

**INTIMACY, SEX  
& RELATIONSHIP**

**Embarrassment  
No Reason Not  
To Have STD  
Conversation**



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**C**ooler evenings remind us that autumn is right around the corner.

Many of us have packed our kids off to school armed with bottles of Purell hand sanitizer and lectures on careful hand-washing to prevent the spread of swine flu. Some of us have had serious talks about the dangers of binge drinking, date rape, speeding and drunken driving.

We've probably discussed the unhealthiness of pulling all-nighters, mononucleosis (the "kissing disease") and the importance of good nutrition. But how many of us have talked about STD prevention and appropriate condom use?

Yes, I know that this sounds old hat. You may be asking, "What is there to say that they don't already know?" Don't do it and if you do, be careful — isn't that enough? Is that all there is to our parental responsibility in the area of sexual health? Hardly.

One of the most difficult issues for parents to discuss turns out to be one of the most potentially deadly. I'm not certain where we get the idea that giving accurate information about STD prevention is equivalent to giving permission to be sexual. We already know how many kids are sexually active without our permission.

By the time we are ready to discuss sex-related information, it may be too late.

Joe, 21, has been in an openly gay relationship with Gary, 20, for 6 months. The first time they had anal sex it was unprotected. Gary just didn't want to "spoil the mood" by using a condom. He recently discovered he's HIV positive.

Kelly and Kevin are sexually active college students. Kelly is on the birth control pill and Kevin uses a condom — but the last time they had sex, the condom slipped off because he didn't know how to apply it without trapping air in the tip. Kelly is now worried she may have gotten herpes from Kevin.

Abstinence is ineffective as the totality of our kid's sex education. It doesn't address the how, when, why and what about sexual desire, arousal and response. When kids have sex it may not be that different from us — so long ago — in a steamy moment when our penis or vagina rule our brain.

If the sum total of our conversations about sex is "just say no" — who helps them with questions like: What should one do with urges? When do you decide the time is "right" and how do you know this person is "the one?" What about our values, self-respect and morality?

And who teaches them the correct way to use a condom to stay healthy and disease-free? No one said this would be an easy conversation, but if you don't do it, who will?

When it comes to condom use, fit is important to proper functioning and to avoid slips and breaks. Make sure to hold the base of the condom as the penis is withdrawn. Only use each condom once.

And make sure you have the right size condom for your anatomy. Proper lubrication is important. Dryness can lead to breakage. Not all lubrications work with latex (no baby oil, Vaseline or other corrosive substances). Suggest they practice applying condoms outside the "heat of the moment" and use them during oral sex (yes, oral sex).

If you don't know the specifics about condoms, how do you expect your sons or daughters to know? Your embarrassment about the subject is no excuse.

Twenty-five percent of teens will contract some form of STD — HPV, herpes, chlamydia or HIV. The birth control pill does nothing to protect against these infections. Practicing safer sex needs to go beyond having a condom in your wallet (or purse). Condoms need to be used, every time, and used correctly.

So let's send our kids to school with the facts to keep them healthy — all the facts!

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