Actions speak louder than words. Children really do notice what their parents say and do.

PREVENTION STARTS WHEN YOU START TALKING—AND LISTENING

Talk honestly with your child about healthy choices and risky behaviors. Listen to what your child has to say. Make talking and listening a habit, the earlier the better!

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Learn the facts about the harmful effects of drugs.
Talk with your child about the negative effects alcohol and drugs would have on their brains and bodies and their ability to learn or play sports. Ask your pediatrician about the other dangers of drug use.

As part of your regular safety conversations, talk about avoiding tobacco, alcohol, and drug use.

Be clear and consistent about family rules.
It does not matter what other families decide; your family rules show your family values.

Correct any wrong beliefs your child may have.

- "Everybody drinks."
- "Marijuana won't hurt you."

Avoid TV programs, movies, and video games that glamorize tobacco, alcohol, and drugs.
Since it's hard to escape the messages found in music and advertising, discuss with your child the influence these messages have on us.

Find time to do things together.
Eating together as a family is a good time to talk and learn about what's going on.

MAKING SMART CHOICES

It's a parent's job to use love and experience to correct mistakes and poor choices.

By using a mix of praise and criticism, you can correct your child's behavior without saying your child is bad. This helps children build self-confidence and learn how to make healthy and safe choices. In time, making smart choices on their own will become easier.

Let children know you care about them. Talk with them about being safe.

HELP YOUR CHILD MAKE GOOD CHOICES AND FRIENDSHIPS

A good sense of self-worth and knowing what is right and wrong will help your child say "No!" to drugs and other risky behaviors. Help your child by

- Noticing efforts as well as successes.
- Praising for things done well and for making good choices.

Encourage positive friendships and interests.

- Check to see that the friends and neighbors your child spends time with are safe and have values similar to yours.
- Find ways to get your child involved in sports, hobbies, school clubs, and other activities. These usually are positive interactions that help develop character and lead to good peer relationships.
- Look for activities that you and your child or the entire family can do together.

Help your child learn the importance of being a responsible individual and what it means to be a real friend.
Children need to learn that doing something they know is wrong is not a good way to "fit in" or feel accepted by others.

Remind your child that real friends do not:

- Ask friends to do risky things like use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.
- Reject friends when they don't want to do something that they know is wrong.

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Good communication between you and your child is one of the best ways to prevent drug use. If talking with your child becomes a problem, ask your pediatrician for help.

HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN DIFFERENT WAYS TO SAY "NO!"

Teach your child how to respond to someone offering drugs. It is much easier to say "No!" when prepared ahead of time.

It helps if you role play and practice. This way, it becomes natural to do at least one of the following:

- Firmly say, "No!"
- Give a reason—"No thanks, I'm not into that." or "No, my parents would get really mad at me."
- Suggest something else to do, like watch a movie or play a game.
- Leave—go home, go to class, go join other friends.

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puberty—ready or not
expect some big changes

Puberty is the time in your life when your body starts changing from that of a child to that of an adult. At times you may feel like your body is totally out of control! Your arms, legs, hands, and feet may grow faster than the rest of your body. You may feel a little clumsier than usual.

Compared to your friends you may feel too tall, too short, too fat, or too skinny. You may feel self-conscious about these changes, but many of your friends probably do too.

Everyone goes through puberty, but not always at the same time or exactly in the same way. In general, here's what you can expect.

When?

There's no "right" time for puberty to begin. **But girls start a little earlier than boys**—usually between 8 and 13 years of age. Puberty for boys usually starts at about 10 to 14 years of age.

What's happening?

Chemicals called hormones will cause many changes in your body.

Breasts!

Girls. The first sign of puberty in most girls is breast development—small, tender lumps under one or both nipples. The soreness goes away as your breasts grow. Don't worry if one breast grows a little faster than the other. By the time your breasts are fully developed, they usually end up being the same size.

When your breasts get larger, you may want to ***start wearing a bra.*** Some girls are excited about this. Other girls may feel embarrassed, especially if they are the first of their friends to need a bra. Do what is comfortable for you.

Boys. During puberty, boys may have swelling under their nipples too. If this happens to you, you may worry that you're growing breasts. ***Don't worry—you're not.*** This swelling is very common and only temporary. But if you're worried, talk with your pediatrician.

Hair, where?!

Girls & Boys. During puberty, soft ***hair starts to grow*** in the pubic area (the area between your legs and around your genitals—vagina or penis). This hair will become thick and very curly. You may also notice hair under your arms and on your legs. Boys might get hair on their faces or chests. Shaving is a personal choice. If you shave, remember to use your own clean razor or electric shaver.

