



Iowa Data

- ✓ Statewide, teens (15-19 years) account for 26% of chlamydia cases and 20% of gonorrhea cases, second only to 20-24 year olds in age groups most affected by STDs.
- ✓ Statewide, teens, 15-19 years, account for 3% of all syphilis cases.
- ✓ In 2011, an estimated 128 adults and adolescents were diagnosed with HIV in Iowa.
- ✓ Many young people engage in sexual risky behaviors that can result in unintended health outcomes, including: HIV infection; STDs; and unintended pregnancy.

*Iowa Dept. of Public Health,
Bureau of Disease Prevention &
Immunization.*

**Learn facts and new research
about teen sexual activity by
exploring internet sites:**

www.eyesopeniowa.org

<http://thenationalcampaign.org/>

www.plannedparenthood.org/teens

http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/questions_sex.html

ONE ON ONE MENTOR BRIEF: Facts and Approaches to Talking About Sexual Activity With Your Mentee

The Issue

Sexual activity is a normal part of human development. Unlike using alcohol or drugs, almost all people will be sexually active sometime in their lives. Adolescent sexual development is important for the process of identity formation and the establishment of romantic and social relationships. However, early sexual activity is a risk-factor that can have a long lasting negative impact.

Many adults are uncomfortable with the idea of teen sexuality, and prefer to remain in ignorance or denial. According to Advocates for Youth in Washington D.C., 46% of all U.S. high school students, and 62% of high school seniors, have had sexual intercourse. 19.8% of middle schoolers have had sexual intercourse. This report also notes that 39% of all sexually active U.S. high school students did not use a condom at last intercourse. Almost 14% of all U.S. high school students have had sexual intercourse with 4 or more partners over their lifetimes.

In an article for USA Today, David Walsh, a psychologist and author of the teen-behavior book *Why Do They Act That Way?*, says the brain is wired to develop intense physical and emotional attraction during the teenage years as part of the maturing process. But he's disturbed by the casual way sex is often portrayed in the media, which he says gives teens a distorted view of true intimacy. Sex — even oral sex — "just becomes kind of a recreational activity that is separate from a close, personal relationship," he says. "When the physical part of the relationship races ahead of everything else, it can almost become the focus of the relationship," Walsh says, "and they're not then developing all of the really important skills like trust and communication and all those things that are the key ingredients for a healthy, long-lasting relationship."

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SUBSTANCE USE AND SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Substance use can be considered a risk factor for risky sexual behavior. Many studies have found that early age at first sex is associated with (though not necessarily causing or caused by) drug and/or alcohol use. Peers are highly influential. Sex and drug use may take place in similar settings and with peers who are inclined to risky behaviors. A study by the Guttmacher Institute reports failure to use a condom was strongly associated with use of alcohol at an early age. Among young men and women, recent substance use and use of either alcohol or drugs at last intercourse were both strongly associated with having had more than one sexual partner in the past three months.



NAVIGATING THE MINEFIELD OF CONVERSATIONS RELATED TO SEX

Conversations about sexual activity are loaded with many potential pitfalls for mentors. Most parents do not mind others talking to their child about drugs and alcohol, but sex is often a different story. Culture and religious beliefs play an important role in sexual activity norms. Abortion and same sex relationships are particularly controversial topics in our society.

To be safe, conversations around this topic between mentor and mentee need to focus on facts. It may be difficult for mentors to navigate this discussion without interjecting personal beliefs. Each mentor will need to make a decision about how they would handle this. Thinking ahead about how you would guide this type of conversation in a non-judgmental way will help you feel comfortable handling the situation when it occurs.

Examples:

- ⇒ Talking about the difficulties faced by teen parents, (completing their education, child care, etc.) deals with facts. Statements about alternatives to raising the child, (adoption/abortion) communicates personal opinion.
- ⇒ Court actions on same sex marriage are facts that illustrate the disagreement in our country around this issue. Statements about the court rulings can communicate personal opinion.

Asking how your mentee feels about the issue before sharing information will give you clues about their personal and family beliefs. Asking why they feel or believe what they stated will give you more background and allow you to formulate a positive and productive discussion that avoids introducing a potential conflict of norms for your mentee.

“SEXTING”



A study published in the American Academy of Pediatrics reported sexting is common among teens, and not just the ones taking part in high-risk behaviors. It is not just older teens who are sexting. The study also found almost a quarter of troubled seventh-graders send sexually suggestive texts or photos, with those sending explicit pictures were especially likely to engage in sexual behavior. Talking to your mentee about how to handle pressure to send explicit photos via email or Snap Chat or texts over their phone can help them avoid situations that would add stressors to their life.

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Tips for Starting the Sexual Activity Conversation

- Couples depicted in television shows and movies can provide an opening to discuss healthy, respectful relationships. Ask your mentee if they felt the couple treated each other with respect, if one of them was more caring than the other, etc. and how they decided on their opinion.
- If your mentee begins asking questions with sexual connotations, clarify with them what they are specifically asking and answer in a concise factual manner. With parental permission, a trip to the library to find a book on the topic can open the door to conversations on this topic.

What Your Mentee Needs to Hear From You

- Many teens do not view oral sex the same as adults. It is much more casual to them. Young people need to hear that oral sex can put them at risk of contracting a STD and may have an emotional impact, just like intercourse.
- Most people automatically think of girls when the topic of peer pressure to have sex comes up. Don't forget about the guys. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found one in three boys felt pressure from their male friends to engage in sexual activity.
- Your mentee can talk to you with any questions or concerns about sexual activity without fear of judgment or shaming.