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Sex is Sex

It used to be that a discussion about the birds and the bees was simple and clear cut; "Don't do anything you wouldn't do if I was in the room," leaving no grey area or room for questions. Unfortunately, it doesn't work quite that way anymore. There are a multitude of ways that teens are engaging in sexual activity without having vaginal intercourse. One of the most common is oral sex. According to the Centers for Disease Control, **over half of teens ages 15 – 19 have engaged in oral sex.**

Some teenagers think that since you can't get pregnant through oral sex, that it is OK, others see it as a way to preserve their 'technical' virginity while still engaging in sexual activity, while others simply see it as 'no big deal.' What teens need to be aware of is that by engaging oral sex, as opposed to vaginal or anal sex, you **do not avoid exposure to serious and even permanent, life-threatening diseases!** Oral sex has been found to spread the following:

- Syphilis
- HIV
- Genital Herpes
- Gonorrhea
- HPV
- Chlamydia



Many teens use the argument that oral sex isn't really sex, so technically they can partake in the practice and still claim virgin status. Along this same line then is a cheeseburger still a burger even though its added the word "cheese" to its definition? In the end, this is purely a discussion of semantics – and does it really matter? Teenagers who engage in oral sex can contract some of the same diseases and suffer devastating emotional consequences whether their sexual activity is defined as genital or oral.

This is not a comfortable topic for many adults; however it needs to be addressed. When talking with teens about sexual activity, blanket statements may no longer suffice. It is extremely important, for the emotional and physical well-being of your teen, for adults to clearly outline their expectations for abstinence from sexual activity. In this way honest dialogue and conversations may pave the way for healthy decision making.

Mosher W, Chandra A, Jones J. Sexual behavior and selected health measures: men and women 15-44 years of age, United States, 2002. *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics* September 15, 2005; Number 362:21-26. Retrieved on May 21: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/>

Tips on Talking with Teens

- **Be Informed and Present:** Know about what is going on in your teen's life by being there. Plan time together when you can engage in activities that your teen enjoys and conversation will naturally arise.
- **Be Honest and Explain the Risks:** Teenagers need to understand the risks – both physical and emotional – associated with sexual activity, not to scare them, but so that they understand the reality.
- **Don't send Mixed Messages:** Clearly outline your expectation for your teen to wait. Don't give conflicting statements, for example: "Come home by eleven, but if you can't at least call me."
- **Stress the Rewards – Abstinence isn't about what you have to give up, but about what you gain.** Through abstinence teens gain the freedom to pursue their goals and dreams and freedom from fears about pregnancy and STDs.
- **Don't be Discouraged!** Among 15 – 17 year olds who are not sexually active, 64% said that the major reason they decided to wait was because of what their parents would think.



Cook, Bruce. "Parents, Teens and Sex: The Big Talk Book" Choosing The Best LLC, Marietta: GA, 2002.

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