

Talk2 Your Teen!

Magazine for Parents and Carers



Free magazine to help parents and carers to talk to children about difficult issues including relationships and sexual health

It's your choice!

Choose to speak to your children about relationships and sex

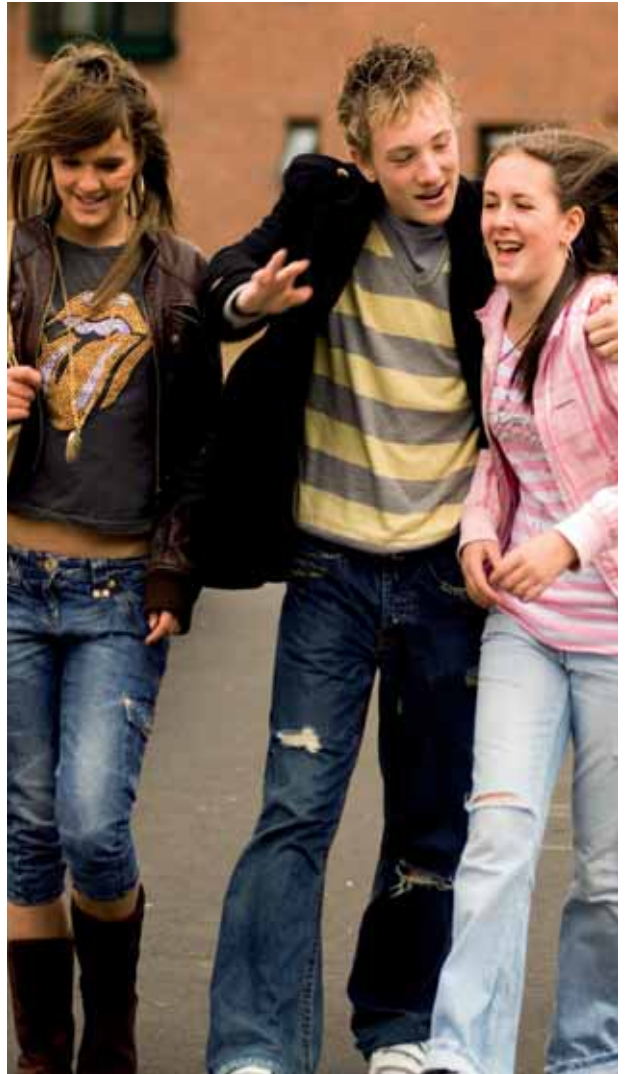
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www.hertsdirect.org/teenpregnancy



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Everyday Conversations, Every Day

Research tells us that it is never too late to talk about sex and relationship issues with our children, but it is always better to start as early as possible.

Welcome to Talk2YourTeen

Often, starting conversations with children about issues such as relationships and sex can be difficult for parents and carers.

Talk2YourTeen has been designed to offer parents and carers in Hertfordshire hints, tips and information about how to approach these and many other issues.

Hopefully, this magazine will help make those conversations that bit easier, not only for you but also for your children!



Did you know?...

Contrary to popular perception, research shows teenagers are eager to talk to their parents about sex and relationships.

44% of 11-14 year olds say they actively want to talk to parents because they don't trust the information they get from their friends.

A third believe that talking would bring them closer to their parents.



Research has shown that...

The earlier parents and carers talk with their children about sex and relationships, and the more open and honest the parents and carers are, the more likely young people are to delay their first sexual experience. Young people are also more likely to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections if and when they do have sex.

Empowerment, not encouragement

To connect to their teenagers, parents need to know that talking in no way encourages doing. In fact studies show that teenagers who receive sex and relationship talks from parents are more likely to delay sex.



WHAT'S this all about?

In Hertfordshire, there is a Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Partnership. The partnership's work is to reduce the number of under 18 conceptions in the county.

By working with young people in the county, we are getting to the heart of the support that young people need, and we work to ensure young people play a key role in the strategy and the development of the work of the partnership.

Key work of the partnership includes:

- Working with schools to support and strengthen the delivery of Sex and Relationship Education
- Ensuring that contraception and sexual health services in the county provide young people with the information, advice and support they need
- Providing training for professionals to help

them to have the skills and knowledge to confidently support and refer young people

- Targeted work in areas where teenage pregnancy rates are highest, such as group work with young people to help raise their self-esteem, reduce their risk-taking behaviour and learn about positive relationships
- Working with organisations and services across the county to ensure their services reflect what young people want and need
- Working with parents and carers to support them to talk to their children about sex and relationships

We cannot achieve this alone. It is important that we work in partnership with parents and carers, to educate young people about resisting peer pressure, being able to say 'no' or 'not yet' to sex that they're not ready for, and practising safer sex when they do become sexually active.