Zits!

Girls & Boys. Another change that happens during puberty is that your skin gets **oilier** and you may start to sweat more. This is because your glands are growing too. It's important to wash every day to keep your skin clean. Most people use a deodorant or antiperspirant to keep odor and wetness under control. ***Don't be surprised,*** even if you wash your face every day, that you still get pimples. This is called acne, and it's normal during this time when your hormone levels are high. Almost **all teens *get acne*** at one time or another. Whether your case is mild or severe, **there are things you can do to keep it under control.** For more information on controlling acne, talk with your pediatrician.

Curves and muscles

Girls. As you go through puberty, you'll get taller, your hips will get wider, and your waist will get smaller. Your body also begins to build up fat in your belly, bottom, and legs. This is normal and gives your body the curvier shape of a woman.

Boys. As you go through puberty, you'll get taller, your shoulders will get broader, and as your muscles get bigger, your weight will increase.

Sometimes the weight gain of puberty causes girls and boys to feel so uncomfortable with how they look that they try to lose weight by throwing up, not eating, or taking medicines. This is not a healthy way to lose weight and may make you very sick. If you feel this way, or have tried any of these ways to lose weight, please talk with your parents or your pediatrician.

Does size matter?

Boys. During puberty, the penis and testes get larger. There's also an increase in ***sex hormones.*** You may notice you get erections (when the penis gets stiff and hard) more often than before. This is normal. Even though you may feel **embarrassed,** try to remember that unless you draw attention to it, most people won't even notice your erection. **Also, remember that** the size of your penis has nothing to do with manliness or sexual functioning.

Wet dreams

Boys. During puberty, your testes begin to produce sperm. This means that during an erection, you may also ejaculate. This is when semen (made up of sperm and other fluids) is released through the penis. This could happen while you are sleeping. You might wake up to find your sheets or pajamas are wet. This is called a nocturnal emission or "wet dream." This is normal and will stop as you get older.

Periods

Girls. Your ***menstrual cycle,*** or "period," starts during puberty. Most girls get their periods 2 to 2½ years after their breasts start to grow (between 10–16 years of age). During puberty, your ovaries begin to release eggs. If an egg connects with sperm from a man's penis (fertilization), it will grow inside your uterus and develop into a baby. To prepare for this, a thick layer of tissue and blood cells builds up in your uterus. If the egg doesn't connect with a sperm, the body does not need these tissues and cells. They turn into a blood-like fluid and flow out of your vagina. Your period is the monthly discharge of this fluid out of the body. A girl who has **started having periods is able to get pregnant,** even if she doesn't have a period every month.

You will need to wear some kind of sanitary pad and/or tampon to absorb this fluid and keep it from getting on your clothes. Most periods last from 3 to 7 days. Having your period does not mean you have to avoid any of your normal activities like swimming, horseback riding, or gym class. Exercise can even help get rid of cramps and other discomforts that you may feel during your period.

Voice cracking?

Boys. Your **voice** will get deeper, but it doesn't happen all at once. It usually starts with your voice cracking. As you keep growing, the cracking will stop and your voice will stay at the lower range.

New feelings

In addition to all the physical changes you will go through during puberty, there are many **emotional changes** as well. For example, you may start to care more about what other people think about you because you want to be accepted and liked. Your relationships with others may begin to change. Some become more important and some less so. You'll start to ***separate more from your parents*** and identify with others your age. You may begin to **make decisions** that could affect the rest of your life.

At times you may not like the attention of your parents and other adults, but they too are trying to adjust to the changes that you're going through. Many teens feel that their parents don't understand them—**this is a normal feeling.** It's usually best to let them know (politely) how you feel and then talk things out together. Also, it's normal to lose your temper more easily and to feel that nobody cares about you. **Talk about your feelings** with your parents, another trusted adult, or your pediatrician. You may be surprised at how much better you will feel.

Sex and sexuality

During this time, many young people also become more aware of their **feminine** and **masculine** sides. A look, a touch, or just thinking about someone may make ***your heart beat faster*** and produce a warm, tingling feeling all over. Talking with your parents or pediatrician is a good way to get information and to help you think about how these changes affect you.

You may ask yourself...

- When should I start dating?
- When is it OK to kiss?
- Is it OK to masturbate (stimulate your genitals for sexual pleasure)?
- How far would I go sexually?
- When will I be ready to have sexual intercourse?
- Will having sex help my relationship?
- Is oral sex really sex?

Some answers...

