

ENGAGING PARENTS IN SRAE:

TIPS FOR CONSISTENT MESSAGING AND COMMUNICATING WITH YOUTH ABOUT SEX

Introduction

Consistent age-appropriate messaging about sex helps youth make healthy decisions. Parents can empower, influence, and inform youth's decisions about sexual debut and other risk behaviors (Lantos, et al., 2019). Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) programs play a vital role in engaging parents and empowering them to make the critical link that effective communication is fundamental to their youth's futures. Your program can provide consistent age-appropriate information and strategies to assist parents to engage with their youth to promote optimal health.

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to Risk Free Optimal Health

1 Consistent emphasis on parental engagement in SRAE programming.

2 Consistent communication with the **unambiguous** and **primary emphasis** on the message of avoiding non-marital sexual activity.

3 Consistent focus on the youth's future goals and dreams.

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PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IS CRITICAL



Parents are the primary influence on youth's socialization and development as they mature. The family's attitudes, beliefs, and norms affect adolescent behavior (Sutton, et. al, 2014). Parents can build trust with their youth by asking about their day, answering questions openly and honestly, and showing interest in their activities. A strong parent-child bond helps youth make the decision to delay sexual activity and avoid other risk behaviors (Sutton, et. al, 2014). SRAE programs can engage parents by providing information and support. Involving parents in your program means that you can share important research regarding the need for providing consistent messaging about risks associated with sex and the important role they can play in their youth's sexual delay.

Consistent Parental Awareness:

The following is a list of tips to share with parents to facilitate consistent awareness of communication:

- Practicing “active” listening when youth speak
- Learning age-appropriate development skills
- Monitoring how youth spend their time on social media, watching videos, and with friends
- Knowing what content youth, especially young boys, are viewing online and which social media platforms they are using (Nikken, et. al. 2013)
- Using parental controls for television, mobile phone, and internet
- Being aware of who youth are spending time with and being attentive to any risk behaviors observed among their friends and classmates
- Communicating values and expectations to youth
- Making sure they understand parents’ expectations

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CONSISTENT MESSAGING IN COMMUNICATION ABOUT SEX IS FUNDAMENTAL TO HELPING YOUTH MAKE BETTER DECISIONS



Since youth may not think clearly about consequences associated with risk behaviors, parents play a critical role in providing guidance to help them be more aware of those types of behaviors. One way parents may give support to youth is by reminding them that decisions made as a result of peer pressure or impulsiveness can jeopardize their future. It is helpful to explain that intentional decision-making helps youth make better decisions.

Practical Strategies Parents May Use:

- Share the joys and benefits of marriage whether or not parents are married currently. Studies show that most young people hope to marry one day.
- Explain that decisions youth make now affect future achievements, relationships, and even their future spouse.
- Practice boundary setting with youth. Many times in the midst of peer pressure they want parameters and guidelines. Teaching youth how to set boundaries empowers them to make good decisions.
- Explain the consequences of risk behaviors and teen pregnancy and how they negatively impact social well-being, physical and emotional health, educational goals, participation in extracurricular activities, and their present and future ability to have happy, healthy, and productive lives.



- Help youth practice controlling and managing their emotions by being aware of disruptive impulses and risk-taking behaviors. Model self-regulation by showing that setting boundaries and having internalized rules in advance are smart and important components of good decision-making. For example, when parents and mentors never drive after drinking alcohol, they are showing youth that setting intentional boundaries in advance helps one to avoid risky and destructive behaviors.
- Make the connection that peer pressure and impulsive decision-making may lead to non-marital sexual activity and other risk behaviors. For example, talk about how kissing and drinking alcohol at a party can lead to unplanned sexual activity.
- Practice refusal skills with youth and build their confidence to say no and communicate their boundaries.
- Talk to youth about their goals and dreams for the future.

COMMUNICATING YOUR VALUES AND MODELING HOW TO DEVELOP OR MAINTAIN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS



Help youth make the connection between making thoughtful, intentional choices based on their values and desires to realize future goals such as academic success in high school, getting a scholarship to attend college, and other plans. Teach youth about self-control, responsibility, and dependability in the context of daily activities. This provides them with the foundation for developing their values, which in turn form the foundation for current and future healthy relationships. Build their confidence by teaching them to be aware when behaviors and choices their friends make do not align with their own values.

Parents can discuss with their youth that:

- Expressing values is communicated through body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice
- Enjoying true friendship with other people and groups does not mean one has to engage in risk behaviors or activities
- Setting goals and delaying sex until marriage are fundamental to one's realization of future goals. Goals may include:
 - Earning college credits and/or vocational training while in high school
 - Participating in team sports
 - Graduating from high school
 - Achieving academic goals
 - Applying for scholarships
 - Attending college

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ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO KNOW IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO START HEALTHY COMMUNICATION



If a youth is already sexually active, this should not prevent parents from talking about sexual cessation. Youth need information. For example, they may not know that contraceptives do not protect against all sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Research shows that promoting the use of contraceptives is linked with youth having more permissive attitudes toward casual sex and can be a predictor of early sexual initiation (Sutton, et al, 2014). Rather than having frequent “sex talks,” it may be more effective for parents to talk with their youth about what is going on in their lives, their future dreams and goals and the best way to realize them, their academic accomplishments, and the importance of healthy relationships.

COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES



Programs and parents can set a foundation for productive communication by listening carefully and showing genuine interest in youth’s lives. Young people can be taught effective communication skills by parents modeling them. For example:

- Timing of communication is important
- One person speaks at a time
- Listen and respond with respect
- Ask questions when you don’t understand
- Use ‘I’ statements, not ‘you’ statements

Open, honest communication in a safe environment provides opportunities for sharing information effectively. Encouraging youth to express their feelings and allowing them to ask questions helps parents establish connections and open lines of communication.

Parents may want to use time spent in the car or on a walk to show interest in their youth’s life. Lecturing during these times may not be effective, but knowing what is happening in their life relative to their goals and plans to achieve them is important.

PROVIDE HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS



Recognizing and valuing the vital role that parents play in the development of their youth’s attitudes about sex is important for SRAE programs. Support parental discussions, and encourage them to appreciate and embrace their role in empowering their youth to delay sexual activity until marriage and to resist sexual coercion. Here are some tips for grantees:

- Increase parents’ comfort and confidence about discussing sex with their youth by giving them information and skills to foster feelings of competence.

- Provide information to parents about risk behaviors and the benefits for their youth to avoid non-marital sexual activity.
- Provide parents with medically accurate information about early sexual activity and STIs.
- Explain that the Success Sequence provides three steps for self-sufficiency and optimal health by encouraging youth to: 1) graduate from high school, 2) get a full time job, and 3) marry before having children.
- Stress the role parents play in supporting their youth to avoid non-marital sexual activity by focusing on setting goals for the future.
- Gather resources and provide opportunities for parents to have conversations about risk factors associated with teen sex.
- Support parents and encourage them to talk early and often with their youth about sex in order to normalize avoiding risk behaviors and delaying sexual activity until marriage.

REFERENCES

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- https://teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/resource-files/STD-Infographic_508%20Compliant_13.pdf
- <https://www.girlshealth.gov/body/sexuality/whywait.html>

SUGGESTED CITATION

- Huber, C. and Vaughan, S. (2020). *Engaging Parents in SRAE: Tips for Consistent Messaging and Communicating with Youth About Sex*. Oklahoma City, OK: Public Strategies.

This document was developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (www.acf.hhs.gov), Family & Youth Services Bureau under a contract with Public Strategies, Contract No. 75P00119R00417

