

Why Parent and Parent Child Programs?

Almost half of all teens (age 12-17) say their parents are the most influential when it comes to decisions about having sex. And some 40 percent of teens say that their morals, values, and/or religious beliefs affect their decisions about whether to have sex (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001). Yet many parents are still hesitant to talk with their children. And far too many parents wait too long before talking with their kids. Why the continued silence?

This silence can be explained by two frequently asked questions: How can we talk to our son or daughter without being embarrassed? What exactly should we say? Although the fear of embarrassment often makes parents hesitate, they need to initiate the discussion. Parent silence may give kids the impression that sexuality is unmentionable. Parent-focused sexuality education programs can help.

How Programs Can Help

Small group discussions among parents give everyone a chance to talk and share their own experiences – even laugh at them together. Parents learn that it's okay to be embarrassed. They also learn that it's best to be open about it with their child, saying, for example, "This is really tough for me. My parents didn't talk about this subject but I want it to be different for us."

School, church and community groups can help parents break the silence, but parents need to ask for these programs. Programs can examine communication styles and offer suggestions on how to be a more "askable" parent. Parents can role-play how to answer the frequently asked questions and discuss the "ground rules" they want to have in their homes. These rules can relate to a broad range of subjects from friends, language, dress, choice of music, television and movies, internet and instant messages, sleep-overs, dating, and discipline. Parents are often relieved to learn that other parents share their concerns. Program evaluations give these lively group discussions high marks. Parents learn from each other and realize they are not the only "mean parent" in the neighborhood.

Parent-child workshops can also help children see that other families recognize the importance of parent-child communication on these important issues. Children can learn that other families also see sexuality as a gift from God that deserves respect and protection. Programs let parents and kids know that they are not alone in their feelings and concerns. It is also helpful to learn other families are dealing with the same issues and they can learn from each other.

The following activities from ***How to Save Sex for Marriage: A Family Workshop*** can encourage parent-child communication: "How well do you know your –

child, parent?"; "The Family Values Interview"; and "The Readiness Questions" (See [Resources - Book List](#)).

What kids say they liked about the Parent-Child Workshops?

- It is comforting to know it's okay for these things to happen
- I liked how you could relate sex to religion and that the presenter made it clear that sex is a gift of God
- That we didn't have to share everything
- Made me realize all kids are asking the same questions.
- Participation with both kids and parents.

What mothers say they liked about the Parent-Child Workshops?

- It helped parents know how to approach speaking to children about certain subjects.
- Kids get to discuss and discover they are not alone. There is always someone who can help and who is trustworthy.
- Resources to prepare me for the big questions, concerns, and fears of my young lady.
- I found the basic information most helpful - my daughter listened attentively and has started asking me questions - which is what I hoped this would accomplish.
- The girls learned a lot. They'll be more comfortable and less embarrassed with their up-coming changes
- I enjoyed the break-out sessions where parents could interact with the facilitator, then have the children come back and present what they had worked on.

What fathers say they liked about the Parent-Child Workshops?

- I was surprised at how painless it was.
- Very helpful to lowering parent/child "anxiety."
- This will help facilitate discussion with my son.
- Interaction together with son.
- Helps parents confront issues.
- Visuals/slides, open frank discussion, gave the boys and parents ideas of where to start discussions
- Very interactive and great introduction to sexuality and excellent beginning for father-son sexual dialogue.
- It shows us how to talk about sex and gives parents ideas for helping kids without embarrassing them

What about our public schools?

A full range of programs can help parents meet the developmental needs of their children. These programs, parent and parent-child, can be presented in nonsectarian or religious settings. The parent and parent-child workshop outlines in this web site can be adapted from a religious to a secular setting.

(see [Program Particulars](#) for step by step suggestions on how to develop a program - *Developing Parent Programs: Challenges & Solutions; Creative Titles for Effective Programs; Encouraging Parents to Get Involved*. In addition to the program outlines, sample announcements, parent letters and flyers are included.)

Pat Socia, the author of *Weaving Character into Sex Education*, states "Character-based sex education, in its true definition, is our best hope for the children in public schools. Students need to develop values as part of their character, and character education must help students to internalize what is right and lend strong support to doing the right thing." Her fact filled book serves as a guide for developing a character-based, secular public school programs. More information can be found at www.projectreality.org in the section on books/pamphlets.

What should you say? Be Prepared!

Parent programs emphasize that preparation is the most important first step in answering the "What should we say?" question. Parents need to think about the differences between *puberty* education and *sex* education, and decide which is most appropriate for their son or daughter at this time. Although puberty education should be the first formal step of sexuality education, only 51% of black and Hispanic mothers talked with their daughter about physical/sexual development. Even more alarming, only 25% of mothers and 22% of fathers prepared their sons for physical/sexual development (Miller, Kotchick, Forehand, & Ham, 1998).

Talking with their child about the physical and emotional changes of puberty enables parents to start an informal dialogue based on trust and respect. This is the foundation they will build upon later as their child matures and is more able to understand sexuality.

Before talking with their child, parents need to reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and values as well as the factual information. Parents often have trouble identifying the attitudes and beliefs about sexuality they wish to share with their children. The best place to start is with their own happy or sad memories of how

they were raised by their parents. Small group discussions can help parents recall these memories while learning from other parents' shared experiences. (see [Teaching Tools, Parents Memories to Share](#))

Some of these recollections may be happy or funny while others may be upsetting or even disturbing. For example, were they the first or last of their group to mature, what were their thoughts and feelings, what style of discipline did their parents use, what did they like or dislike about their teen relationships with their parents, was religion a part of their family life? Whatever memories come to the surface – good or bad – they can be used as a framework to prepare the next generation for an equally good or even better experience. Often, parents who recall confusion and poor preparation will use their own memories as a motivation to prepare their child differently.

Parents appreciate programs that help them prepare for their conversations with their children. The program evaluations give the highest marks to time spent:

1. Getting to know the other parents and learning from each other;
2. Reviewing the list of questions and concerns their child's class had about their changing bodies and sex;
3. Practicing how to answer questions with the help of other parents and the facilitator;
4. Receiving a list of recommended books and web sites to help prepare for discussions with their child;

References:

Miller, K. S., Kotchick, S. D., Forehand, R., & Ham, A. Y. (1998). Family communication about sex: what are parents saying and are their adolescents listening? *Family Planning Perspectives*, 30(5), 218-222 & 235.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. (2001). *Faithful nation: what American adults and teens think about faith, morals, religion, and teen pregnancy*. Washington, DC: Author.

Socia, P. (1998). *Weaving character into sex education*, Golf, IL: Project Reality www.projectreality.org in the section on books/pamphlets.