

THAT THREE LETTER WORD

Remember - adjusting to the fact that your teenager is sexually active is not usually something that happens once and for ever; it is an on-going issue.

Sex

It may only be three letters, but the mere thought of the word can cause a great deal of angst and agitation for many parents and caregivers! It can also be particularly difficult to come to terms with your child's sexuality if you have any unresolved issues relating to your own sex life. Being prepared to look at your own emotions and beliefs, and to educate yourself, can be important parts of responding in a positive way to your teenager's sexual development.

Hormones:

Adolescents are faced with a huge number of physical changes in their bodies resulting from an increase in hormones. These hormones are responsible for changing your teenager from a child into an adult. The sex hormones which develop in females and males are responsible for the dramatic and often inexplicable behavioural and emotional changes that adolescents experience.

Education Versus Ignorance:

A large part of being an adolescent is about trying things for the first time. Sex is no exception. It is important therefore, that they are well informed so they can make informed choices and act in responsible ways. It's also important that they get accurate information from their parents/caregivers.

Parents Belief's:

Although it may not fit in with your beliefs, the fact is that by late adolescence most young people are sexually active. Inevitably, some parents find it easier than others to accept that their children are sexually active. Try to strike a careful balance between talking to your teenager about your own values, whilst recognising the different attitudes between the generations is important.

Peer Pressure and Identity:

Developmentally, adolescence is about 'a search for identity'. Adolescent sexuality is central to this search, as is pressure from peers to express this sexuality in certain ways. As parents/caregivers, it's important to reinforce your children's rights not to have sex and to discuss ways they could deal with peer pressure.

Keeping the Lines of Communication Open:

This is critical if you want to have any influence and to know when they may need help. If you feel uncomfortable talking about sex, acknowledge your discomfort honestly. This will help to show that sex is not a taboo subject in your family. Also, it's important to be prepared to back up your beliefs with good reasons and to be willing to discuss other ideas. Most importantly, discuss healthy sex as coming from having respectful and responsible relationships. Remember, whatever you tell them, they will learn more from your actions than what you say.

What if My Child is Pregnant?

Unplanned pregnancy is a huge issue for adolescents, and their decisions can have major implications for them and their families. It's important to discuss issues rationally and ensure that informed decisions are made. Ideally, you will be able to support your children both in the decision-making process and in living with the decisions made. You may not agree with them, but they will still need your love and your acceptance of their rights.

