

Friendships are very important in this period. According to local social conditions and customs, adolescence is a time when young people enjoy more autonomy in their relations with others and in the hours they keep in family life. Without taking away their rightful autonomy, when necessary, parents should know how to say “no” to their children and, at the same time, they should know how to cultivate a taste in their children for what is beautiful, noble and true. Parents should also be sensitive to adolescents’ self-esteem, which may pass through a confused phase when they are not clear about what personal dignity means and requires.

Through loving and patient advice, parents will help young people to avoid an excessive closing in on themselves. When necessary, they will also teach them to go against social trends that tend to stifle true love and an appreciation for spiritual realities...

The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Pontifical Council for the Family, #107, 108.

Adolescents are becoming increasingly capable of abstract thought, challenging argumentation and private spirituality. They are developing an awareness of their inner life and universal moral principles. In this process, their thinking, choices and actions become more complex. They are searching and trying to build the necessary components of their future adult lives. Their ability to develop friendships and fall in love is intensifying. Sometimes, the intensity of a relationship can cloud teens’ abilities to see the consequences of their actions. For example, when teens hear “monogamous, committed relationship,” they may interpret this to mean their current relationship.

What is my child learning about HIV/AIDS in Grades 9-12?

By high school the school health curriculum is explicit about sexuality, sexual experience and birth control. Your teen is learning about condoms, birth control pills, contraceptive foams with noxinnell 9, oral sex, human anatomy, and reproductive health. Many peers may be sexually active at this point.

The New York Board of Regents mandates that abstinence be stressed as the only effective way of not transmitting AIDS/HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. The reality of teaching situations in public schools may be that methods of birth control are given considerably more classroom time than creative approaches to abstinence. Unfortunately, the messages "If you can't be good, be careful" or the implicit "You probably will be sexually active, so don't get an STD or AIDS or get pregnant" may be sent. The media continues to wield its frequently powerful message, "If it feels good, do it."

Factual information on birth control and its reliability, or lack thereof, is also mandated by the state. As Catholic parents, we need to be aware of the presumption that exists in our society that all will use artificial contraceptive methods and that these are foolproof.

How do I deal with my 15-18 Year Old?

Parenting an adolescent is a challenging and rewarding experience. It is important that you keep lines of communication open and maintain a listening stance toward your teen’s feelings as well as verbal and nonverbal cues. As you set appropriate boundaries, be positive and affirm your love for him or her. Be prepared to express your values directly and to share reasons why you have embraced them. Being a model for the behavior you want your son or daughter to embrace is crucial; teens are very sensitive to hypocrisy.

As you teach about HIV/AIDS, it is important to emphasize that the only 100% effective way to prevent the transmission of the virus is abstinence from risky behaviors, particularly sexual activity. It is equally important to teach the value of abstinence for itself, not only as a way to avoid disease. For teens, freedom from disease is only one positive consequence of an abstinent lifestyle. Point out the other psychological, social and spiritual benefits of making good choices.

Activities/Strategies for Home

1. Explain abstinence as a positive ideal, a choice to affirm your self respect and your power to be in control of both yourself and your future. It means you are choosing to give the most intimate gift of self to the person you marry. Abstinence from sex before marriage frees a person to:
 - follow life/career plans
 - develop skills for emotional intimacy and respect for the opposite sex
 - strengthen communication skills and the ability to deal with conflict constructively, rather than use sex to avoid being honest and up front with one's relationships
 - develop a fuller understanding of love
 - develop close friendships with others and, in this way, avoid restrictive exclusiveness
 - enjoy a relationship with a person without the fear of becoming infected with a disease or being caught in a sexual act
 - live a life that reflects the teaching of our Catholic faith.

1. Ask your teens to visualize the dreams they have for their lives. Talk about their goals and plans; ask what it will take to achieve these goals. Then ask them what might happen to those plans if they were to contract a disease like HIV/AIDS, father a child or become pregnant. Make the point that our choices each day affect our whole life; we need to keep our future in mind whenever we are faced with immediate choices. Instilling a sense of hope and excitement about the future counteracts the drive toward immediate gratification which the media promotes.
2. Always present our sexuality as a gift of God that draws us into relationships. When our sexuality is expressed properly, we grow into the fullness of life and love God intends that we have. When we choose to express our sexuality outside its proper context of the marriage relationship, we are opening ourselves to many risks. Explore those risks with your teen “when the moment arises,” when your teens talk about someone they know, when music lyrics, a TV show or movie depicts the pain associated with a sexually active relationship outside of marriage.
3. Through your parish and community, introduce your teen to positive role models of young couples who show good relationship skills: respect for each other, good communication, shared values, good sense of humor, etc. Encourage the couples to share with your teen the importance of building a solid foundation of friendship and love in a relationship, and how this can be achieved without genital sexuality activity.
4. Part of developing an attitude of compassion is to hold regularly in prayer those who suffer. Remember those who are suffering the effects of HIV, whether the suffering comes from its physical effects or the social stigma that is often experienced by persons with HIV/AIDS. Pray also for the families, friends and caregivers who share in the suffering. Take this prayer to action by participating in some support service for persons affected with HIV/AIDS.

Selected Resources

- For confidential information concerning HIV/AIDS, call:
 - The NYS Confidentiality Hotline
1-800-962-5065
- For up-to-date information and statistics concerning HIV/AIDS, contact:
 - NYS AIDS Institute
Education and Training Unit
Corning Tower, Room 503
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12237
518-474-3045
 - Center for Disease Control
Center for Infectious Diseases, AIDS Programs
1600 Clifton Road, NW
Atlanta, GA 30333
404-639-3534 or 434-639-3311
CDC National AIDS Hotline:
1-800-342-AIDS

TALKING TO YOUR 15-18 YEAR OLD ABOUT HIV/AIDS:

A Catholic Perspective

Prepared by the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, Diocese of Rochester, New York. This series of brochures is based on “HIV/AIDS Education: A Catholic Framework of Understanding,” a document of the Roman Catholic Bishops of New York State. Copyrighted materials are used with the permission of the New York State Catholic Conference.