



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Parental influence and involvement are key to teens' sexual decision-making

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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When it comes to positively influencing teens' sexual decision-making, parents would probably be surprised to learn that they, not the media or their teens' friends, are the most influential factor.

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's two most recent surveys, conducted between August and September 2003, titled "With One Voice: America's Adults and Teens Sound Off About Teen Pregnancy" and "The Parent Gap: Teen Pregnancy and Parental Influence," nearly half (45 percent) of teens said that parents influenced their decisions about sex more than anyone else.

An even clearer majority (59 percent) said they considered their parents role models of healthy and responsible relationships. Additionally, a vast majority (88 percent) of teens said it would be "easier" to postpone sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy if they were able to have "more open, honest conversations" about these issues with their parents.

This illustrates the need for parents to talk with their teens early and often, clearly communicating their own sexual values, while recognizing that postponing sexual involvement until marriage is the healthiest choice for teens emotionally and physically.

So, how can parents become more effective at influencing teens' sexual decision-making? Here are some helpful tips from the Medical Institute for Sexual Health:

- 1) Start early, work your way up to talking about sex;
- 2) Believe in your children/teens and build their confidence;
- 3) Look for teaching opportunities and use them;
- 4) Relax and create an open environment for talking;
- 5) Give accurate, age-appropriate information; and
- 6) Anticipate the next stage before it happens.

To help equip parents to accomplish this task, specific abstinence-only educational materials such as: "Sex Q and A: Kids' Questions-Parents' Answers,"

"Saving Sex for Marriage-Abstinence is a Choice Worth Making," and "Encouraging Abstinence-Ten Tips for Parents" are available free upon request from the Alabama

Abstinence-Only Education Program through the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Family Health Services.

Similarly, the issue of family "connectedness" has been revealed as an important factor in protecting teens. According to the 2000 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the largest national study of its kind ever conducted (90,000 adolescents in grades 7-12), positive parent-family relationships help prevent teens' involvement in risky behaviors, which include early sexual intercourse.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy's September 2003 publication, titled "Parent Power: What Parents Need to Know and Do to Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy," also concludes "parents should recognize that a close, loving relationship with their children can be the best protection" against teen pregnancy.

To help parents take a more active role in their teens' lives, specific abstinence-only educational materials such as "Connected Parents" and "Reaching the Millennial Generation" reports are also available free upon request from the program.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teens contract nearly one in four of the 15 million cases of sexually transmitted diseases with which Americans will become infected this year.

"This is a very serious issue and parents needs to rise to the challenge of having open and honest discussions about saving sex for marriage," said Dr. Thomas Miller, director of the Bureau of Family Health Services. "This may be very uncomfortable at first, but it will help ensure their teens' wellbeing now and in the future."

The good news for parents is that there are numerous, outstanding and medically accurate abstinence-only educational materials available free upon request from the Alabama Abstinence-Only Education Program to equip them to be more effective with their influence and more connected through their involvement in their teens' lives—both of which are key to protecting teens from premarital sexual involvement.

In addition, the program's Web site at www.adph.org/abstinence has information on sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy statistics and reasons why abstinence until marriage is the healthiest choice for teens.

To review the information, resources and request free abstinence-only educational materials from the program, please log onto www.adph.org/abstinence or contact Susan R. Stewart, RN, MSN, program director, at (334) 206-2901.

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