

Printed on HHS letterhead

Dear Community Leader:

Your organization is on the front lines of the many challenging issues facing today's families. Few are tougher or more important to discuss than sex. That's why I am so pleased to introduce an innovative public service initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The *Parents Speak Up National Campaign* is designed to encourage parents to talk to their children about waiting to have sex. This multimedia campaign includes a complete array of national advertising as well as information and resources for community organizations to help support parents in having this conversation.

It is the right time. Skyrocketing teen pregnancy rates, alarming rates of STD infections and regret over decisions made are harming our teens, their families and our communities. Consider that the U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world and that nearly half of the 19 million new STDs annually occur among 15- to 24-year-olds. Early sexual activity is also linked to emotional problems such as depression. Sadly, these trends are weakening our communities, leading to greater costs and lost opportunities for so many.

We know that the solution to early sexual activity begins with conversation. When asked, teens report that parents have the most influence on their decisions about whether or not to have sex. In fact, teens whose parents encourage them to delay sex are more likely to do so. Parents make a difference when they speak up.

The challenge, of course, is that parents often don't know where to begin. Parents of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have a variety of anxieties and barriers that make it difficult to talk to their children about sex. The hesitation is natural. Some parents don't want to "let go" of their child and fear that talking about sex will make them grow up too

fast. Others aren't sure how to initiate such a sensitive conversation in part because their parents never talked to them.

The *Parents Speak Up National Campaign* is designed to overcome these barriers. We want to inspire and encourage conversations that can change lives. By teaming up with the *Parents Speak Up National Campaign*, you'll provide expert, useful information for parents which will empower them to have frequent, meaningful conversations with their teen – all in a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental and approachable way.

Please join us. Included in this kit and on our website, www.4parents.gov, are free materials and resources which can be used to educate parents on how to make this difficult conversation easier, including a “Talking Tips for Parents” handout and a video which introduces the campaign and showcases the public service advertising. Be sure to fill out and return the enclosed feedback card so that we can keep you updated about the program and send additional materials as they become available. Know others who may be interested? Send us their names, too. We encourage you to share news about the *Parents Speak Up National Campaign* with your organization, your community and your colleagues.

America's parents need all the support we can give them in tackling this difficult issue.

Sincerely,

Susan Orr

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population Affairs



OVERVIEW

What

National public education campaign sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Objective

Encourage parents to talk to their children early and often about waiting to have sex.

Target Audience

All parents, caretakers, and guardians of pre-teen and teenage children.

Campaign Elements

TV, radio, print, outdoor, web and community outreach.

Website

www.4parents.gov

Did you know?

- The U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world.
- Nearly half of the 19 million new STDs every year occur among 15- to 24-year olds and can cause long-term health complications.
- A full 66 percent of sexually active teens wish they had waited.
- Research shows that teen sex can deflate self-esteem, erode optimism and spoil the quality of intimate relationships.

Parents Can Make a Difference

- Research shows that parents have the greatest influence on their teens' sexual decisions—more than their peers or the media.
- 9 out of 10 teens say that it would be easier to wait to have sex if they could talk with their parents about it.

The Importance of Community Support

- Many parents feel uncomfortable addressing sexual issues with their child and lack the knowledge and skills to have an effective conversation.
- Parents are looking for support and guidance from trusted members of the community to help make the conversation easier.

For more information, visit www.4parents.gov or contact:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Office of Population Affairs

1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 700

Rockville, Maryland 20852





HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Help Get the Word Out

- Include a campaign announcement on your website, newsletters and publications.
- Provide a link on your website to www.4parents.gov.
- Incorporate campaign information and articles from credentialed experts on your website and in publications.
- Send campaign information to colleagues who may be interested in becoming involved.
- Download campaign material for free from www.4parents.gov to distribute at meetings and events.

Organize Parent Workshops

- Select individuals in your organizations to become experts on the campaign and serve as facilitators of parent workshops.
- Encourage local chapters and groups to organize parent events and ongoing workshops.
- Order or download the Parent Mentoring Kit which includes:
 - Training video and materials for facilitators running the workshops
 - Information on the defenses and anxieties that parents have about talking to their child about waiting to have sex
 - Parent training video to use in workshop to give parents the knowledge and skills they need to have an effective conversation with their children
 - Handouts for parents with tips on how to talk to their children about waiting to have sex.

Stay Involved

- Fill out the feedback card provided to receive additional campaign materials and share your parent workshop successes and ideas.
- Sign up for campaign updates and a free e-newsletter at 4parents.gov to keep abreast of campaign information and events.
- Email us at Information@4parents.gov with your questions and comments.

For more information on how to get involved or to order materials, please contact Allison Witt at 202-778-4544.



TALKING TIPS FOR PARENTS

TALK EARLY AND OFTEN.

It's never too early to start the conversation. And it's never too late. You can talk about love and relationships with a child as young as six. When your child is in middle school you can be very clear with him or her about why it is important to make good decisions about sex. In high school, it is important to continue talking since this is when peer pressure can be the strongest. Keep the lines of communication open by talking frequently with your child.

SHARE YOUR VALUES.

Kids need to hear more than “don't do it.” It is important to let your child know how you feel about sex and why it is important to wait. Clearly state your expectations and how waiting will help ensure that they reach their goals. By setting expectations, you let your child know you believe they can make smart and healthy choices.

USE BITE-SIZED PIECES.

Break down the conversation into bite-sized pieces. One “big talk” can be overwhelming and uncomfortable for you and your child, but by talking early and often, you can start with one or two small bits of information and then continue to provide more information over time.

UTILIZE TEACHABLE MOMENTS.

This is a difficult subject to bring up. Make it easier by using everyday occurrences such as lyrics on the radio or content on a TV show to start the conversation. This natural gateway will create a more relaxed environment for discussion.

ASK QUESTIONS & LISTEN.

Don't just talk. Ask questions. This needs to be a two-way discussion. Find out how your kids feel and what they think. And be a good listener. Don't interrupt them so they know you want to hear from them too.

For more information, please visit www.4parents.gov

