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Volume II, Issue 14

July 7, 2009

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"Self-fulfilling Prophecy"

Youth behave in the way that they are expected to, or believe that they are expected to.

Through both verbal and non-verbal clues, you express to your child whether or not you expect that they will have sex prior to marriage. And, as has been proven over and over again, they will try **not** to disappoint your expectation – whatever they may be.

Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, Free Press, 1968

Do you know that when parents tell their teenager they want them to wait, their son or daughter is more likely to wait?

Parental Values and Disapproval of Teen Sex. Studies have demonstrated a robust correlation between parental values on teen sex and teen sexual behavior. Importantly, the association is between teens' *perceptions* of their parents' disapproval, not necessarily parents' actual views, and delayed initiation. This does not mean that parental values are unimportant. In fact, research shows that, overall, parents' beliefs about teen sex are a significant predictor of teens' perceptions. **(Another predictor appears to be strong parent-child relationships during early adolescence.)**^[16] <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/bg2194.cfm>

Tips for Connecting with your Teen

The fact is when teens have close ties with family and friends; they are more productive, happier, and less likely to get into trouble. They develop a sense of belonging, of being part of a larger group, and feel an unspoken trust that the people who are important to them will always be there for them, no matter what the circumstance.

Connecting with your teen through communication:

- **Like your teen**, if your teen thinks you like them they will communicate; if they think you dislike them, they will shut you out! Let your teen know you like the person he/she is; it does not mean you have to agree with everything they do or say. Teens can deal with your disapproval, so long as they know that you *accept and love them despite their flaws*.
- **Listen to your teen**, once your adolescent is willing to stay in the room with you for longer than 15 seconds (because he knows you really want to be with him), the most important principle in communication is to listen. Stop talking and listen. Even if you don't like what you hear, listen.
- **Time your conversations well**; find a space in his/her world into which you can step in. Meet for lunch away from school. Stay up an extra half-hour at night to talk.
- **Make eye contact**; as they talk, turn off the TV, put away the magazine, stop cooking, etc. Eye contact is very intimate and hard to ignore, when you make eye contact you connect.
- **Don't interrupt**; when you interrupt your teenager, you're saying; "I don't want to hear the rest of what you're saying because either it's not important enough, or what I have to say is more important." No matter how badly you want to interrupt and correct, wait. It will pay off.
- **Sit down**; sitting while you talk communicates that what your teenager is saying is important to you, that you really want to hear it.
- **Ask personal questions**; teens are egocentric and think about themselves constantly. So the best way to begin communicating is to ask them questions about themselves.

Connecting with your teen through intimacy; communication opens the door for relationships, intimacy cements them together. A way to think of intimacy means "INTO-ME-SEE":

- **Magic Touch**; some parents roll their eyes when they learn that teens need physical intimacy. Touch lets teenagers know that someone sees them, someone likes them. So when a parent, still the most important person in a teen's life, touches them; it affects them deeply. www.guardyourself.org
- **Creating emotional intimacy**; occurs when a teenager feels a parent has "seen into" her/his true self and accepted what is there.
- **Connecting through love**; Mother Teresa made love simple, identifying and then filling the needs of those she saw *without expecting anything in return*. This is the kind of unconditional love you need to give your teenagers.
- **Through appreciation**, appreciation is a word we use to describe our recognition of someone else's value or worth. We all need to feel valuable to the people we know and the world we live in, but teens, who naturally struggle with insecurities about their developing identities, feel this even more keenly than other people do.

Parental disapproval of sex; there are four main reasons teenagers have sex, and none of them are healthy or lead to good relationships:

- **For fun, excitement and thrills**; to seek out the unknown. In this situation, most teens have very limited attachments to their sexual partners, viewing him or her as an object of play.
- **To be accepted by peers and society at large**; we know that young teens typically have poor self-esteem, and that some teens opt for sex to bolster their sense of value.
- **To have their needs met**; all teens are wired with needs for intimacy, love and a sense of their own value.
- **To lose themselves**; some teens use sex like a drug to blot out pain or other uncomfortable feelings.

For parents who care for their children and want to protect them, there is perhaps no better or stronger force at their disposal than connectedness. Excerpts from: Your Kids at Risk, Meg Meeker, MD

Family