# Helping Parents Talk To Their Children About Sex

## Statement of Problem

As young people grow up and begin to make decisions about their health, they are often bombarded with messages from their peers and the media about how and whether to have sex. While the information they receive from these sources matters, research shows that one of the most important influences on an adolescent's sexual activity is their parents. In fact, studies have shown that teens who report having open and honest conversations with their parents about sex are more likely to delay sexual activity, have fewer partners, and use condoms and other contraceptives when they do have sex.

However, many parents and caregivers do not initiate or create space for these conversations for a variety of reasons. Some may feel that those discussions should come from a trained health educator at their child's school, or that their child won't be sexually active anytime soon. Providing caregivers with factual information and helping them develop their communication skills are vital steps to fostering parent-teen conversations about sexual health that could lead to fewer risk-taking behaviors on the part of the adolescent.

## Description

In partnership with researchers, patients and families across Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, we built a website, ParentsAreTalking.com, that provides resources parents can use to guide conversations with their teens about sexual health. Considering the breadth of parents' personal beliefs on sexual health and sexuality, the purpose of the site is not to tell them exactly what to say to their children, but rather to ensure they have accurate information and techniques for doing so. The information is designed to fit the needs of a diverse age spectrum, ranging from preteen to college-aged adolescents.

The Parents Are Talking website covers a variety of pressing sexual health topics, including:

- The basic stages of puberty demonstrated by interactive diagrams with female and male anatomy
- Contraceptive options and characteristics
- How to detect an unhealthy or abusive relationship

In addition to providing valuable information on puberty and sex itself, we also provide resources on building strong parenting and communications skills. These skills include learning how to use teachable moments and clearly communicating one's values, beliefs and attitudes. When caregivers communicate effectively, they can build trust and foster a relationship in which their teen feels comfortable approaching them with pressing questions related to sex, relationships and other major life conversations.

The main research component of this project comes with evaluating how users are engaging with the site and which strategies are effective at increasing its accessibility and use.

## Next Steps

We will use Google Analytics to evaluate user engagement. Google Analytics allows us to track metrics such as the number of visitors to the site, the geographic region they are coming from, how long they stay before logging off and which pages they visit most frequently. From this data, we expect to gain key insights into how our audiences use the site, including how they are finding it and which sections are most useful or interesting. From there, we plan to modify the site based to optimize user engagement and encourage more families to use this resource when navigating conversations about sex with their children.

*This project page was last updated in August 2019*.

## Suggested Citation

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## Related Tools & Publications

Low Acceptability of Certain Contraceptive Methods Among Young Women
Article
Dec 2017

Messages About Abstinence, Delaying Sexual Debut and Sexual Decision-making in Conversations Between Mothers and Young Adolescents
Article
Apr 2018

Messages about Contraception and Condoms in Mother-adolescent Dyadic Conversations: Knowledge, Risks and Effectiveness
Article
Feb 2019
Related Projects

Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy in Pennsylvania through Long-Acting Reversible Contraception
Adolescent Health & Well-Being