



Talking to your  
teenager about

# sexuality

& sexual health

  
Newfoundland  
Labrador

A Guide for **PARENTS**  
and **CAREGIVERS**

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## The **MEANING** of sexuality

The term **sexuality** refers to more than sexual intercourse or being sexually active.

Sexuality involves a person's entire mind and body, as well as their sex organs. For children and young people, sexuality is shaped by the family and society. It includes:

- values
- attitudes
- behaviors
- physical appearance
- body image
- feelings
- personality
- spiritual beliefs

Sexuality is an important part of a person's health and well-being.

Learning about sexuality and sexual health helps children and young people become healthy adults. Sex education is a key way to provide young people with the knowledge and skills they need to enjoy good sexual health.

# YOUR ROLE as a parent/caregiver

In this booklet, the word “parent” includes anyone who is in a parent role.

Parents want to give their teens knowledge and guidance to help them become responsible and secure adults. As a parent, you may be fearful about talking to your teenager about sexuality because:

1. **You may not be comfortable** talking about sexual body parts and what they do. For many parents, sex was NOT a topic that your own parents discussed when you were growing up.
2. You wonder if talking about sex with your teenager will **encourage them to experiment**. In fact, the opposite may be true. Young people with parents who discuss all aspects of sexuality with them tend to delay being sexually active, compared to youth with parents that never discuss sexuality.
3. You may not be sure what your teen **already knows** or **needs to know**.

From the day they are born, children learn many things from you about sexuality. Children learn from:

- the way parents and other adults touch them
- the way they feel about their own bodies
- what their family believes is okay and not okay to do, and
- words that family members use (and do not use) to refer to body parts.

At the most basic level, children learn about sexuality from the relationships they observe all around them.

Today’s teens are also learning a lot from sources outside the family, such as:

- movies and TV
- the internet
- their friends, and
- their own lives.

# Helping your teen **GROW UP** sexually healthy

Most parents hope their teen will make positive choices based on the values that their family shares. By talking about your family's values and beliefs, you will be helping your teen grow up sexually healthy. Parents are very important role models in a teen's life.

As a parent, ask yourself:

- Does my teen **know** what I believe?
- Have I talked with my teen about sexuality and **our family's values** in an honest way?

If you decide to spend time talking about sexuality with your family, here are a few tips:

- Choose a quiet time when no one is feeling rushed.
- Treat each other with respect.
- Really listen to each other.
- Be honest.
- Share the reasons for your beliefs.

You can help your teen to grow up to be sexually healthy by:

- Encouraging them to feel good about who they are and about their body.
- Helping them to develop a positive body image.
- Helping them express their feelings.
- Being patient and ready to hear what they have to say.
- Talking about what makes any relationship a healthy one.
- Stating your family's values.

Other ways to help teens:

- Encourage them to make their own decisions, even when their friends may not agree.
- Help them to learn that all decisions have consequences (and that decisions they make about relationships and sex may have very important consequences).
- Help them to develop a personal value system (and accept that it may be different from yours!).
- Speak frankly about the distorted way sexual relationships are shown in the media.
- Respect their need for privacy (by not demanding to know intimate details).
- Show that you trust and respect them.

# TALKING


## about sex with your teenager

Most young people want their parents to provide them with information about sex and sexuality. But they are not sure how to raise the subject or start the conversation.

Maybe you feel the same way! As a parent, you need to accept that it is your job to help your teen understand sexuality.

### → Tips for talking about sex with your teen

Inform yourself	You do not have to be an expert! But you may need to get more information. In many cases, parents and teens can find the answers together. Answer questions in a direct and honest way, without judgment.
Accept the awkwardness	Yes, it feels awkward and embarrassing to talk to your teen about sex. Accept that this is so. Then do it anyway!
Include the feelings	Along with facts, you need to be clear with your teenager that sexuality is very much about feelings, relationships, and how other people can be affected.
Have resources on hand	Be sure there are books or videos in your home that provide accurate information. When teens won't talk to their parents, they may be willing to read a booklet, watch a video, or go to a website that you have previewed and give to them. Make sure you do this preview and ensure the information you provide is aimed at teenagers.
State your values	Tell your teen what your values are—and expect those values to be challenged! Teenagers want to be independent. They are forming their own identity.

