

IU Health & Wellness

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Teens and sex. A lot has changed in 20 years. One example is technology -- teenagers are connecting faster and with more frequency than ever before. They are also absorbing exuberant amounts of images from the media. Indiana University sexual health expert Catherine Sherwood-Laughlin says sex education is critical these days -- and it needs to begin at home. "Schools are not completely responsible for a child's sexuality education; the sexuality



education begins at home and the parents need to be the primary sex educators for their children," said Sherwood-Laughlin, whose research involves adolescent sexual behaviors. "Parents need to set the morals, values and expectations, as well as provide education, while the schools need to provide medically accurate information and also support abstinence as the best choice for teens."

Sherwood-Laughlin offers parents the following information and insights:

- **The basics.** According to the national Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), almost half of all high school students have had sexual intercourse during their lifetimes. Of these, 7.1 percent had sexual intercourse for the first time before the age of thirteen. About 13 percent of high school students have ever been tested for HIV, but 89.5 percent have been taught about HIV and AIDS infection. "The CDC results show that males are more likely than females to have ever had sexual intercourse, had sexual intercourse for the first time before age 13, had intercourse with four or more lifetime sex partners and drank alcohol during last sexual intercourse.

Whereas females were less likely to use a condom during last sexual intercourse among those students who were sexually active," Sherwood-Laughlin said.

- **The pressure is on.** According to Sherwood-Laughlin, the media puts a lot of pressure on teenagers to have sex. "There aren't any consequences to premature sexual activity in the media, so teens receive mixed messages. They need adults in their lives to help clear up those messages," says Sherwood-Laughlin.
- **Sex education.** Evaluate what type of sex education your child is receiving -- at home and in school. "Parents need to know what is being taught to their children, regardless of their age and type of program," said Sherwood-Laughlin. "If there are teens who are, have been or will be sexually active, then they (parents and schools) need to provide information about how to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and how to deal with all of the emotions and feelings that accompany sexual intimacy."
- **The link between substance use and risky sexual behavior.** According to the 2007 YRBSS, 22.5 percent of high school students drank alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual intercourse. "We know that people are less likely to make good decisions while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol," says Sherwood-Laughlin. "If teens are attending parties or other social events where there aren't responsible adults supervising, that can lead to teens taking risks and/or making poor decisions."
- **The lingo is changing.** "It's very interesting that there is a whole new language due to text messaging and the way teens communicate with today's technology," says Sherwood-Laughlin. "There are new words related to sex and sexual activity that parents need to know so they can understand their teens and their friends." Sherwood-Laughlin recommends visiting the following sites for more information: <http://www.netlingo.com/emailsh.cfm>

Despite the current trends involving teens and sex, one issue remains the same: "The teenage years are years of instability, changes in growth and development, changes in responsibilities and many transitions, so teens need as much support and help as they can get so they can make good decisions and understand all of the outcomes/consequences of their decisions," Sherwood-Laughlin said.

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<http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news/page/normal/8878.html>