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Talking to Teens and Young Adults with Bleeding Disorders About Safer Sex

Learn why and how you should have these tough conversations.

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 Family Matters

With abortion access restricted in many states and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) on the rise nationwide, having a conversation with your teen or young adult about **safer sex** has never been more important.

The statistics are startling: The U.S. has one of the **highest rates of teen pregnancy** in the developed world. While HIV/AIDS was once the main STI concern for hemophilia treatment centers, today chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HPV are more common, says Diane Bartlett, LCSW, program manager and social worker at St. Luke's Hemophilia Center in Boise, Idaho.

“The two age groups with the highest risk for STIs are adolescents to young adults and those over age 65,” Bartlett says. Half of all new cases of STIs occur in people ages 15 to 24, according to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**.

Don't expect schools to cover sex education, says Joseph Stanco, DNP, FNP-BC, CPI, a family nurse practitioner with Northwell Health Hemostasis and Thrombosis Center in New Hyde Park, New York. Only 30 states and the District of Columbia require sex education in middle school or high school. Even then, the information your child receives may be limited. “It's really up to parents,” Stanco says. “And studies over the last decades have shown parents have a positive influence on their child's sexual behavior.”

Here's when and how to have these necessary conversations:

1. Talk early and often.

Beginning in early childhood and continuing throughout your child's life, use age-appropriate and medically accurate language to discuss anatomy, consent, and safe touch. “Children will start talking about sex around 9 to 10 years of age, with their friends and on the playground, so parents want to have some of these conversations prior to that,” Bartlett says.

2. Discuss consent.

Talk to your child about what consent means and what that looks like in a healthy relationship, Bartlett says. Role-playing can help teens and young adults recognize unsafe situations and learn to speak up and set boundaries.

3. Use sexual content in TV shows, movies, and social media as a discussion springboard.

“This way, it doesn't call out your child personally. It's a more neutral approach,” Bartlett says.

4. Avoid shaming or blaming.

Use neutral and nonjudgmental language. Don't label normal **sexual health**, expression, and behaviors as gross or “dirty,” Bartlett says.

5. Identify another trusted adult.

Teens and young adults may feel more comfortable talking about sex with someone other than their parents.

6. Tap into HTC resources.

Sexual health education, including access to STI prevention tools, screening, and treatment, is part of the care that all HTCs provide for patients throughout their lives. HTC chapters often hold events focused on sexual health that parents and children can attend together.

HTCs are especially beneficial for children who fear coming out to their parents as LGBTQ+. “We always encourage children to speak to their parents and involve them in their care, but there are times when it may not be in their best interest,” Stanco says. “We create a space so this is comfortable and confidential.”

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