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- **BE AWARE** of moments that arise when you can share your views. This might happen when you and your teen are watching TV, reading a magazine, or listening to the radio.
  - **BE CLEAR** about the fact that there is only one way to fully protect ourselves from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. **It's by not having any sexual contact with a partner.** It's also true that using condoms can reduce, but not fully remove, the risks.
  - **SEE** the section **Danger! Sexual Health at Risk** for more information on what teens can do to help protect themselves from STIs and HIV/AIDS.
  - **VISIT** the **Resources** section to find out what's available in Newfoundland and on the internet.

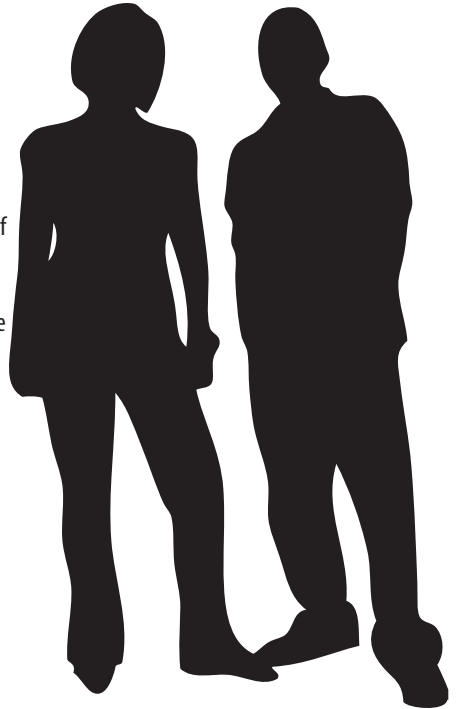
# Sexual **DEVELOPMENT** in teens

## What to expect in pre-teens aged **9 to 12**

- The changes of puberty may begin.
- May become more modest and seek privacy.
- May experience concerns about body image.
- May have more sexual feelings and fantasies.
- May develop a crush on friends, older teens, teachers, musicians, or movie stars.
- May direct romantic feelings to people of the opposite sex.
- May direct romantic feelings to people of the same sex.
- May explore sexual contact with peers.
- May masturbate to orgasm.
- May have to face decisions about sex and drugs.

## What to expect in teens aged **13 to 18**

- The changes of puberty end. Most boys develop about two years later than girls.
- Become more aware of physical appearance.
- Want to be independent. Value their independence.
- Have more sexual feelings.
- May be more influenced by peer groups. Being accepted by peers is very important.
- May be interested in or may become part of a romantic relationship.
- Desire physical closeness with a partner.
- May face peer pressure to be sexually active whether or not they feel ready.
- May prefer romantic relationship to close friendship.
- May make choices that could lead to pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STIs).



# DANGER! Sexual health at risk


When teens begin to have sexual contact with a partner, they may find that the world contains a whole new kind of “alphabet soup.”

STIs are sexually transmitted infections. Some of the most common ones are:

- **HPV** – the Human Papillomavirus can cause warts on the sex organs of both males and females. The warts can be treated but they may return. What’s more serious is the fact that HPV is the main cause of cancer of the cervix in women. Once your daughter is sexually active, Pap tests are recommended to detect changes in which the cervix might develop into cancer. Thousands of young women across Canada receive the HPV vaccine in school or at a clinic to help protect them from HPV.
- **Herpes** – a virus that causes sores on the sex organs or the face (cold sores). There is no cure. People will have the virus for the rest of their lives.
- **Chlamydia** – a bacterial infection that is spread through sexual contact. It can be treated with antibiotics.
- **Gonorrhea** – a bacterial infection that is spread through sexual contact. It can be treated with antibiotics.
- **HIV/AIDS** – HIV is a virus that spreads from person-to-person through sexual fluids and blood. It can cause AIDS, a disease that may destroy the person’s immune system. Fewer people die of AIDS now, thanks to new drugs that control its symptoms.

