

## Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Programs For Teen Healthy Relationships and Sexual Health

This tip sheet provides suggestions for different ways to engage parents, guardians, and caregivers in teen pregnancy prevention programs. The literature shows that it's important for parents to be involved in teen pregnancy prevention efforts and to help parents have conversations with their teens about healthy relationships and their sexual health. This tip sheet accompanies a set of conversation cards that parents can use to start conversations about different topics related to sexual health and relationships with their teens.

Adolescence encompasses the transition between childhood dependency and adult independence, and the evolution from family-centered relationships to peer-centered relationships to adult relationships, partnerships and marriage. Our goal for adolescents should be to help them to achieve **optimal health**, which has a holistic focus with the aim of attaining the best possible health outcomes by promoting healthier behaviors and not merely the absence of disease. When applying an optimal health model to sexual health, we define sexual health as a state of physical, mental, social, spiritual, and intellectual health and well-being. Therefore, in adolescents, we apply a primary prevention or risk avoidance model of preventing illness and/or behaviors before they are initiated. While this is the overall message to the population, optimal sexual health messages for adolescents should be family-centered, age appropriate, and culturally informed; identifying each individual's path towards better health.



### Things to Keep in Mind

Parents and caregivers want to be engaged in the conversation but do not necessarily know how. They are often uncomfortable with the topic of conversation and may rely on schools or community-based programs to address this topic with their children. It's important to support and encourage parents and caregivers to have these conversations.

Parents and caregivers have a powerful role in supporting their teen's health, development and learning. When parents and caregivers are engaged in their teens' school activities, their teens get better grades, choose healthier behaviors, and have better social skills. School health activities are also more successful when parents and caregivers are involved.

There may be barriers to parent, guardian, or caregiver participation in school- or community-based events that schools and organizations can help to address. These barriers include family finances, transportation, and childcare.



# Supporting Your Parents and Caregivers

---



## Engage parents where they are

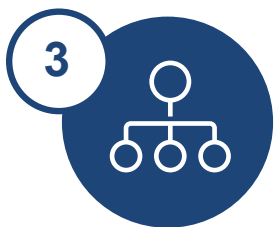
Meet parents in the community and not necessarily within a school setting. Not all parents feel welcomed in those settings or may face other barriers. Make sure the invitation to parents is truly inviting and caters to how parents take in information (e.g., posters, e-mail blasts, text messaging, etc.).

- i. *School Settings.* Some parents do not feel comfortable meeting in school as it may not feel like a welcoming environment. It may be possible to change this perception by engaging parents and caregivers using school-based activities that are positive in nature (e.g., family skills-building workshops, family dinners, award ceremonies, etc.). Using these engagement techniques can allow them to view school as a place for positive information and interaction.
- ii. *Community Settings.* While there are some commonalities, each community is unique. Organizations should experiment with a variety of community engagement techniques to find what works best to increase engagement. Working with other community organizations to understand what resonates with the community is a good start.



## Meet parents' basic needs, such as housing, childcare, and transportation first and then provide additional education and resources

Provide childcare and food and use incentives when possible. Locate engagement activities near accessible public transportation or in local establishments that are easily accessible for parents with limited access to transportation.



## Encourage and help parents to develop a network of support

Help parents find support by coordinating with school counselors and other community support organizations.



## Give parents opportunities to connect with each other

Use Parent Teacher Association meetings, parent/teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, school open houses, and other events where parents are already convening to start discussions among parents, guardians, and caregivers. Additionally, help create or use existing social media platforms to start discussions around teen healthy relationships and sexual health programs. For example, you can use existing Facebook groups/communities or create a new Facebook group with a discussion board to provide a space for parents, guardians, and caregivers to communicate with one another about their experiences, questions, and concerns.



## Partner with parents and parent groups

Utilize the community and existing community groups (formal or informal). Partner with organizations that already have strong parent engagement. Utilize community organizations, such as places of worship, community centers, libraries, kids' sports leagues, or other types of organizations where parents tend to congregate within the community. Parents are more likely to come to places in the community that are comfortable for them.

---

## Supporting Your Parents and Caregivers

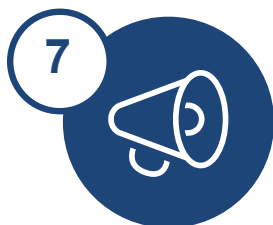
---



### Create structured opportunities for parents and their children to talk

Examples include parent-youth workshops or events and take-home assignments to discuss topics specific to relationships and sexual education.

---



### Deliver ongoing communication with parents through school relationships

Cultivating a positive relationship between your organization and schools is essential for success. Schools are the best connectors to parents and caregivers. Keep a rhythm of outreach to parents and caregivers by piggybacking on materials, e-mail blasts, and social media posts sent out by the school to promote teen healthy relationship and sexual health programs, upcoming parent nights, parent information sessions, and other events and touch points.

---



### Tailor parent materials to be culturally appropriate

Any materials created to engage parents, such as workshop materials and messaging on message boards, should be culturally tailored to ensure all parents feel included and welcomed to participate. Consider translating materials or finding translated materials to meet the specific cultural and demographic needs of parents/caregivers in the community.

---



### Leverage key cultural celebrations important to families/parents by creating a partnership with key gatekeepers, such as religious and community leaders

Events and celebrations may include graduation or other award ceremonies, prom and graduation night events, and cultural events, such as Quinceañera and Bar or Bat Mitzvah events.

---

# Citations

---

Burns, J.C., & Caldwell, C.H. (2016). Breaking the ice! Predictors about communication between nonresident African American fathers and sons about sex. *J Am Assoc Nurse Pract.*, 28(2):84-90. doi: 10.1002/2327-6924.12252. Epub 2015 Apr 4.

Center for Relationship Education. (2019). SMARTool 2.0: Assessing Potential Effectiveness for Sexual Risk Avoidance Curricula and Programs. Denver, CO: Center for Relationship Education. Available at <https://www.myrelationshipcenter.org/getmedia/dbed93af-9424-4009-8f1f-8495b4aba8b4/SMARTool-Curricula.pdf.aspx>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2020). Parents for Healthy Schools. Atlanta: CDC. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/parentsforhealthyschools/p4hs.htm>

Coakley, T.M., Randolph, S.D., Coard, S.I., & Ritchwood, T.D. (2019). Principal Sources of Information African American Fathers Draw Upon to Inform their Sons about Sex and Sexual Health Risks. *J Natl Med Assoc.*, pii: S0027-9684(19)30055-0. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1016/j.jnma.2019.04.001.

Crocker, B.S.C., Pit, S.W., Hansen, V., John-Leader, F., & Wright, M.L. (2019). A positive approach to adolescent sexual health promotion: a qualitative evaluation of key stakeholder perceptions of the Australian Positive Adolescent Sexual Health (PASH) Conference. *BMC Public Health.*, 19(1):681. doi: 10.1186/s12889-019-6993-9.

Ohalette, N., Georges, J., & Doswell, W. (2010). Tales from the "hood:" placing reproductive health communication between African American fathers and children in context. *ABNF J*, 21(1):14-20.

Randolph, S.D., Coakley, T., Shears, J., & Thorpe, R.J., Jr. (2017). African-American Fathers' Perspectives on Facilitators and Barriers to Father-Son Sexual Health Communication. *Res Nurs Health*, 40(3):229-236. doi: 10.1002/nur.21789. Epub 2017 Feb 21.

Stauss, K., Boyas, J., & Murphy-Erby, Y. (2012). Implementing and evaluating a rural community-based sexual abstinence program: challenges and solutions. *Sex Education*, 12(1):47-63. doi 10.1080/14681811.2011.601158.

Sutton, M.Y., Lasswell, S.M., Lanier, Y., & Miller, K.S. (2014). Impact of parent-child communication interventions on sex behaviors and cognitive outcomes for black/African-American and Hispanic/Latino youth: a systematic review, 1988-2012. *J Adolesc Health.*, 54(4):369-84. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.11.004. Epub 2014 Jan 1.