In Hertfordshire we are aiming to support parents and carers through developing information resources. We have also now produced this magazine to help you to feel more confident talking to your children about relationships and sexual health issues.



DID YOU KNOW?

Research has shown that the earlier parents and carers talk with their children about sex and relationships, and the more open and honest parents and carers are, the more likely young people are to delay their first sexual experience

Young people are also more likely to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections if and when they do have sex.



In the Netherlands it is normal for young people to learn about sex from

an early age. It's a much more open culture and parents are more likely to talk to their children about sex. British teenagers are most likely to talk to a friend if planning on having sex, whereas, in Holland - which has a low teenage pregnancy rate - teenagers are most likely to talk to their parents!

Although teenage pregnancy rate is falling, and is now at the lowest level for 20 years, more teenage girls still get pregnant than in other Western European countries.

Sexual Health Independent Advisory Group acknowledges studies that show that it is two or three times more likely that young people will have unprotected sex when drunk.



According to the Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group and the Sexual Health Independent Advisory Group, having ambition, and having parents who are ambitious for you, is a powerful contraceptive for young people.

BOOST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

on young people's sexual health

- Most young people don't have sex until at least 16 but those who do have sex before 16 are much more likely to regret it and to not use contraception.
- Four out of five under 16s haven't had sex

Research shows that the earlier you talk to your children the more likely they are to delay their first sexual experience – so don't just think 'I will talk to them when they're older!'

- There are 14 different methods of contraception available. It's important to know about all the methods to make the right choice www.brook.org.uk
- The choice includes new, long acting contraceptive methods which are very safe and effective
- Only condoms protect against Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- Eight STIs have no symptoms – most notable of these is chlamydia. In 70% of girls and 50% of boys with chlamydia, there are no symptoms
- Chlamydia is the most common sexually transmitted infection amongst young people. One in ten sexually active young people has chlamydia
- In a single act of unprotected sex with an infected partner, young women have a:

- 1% chance of acquiring HIV
- 30% chance of getting genital herpes
- 50% chance of contracting gonorrhoea

- Most STIs are easily treated, but some, like HIV, cannot be cured
- Untreated, chlamydia can lead to serious fertility problems
- There are services across Hertfordshire that offer young people free confidential information, advice and screening for chlamydia and other STIs (so they don't have to worry about their friends finding out that they've visited a clinic if they don't want them to)
- The test for chlamydia is usually done by testing a sample of your urine. Some clinics still take a swab from the penis or the cervix. If the test is positive, the treatment for chlamydia is a simple course of antibiotics
- Young people under 24 who live in Hertfordshire can be screened for chlamydia at a number of sites across the county. To find your most convenient site visit www.c-sure.org.uk and request a confidential home testing kit. Alternatively, you can request a kit by texting the word KIT followed by your name and address to 07781472981.

Top tips

So you've got the information to talk to your children about relationships and sex, but you're still struggling to even say the word 'sex' in front of them without feeling embarrassed?

You're not alone, it's a feeling experienced by many parents and carers in Britain! In fact it's so common, national charity Parentline Plus has put together the following tips for approaching the subject with your children.

1 Ask your young people what they think about relationships and sex. This is a great way of finding out what they already know and what attitudes they're shaping on the subject.

2 Use everyday media to approach the subject. TV, radio, magazines, the internet – these issues are everywhere and talking about how the issues affect other people can make it less embarrassing.

3 Start early by encouraging young people to ask questions and answer them simply. Keep the conversation going as they get older.

4 Talk about the importance of considering the feelings of others in relationships and not just the biology. This is a very important factor for helping your children to have respect for themselves and others in relationships.

5 Ask them what they think about waiting to have sex with someone they care about and who will share the responsibility for contraception and safe sex.



6

If you're asked an awkward question in public you can tell them you will talk about it at home – and do so otherwise they will think there is something wrong with asking.



7

Find out what relationship and sex education is being taught in school so you can discuss what they thought of the lessons. You can then use this as a prompt for your own discussions.



8

Talk when you are doing everyday things so it is a normal part of family life.

