

A LINE ON LIFE

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Adolescent Sex Myths*

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Adolescence is often a time of ambivalent sexual feelings, unrewarding relationships, and unwanted pregnancy. Some widely held myths among young people seem to perpetuate these problems. Here are some of these myths.

Myth. Sex produces instant adulthood.

Facts. In their desire to become adults quickly, some adolescents believe that engaging in adult activities (sexual intercourse, smoking, drinking alcohol, driving, etc.) will make them adults. With sex, it leads to two bad effects. It may push teenagers into situations they do not want — romantic commitments, pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases. On the other hand, if teenagers feel these activities have actually made them fully mature, it may inhibit their growth and development in other areas.

Myth. Sex means love.

Facts. Young women are more likely to believe that love and sex go together. Teenagers may feel sexual advances indicate love and commitment and are very disappointed when this is not the case. Or they may feel that love (which is not necessary for sex) will be an inevitable outcome of having sexual intercourse. Young people often believe that if you have sex with someone, he or she will be more likely to love them. While it does happen at times, it more often leads to feelings of disappointment and possibly betrayal.

Myth. "No" means "Yes."

Facts. Many guys feel that they must take advantage of every sexual opportunity to prove their masculinity. In addition, they believe that most women who say "no" really mean "yes." As a result, "date rape" is very prevalent, though most cases go unreported. In fear of offending the man, some women may actually *smile* while saying "no," giving him conflicting messages. Others find it extremely difficult to openly say "no" and wind up in passively squirming and retreating without saying anything. The most effective and assertive response to an unwanted sexual advance would be to say, "*Although I like you, I definitely do not want to have sexual intercourse.*" This does not damage the fellow's ego, and it indicates her wishes clearly and firmly.

Myth. I can't get pregnant.

Facts. Typically because of guilt feelings about sex, many sexually active teenagers make no (or inadequate) attempts at contraception. This myth is based on the lack of factual information plus the use of denial (unconsciously refusing to see a stressful situation) as a defense against anxiety. As may occur with driving, drugs or pregnancy, many adolescents have an illusion of invulnerability. Although it may happen to others, "*it won't happen to me.*" In contrast, some unconsciously want a pregnancy — as proof of masculinity or femininity, desire for adult status, revenge toward parents or a former lover, or a fantasy that a baby will fulfill their need to be loved.

Myth. Condoms allow no feelings.

Facts. Many sexually active teenagers are resistant to using condoms (rubbers) for birth control. This is primarily true for those who have never used condoms. The younger boys listen to the older boys, mimic their words, and come to believe that "*real men*" are not supposed to like condoms. The reality is that they detract somewhat from the man's physical stimulation, but not from the woman's. However, anything that is perceived psychologically as unpleasurable (including condoms) can reduce the satisfaction in any interaction. Even so, this relates more to expectations of the situation rather than the physical effects of the condom. As an added feature, the **latex condom** (used correctly) is the best protection against sexually transmitted diseases — including AIDS — outside of abstaining from sex.

**Whether we want them to or not,
our children will learn about sex.
If parents openly discuss sexuality with their children,
they can greatly influence what their children learn.**

An Adult Sexual Myth. Knowledge leads to sexual activity.

Facts. Some parents and other adults are reluctant to give young people accurate sexual information. They fear that knowledge about sexuality leads to premature sexual activity — or that talking openly about sex stimulates casual sexual relationships. Whether or not sexual information is given, a certain portion of teenagers will be sexually active.

Adults who try to protect their children from the information that they need to make responsible sexual decisions simply push sexually active adolescents toward irresponsible sex. Talking about sexual issues openly encourages responsibility. Timely, effective sex education — rather than too little information given too late — helps to postpone first sexual intercourse, helps prevent pregnancy and sexual diseases when sexual activity does begin, and develops increased respect for one's self and others.

There is no question of whether your children will receive information about sex; the only question is how. An informal sex education from peers and the media is riddled with confusion and misinformation. With effective sexual education from home and school, adolescents can be provided with factual information to make wise decisions about their behavior. **This is not a myth.**

* Adapted from Byer, Shainberg & Jones' *Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1988, page 397-399.