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Sex, Drugs and 'Hyper-Texting'

By CWK Network Producer

There are a number of factors that weigh into whether their child will have sex at a young age but few may realize just how powerful those factors are. Experts say one reason young teens have sex is low self-esteem.

"They were using me. They were using me because I was easy. I was easy to get in bed," says Katlyn, 16.

Another influence is the media.

"I think for some people they'll just see it and they'll just do it because it's on TV and you know, it's casual," says Christina, 17.

New research indicates another factor is how much time a teen spends texting. A study presented at a recent meeting of the American Public Health Association finds 'hyper-texters' – teens who text at least 120 times a day or more – are nearly three-and-half time more likely to have sex than their peers who don't text that much.

"We're concerned about their behavior, we certainly don't want them to be sexually active, we don't want them to think about sex, and yet they're exploited daily by the things they see, by the music they hear, by the clothes that they're reinforced to wear. And they are very poorly guided by parents, by our society, their religions, and generally by everyone that they meet except each other," says Gail Elizabeth Wyatt, Ph.D., clinical psychologist, UCLA professor.

Experts say the irony is that the greatest influence on a child's decision to have sex is the opinion of his or her parents but that only works if the parents have expressed their views.

Parents have 100% of the power, because most kids won't admit that they listen to their parents, but what you say to them in an exchange of information is really what they need," says Alduan Tarrt, Ph.D., psychologist.

"I think other parents should quit being scared and just to talk to their kids about sex, stop trying to sugarcoat everything, trying to make everything look pretty, just talk to your kid, because if you don't talk to them they are going to get lost," says Tremain, age 17.

What We Need to Know

Talking to children and teens about sex and sexually transmitted diseases may not be something adults look forward to, but it could be the most important step in protecting children from risky sexual behavior. Consider these statistics:

- 80% of girls and 60% of boys who had sexual relations before age 13 wish they had waited. (*Teen Pregnancy Prevention, 2006*)
- The highest rate of teen pregnancy happens in the United States of America. (*TPP, 2006*)
- 77% of teens say they don't know how to bring up the subject of sex with their parents. (*Advocates for Youth, 2006*)
- 80% of teens do not talk to parents about sexual health issues because they are embarrassed to do so, or they are worried about their parents' reaction. (*Advocates For Youth, 2006*)

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, studies show that teenagers who feel highly connected to their parents are far more likely to *delay* sexual activity than their peers. Experts at Advocates for Youth provide these guidelines for talking about sex with your child:

- Find the moments that offer possibilities for dialogue. A song on the radio can start a conversation just as well as the news of a friend's pregnancy.
- Listen, listen, and then listen some more. Remember, just because your teen is asking about sex doesn't mean he or she is participating in sexual intercourse. Most of the time they only need information.
- Answer your children's questions; be factual, brief and honest. However, remind your children that just as they may want to keep some things private, your sexual experiences are things you might want to keep private as well.

- Admit when you do not know an answer, but be sure to follow up and find out. Ask your child to help you do the research.
- Talk with your child about relationships and how to build good ones.
- Discuss the different ways people express intimacy. Sexual intercourse should never come first in a healthy relationship.
- Be sure your children understand your family's values regarding sexual intercourse. Tell them that although sexual intercourse is pleasurable, young people should wait until they are in a loving, responsible relationship.
- Help them with decision-making skills, such as ways to say, "No," and how to get out of risky situations. Assure them you are only a phone call away for assistance and rescue.
- Tell them you love them.

Resources

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

[Parent Power: What Parents Need to Know to Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#)

[Advocates For Youth Teen Pregnancy Prevention](#)

[Hyper-Texting Teens Study](#)

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