Masturbation is normal and won't harm you. Many boys and girls masturbate, many don't. Deciding to become sexually active, however, can be **very confusing.** On the one hand, you hear so many warnings and dangers about having sex. On the other hand, movies, TV, magazines, even the lyrics in songs all seem to be telling you that having sex is OK.

The fact is, sex is a part of life and, like many parts of life, **it can be good or bad.** It all depends on you and the choices you make. Take dating, for example. If you and a friend feel ready to start dating and it's OK with your parents, that's fine. You may find yourself in a more serious relationship. But if one of you wants to stop ***dating,*** try not to hurt the other person's feelings—just be honest with each other. After a breakup both partners may be sad or angry, but keeping on with normal activities and talking it over with a trusted adult is usually helpful.

Getting close to someone you like is OK too. Holding hands, hugging, and kissing may happen, but they ***don't have to lead to having sex.*** Deciding whether to have sex is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Some good advice is in a brochure called *Deciding to Wait* that your pediatrician can give you. Why not **take your time** and think it through? Talk with your parents about your family's values. Waiting to have sex until you are older, in a serious relationship, and able to **accept the responsibilities** that come along with it is a great idea! And you can avoid becoming pregnant, getting someone pregnant, or getting deadly diseases. There is only one way to avoid pregnancy and infections related to sex, and **that is by not having sex.** And remember that oral sex is sex. You don't have to worry about pregnancy with oral sex, but you do have to worry about infections like herpes, gonorrhea, and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

However, if you decide to have sex, talk with your pediatrician about which type of birth control is best for you and how to **protect yourself** against sexually transmitted diseases.

Taking care of yourself

As you get older, there will be many decisions that you will need to make to ensure that you **stay healthy.** Eating right, exer-

cising, and **getting enough rest** are important during puberty because your body is going through many changes. It's also important to feel good about yourself and the decisions you make. Whenever you have questions about your health or your feelings, don't be afraid to share them with your parents and pediatrician.

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Talking With Your Teen About Sex

Children are exposed to sexual messages every day—on TV, on the Internet, in movies, in magazines, and in music. Sex in the media is so common that you might think that teens today already know all they need to know about sex. They may even claim to know it all, so sex is something you just don't talk about. Unfortunately, only a small amount of what is seen in the media shows responsible sexual behavior or gives correct information.

Your teen needs a reliable, honest source to turn to for answers—the best source is you. You may feel uneasy talking with your teen about sex, but your guidance is important. Beyond the basic facts about sex, your teen needs to hear from you about your family values and beliefs. This needs to be an ongoing discussion and not just one "big talk." The following information may help you talk with your teen about this important and sensitive subject.

Why should I talk to my teen about sex?

When it comes to something as important as sex and sexuality, nothing can replace your influence. You are the best person to teach your teen about relationships, love, commitment, and respect in what you say and by your own example.

Talk about sex should begin when your child first asks questions like "Where do babies come from?" If you wait until your children are teens to talk about sex, they will probably learn their first lessons about sex from other sources. Studies show that children who learn about sex from friends or through a program at school instead of their parents are more likely to have sex before marriage. Teens who talk with their parents about sex are sexually active at a later age than those who don't.

What should I tell my teen about sex?

Communication between parents and teens is very important. Your teen may not share the same values as you but that shouldn't stop you from talking about sex and sexuality.

Before your children reach their early teens, girls and boys should know about the following:

- Correct body names and functions of male and female sex organs
- Puberty and how the body changes
- Menstruation (periods)
- Sexual intercourse and the risk of getting pregnant and/or getting an STD, including HIV (the virus that causes AIDS)
- Your family values regarding dating, sexual activity, cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs

During the teen years, your talks about sex should focus more on the social and emotional aspects of sex, and your values. Be ready to answer questions like

- When can I start dating?
- When is it OK to kiss a boy (or a girl)?
- How far is too far?
- How will I know when I'm ready to have sex?
- Won't having sex help me keep my boyfriend (or girlfriend)?
- Do you think I should have sex before marriage?
- Is oral sex really sex?
- How do I say "No"?
- What do I do if someone tries to force me to have sex?

Answer your teen's questions based on your values—even if you think your values are old-fashioned. If you feel strongly that sex before marriage is wrong, share this with your teen and explain why you feel that way. If you explain the reasons for your beliefs, your teen is more likely to understand and adopt your values.

