

Parent Guide to Teachable Moments

California requires that students receive education about HIV/AIDS. While most education can be given through the classrooms, there is no substitute for the guidance of parents. However, parents and teenagers often find it difficult to communicate and discuss topics such as sex and drugs because it makes them uncomfortable. It is important to bridge this communication gap, however, and discuss this very important topic. Parents want to protect their children but don't always know how to go about opening the lines of communication for varying reasons:

- **Some mistakenly believe discussing sexual and drug issues will encourage teens to engage in these activities.**
- **Parents feel they might not have enough accurate information.**
- **Some parents deny that their child could ever engage in risky behavior.**
- **Many parents have little experience talking about sex.**
- **Some parents have trouble relating to their teens as sexual beings.**
- **Parental denial or discomfort exists regarding homosexuality.**

Teenagers want to go to their parents for information about sensitive topics such as sex, drugs and AIDS but are often embarrassed or uncomfortable. Some teenagers don't go to their parents because they sense their parents discomfort with these topics. It is important that parents be educated so they may discuss sex, drugs and AIDS more comfortably. These **basic facts about AIDS and safer sex can guide the conversation:** Parents need to know that their **discomfort is normal** and that there are ways to overcome their discomfort and become active communicators and listeners with their teenagers.

- **AIDS is a preventable disease.**
- **There is no cure for AIDS.**
- **The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes AIDS, is transmitted during sex or while sharing injection drug equipment.**
- **HIV is not spread by casual contact.**
- **Abstinence from both sex and drugs is the best way to prevent infection with HIV, the virus which causes AIDS.**
- **Sexually active persons should use latex condoms in conjunction with a nonoxynol-9 cream or gel (a spermicide) for extra protection during vaginal/anal intercourse.**
- **The use of a latex condom plus spermicide is termed "safer" sex, meaning safer than no protection at all. Only abstinence (or sex with a lifelong, mutually monogamous uninfected partner) is 100% "safe sex."**
- **The more sexual partners a person has, the greater the chance of coming in contact with someone who is infected.**
- **Drugs and alcohol impair judgment when making sexual decisions. They should not be used before or during sexual activity.**

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Here are some simple **communication techniques** that parents can practice when discussing this sensitive subject with their teenager:

- **Learn the basic information about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases so you can share the facts.**
- **Think about and plan what you want to say before you start talking.**
- **The best time to talk with your teen is when the subject of HIV/AIDS comes up naturally in conversation.**
- **If the subject doesn't come up, don't wait. You can start the conversation.**
- **Discuss the facts at a level that your teen can understand.**
- **Share your feelings. It is okay to admit feeling awkward or embarrassed about this topic.**
- **Find out what your teen already knows and thinks about HIV/AIDS.**
- **Listen to your teen. Be calm and give your teen time to share their feelings.**
- **Reassure your teen. Let your teen know you are a resource and that you will be there for him or her.**

Once a parent is educated and has practiced communication skills, they are ready to **talk with their teenager about HIV/AIDS**. Even though their teenager does not ask direct questions regarding this topic it does not mean they don't want to ask these questions.

Take advantage of daily situations and discuss radio, television or newspaper articles with your child. When you hear HIV/AIDS mentioned or see something written, comment on it and open a discussion as casually as possible. Ask your child how they feel about the topic. If a question arises that you can't answer, admit that you don't know the answer and research it to discuss later.

Combine facts, feelings and values when talking with your teen. For example, when discussing condoms also discuss your feelings about waiting to have sex until they are married or in a permanent relationship. This way, condom use and sexual abstinence can be discussed.