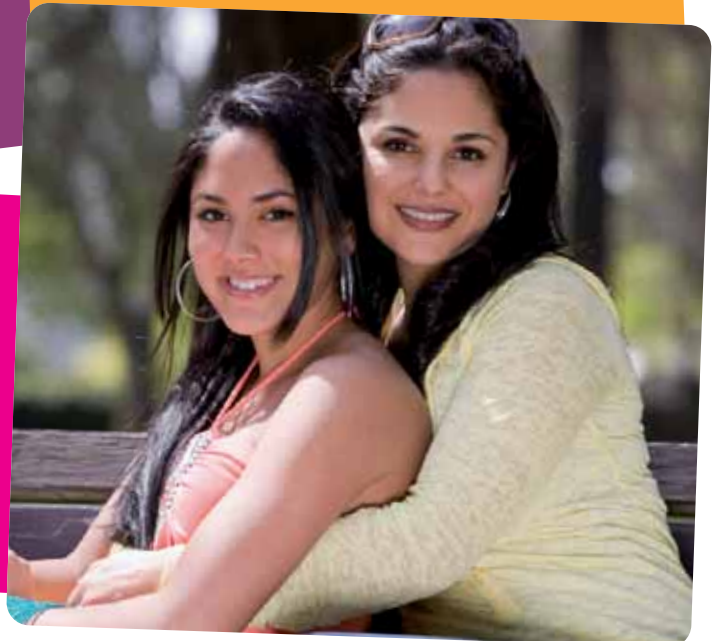
This could be anything, doing the washing-up, going for a walk, watching tv. It's a more informal approach than sitting your children down for 'a talk'.

9

Ask other parents and carers about how they answer difficult questions. Never think you're going through this alone. It's something that all parents and carers face. It's great to learn from each other what works and what doesn't!

10

If unsure of the right words to use, get hold of books and leaflets and find websites for you to both look at and talk about. There are loads of places you can get information and help. See the back page of this magazine for more ideas.



Real life

My parents never talked to me about sex or relationships. They just said: "Ask if there is anything you want to know." But, to be honest, they seemed so old (my age now!) and so far removed that they were the last people I would have asked.

When I had my children I was determined to be open with them and make it possible for them to talk about anything – which is great when they are young and ask questions, which you can answer honestly and then use to have a longer chat.

But of course I hadn't taken into account that, as they grow up, it is actually quite difficult because they dictate the agenda and often make it

clear they don't want to talk to you – abruptly closing off any overtures by walking out of the room or plugging in the earphones!

So, I always found car journeys useful because it was a neutral place and they couldn't escape, especially at night, which spared everyone's blushes!

My daughter was relatively easy because she is very open and likes to talk about everything – but her much younger brother

was different, shy and very private.

I decided to sit with him one night after he had gone to bed but we hadn't got very far when the door burst open and his sister came in from a night out and declared: "Oh you're having the sex talk. Don't listen to mum she doesn't know anything, just ask me if there's anything you want to know."

So much for history not repeating itself?



HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT Sex and Relationships Education?

SRE (Sex and Relationships Education) – these words tend to evoke one of two reactions from most parents and carers – either fear about what their child is being taught, or relief that someone else is tackling these difficult topics for them!



The ideal would be for every parent and carer to think: great, my child is receiving good, useful and important information – how can I support this. As a parent or carer, you have an important role in supporting your children with these issues.

In 2006, 3218 pupils (Years 9, 10 and 11) in a sample of Hertfordshire secondary schools were surveyed on their knowledge and views

on a range of issues including the SRE they receive in and out of school. This is what we found: Young people who took part felt positive about the SRE they receive but wanted to know more about managing relationships and emotions - their own and others.

One Year 11 boy said: *“There should be more, loads more.”* **Another added:** *“We don’t want soppy lessons about sex but to know the*

facts and what will happen to our bodies.”

The pupils were asked about where they currently get their information about sex and relationships. School was their main source, followed by family and friends.

When they were asked where they'd like to receive information about sex and relationships, school came first and parent or carer was a close second.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families points out that the teaching of sex and relationships is a 'partnership' between schools and parents. The school's SRE programme will complement your role and support you as sex educator of your child.

The local survey also revealed that as pupils get older they are less likely to go to their parents or carer for sexual health and relationship advice. This supports national research which shows that parents and carers should be open and honest with their child from an early age.

The study also found that having friends as a main source of sex information is associated with more permissive attitudes to sexual activity under 16, which again adds value to parents and carers ensuring that their children receive accurate information from them and not from their friends.

SRE is clearly an important lifelong learning process of acquiring information, developing skills and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexuality, relationships and feelings. Young people need to be supported with accurate information to help them establish positive relationships and enable them to develop the skills to make informed decisions. And how do you go about

supporting your child's school and what they are teaching?

