



Parent-Child Communication

May 2016

It is not surprising that positive communication between adolescents and their parents or caregivers has many benefits. Strong parent-child communication* promotes adolescents' self-esteem and prevents risky behaviors, including substance use, delinquency, and sexual risk taking.^{1,2} Research has shown that by providing accurate information and creating open lines of communication, parents increase their children's adoption of safer behaviors, such as delaying sexual initiation and increasing the use of condoms and other contraceptives.^{3,4} Out-of-home youth (e.g., youth in foster care) also need help to establish connections with caring trusted adults who can provide guidance during adolescence.⁵ Caregiver-child communication is particularly important for out-of-home youth because they are especially vulnerable and at greater risk of having poor adult outcomes, like unemployment and high school incompleteness.⁶

Because many parents and caregivers are the primary sexuality educators for their children, boosting their confidence and equipping them with the appropriate resources to discuss sexuality can help in those important conversations. Encouraging adolescents to talk to their parents about sensitive issues is also important. To help facilitate parent-child communication, consider using some of the ideas below to integrate parent-child communication strategies, approaches, and resources into your program today.

WHAT WE KNOW

- 87% of adolescents say that it would be easier for them to postpone sexual activity and avoid pregnancy if they were able to have more open, honest conversations about these topics with their parents.⁷
- With regards to their decisions about sex, adolescents say that their parents or their own morals, values, and religious beliefs are greater influences than their friends, popular culture, teachers, and sex educators.⁷
- The positive effects of parent-child communication on sexual behaviors has been found among multiple racial/ethnic groups and low-income populations.^{8,9} However, the effects are greater when adolescents and parents feel connected to one another and when parents can discuss sexuality in a comfortable manner.
- Adolescents whose parents clearly express their values and beliefs, including those who communicate strong disapproval of sexual activity or unprotected sex, are more likely to avoid risky sexual behaviors.^{10,11}

* Throughout, we use the term "parent-child communication," but acknowledge that "parents" can include parents, foster parents, grandparents, and other caregivers.

- Timing is important. Communication before sexual initiation is associated with delayed initiation, fewer sexual partners, and increased use of condoms and other contraceptives.¹²

TIPS FOR INTEGRATING PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION INTO YOUR PROGRAM

Equip Parents to Effectively Communicate with their Children

- Create and promote a library of online resources to help parents grow their knowledge and awareness of sexuality and risk behaviors.
- Offer workshops and evidence-based programs to parents to help build their skills and comfort level in talking to their children about sexuality. One sample program that you can use is *Plain Talk*, accessible here: http://www.issueab.org/resource/plain_talk_implementation_guide.
- Add homework assignments for youth to prompt parents to clarify and talk about sexuality and share their values and expectations with their children.

Partner with Parents and Parent Groups

- Train active parents to empower their peers to communicate about sexuality using a parent-peer education model, such as the *Adult Role Models Program*: <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-new-york-city/parents/adult-role-models-program-workshops/manual-adult-role-models-program>.
- Recruit parent volunteers to help deliver sessions on adulthood preparation subjects (e.g., educational and career success).
- Ask parent groups to review your program curriculum and voice their concerns and suggested improvements.

Create Structured Opportunities for Youth and their Parents to Talk

- Partner with a local organization to launch a service-learning project that includes family participation.
- In your community, promote national observances that encourage parent-child communication about sexuality (e.g., National Family Sexuality Education Month, Let’s Talk Month).

SPECIFIC RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

Evidence-based and Evidence-informed Interventions

Intervention	Description	Available at
Children’s Aid Society Carrera Model	A long-term youth development program, which includes a multi-week workshop series to help caregivers increase their sexual literacy, improve communication skills with family members, and develop a holistic definition of sexuality	http://stopteenpregnancy.childrensaidsociety.org/
Parents Matter!	A 5-session program for parents and guardians of children 9 to 12 years of age, which includes risk awareness, positive parenting, and sexual communication components	https://npin.cdc.gov/parentsmatter/
Project TALC (Teens and Adults Learning to Communicate)	A 24-session social learning program designed to provide emotional coping skills to HIV-positive parents and their adolescent children	http://chipts.ucla.edu/projects/talc-la/

Intervention	Description	Available at
Safer Choices	A 20-session school-based sexual education program, including a parent education newsletter, homework activities for parents and students to complete together, parent orientation, and parent representation on a health promotion council	http://recapp.etr.org/recapp/index.cfm?fuseaction=pages.ebpDetail&PageID=131
Teen Outreach Program (TOP)	A positive youth development program that includes “family night out” gatherings, parent workshops on adolescent sexuality, as well as child care and dinner incentives for parent participation	http://teenoutreachprogram.com/top/

Online Resources

- **Office of Adolescent Health (OAH)—Talking with Teens** includes conversation tools and fact sheets for parents (<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/info/parents/>).
- **Innovative Approaches to Increase Parent-Child Communication about Sexuality**, from Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS), includes examples of parent-child communication strategies from the field and their impact (http://www.siecus.org/data/global/images/innovative_approaches.pdf).
- **The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy** provides tips and scripts to help parents talk with their children about relationships, love, sex, and birth control (<https://thenationalcampaign.org/featured-topics/parents>).
- **The Parents’ Sex Ed Center**, from Advocates for Youth, includes research, resource guides, and curricula to engage parents in sexual education (<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents-sex-ed-center-home>).
- **Parent-Child Connectedness: New Interventions for Teen Pregnancy Prevention**, from ETR Associates, describes ways to enhance parent-child relationships (<http://recapp.etr.org/recapp/documents/research/PCCInterventions.pdf>).

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This tip sheet was developed by the RTI Training and Technical Assistance Team, a subcontractor to RTI International under contract #HHSP233200951WC Task 25 with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau.