

# TEENS URGENTLY NEED ANSWERS

**D**o you remember when you realized you couldn't protect your children from life's dangers, no matter how hard you tried?

Perhaps it was when your toddler took his first tentative steps — smack into the coffee-table. Maybe your moment of truth came after learning your 8-year-old had talked to the “nice man looking



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for the owner of a lost puppy” — only a week after your “never talk to strangers” lecture. And what parent can't relate to watching their teen take the car for the first time? Or maybe it was on the evening you heard your 14-year-old sobbing in her room because she had just found out she was pregnant.

Whenever and however it happens, it's only a matter of time before we come face to face with our kids' independence and our limitations as parents. All too soon, we must let go of their hands and let them cross the street alone — trusting we've prepared them as best we can.

It's not easy being a parent.

We want our kids to have it better than we had it, to learn from our mistakes and to make smart choices at difficult times. But raising self-assured, morally conscious and socially aware adults is an enormous challenge — especially in this highly sexualized culture.

It's also not easy being a teen. Adolescence has always been synonymous with turmoil. But the current climate has stimulated kids differently than generations ago. Many teens feel confused, anxious and over their heads with no one to answer their most personal questions. When I talk to high school students they're interested in pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases — wondering if they can get pregnant the “first time.” (Yes, you can, I tell

them.)

They ask if they can conceive if they don't have an orgasm, if they have their periods or if their partner stops before he ejaculates. (Yes, yes, and yes.) They have questions about sexual attraction to same-sex people and how to know if they're gay. They have questions about how to say “no” and still be popular and questions about when to say “yes.” They're bombarded by messages in movies, music, magazines, MTV and the Internet — Paris Hilton partying it up and lyrics by 50 Cent that describe explicit sexual acts in the “Candy Shop.”

Terms such as “hooking up,” “buddy sex” (sex with a friend — no strings attached), and “rainbow parties” (each girl puts on a different color lipstick and gives the boys oral sex) are common and trivialize behaviors that have potentially serious consequences. This is a far cry from the make-out sessions, spin-the-bottle and baseball analogies of eons ago.

Along with the new sexual “freedom” comes a new level of responsibility. Our teens need the tools to manage them. Chat rooms, text messaging and other technology have replaced personal discussions with more compartmentalized communication. It's not surprising that relationships would follow suit — separating pure physical release from reciprocal commitment and genuine intimacy. Sex has become another commodity to get what you need — peer approval, attention and pseudo-maturity.

I recently received this letter from a young woman who had the courage to write to me:

*Hi, I'm 16 and actually earlier today my boyfriend came over and while we were fooling around, we were having dry sex at the time; he stuck his penis inside me. I only let him stay in me for no longer than 1 min. after I asked him if he had “came” any at all while he was inside me and he said no. We're really truthful with each other and he understood that I wasn't ready for that yet.*

*I know there is pre-ejaculation but he was only inside me a little (not all the way in) I really need to*

*know what kind of chance I have of being pregnant. Is it a large chance? and a while after performing oral (he ejaculated in my mouth) we started to have dry sex again but we made sure that he was covered by his boxers, but I'm still worried and I know I won't do anything that close to having sex again for a long time. please reply as soon as you can I'm trying not to worry too much because I know that can mess with my menstruation cycle and cause it to be off balance, please reply. Thank you....*

*p.s. I'm not sure if you answer these kinds of questions but you are the only one I have found that I can ask. So if you can't answer please reply anyway. Thank you very much.*

How would you feel if you were this young woman's mom or dad? Do you think it's too late to have a heart-to-heart discussion with her?

Of course not. Where are the responsible adults in her life? What worries me as a psychologist is how casually (and parenthetically) she mentions that her boyfriend ejaculated in her mouth, apparently unaware of the risk of HIV and STD transmission. These are not easy topics to discuss, but ignoring them or leaving it to the schools to handle alone certainly isn't the answer.

Information — especially accurate information — is power. Be honest, if you were to grade yourself on how well you've prepared your kids to deal with the topics of sex and relationship, how would you do? Would you get a passing score? Technically, we should be able to discuss sexual issues as easily as we discuss our kid's dietary choices — broccoli or nachos? If we want our kids to have it better than we had, let's not leave them with the same shame and embarrassment we may have felt about sex when we were growing up. Let's not wait for the “right time,” because it's usually too late. The median age of puberty is about 12 and, depending on the stats you reference, about 27 percent of 13-16 year olds are sexually active. And while teen pregnancy may be down nationally, kids are still having kids at alarming rates.

So why not sit down with your teens and say,

“Let's read this article in the Courant together and talk. Is this really how things are with kids today?” And after you do, please let me know how it worked out. If you don't know the answer to some of their questions, look it up together. What's the worst that could happen? Better yet, what's the best that could happen?

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## To Ask A Question ...

Our intimate relationships and sexual health are intensely personal concerns that many people find difficult to discuss. Please think of this as a safe place to have those concerns addressed.

Write to me in confidence at:  
AskDrScantling@aol.com.

Feel free to ask me whatever is on your mind regarding sexual wellness, health, intimacy and relationship -- mind, body or spirit. The large volume of e-mail I receive makes answering individual letters impossible, but your questions will help me identify the subjects most important to you and other NE Magazine readers. Some readers' letters will be chosen for publication and reply in the column. They will be edited to eliminate names and other personal identifying information.