

Dear Parents,

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read the new HiTOPS Newsletter. We have dedicated ourselves to designing a newsletter that meets your needs, as we have heard them, over the course of the last year. HiTOPS strongly believes in the power of parents—power to educate your child on sexual health issues, power to influence your child's decision-making processes, and power to help your child develop values that are consistent with yours and a healthy community.

HiTOPS is a community resource not only for teens and young adults, but also for you. We offer classes and workshops for you to participate in at HiTOPS, complete with do-at-home activities to reinforce the skills and techniques you may learn in the classes. Beware—your dinner table conversations may change! Be assured this is a good thing—it means your kids do want to talk with you about tough issues. They want to know how you feel about many subjects—healthy relationships; the differences between dating (70's style) and "hooking up;" feelings about being normal; and how and where to get potentially life-saving information and services.

So please read on, let us know if this works for you, and what other topics you'd like us to cover. This is a newsletter for you.

Sincerely,
Bonnie Parker, RN
Executive Director, HiTOPS, Inc.

HiTOPS gratefully acknowledges
THE LARSON FAMILY
and
CHURCH AND DWIGHT—
makers of Trojan Brand Condoms
For their generous support
of the Parent Project

Kids Whose Parents Talk with Them about Sexual Issues Take Fewer Risks

by Elizabeth M. Casparian, PhD
HiTOPS Director of Educational Programs

Many parents state that they have told their kids about sex, but, like Megan's friends, most children report that they are not having meaningful conversations with their parents about birth control, dating, STDs, or other subjects that teens grapple with almost daily. Most parents report that they feel uncomfortable talking with their children because they worry that they will introduce information too early, will not know the facts about the things their kids want to know, or will be horribly embarrassed by such conversations. In addition, many parents feel that since they did not get much sex education from their own parents, they have no role model to follow and do not know where to begin.

In hopes of bridging a gap, the majority of parents support comprehensive sexuality education taught in school. What actually gets taught, however, and who teaches it differs from district to district and even from school to school within the same district. Most of the sexuality education that children receive is valuable and provides basic informa-

tion, but much of it is considered by teens as "too little, too late." Parents can be assured that current research shows positive benefits to having conversations about sexual issues with their children.

According to a 1997 longitudinal study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association, teens take risks with their health and their future when they do not feel a

"My friends are always so surprised how easily my mom and I talk about sex. They wish they could talk with their own parents."

**MEGAN, 17, HiTOPS
2004 TEEN
COUNCIL MEMBER**

strong connection to home, family and school. Teens who feel a lack of caring and warmth from parents report greater emotional distress, school problems, drug use, lower self-esteem and increased sexual risk-taking than teens that report feeling connected, cared for and loved by their parents. When a parent takes the time to talk with their children about sensitive subjects such as sexuality, in an open and positive manner, they help chil-

dren feel cared for and connected to their parents. When parents affirm the value of their children, by listening to them and trying to really hear what the teen is experiencing and what kinds of guidance they need, then young people more often develop positive, healthy attitudes about themselves, which can help

them develop skills to take responsibility for their own health.

In addition to research which shows that general positive communication between parents and adults results in less risk-taking in teens, direct discussions between parents and teens about sexual issues also showed positive effects on teens' behavior. The American Journal of Public Health reported that when mothers discussed condom use before teens initiated sexual intercourse, youth were *three times more likely* to use condoms than were teens whose mothers never discussed condoms or who discussed condoms only after teens became sexually active. Moreover, condom use at first intercourse significantly predicted future condom use—teens who used condoms at first intercourse were 20 times more likely than other teens to use condoms regularly and 10 times more likely to use them at most recent intercourse.

In another study, researchers found that teens who reported previous discussions of sexuality with parents were *seven times more likely* to feel able to communicate with a partner about HIV/AIDS than those who had no had such discussions with their parents. The Journal of Adolescent Health reported that, when asked where they would prefer to get their information about contraception, almost 20 percent of teens surveyed preferred parents over community health centers, health classes, hospitals, private doctors, television or friends. As well, teens who use contraception consistently reported more frequent conversations about sexuality with parents than teens who were not using contraception.