- A great first step would be to contact the school, ask to see the SRE policy and ask what your child will be learning and when.
- Ask your child what they are learning at school.
- Ask to speak to staff from the school health service who support the delivery of SRE programmes in your child's school. In many schools and community settings, school nurses also offer confidential drop-in services for young people to access a range of services. School health staff are also available to support parents and carers - they can help parents and carers identify suitable information resources to use at home, like leaflets to support parents and carers in discussing sex and relationship issues with their children. In some areas, they hold informal sessions to discuss suggestions like those made in this magazine and to enable parents and carers to gain mutual

support from each other on how to approach this discussion with their children. Alternatively, school health staff will meet parents and carers individually to offer advice and make suggestions or offer resources such as leaflets or books to assist parents and carers in talking about sex and relationships, in a way that they feel most comfortable and that is age appropriate for the child.

- Alternatively the Hertfordshire Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Partnership has developed a free leaflet for parents and carers to inform you about what is taught in schools. This leaflet is available free through your child's school. Simply ask the school office for a copy of SRE - a handy guide for parents and carers in Hertfordshire'.

Your child's school nurse will also answer questions on health and development and issues relating to puberty and adolescence.

Here are some of the issues parents and carers have faced



"I want to talk to my teenager about sex but she just won't let me - how do I get started?"

As children get older they usually need more privacy. If you have already talked to her when she was younger then you know that she has some information and she knows that you are available when she wants to talk.

If you haven't, it would probably be useful to get some leaflets and leave them around the house.

Many parents find it hard to know when to start talking about sex with their child - sometimes you can initiate a conversation around a soap storyline, or a magazine article or the lyrics of a pop song, saying what you think about the characters' attitudes to sex if you think their relationship is loving.

You could also ask your daughter's opinion too.



"My son's school is doing sex education and they are stressing the importance of commitment before having sex. I don't agree - I got married far too young because I confused lust with love. I'd like him to have a good time before he settles down. What should I say to him?"

How about discussing differing values and beliefs about relationships?

You could say that some people believe that commitment is vital, but you think that while people are young, caring for each other and ensuring that no one is hurt or exploited is more important.

You could also talk about the importance of using contraception and condoms to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) - recently the rate of STIs has increased amongst teenagers.



"I think my daughter is having sex with her boyfriend. She's 14. How can I be sure and what should I do?"

This is likely to be a really hard subject to bring up, but perhaps the simplest place to start is by talking with her about it. You may be able

to pick up on a story from TV or the paper to start a conversation about young people, sex and relationships.

Make sure she understands that your concern is for her health and well-being. If you're right and she is in a sexual relationship, it's probably worth having some leaflets and information about contraception for her to read and talk over with you.

We work with young people in Hertfordshire

This is what they say to us!

Dr Elizabeth Broadwith is Associate Specialist and Head of Community Family Planning in West Hertfordshire, a role she has been in for over 10 years.

'The types of issues that young people come to see us about, are the same issues that older people want to know about - advice about contraceptive methods, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).'

The quality of service we offer doesn't differ from that which we offer adults, but the emphasis of the advice might - for example an implant may be a better idea for a young person than a pill as there's no pressure to remember to take it every day.

"A moment of crisis is not going to be the time that a young person starts thinking about improving their communication with their parents or carers."

We always promote condom use, even when another contraceptive method is being used, as the best way to prevent the spread of STIs. Condoms are available free from clinics across the county, through Youth Connexions 'one stop shops' and some youth projects across the county for young people. Unfortunately, alcohol

can be a hindrance in trying to encourage young people to always use protection. Alcohol use particularly seems to tie-in with unprotected sex amongst young people.

Whilst the service adheres to national guidance around young people's rights to confidentiality, meaning that parents and carers would not be told about the service their son or daughter is receiving, unless the child chooses to inform them, the service does encourage young people to talk to a responsible adult in their life. "The service has to be confidential otherwise young people wouldn't use it, and I'm sure most parents and carers would accept that if their son or daughter is sexually active it's better for them to act responsibly and visit us for contraception than to find themselves pregnant or with an STI.

So many young people visit us with the belief that their parents or carers wouldn't understand.

What parents and carers need to remember is that in a moment of crisis (for example

when a young person discovers they may be pregnant or have an STI) if that young person is insecure with their support at home that's not going to be the time that they start thinking about improving their communication with their parents and carers!

"So many young people visit us with the belief that their parents or carers wouldn't understand."

If parents and carers really want young people to come to them in a time like this, they need to ensure that they have good communication channels open with them from an earlier age.

