Talking With Teens About Healthy Sexual Relationships

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Learning Objectives

• Describe statistics related to adolescent sexual health activities in the United States and the Netherlands
• Describe the importance of a paradigm shift away from a risk-based perspective toward engaging youth in discussions about healthy sexual relationships
• Discuss strategies for engaging youth in discussions of healthy sexual relationships

Most teens have had sex by age 20

PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO HAVE HAD SEXUAL INTERCOURSE BEFORE AGE 20

Most teens have had sex by age 18

PERCENTAGE OF ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE HAD VAGINAL INTERCOURSE

Sources: Darroch et al., 2007; Graaf et al., 2005; Mosher et al., 2005.
SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE THE NORM IN BOTH COUNTRIES

AVERAGE AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

U.S. TEENS = HIGH PREGNANCY RATE
DUTCH TEENS = DRASTICALLY LOWER PREGNANCY RATE

PREGNANCY, ABORTION, AND BIRTH RATES IN THE U.S. AND THE NETHERLANDS (PER 1000, GIRLS AGES 15-19)

U.S. TEENS
DUTCH TEENS

U.S. TEENS = HIGH PREGNANCY RATE
DUTCH TEENS = DRASTICALLY LOWER PREGNANCY RATE

RATES IN WHITE GIRLS (PER 1000, AGES 15-19)

U.S. TEENS
DUTCH TEENS

U.S. TEENS = Higher HIV Prevalence
DUTCH TEENS = DRASTICALLY LOWER HIV PREVALENCE

U.S. Teens = Riskier Sexual Activity

DUTCH TEENS = HIGHER USE OF CONDOMS, BIRTH CONTROL AT LAST SEX AMONG SEXUALLY ACTIVE 15-YEAR-OLDS

U.S. Teens = Regret

DUTCH TEENS = READY

Sources: Currie et al., 2008; Godeau et al., 2008; Santelli et al., 2008.

A Study of Cultural Meanings

Data Collection

- Interview Period: 1991-2000
- Interviewees: white, secular and moderately religious, middle class
- Interview Type: Semi-structured, in-depth interviews
  - 72 interviews with boys and girls, ages 15-18
  - 58 parent interviews (mothers and fathers)
  - Interview Content: Variety of topics
- Interviews: 1-2 hours, taped, transcribed, & analyzed
Lessons to be Learned?

• Change in Attitudes and Practices Can Happen

• Health Professionals can Play an Important Role in Supporting Policy and Cultural Change

• Collaboration with Other Groups is important:
  -- Educators
  -- Youth Development
  -- Members of the Media
  -- Members of the Clergy

The Dutch Experience

• Positive involvement of general practitioners an influential factor in the introduction of modern contraception and the strong acceptance of family planning

• The general practitioner, who plays a central role as a provider of contraceptive services, is viewed as the most important and reliable source of information.
**NEW PARADIGM**

**A New Paradigm**

ABCD² = HEALTHY SEXUALITY

**AUTONOMY**: Develop sexual autonomy

**BUILD**: Build good relationships

**CONNECTEDNESS**: Foster connectedness...

**DIVERSITY / DISPARITIES**: Recognize diversity/
Remove disparities

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**Another Paradigm**

**Autonomy of Sexual Self**

- Own and control sexual decision-making process
- Recognize and articulate own wishes and boundaries
- Or: know when and how to say “yes” and “no”
- Anticipate and adequately prepare for sexual activity
- Strive for pleasure and enjoyment of sexual contact

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**Develop Autonomy of Sexual Self**

- Personal control and self-efficacy in sex negotiation significantly associated with safer sex behavior
- Adolescents with a sense of control over their lives (in general and in sexual situations) more likely to abstain from sex or to use condoms when they engage in sexual intercourse

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Autonomy of Sexual Self

- "Sexual subjectivity"—sexual body esteem, sense of entitlement to pleasure, sexual self-reflection—associated with higher levels of self-efficacy in condom use in girls
- "Sexual self-efficacy"—conviction that one can act upon one’s own needs in a relationship—predicts higher condom use at first intercourse in girls

Another Paradigm

Build Good Romantic Relationships

- Get to know each other
- Build trust over time
- Deal well with conflict
- Strive for power equality
- Enjoy each other’s company

Building Healthy Relationships

- Communication with partners about contraception prior to first sex significantly increases contraception use in both genders
- Open communication in adolescent dating couples increases communication about contraception; youth who are more satisfied in their relationships report more open communication

Building Healthy Relationships

- Factors correlating with a more pleasurable first sex for women:
  - Greater commitment to partner
  - Longer length of time in relationship before first coitus
  - Greater love for partner
  - Older age at first coitus (age 17 or older)
  - Use of contraception
Building Healthy Relationships

- Factors contributing to a more pleasurable first coitus for men:
  - Greater commitment to partner
  - Longer length of time in relationship before first coitus
  - Being older
  - Use of contraception
  - Not having used alcohol


Connectedness

- Connectedness with parents and other trusted adults is important for many aspects of adolescent health, including sexual health


Parent-teenager communication about sex has positive impacts on teen sexual health especially when:

- Parents and teenagers have a close relationship
- Communication about sex is frequent rather than once
- Teenagers feel their parents are open and comfortable


Another Paradigm

Foster Connectedness between Adolescents and their Parents & Other Caregivers

- Honesty and integrity in relationship with parents and other caregivers
- Honesty and integrity in relationship with professional care providers
  - Educators
  - Medical Professionals
  - Members of the Clergy
Another Paradigm

Recognize

- Diversity in Sexual Development, Orientations, and Values
- Disparities in Access to Socioeconomic Resources

Additional Sources