Other concerns include the following:

- **Peer pressure.** Teens face a lot of peer pressure to have sex. If they aren't ready to have sex, they may feel left out. But more than 50% of teens wait until after high school to have sex, and there are benefits of waiting. Abstinence from sex (oral, vaginal, and anal) provides 100% protection against STDs and pregnancy, and less emotional stress if there's a breakup.
- **STDs.** Teens need to know that having sex exposes them to the risk of STDs. Common STDs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus, herpes, and trichomoniasis. AIDS is usually transmitted during sex and is a leading cause of death in young people aged 15 to 24. These young people were probably infected with HIV when they were teens.
- **Prevention.** The only sure way to prevent STDs is *not* to have sex.
- **Reducing the risk.** Condoms (male or female) are the safest method to prevent most STDs and should always be used. Also, postponing sex until later teen years or adulthood reduces the risk. If both partners are abstinent before marriage or a long-term, mature relationship, have never had an STD, and have sex with each other only, the risk is eliminated.

Sex and the media

Media entertains, educates, and informs. But some messages may not be what we want children to learn.

American media today often portrays sexual images and suggestive sexual content. In fact, the average young viewer is exposed to more than 14,000 sexual references each year. Only a small amount of what is seen in the media shows responsible sexual behavior or gives correct information about abstinence (not having sex), birth control, or the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Media in any format can have a positive or negative effect on your teen. This makes it important for you to know what your teen is listening to or watching. Watch TV with your teen—it can be a great starting point for your next talk about sex.

- **Birth control.** Girls *and* boys need to know about birth control whether they decide to have sex or not. If your teen doesn't know about birth control, an unplanned pregnancy might result. Ten percent of teen girls in the United States get pregnant each year. By the age of 20, 4 out of 10 girls become pregnant. Birth control pills, shots (trade name: Depo-Provera), and contraceptive patches only prevent pregnancy—they don't protect against STDs, including HIV/AIDS. Condoms and another reliable birth control method need to be used each time to help reduce the risk of STDs and pregnancy.
- **Date rape.** Date (or acquaintance) rape is a serious problem for teens. It happens when a person your teen knows (for example, a date, friend, or neighbor) forces her (or him) to have sex. Make sure your teen understands that "no always means no." Also, dating in groups instead of alone and avoiding drugs and alcohol may make date rape less likely to happen.
- **Sexuality.** This is a difficult topic for many parents, but your teen probably has many questions about heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. Many young people go through a stage when they wonder "Am I gay?" It often happens when a teen is attracted to a friend of the same sex, or has a crush on a teacher of the same sex. This is common and doesn't necessarily mean your teen is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Sexual identity may not be firmly set until adulthood. If your teen is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, your love and acceptance is important.
- **Masturbation.** Masturbation is a topic few people feel comfortable talking about. It's a normal and healthy part of human sexuality and shouldn't be discouraged. Discuss this in terms of your values. Talk with your pediatrician if your child can't limit masturbation to a private place (for example, bedroom or bathroom).

How do I talk with my teen?

Sex is a very personal and private matter. Many parents find it difficult to talk with their children about sex. Teens may be too embarrassed, not trust their parent's advice, or prefer not to talk with their parents about it. But sex is an important topic to talk about.

The following tips may help make talking with your teen easier:

- **Be prepared.** Read about the subject so your own questions are answered before talking with your teen. Practice what you plan to say with your spouse or partner, a friend, or another parent. This may make it easier to talk with your teen when the time comes. Speak calmly and clearly.
- **Be honest.** Let your teen know that talking about sex isn't easy for you but that you think it's important that information about sex comes from you. And even though you would prefer that your values be accepted, ultimately decisions about sex are up to your teen. If your teen disagrees with you or gets angry, take heart, you have been heard. These talks will help your teen develop a solid value system, even if it's different from your own.
- **Listen.** Give your teen a chance to talk and ask questions. It's important that you give your full attention.

"Won't talking about sex with my children make them want to try it?"

Parents often fear that if they talk about sex, their children may want to try it. Teens are curious about sex, whether you talk to them about it or not. Studies show that teens whose parents talk openly about sex are actually *more* responsible in their sexual behavior.

Your guidance is important. It will help your teen make better-informed decisions about sex. Teens who don't have the facts about sex and look to friends and the media for answers are the most likely to get into trouble (such as getting STDs or becoming pregnant).

- **Try to strike a balance.** While teens need privacy, they also need information and guidance from parents. If your teen doesn't want to talk with you about sex and tells you that it's none of your business, be firm and say that it is your business. Your teen should know that you're asking out of love and concern, especially because there are potentially harmful situations. If your teen is quiet when you try to talk about sex, say what you have to say anyway. Your message may get through.
- **Ask for help.** If you just can't talk to your teen about sex, ask your pediatrician; a trusted aunt or uncle; or a minister, priest, or rabbi for help. Also, many parents find it useful to give their teens a book on human sexuality and say, "Take a look at this, and let's talk."

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