

The National Campaign would like to acknowledge the contributions of many young people whose ideas and suggestions form the basis of this publication. In particular, we recognize the important role played by members of the National Campaign's Youth Leadership Team and their efforts to seek solutions to the difficult problem of teen pregnancy. We also would like to thank those young people who have given us their insights through the Campaign's website, polling questions, and focus groups; the thousands of teen "trendspotters" from *Teen People* magazine who have helped us so often; and the countless teens who have told us their stories in communities we have visited around the country. Finally, we would like to thank the Compton Foundation for supporting the Campaign's Youth Leadership Team and, in particular, for encouraging us to build a program that creates opportunities for teens to find solutions to the ideological rifts that often surround efforts to prevent teen pregnancy. As we occasionally say, "While the adults are arguing, the teens are finding solutions."

Sarah S. Brown

Director

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

May 2003

*For more information and related materials,
visit: www.teenpregnancy.org*



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AOL Keyword: Campaign
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THE
NATIONAL
CAMPAIGN TO
PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY



***Talking
Back:***



What Teens
Want Adults to Know
About Teen Pregnancy



Introduction

In 1999, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy released the first edition of *Talking Back: What Teens Want Parents to Know About Teen Pregnancy*. What was true in 1999 remains the case today: Teens get advice on all kinds of issues from their parents, teachers, and other adults, but they don't often get asked to offer it. Consequently, the National Campaign continues to ask teens a direct question: If you could offer your parents and other adults advice about how to help you and your friends avoid pregnancy, what would it be? The following tips represent the major answers to this question that we have heard from teens over the years.

Above all, young people make quite clear that they really *do* want to hear from their parents, in particular, about sex, love, relationships, and values, even if they don't always act like it. Teens tell us that they appreciate adult advice and support, and welcome closeness and communication with grown ups. They say, however, that they often get lectures rather than conversations — or sometimes just awkward, even icy silence. Moreover, they seem perplexed by the disagreements adults often have about abstinence and contraception that frequently hamper efforts to help young people.

In the midst of such concerns, we hope this new edition of *Talking Back* helps adults and parents in three ways — first, by letting them know that their efforts to help teens really do make a difference — that when it comes to young people's decisions about sex, it is not just peers and popular culture that matter. Second, we hope that this publication offers the kind of practical advice that will make parents' jobs just a bit easier. And third, we hope that what teens have offered here helps adults communicate better with young people and overcome the polarization that often surrounds efforts to prevent teen pregnancy.



Talking Back:

1. Show us why teen pregnancy is such a bad idea.

For example, let us hear directly from teen parents about how hard it has been for them. Hearing the real story from teen mothers and fathers can make a big difference. Help us understand why teen pregnancy can get in the way of reaching our goals.

2. Show us what good, responsible relationships look like.

We're as influenced by what you do as by what you say. We know what hypocrisy means and what it looks like. If you show respectful communication and responsibility yourselves, we will be more likely to follow your example. We also don't expect you to be perfect and want you to know that we can learn from your difficult experiences and mistakes as well.

3. Talk to us honestly about love, sex, and relationships.

Just because we're young doesn't mean that we can't fall in love or be interested in sex. These feelings are very real and powerful to us. Talk to us about all this (but no lectures, please). If you won't discuss these issues with us, please help us find another adult who will.

What Teens Want Adults to Know About Teen Pregnancy

4. **Telling us not to have sex is not enough.**

Explain why you feel that way (if you do), and ask us what we think. Tell us how you felt as a teen, but understand that things may be different for us. Discuss emotions, not just health and safety. Keep an open mind, encourage us to share our thoughts and feelings with you, listen to us, and take our opinions seriously. Again, no lectures.

5. **Even if we don't ask, we still have questions.**

How do I know when having sex is the right thing to do? Should I wait until marriage? How far is too far for me or someone my age? How do I say "no?" How do I handle all the pressures from my friends? If we don't start these conversations, you should.

6. **Whether we're having sex or not, we need to be prepared.**

We need to know how to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. That means information about saying no and about using protection. We need honest and helpful information from the people we trust most. If we don't get the information from you, we are going to get it somewhere else.

7. If we ask you about sex or birth control, don't assume we are already "doing it."

We may just be curious, or we may just want to talk with someone we trust. And don't think giving us information about sex and birth control will encourage us to have sex. We need to know the facts so that we can make good decisions in the future — maybe next week, maybe years from now.

8. Pay attention to us before we get into trouble.

Reward us for doing the right thing — even when it seems like no big thing. Don't shower us with attention only when we do something wrong. The more involved you are in good ways, the less likely we'll be to make bad decisions. Talk with us about our friends, our school, what we're interested in and worried about — even the latest gossip. Come to our games and to school things. Show us that you care what is happening in our lives.

9. Don't leave us alone so much.

Sometimes we have sex because there's not much else to do. If you can't be home with us when we're not in school, know what we're up to — make sure we have something to do that we really like, where there are other kids and some adults around who are comfortable with us. If we're at a party, make sure there is an adult around.

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10. We really care what you think, even if we don't always act like it.

Even though we may look all grown up, we still want your help and advice. But remember, we are living in a very different time than when you were growing up. Your experiences were not the same as ours and the choices we face are often different. When we don't do exactly what you tell us to do, don't think you failed, and don't stop trying.

11. We hate "The Talk" as much as you do.

Please don't sit us down for a "sex talk." Instead, start talking with us about sex, love, and relationships when we're young, and keep the conversation going as we grow older. Making us feel comfortable and encouraging us to talk and ask questions is important, too — just make sure you listen to the answers. If you get angry or upset about our questions or ideas, we won't talk about these things with you again.

12. For us, it's not about abstinence or contraception; it's about abstinence and contraception.

We get it. We know the best way to protect ourselves is not to have sex. But we also need to know about contraception. It seems to us that adults waste an awful lot of time arguing about all this.

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