



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS: USING TEACHABLE MOMENTS TO CONVEY SAFER SEX MESSAGES TO YOUNG PEOPLE

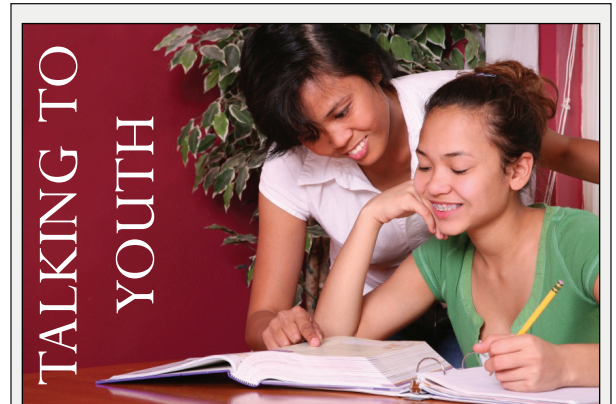
teach•a•ble mo•ment (*plural* teach•a•ble mo•ments): a time at which a person, especially a child, is likely to be particularly disposed to learn something or particularly responsive to being taught or made aware of something.¹

With accurate information and adequate support, young people can make healthy and responsible decisions about having sex and using contraception. Adults can be most effective by providing the information and support needed to promote responsible decision-making in youth and help ensure transition to adulthood is safe and healthy. A key component for adults is taking advantage of teachable moments to discuss sex and the use of contraception with young people. Youth are often hesitant to talk with adults about sex. When young people are willing to discuss this topic, adults must be prepared to help them make the best decisions possible. The following information will help adults use teachable moments to talk to young people about safe sex.

SPREAD THE WORD:

Important information youth should know

- **Abstaining from sex is the only 100% sure way to prevent pregnancy.**
- **Contraception works, is available, and can be low cost or free.**
 - Plan ahead: it is much easier to think about contraception, and there are many more options *before* having sex.
 - Many types of contraception are available: a clinician can help you identify the right type for you.
 - Methods that may not have worked for a friend or relative may work well for you.
 - Talking to your partner makes it easier to make decisions together.
 - Both partners can use contraception (such as condoms and pills) to increase protection against pregnancy and STIs.
- **Emergency contraception is safe, highly effective, and available;** it's the only existing way to prevent pregnancy after having unprotected sex (www.not-2-late.com).
- **Speak Up:** *It's okay to talk about sex.* Youth can feel comfortable seeking medical advice about contraception because confidentiality laws protect their privacy.



Tips for creating a teachable moment

- Create a safe space to talk about sex.
- Bring it up! Open the door to conversation.
- Refer to popular culture when initiating a conversation.
- Keep it private: a one-on-one conversation may be best.
- Be accessible: the conversation should be on-going and relationship-building.

KEEP IN MIND

- Discussion of both pregnancy prevention and reducing sexually transmitted infections is crucial.
- It is okay to say “I don’t know” and look up answers together; be sure to use a credible source of information.
- It is important to know your own limitations and comfort level; it’s okay to refer a young person to another trusted adult if the conversation moves outside of your personal boundaries.
- Using humor, when appropriate, can go a long way.
- **Boys need information too!**

THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

- Set aside your personal judgments!
- Be aware of your body-language and non-verbal cues; youth don’t want to feel judged by adults.
- Don’t assume you know how it feels to be a young person today.
- Don’t make assumptions based on your personal experiences.
- If a teen asks questions about sex, it does not mean that teen is having sex.
- **Educate everyone about contraception!** Pregnancy happens as a result of vaginal intercourse, regardless of sexual identity.

ARM YOURSELF:

Gather Resources and Youth-Friendly Referrals

- Know other trusted allies and youth friendly professionals for referral.
- Build a network of trusted adults in your community.
- Display youth friendly fact sheets or pamphlets.
- Make condoms readily available in your office/home.
- Be prepared to talk about sex to all youth (e.g. LGBTQ youth, heterosexual youth, and abstinent youth).



RESOURCES

Healthy Teen Network: www.healthyteennetwork.org

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals: www.arhp.org

Planned Parenthood: www.plannedparenthood.org

Sex Etc.: www.sexetc.org (www.sxetc.org)

Teen Wire: www.TeenWire.com

¹ http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_561539567/teachable_moment.html

² Frost, J. J. & Forrest, J. D. (1995). Understanding the Impact of Effective Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 27 (5). <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/2718895.html>.

³ Haffner, D. (Ed.). (1995). *Facing facts: Sexual health for America's adolescents*. NY, NY: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. http://www.siecus.org/pubs/Facing_Facts.pdf.



- Talking about sex does not lead to sex.²
- Having sexual feelings is a normal part of adolescent development.³
- Risk taking can be part of normal adolescent development; adults can be most effective by promoting healthy decision making during this stage.³
- Alter your approach according to the young person’s developmental level.³