Your teen needs to know that STIs can be spread by kissing, skin-to-skin contact, oral sex, vaginal sex, and anal sex. Many people who have STIs do not know they have an infection. They can pass it to a partner if they engage in oral, vaginal, or anal sex without a condom or dental dam. A dental dam is a square piece of latex used to cover the vagina or anus.





To reduce the spread of STIs, both male and female teens should be aware that:

- HPV, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and herpes can be spread through oral sex.
- Herpes can be spread through both kissing and oral sex.
- HIV/AIDS is more likely to spread through anal or vaginal sex, or by sharing infected needles or other “works” during drug use.
- Using a condom will help to protect teens from STIs and pregnancy. Males can wear a condom during oral, vaginal, or anal sex.
- A dental dam can be used during oral sex.

Some parents buy condoms and tell their teen where the condoms are stored. If you do this and ask no questions about when or how they are used, you may be helping them feel comfortable about using condoms.



**VISIT** the Resources section of this booklet to find out where you can learn more about STIs.

## Teens and BIRTH CONTROL

All teens who have sexual intercourse with a partner need to know how to prevent pregnancy. Condoms help to prevent pregnancy. They also help to protect your son or daughter from STIs and HIV/AIDS.

### → The male condom

What is it?	How does it work?	How well does it prevent pregnancy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ A soft tube that fits over the erect penis. It is used once and then thrown away.</li><li>→ Sold in different sizes, shapes, thicknesses, colours, and flavours.</li><li>→ Most condoms are made of latex. For those who are allergic to latex, condoms made of polyurethane (soft plastic) or silicone, are available.</li><li>→ Sold in stores, pharmacies, and online.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Creates a physical barrier that prevents body fluids from passing between partners. It reduces skin-to-skin contact between penis and vagina. This helps to protect both people from disease.</li><li>→ A new condom must be used for each act of intercourse.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ The condom is 98% effective when used perfectly every time you have sex.</li><li>→ With average use, it is 85% effective.</li></ul>

## → The female condom

What is it?	How does it work?	How well does it prevent pregnancy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ A soft plastic tube that fits into a woman's vagina. It is made of polyurethane.</li> <li>→ Sold online and in some stores and pharmacies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ The woman places it in her vagina before sexual intercourse.</li> <li>→ It lines the vagina and prevents direct contact between penis and vagina. It also stops body fluids from mixing.</li> <li>→ A new condom must be used for each act of intercourse.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ The female condom is 95% effective when used perfectly.</li> <li>→ With average use, it is 79% effective.</li> </ul>

If your teen is female, she has many birth control choices available to her. Other common forms of birth control include:

- Hormonal methods such as The Pill, patch, ring, or injection, and
- Intrauterine devices such as the copper IUD or the IUD system.

Emergency contraception is also an important option to know about.

## → Emergency Birth Control (Plan B\*)

What is it?	How does it work?	How well does it prevent pregnancy?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Two pills are taken as soon as possible after having sex without any form of birth control.</li> <li>→ Often called the "morning after pill."</li> <li>→ The pills must be taken within 3 days of having sex without birth control or method failure.</li> <li>→ Sold in pharmacies without a prescription.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Changes the mucus in a woman's cervix so that it becomes "hostile" to sperm.</li> <li>→ Makes the lining of the uterus thinner so that a fertilized egg will not implant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Up to 99% of women who take the correct number of pills at the right time will be able to avoid an unwanted pregnancy.</li> <li>→ If the woman does become pregnant, the pills will not harm the fetus or stop the pregnancy.</li> </ul>

# ALCOHOL and DRUG use

Most parents are wise to wonder when and how their teens will experiment with sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. While loud music may damage young ears, mixing alcohol, drugs, and sex can have serious and long term effects on someone's mental, emotional, and sexual health. Teens who use alcohol and drugs are more likely to have sex, to have sex at younger ages, and to have more sex partners.