I'm pleased to say that the majority of young people we see at the clinics are responsible young adults who are taking positive steps to protect their sexual health, parents and carers in Hertfordshire should be proud to have such responsible sons and daughters!"

For more information about the contraceptive services available for young people across Hertfordshire please visit www.hpherts.nhs.uk

Will Crowhurst is Teenage Pregnancy Outreach Worker (for young men), a role he has been in for over a year and a half. He works with youth projects all over the county facilitating group work around sexual health and relationships, self-esteem, communication skills and information on how to access contraception and sexual health services.

How does your role support young people with their sexual health needs?

By providing an informal and non-judgemental atmosphere in which young people can feel safe to ask questions, and exploring feelings and attitudes towards relationships and sexual health. I also provide information on how to access local sexual health services.



What are the key issues that young people raise with you and ask questions about?

Once you scratch the surface, you find that some young people feel very much under pressure to be engaging in, or at least being perceived to be engaging in sexual activities.

A lot of 13 year olds are looking for advice about how to know when someone fancies them, what to say to someone who they like, how do you ask someone out? What is going to happen if they look silly in front of their mates etc. As well as wanting to understand more about their bodies, what sex is and all the myths they hear about it. Sixteen year olds might ask similar questions but are also interested in finding out where their local services are,



where they can get condoms and sexual health advice and information. Young people are also concerned about how to access sexual health services and whether or not they are entitled to a confidential service – which of course they are.

What is your general feeling about young people's perspectives on these issues - are they uncomfortable talking about them and do they want more information from any particular source?



My feeling is that young people want much more opportunity and openness to discuss these issues. When you first start talking about anything to do with sex and relationships, it can sometimes be a little

embarrassing for them, but once the initial embarrassment passes young people are genuinely interested in discussing relationships, sex and sexual health.

to communicate your feelings or views.

What impact do you believe alcohol has on young people's sexual health behaviours?

I think alcohol impacts on behaviour and our decision making abilities, it makes young people, like adults, more likely to take risks and not consider the consequences of their actions. While adults are engaging in negative alcohol related behaviour we can't expect young people not to mimic that behaviour.

What do you believe are the key things that impact on young people taking risks with their sexual health?

I think one of the key things for young people is a lack of confidence in being able to communicate their feelings and needs to each other.

It's great that we educate young people on how to use a condom but also vital that we can give them the skills necessary on how to negotiate using a condom with their partner, what is a good or bad relationship and the importance of being able

Working across the county, Will's colleague Cathy Copestake is the Teenage Pregnancy Outreach Worker (for young women) fulfilling the same role as Will but working predominantly with young women.



Information

for parents and carers

Parentline Plus provides confidential advice and support to parents and carers on a whole range of parenting issues.

Visit: www.parentlineplus.org.uk or call **0808 800 2222**.

Advice from Families First for Health by Great Ormond Street
www.childrenfirst.nhs.uk

Net Doctor offer their own useful hints and tips: www.netdoctor.co.uk

FPA (Family Planning Association) have a number of recommended books that provide up to date information and terminology to help in any discussion. www.fpa.org.uk
fpa helpline: **0845 122 8690**

Mummy Laid an Egg (for parents of children aged 6+); Let's talk about where babies come from (for parents of children aged 8-12); Let's talk about sex (for parents of children aged 10-14).

Email: fpadirect@fpa.org.uk or call **0845 122 8600** with any queries or to order the books.

Hertfordshire County Council website
www.hertsdirect.org/teenpregnancy

Hertfordshire Customer Service Centre
Call **01438 737500** to request a free copy of this magazine.

Information for Young People

There are a number of places where young people can get good, accurate information about relationships and sexual health. Look at these websites.

www.ruthinking.co.uk Or phone **0800 28 29 30** for confidential information for young people, facts and advice from professionals about any relationships and sexual health issues concerning them.

www.thesite.org.uk website run by the charity YouthNet. It has factsheets, support and guidance for young adults on sex and relationships.

www.teenagehealthfreak.org website includes questions from real teenagers, answered by experts. Plus lots of other information too!

www.likeitis.org

Marie Stopes International website aims to give young people access to information about all aspects of sex education and teenage life.

www.brook.org.uk Or call **0800 018 5023**

National voluntary sector provider of free and confidential sexual health advice and services specifically for young people under 25.

www.channelmogo.org is for all 11-19 year olds in Hertfordshire. The site offers issue-based information linked to local services as well as interactive elements such as vidcasts, mp3 downloads, reviews, etc. The Survival Zone hosts information on hot topics chosen by young people and written by experts in the county. Subjects include transport, bullying, volunteering, sex and relationships, money and much more.