It is certainly clear that there are many benefits to parent-child communication about sexual issues, but many parents do not feel adequately prepared to have such conversations. In one survey conducted by YM Magazine in 1998, data showed that only 38 percent

of young women and 25 percent of young men said that they had ever gotten a "good idea" from their parents that helped them talk about sexual issues with a boyfriend/ girlfriend. In addition, most attempts by parents to impart sexuality information to young people tend to be in a 'top down' communication style that denies teens the opportunity to discuss their own thoughts feelings and desires or to draw links between their own and their parents perspectives. Since most parents did not receive good information about sexuality as they were growing up and since few parents had good role models for having positive conversations about sex within their families, it is no wonder that parents express reluctance, fear and anxiety about having those conversations with their own children.

Participation in parenting workshops can significantly reduce a parents' anxiety about how to talk about sexuality with any age child. Listening to the experiences of other parents can also help participants feel less alone and more part of a community of parents working together to raise a community of healthy children. ♀♂

10 Tips for Building Your Child's Self-Esteem

1. Give lots of positive feedback.
2. Avoid putdowns, especially about how your child looks.
3. Do one-on-one activities with your child.
4. Give children chores and require that they be done well.
5. Ask children open-ended questions and listen to their answers.
6. Give rewards other than money.
7. Know your children's friends.
8. Limit TV and other electronic use.
9. Insist on an all-family meal at least once a week.
10. Plan family activities and require attendance.

* To find out more about these tips and why they work, attend our Parent Session, October 6, 7:30-9:00 pm, "Risk-Proof Your Kids: Learn to Raise Self-Esteem in Kids," by Elizabeth Casparian, PhD, Director of Educational Services at HiTOPS. To register: call 683-5155, ext 18.

THE PRINCETON REGIONAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT,
THE HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP HEALTH DEPARTMENT
AND BRISTOL MYERS-SQUIBB

in partnership with many community agencies present



"WHAT'S EATING YOU?"

CONSUMER CULTURE, EATING DISORDERS AND ADOLESCENCE
A Special Health Education and Prevention Workshop for Parents

Princeton Public Library
Tuesday October 26, 2004
7:00-9:30pm

Call to Register:
Princeton Public Library Youth Services
924-9529, Extension 240

Timberlane Middle School
Thursday November 11, 2004
7:00-9:30pm

Call to Register:
Hopewell Township Health Department
737-0120, Extension 636

Television as Sexuality Educator: Friend or Foe?

by Elizabeth Schroeder, MSW
Professional Trainer/Consultant

Parents have a mixed relationship with television. Some love it for its entertainment value, some see it as “the enemy”, and others see it as a necessary evil—the electronic babysitter that keeps the kids occupied while they cook dinner, pay bills, or catch up with a partner/spouse. Regardless of how we feel, television is a very real part of our—and our children’s—lives. It is also a significant source of sexuality information, both accurate and inaccurate. Most television shows during prime viewing hours have some kind of sexual content, including at least two scenes in which sexuality is discussed openly or portrayed. Very few of these scenes, however, discuss the potential risks or consequences of certain sexual behaviors. TV gives messages about body image, gender roles, relationships, and sexual decision-making, many of which are inconsistent with the messages we are trying to give our young people. This is why the media must be discussed openly with them. The ways in which we do this, however, are important. Here are some tips:

Watch TV with your kids. You may know what your child’s favorite TV shows are, but have you ever seen an episode? When you can, watch the show *with* your kids. If you’re not available, record the show, watch it within the next day or so, and comment on it. Try not to convince them that something they have viewed is good or bad. Instead, try to make educated consumers out of them. Point out a scene or exchange between two

characters, and ask them what they thought about it. This will encourage them to think for themselves, help you understand where they are in terms of sexuality information and messages, and inform you of where you need to reinforce your values without linking them directly to the media.

When you do watch TV together, TALK OUT LOUD to it. At the commercial breaks, hit the “mute”



button and talk about what you just saw. “What would you do if you were in so-and-so’s place?” “What do you think this story says about (kids, women,

people of color, the elderly, gay people)?” Just be sure to wait for the break. If you talk nonstop through a show, you are pretty much guaranteeing that your child won’t want to watch with you!

