

## ***October is National Let's Talk Month!***

By

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

October is National Let's Talk Month. Have you talked to your teen about avoiding risky behaviors involving sex? Presented here are 10 Tips from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy website for parents and adults to consider when planning to have the talk. They are highlighted and summarized as follows:

- 1) **Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes.** What do you really think about school-aged teens being sexually active, and perhaps even becoming parents? Were you sexually active as a teenager and how do you feel about that now? What will you say to your own children about these issues?
- 2) **Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific.** Kids have lots of questions about sex, and the majority of them say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents. Ask them what they think and what they know so you can correct misconceptions. Ask what, if anything, worries them.
- 3) **Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents.** If your children get out of school at 3 p.m. and you don't get home from work until 6 p.m., who is responsible for making certain they are not only safe during these hours, but are also engaged in useful activities? Are there adults in charge when they go out with friends?
- 4) **Know your children's friends and their families.** Help your teens become friends with kids whose families share your values. You might even arrange to meet with the parents of your children's friends to establish common rules and expectations.
- 5) **Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating.** Allowing your teen to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Group activities among young people are fine and often fun and preferable.
- 6) **Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is. And don't allow your son to develop an intense relationship with a girl much younger than he is.** Older guys can seem glamorous to a girl especially when they have money and a car. This allure

may lead girls into risky situations, including unwanted sex and sex with no protection.

- 7) **Help your teens have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.** Help your teens set meaningful goals for a bright future, talking to them about what it takes to make future plans come true. For example, if they want to be a teacher, they will need to stay in school in order to earn various degrees and pass certain exams. A pregnancy can derail the best of plans, and make it almost impossible to afford college.
- 8) **Let your teens know that you value education highly.** Encourage your teen to take school seriously and to set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood. Intervene early if things are not going well grade-wise, and meet with teachers, principals, guidance counselors, and coaches. Even volunteer at the school, if possible.
- 9) **Know what your kids are watching, reading, and listening to.** The media—television, music videos, radio, movies, magazines, and the internet—are chock full of material sending the wrong messages to teens about sex. If certain programs or movies offend you, say so, and explain why. You can always turn the TV off, cancel subscriptions, and place certain movies off limits. You will probably not be able to fully control what your children see and hear, but you can certainly make your views known and control your own home environment.
- 10) **Don't underestimate the great need that children feel—at all ages—for a close relationship with their parents and for their parents' guidance, approval, and support.** Express love and affection clearly and often. Hug your children, and tell them how much they mean to you. A relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline, rich in communication, and emphasizes mutual trust and respect will create a healthy self-esteem in your teenager.

Hopefully, these ten tips for parents have provided helpful ideas on how to create a healthy atmosphere for open communication about sex with your teens. For more in-depth information, the website, [www.thenationalcampaign.org](http://www.thenationalcampaign.org), is an excellent resource for both adults and teens on the topic of sex and sexuality. Both you and your teen might peruse this website together to start conversation today on this topic. Don't procrastinate having this talk!