

Abstinence—It works every time

When it comes to teen sex, guess who's making news as a way to prevent pregnancy? None other than Mom and Dad.

New research indicates that parents have far greater influence on their children's sexual decision-making than previously thought. Apparently, what parents say does matter when it comes to preventing teen pregnancy.

More than two decades of study confirms that families—particularly parents—are important influencers of whether their teenagers become sexually active. Studies reveal that parent/child closeness is associated with reduced teen pregnancy risk. Closer teens are to their parents, the more likely they are to remain sexually abstinent.

So if you're thinking about handing your teens a condom, don't. You'd be better off giving them yourself. . . your views, your expectations, your values, your unconditional love.

"But wait a minute," some of you are saying. "I'd be embarrassed to talk about that stuff and besides, my kid thinks he knows everything already." Maybe not—if he's anything like the youth surveyed by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Those teens said they want their parents to talk with them about sexuality issues.

If parents don't, there are others who are all too happy to fill young minds with their own thoughts on teen sexuality. ("Don't have sex until you're ready. And when you do, use a condom.") And chances are, they won't be the views you—or most of mainstream America—hold. Only 14 percent of Americans say it's okay for teens to be sexually active as long as they have access to birth control.

More than two-thirds of both adults and teens say it is very important for high school students to be given a strong message from society that they abstain from sex. Yet, the government spends millions to promote the "safe sex" ideology in our schools. Without parental input, officials hand out condoms and pills to kids who then assume they're expected to use them. Whose kid is it, anyway?

Why the family factor makes a difference

The connection between parental involvement and reduced teen pregnancies is not just a random blip on the cultural radar. A recent study of adolescent health published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that teens who felt "connected" to their parents were far less likely to initiate sex at a young age. The teen you nurture today very well may be the young adult who can resist peer and hormonal pressure tomorrow.

A parent's belief system also plays a major role in teens' sexual behavior. Findings are rolling in to support the notion that when parents hold strong opinions on the value of abstinence and the risks of teen sexual involvement, their children are at less risk for teen pregnancy. Good grief, you mean underneath those baggy clothes and earrings is a teen who listens to Mom and Dad? Apparently so.

In a recent *New York Times/CBS News* poll, nearly half of all teenagers say sex before marriage is "always wrong." At the same time the *Times/CBS* poll was released, a new *National Center for Health Statistics* study concluded that teen birth rates fell 12 percent between 1991 and 1996—about the same time that there was a surge in abstinence programs across the country.

But what about teens who've decided not to

wait? Shouldn't they be taught proper condom usage? That sounds great in theory, but the highest reported rate of consistent condom usage is about 50 percent—and that's among adult couples with one HIV-positive individual.

Don't miss the significance of this. Who should be more motivated to use condoms than couples with one partner infected by HIV? Yet, half of these couples did not use condoms every time. What are the chances that teens will do better? In national surveys and other large scale studies among the general population, only five to 17 percent report that they use condoms consistently.

Protected sex really isn't

Real-life statistics show that the use of condoms isn't a guarantee against becoming pregnant or

contracting a sexually transmitted disease. And latex offers very unreliable protection against genital herpes, chlamydia and, worst of all, human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV causes genital warts and most cervical cancers which kill nearly as many women each year as AIDS.

The young teenager who is told that this little latex device is safe and reliable may not know she is risking illness, infertility and even death. Why are we settling for risk reduction when we can have risk elimination?

And no condom on earth can protect a teen from the pain of a broken heart.

They claim protection. We guarantee it.

Focus on the Family believes our kids deserve

Studies show that parent/child closeness is associated with reduced teen pregnancy risk.

Ten percent of all 15- to 19-year-old females become pregnant each year.

More than 80 percent of pregnant girls under age 17 who give birth and keep their babies end up on welfare, costing society a staggering \$21 billion a year.

Three million new cases of STDs among teens are reported each year.

Up to 29 percent of sexually active adolescent girls have been found to be infected with chlamydia.

A study of sexually active college women showed that 43 percent acquired HPV infection within a three-year period.

better. By abstaining from intercourse until marriage, and then staying faithful to an uninfected partner, one can enjoy sex without negative health consequences. This is the only true "safe sex".

Though once vilified as culturally irrelevant and unworkable for teens, abstinence does work.

A study of the Washington, D.C., Best Friends program is a good example. Only one percent of this program's participants became pregnant, and 90 percent remained sexually abstinent. In a 1996 study on adolescent sexuality, researchers noted a 54 percent decrease in recent sexual activity on year after teenagers were taught an abstinence curriculum. The data seem clear that when you give teens an unambiguous message and raise the bar for their behavior, they respond by saying "no" to premarital sex.

True love can wait.

In fact, since 1994, more than 2.4 million teens between 15 and 19 have pledged to remain sexually abstinent until marriage. When adolescents report that they've made a pledge to

save sex until marriage, they are more likely to delay intercourse.

Findings like these are hard to ignore. Even Congress has allotted \$250 million over five years to implement abstinence-until-marriage programs. This comes after squandering three billion taxpayer dollars on "safer sex" education—with dismal results.

You don't need to concede the battle for your children's sexual health to peers, popular culture and the media. You have more influence with your teens than you think. Use it. Tell them about abstinence.

Most sex ed ignores the most important sex organ: the brain

The idea behind abstinence education is somewhat radical: kids are given credit for using their minds—not their bodies. Abstinence programs hand out respect and relationship-building skills, not condoms. How do teens respond? Enthusiastically. They themselves tell us they want help resisting sexual pressure.

In an Emory University survey of 1,000 sexually experienced girls 16 and younger, nearly 85 percent said they would like to learn, "How to say no without hurting the other person's feelings." With finds like these, it comes as no surprise that 62 percent of high school girls who've already tried sex indicated they "should have waited," according to a 1994 Roper-Starch study.

After two decades of being taught that "yes" was the expected answer, it seems apparent that today's teens want to be empowered to say "no." Parents, are we hearing them?

Our kids deserve a guarantee—the truth that abstinence until marriage is the only 100 percent successful way to avoid unwanted pregnancy and STDs.

The only sex that isn't hazardous to your health

What many spouses have suspected, researchers now have verified: married couples have the best and most satisfying sex. Not only is physical intimacy more rewarding in marriage, but enjoyment is greater if sexual expression is shared with only one partner in a lifetime.

So, Mom and Dad, take heart. Stay involved with your teens. Don't write them off as lost, hard-headed or unapproachable. They want to talk with you about love, sex and values. And they're far more open to the abstinence message than you might think.

If you agree with Focus on the Family that abstinence is best, tear out this ad and save it. Take it to your next school board meeting. Send it to your congressman or senator. And by all means, share it with your teenagers. And be the kind of parent who gives your teens what they really need: yourself.

Abstinence. It works every time.