



TIPS of the Month

APRIL 2023

Living with
ADOLESCENT SEXUAL ACTIVITY



**Military Family
Resource Centre**
Montreal Region

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First person experience

I am nearly forty, with a job I like, two kids, and a partner in the CAF. Our oldest, Océane, is sixteen, and we have been arguing about the clothes she wears to school and to go out with her friends. My mother never talked to me about sex, and she would never have allowed me out of the house showing so much skin. I talk to Océane about how a romantic relationship should make her feel safe, respected, cherished and how I worry that her clothes send a different message. I trust her to hold out for someone who will do that for her; but I still feel insecure about the pressures she may feel to have sex, or the urges she might have herself to have sex. We're a long way from staying a virgin until marriage, and sometimes I feel lost.

Some perspective:

- Adolescence is a time of exploration: as kids become teens, they start to feel complex emotions, confront choices about their personal values, and try to figure out who they are.
- Adolescence is also a time of risk taking: teens don't yet have the experience to make good future oriented choices, and psychologists believe that they have to mature to learn to delay gratification and make wise choices.
- Children have the natural desire to explore their bodies; in adolescence, the exploration becomes more sexual and interpersonal, with a natural progression from hand-holding to kissing to sexual activity up to and including orgasm, with or without penetration.
- Adolescence is the time when almost all teens are exposed to pornography, which can be characterized as sex without values or relationships. It is important to accept that your kids have seen it, and to talk about all the reasons it is different from real life: pornography does not value consent, relationships, and frequently shows abusive behaviour. It is important to explain that pornography is a business: there is money to be made, and the models are acting; it is not to be confused with depictions of loving relationships.
- Research shows that:
 - o Open, kind and caring communication with parents or significant adults transmits the adult's values to the young person, including values that govern what level of sexual activity is appropriate.
 - o Clear, explicit discussion about what makes a meaningful relationship (feeling safe, respected and cherished, and the necessity of enthusiastic consent) and modelling that relationship with your teen transmits those values to your son or daughter.
 - o Clear, explicit discussion of sex in the context of a kind or loving relationship, throughout childhood and adolescence, is the best way to promote reasonable sexual behaviour, without risk taking, abuse or negligence.

In other words, having a good relationship with your teen, where you transmit all appropriate information about sexual behaviour, where you model kindness, where you talk realistically about values, hopes and dreams, is the best way to encourage your teen to behave kindly, while exploring relationships, identity and sexuality.



Ways to talk about values, and / or sex:

- **Don't wait until puberty to start talking about puberty.** “So these are some things that are going to happen to you in the future (with appropriate descriptions, for boys and girls). And if you have questions, please ask.”
- **If your teen speaks up about sex, sexuality or gender, listen, love and be humble.** Research shows that most kids don't “grow out of” their interest in different sexual orientations. If you don't have an answer for your child's questions, make time to do the research together. If you can be humble and accepting, you will lay the foundation for getting through these important moments together.
- **If you observe unkind behaviour in a movie or among your teen's friends, ask your teen what they think about it.** In the discussion, you will be able to share your values as well as learn about your teen's thoughts and values.
- **Talk affirmatively about relationship ideals:** about kindness and consideration, about how people in a family or a couple take care of each other, resolve conflicts, admit fault and show forgiveness.

All of these suggestions are from an excellent podcast called *What Your Teen Wishes You Knew About Sex Education*, February 11, 2020, and December 17, 2019; LifeKit@ npr.org, in the section LifeKit/Parenting.

How to keep yourself well:

- Practice all of these skills and attitudes with your own partner, with others you know.
- Get enough sleep, and help your kids to sleep too.
- Get support whenever you think the situation might get out of control, before it gets out of control. The MFRC is there for you, and a confidential consultation is only a phone call away. (450) 358-7099, ext 2917
- Give yourself some time to do the things that make you feel better.

References

- <https://www.actforyouth.net>
This is an excellent website from the New York State Department of Health and Human Services; very good, short concise articles on adolescent sexual health.
- <http://opa.hhs.gov/adolescent-health>.
This website has a good description of adolescent development from several different perspectives.
- NPR.org, LifeKit

Need help?

Contact Psychosocial Intake at the Military Family Resource Centre, Montreal Region:

Saint-Hubert: 450-462-8777, Ext. 6821 and Saint-Jean: 450-358-7099, Ext. 2917 or SvcPersCRFMSoutienPsySt-Jean@forces.gc.ca