- Young people who drink alcohol are 7 times more likely to have sex with a partner than those who abstain.
- Teens who use drugs are 5 times more likely to have sex with a partner.
- A person is incapable of consent to sexual activity when under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Alcohol and drugs may affect a person's judgment. Your teen may be aware of the dangers of STIs and might normally use birth control. But when using alcohol or drugs, many teens "forget" to protect themselves.


Date rape is more and more common in Canada. Drugs like GHB (known as "liquid ecstasy") and Ketamine (known as "Special K") can be slipped into someone's drink at a party or a bar. The drugs take effect quickly. While the victim is unconscious, the sexual assault takes place. Victims often have no memory of what happened.

Much more common than date rape is for young people to drink too much alcohol (or take drugs) and then be the victim of a sexual assault. This can happen to both men and women.

## → Facts about sexual assault

- The most commonly used sexual assault drug in Canada is alcohol.
- Marijuana is the second most commonly used drug.





## The effects of sexual assault

- Women tend to blame themselves.
- If they were drinking alcohol, their memory of what happened may be fuzzy, so they do not report the crime.
- Most victims do not tell anyone about the assault. They just try to forget that it happened.
- The emotional damage can last a long time. Trust and self-esteem may be hard to rebuild.
- Long-term effects of a sexual assault may be pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection.

About 75% of all rapes in Canada are committed by a date or someone that the victim knows.

As a parent, you can help your son or daughter avoid the dangerous mix of sex and drugs. Remind them of these safety tips:

- Carry your drink with you at all times while at a bar or party or have a friend hold it (so no one can tamper with it).
- Watch for signs that someone may have added something to your drink. If you feel giddy or very sleepy, your drink may have been “spiked” with a drug.
- Use a buddy system where two or three people agree to keep track of each other during a night out.
- Have a designated driver who will be able to take people home right away or to hospital if you suspect your drink was drugged.



## The **INTERNET** and sex

Millions of Canada's teens use Instant Messaging, Facebook, and My Space every day. As the parent of a teen, you may not have a clear sense of all the ways that young people are exposed to sexual images and "sex talk" while sitting in front of a computer. Cell phones with Internet access—and text messaging—mean that teens do not need to be at home to be harassed, exploited, or threatened. The Internet offers people who want to sexually exploit teens an easy way to get into young minds and hearts.

As a parent, here's what you can do to protect your teen from sexual exploitation on-line:

- Communicate often with your teen and build trust. They need to know that they can tell you about anything that scares them or makes them feel uncomfortable.
- Create boundaries. Teens who limit their Internet and cell phone contact to people they know in person (from school, sports, or other activities), may be safer than those who "chat" with strangers through Instant Messaging or text messaging.
- Keep the computer in a public part of your home. Do not allow teens to have a computer in their bedroom or other private place.
- Insist on a reality check. Make it clear to your teen that the strangers they meet on-line may NOT be who they say they are.

## → Internet safety rules for teens

No personal details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Your teen should not tell people on-line where they go to meet friends, eat, play sports, or exercise.</li><li>→ They must not provide on-line “friends” with an address or phone number that would allow someone to contact them in real life.</li></ul>
No pictures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Your teen should only send Webcam and cell phone images to people they know in real life.</li><li>→ Some predators ask teens to send them “sexy” pictures. Then, they threaten to send the pictures to parents or others as a way of manipulating the teen.</li><li>→ No modeling agency or theatre group will ask a teen to provide a picture on the Internet. If someone asks your teen for such an image, report this to police.</li></ul>
No meetings in person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>→ Your teen should never arrange a meeting with someone they met on-line UNLESS they take an adult with them and meet in a public place.</li></ul>

## → The law is on your teens side!

Canada and many other countries in the world have ratified The Convention on the Rights of the Child. It applies to every person under the age of 18 and clearly states that **young people have a right to be protected from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.**

Although you may think that the Internet crosses all national borders and that laws do not protect teens in Canada, here’s how Canadian law protects teens:

- Communicating with someone under the age of 18 with the goal of getting sexual services is against the law.
- It is illegal to use a computer to lure someone under 18 into sexual activities.
- Giving money to anyone under the age of 18 for any sexual activity is considered sexual abuse. This kind of sexual abuse is illegal in Canada and in most other countries.