Don’t forget the ads. We often leave the room when the commercials come on, yet some of the most sexualized images come in the form of prime-time television commercials. Victoria’s Secret’s “What is Sexy?” ad campaign, some of which air during teen programming, is one example.

Now, the greatest challenge many parents face is simply time. Many of us do not have time to watch OUR favorite television shows, let alone a show that our children watch. We may also have neither the energy nor the tolerance to sit through teen-centered programs. You can, however,

use these techniques with pretty much any kind of media. Go to the movies with your teen, and talk with her or him about it afterwards. Talk about a magazine your teen reads. Try to find a way to make discussions about media fit into your busy schedule, regardless of what type of media it is.

Above all, be sure to listen to your child. Try not to become upset when they express views that are contrary to yours. It is important to know what your child is thinking, even if you disagree. By making your conversations true exchanges, you can offer a point of view to them they may not have considered before. It’s a great way to share your values, and see first-hand how your kids are developing theirs. ♀♂

PARENT FAQ

Q: I just found that my 12-year-old has been visiting porn sites on the internet. How can I best handle this situation?

A: Take a deep breath and take some time to consider what message you want to give your teen about pornography. Your child may have a lot of normal curiosity about sex, so begin the conversation in a way that avoids putting the child on the defensive or that allows the child to turn the conversation into an attack on you about respecting their privacy. Parents may want to communicate to their child that many pornographic images may be confusing, disturbing or frightening to young teens. Ask your child what they thought about what they saw. Depending upon the age of the child, this will bring up other issues to discuss. Communicate your own values about pornography while acknowledging that others may feel differently. Listen carefully and respond to your child’s words and body language so that you can turn this situation into a wonderful learning experience for you and your child.

*** To learn more about parenting issues relating to the internet, join us on January 5, 2005. Guest speaker, Judith Steinhart, Senior Health Educator at Alice!, Columbia University’s Health Education Program, will lead the discussion.**

HiTOPS Free Parent Programs

7:30-9:00pm WEDNESDAYS

HiTOPS, 21 WIGGINS STREET, PRINCETON

HiTOPS is offering a Parent Education Series designed to allow parents to pick and choose the topics related to sexual health and raising children that most interest them. Each 90-minute presentation will cover a specific topic of interest. Parents of any age children may attend, although some topics are geared towards a specific age group. You may choose to attend as many workshops as you like. HiTOPS Educators and expert guest speakers will conduct these workshops. There is no fee to attend, but registration is required because space is limited. All donations are welcome!

REGISTRATION: Call (609) 683-5155, ext 18, Elizabeth Walters

October 6, 2004
RISK-PROOF YOUR KIDS:
 Learn to Raise Self-Esteem in Kids

October 20
READY OR NOT:
Helping Your Child Postpone Sexual Involvement

November 3
FRIEND OR FOE?
Sex and the Media

November 17
GETTING STARTED:
Talking with Your Younger Child about Puberty and Sex

January 5, 2005
TAKE A DEEP BREATH:
How to Talk With Your Kids about Sex and the Internet

January 19
ODD KID OUT:
When Your Child is Left Out or Bullied

February 2
SEX ON THE ROCKS:
 Sex, Alcohol & other Drugs

February 16
FATHER KNOWS BEST?
Men's Role in Raising Teenagers

March 2
I'M NOT A BABY ANYMORE:
Helping Teens Negotiate the Health Care System

March 16
MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL:
Helping Teens Develop a Healthy Body Image

April 6
POWER PLAYS:
Teen Dating Violence and Assault

April 20
TALK TO ME:
Teen Led Parent Communication Workshop

We are looking for energetic friends to plan and run the HiTOPS Annual Guardian Award Dinner in April 2005. If you are interested in helping us put on this event showcasing our teens, please contact Lindsey Fraser at (609)683-5155, ext 10, or Lindsey@hitops.org

ATTENTION VOLUNTEERS!



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