

Be An Askable Parent!

By

Carolyn Hendry Wyatt, Extension Agent III, Family & Consumer Science/4-H
Hardee County Extension Service

October is National Let's Talk Month, so this month's column is going to have some answers to questions that may help parents when planning to have "the talk" with their teen. For the past 15 years, The National Campaign has asked teens from all over the country a fairly simple question: If you could give your parents or other important adults advice about how to help you and your friends avoid pregnancy, what would it be? Some of their answers may surprise you, so read on.

- **Show us why teen pregnancy is such a bad idea.** For instance, let us hear directly from teen mothers and fathers about how hard it has been for them. Even though most of us don't want to get pregnant or cause a pregnancy, sometimes we need real-life examples to motivate us.
- **Talk to us honestly about sex, love, and relationships.** Just because we're young doesn't mean that we can't fall in love or be deeply interested in sex. These feelings are very real and powerful to us. Help us to handle the feelings in a safe way - without getting hurt or hurting others.
- **Telling us not to have sex is not enough.** Explain why you feel that way, and ask us what we think. Tell us how you felt as a teen. Listen to us and take our opinions seriously. A special request on this front: Conversations instead of lectures, please!
- **Whether we're having sex or not, we need to be prepared.** We need to know how to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. If we ask you about sex or birth control, don't assume we're already having sex. We may just be curious, or we may want to talk with someone we trust. And don't think that giving us information about sex and birth control will encourage us to have sex.
- **Pay attention to us BEFORE we get into trouble.** Programs for teen moms and teen dads are great, but we all need encouragement, attention, and support. Reward us for doing the right thing - even when it seems like no big thing. Don't shower us with attention only when there's a baby involved.
- **Sometimes, all it takes not to have sex is NOT to have the opportunity.** If you can't be at home with us after school, make sure we have something to do that we really like, where there are other kids and some adults who are comfortable with kids our age. Often we have sex because there's not much else to do. Don't leave us alone so much!

- **We really care what you think, even if we don't always act like it.** When we don't end up doing exactly what you tell us to, don't think that you've failed to reach us.
- **Show us what good, responsible relationships look like.** We're as influenced by what you do as by what you say. Demonstrating a respectful relationship—one that is characterized by trust, love, communication, and responsibility—can go a long way in helping us understand why healthy relationships are so important and worthwhile.
- **Help us avoid unhealthy relationships.** Help us better understand some of the early warning signs of an unhealthy relationship such as pressure to have sex, jealousy, possessiveness, constant texting or instant messages, or attempts to keep us from spending time with friends and family. And while you're at it, it wouldn't hurt to remind us not to give in to something that makes us uncomfortable, whether in real life or in cyberspace. Help us recognize that what we send through our phone or post on the web or on Facebook will not always remain private and will never truly go away.
- **We hate "The Talk" as much as you do.** Instead, start talking with us about sex and responsibility when we're young, and keep the conversation going as we grow older.

The National Campaign's goal is to improve the lives and future prospects of children and families and, in particular, to help ensure that children are born into stable, two-parent families who are committed to and ready for the demanding task of raising the next generation. The specific strategy for reaching this goal is to prevent teen pregnancy and unplanned pregnancy among single, young adults. They support a combination of responsible values and behavior by both men and women and responsible policies in both the public and private sectors. If successful, child and family well-being will improve. There will be less poverty, more opportunities for young men and women to complete their education or achieve other life goals, fewer abortions, and a stronger nation. Isn't this a worthy goal? For more information the following websites may be of interest to you:

www.TheNationalCampaign.org; www.StayTeen.org; and www.blog.TheNC.org.