# Resources

## Newfoundland and Labrador

Information on sexual health is available from your local community health offices. To learn more about Eastern Health's public health clinic on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in St. John's, call 752-4882.

To obtain additional printed resources on topics covered in this booklet contact:

- Eastern Health: St. John's: 709-752-4907  
*email: [hpresourcecenter.stjohns@easternhealth.ca](mailto:hpresourcecenter.stjohns@easternhealth.ca)*  
Holyrood: 709-229-1578  
*e-mail: [hpresourcecenter.rural@easternhealth.ca](mailto:hpresourcecenter.rural@easternhealth.ca)*
- Central Health: 709-651-6237
- Western Health: 709-637-5000 Ext.5492
- Labrador Grenfell Health: 709-897-2330

## Other resources include:

- Planned Parenthood NL Sexual Health Centre, St. John's.  
Phone 579-1009 or toll-free 1-877-NO MYTHS (1-877-666-9847)  
Services include pregnancy testing, physician clinics, and education.  
*[www.nlsexualhealthcentre.org](http://www.nlsexualhealthcentre.org)*
- AIDS Committee of NL, located at the Tommy Sexton Centre, St. John's.  
Phone 579-8656 or toll free 1-800-563-1575  
*[www.acnl.net](http://www.acnl.net)*
- PFLAG Canada  
This national organization was founded by parents to support understanding and acceptance of their non-heterosexual children. There is a Newfoundland contact link on the national website.  
*[www.pflagcanada.ca](http://www.pflagcanada.ca)*
- Provincial Cervical Screening Initiatives Program, NL  
Toll free 1-866-643-8719  
Resources for schools, public health, service providers,educators.  
*<http://westernhealth.nl.ca/index.php/programs-and-services/services-a-z/provincial-cervical-screening-initiatives-program>*

## Websites we recommend



### Sexual Health

- Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (SOGC)  
<http://www.sexualityandu.ca>
- Canadian Federation for Sexual Health  
<http://www.cfsh.ca>
- Public Health Agency Canada (PHAC)  
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/sex/index-eng.php>
- Peel Public Health (Region of Peel, Ontario)  
<http://www.peelregion.ca/health/topics/sexual/sexuality.htm>
- Body Image Network  
<http://www.bodyimagenetwork.ca/#>
- Cervical Screening Initiatives NL  
<http://westernhealth.nl.ca/index.php/programs-and-services/services-a-z/provincial-cervical-screening-initiatives-program>



### Birth Control and Sexually Transmitted Infections

- SOGC  
<http://sexualityandu.ca/teens/contraception.aspx>
- Planned Parenthood NL Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)  
<http://www.nlsexualhealthcentre.org/>
- PHAC  
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/std-mts/index-eng.php>



### Alcohol and Drugs

- Addictions Services NL  
<http://www.getuponit.ca/en/>
- Drug Prevention Strategy, Government of Canada  
<http://www.nationalantidrugstrategy.gc.ca/parents/parents.html>

## References

The statistics on how alcohol and drug use increase the likelihood of teen sexual contact come from ***Dangerous Liaisons: Substance Abuse and Sex***, published by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA), funded by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, New York: December 1999.

- Canadian Red Cross website ([www.redcross.ca](http://www.redcross.ca)): information on Sex and the Internet.
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada website ([www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)): information on STIs and birth control.
- Public Health Agency of Canada website ([www.phac-aspc.ca](http://www.phac-aspc.ca)): statistics on STIs.



# Regional Health Authorities

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St. John's Telephone: 709-752-4937

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