

Meagan Sanders

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Needs Assessment

Parents and teens often struggle in communicating regarding sex. At a youth conference done in Pennsylvania, teens said that it was easier to talk to peers about sex than it was to talk to their parents (Fay & Yanoff, 2000, pp.170). Talking about sex between parents and children seems to be a struggle that many American families face. With a public school system that offers sex education classes it seems that there would be no need. From the same conference, “Many [youth] saw the school as having the responsibility to fill the role of ‘someone to talk to’...However, few had anything good to say about their school’s efforts to supplement the parent’s role” (Fay & Yanoff, 2000, pp. 170). It seems that there is still a need for parents to be a portion of their child’s sexual education.

It is important to recognize that many children are “parented” by those that may not be their mother and father. In today’s culture many other biological relatives, adoptive families or combination of people are taking on the role of “parent” for children. For the purposes of this anyone who is spends time taking care of a child and are in the eyes of the law are their legal guardian will be addressed as the child’s parent.

Before beginning in schools, it was left many up to the family to decide how children were educated. Prior to schools’ providing sex education people often used forums like churches and lectures to get information out. As attendance grew, public schools became a better option to

reach more young people. Sex education in schools began in the early 19th century; however, it looked very different from today's model. Due to fear of making the youth more curious about sex, the starts of education were focused on stifling that. Girls and boys were placed in separate classes and given not only the health facts but also a lecture on practicing good morals and the dangers of sex outside marriage. In 1913 Chicago became the first school district to implement a sex education program; this began at debate that is still very prevalent today. Both those for and opposed to sex education agreed that young adult sexuality was a problem; however they had differing views on how to deal with. The opposition argued that bring up such a topic would lead students down a path of immorality; where as those who argued for it believed that if students were taught the scientific facts regarding reproduction they would have a better moral compass (Morgan, 2000).

During the 1920s there was a struggle as American ideas toward whether sex is meant only for reproduction or if it were also for pleasure during marriage. This struggle continued until the time of WWII when the spread of sexually transmitted diseases lessened. Sex education then became about the more positive aspects of sex and how it pertained to marriage. With the 1960s and 1970s the sexual revolution begun; again changing the American culture around sex. Premarital sex, pregnancy rates, and sexually transmitted diseases all begun to rise. In 1964 the Sexuality Information Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) was formed. They "believed that teaching about sexuality in a value-neutral manner would allow students to reach their own conclusions about sexual behavior and sexual morality" (Morgan, 2000). The 1980s brought HIV/AIDS into the spot light; bringing homosexuality into a public forum.

Today adolescence is defined as the ages between 10 and 19 (Goldman, 2008, pp.418). American schools now provided some sort of sex education, often within a mandatory health class – that also covers things regarding physical well being. Although there are reports that 94% of parents say they have talked to their children about sex, only about 9% believe they have given adequate information (Goldman, 2008, pp.420). Schools seem to be still the main source of education for young people.

As stated earlier, teens do not feel that the school system is fulfilling their needs when it comes to this topic. So it is then left up to other sources. Many youth can not see regular doctors, and organizations – like Planned Parenthood – do not have the resources to get to every child. Parents are often then left with the responsibility. Parents who are reluctant to talk to their children about sex feel, “chastised for not being sufficiently informed about the topic” (Cates, 2008, pp.137). With this lack of confidence many parents miss valuable opportunities to talk about sex with their child. One doctor said, “Children, I think, by nature are very curious and they start asking questions. And if parents are not even comfortable answering them, then they just stop asking” (Cates, 2008, pp.137).

If a parent does find the courage to talk about sex with their child, it often comes to late. In the study “Timing of Parent and Child Communication About Sexuality Relative to Children’s Sexual Behaviors,” greater than 40% said that their parents sex talk had come only after they were already sexually active (website). Although this is very small sample, it does show an indication that talks with parents need to be happening sooner. It does seem that there is a need for parent to become better informed and more actively involved in regards to discussing this with their children.

One of the big things when it comes to talk with adolescences is remembering to be age appropriate. “Experts also say that parents should discuss certain issues with their children at age-appropriate times, and that the discussion should evolve as children mature” (Park, 2009). In keeping with the thought that parents should talk about what their child needs to know at the time, a parent must also put down the checklist. A parent does not need to go over every thing in one sitting. It is more effective it is an open forum, where questions can be answered and children feel they are able to talk about it again later. However, talking to your teen about sex is a complicated issue, and these two tips only touch the top of the iceberg.

Although there are sources online and some areas have agencies that are able to supply parents with tools to have “the talk” with their children there is still lacking a wide spread program to help parents broach this subject. A place where parents can have their questions answered not only about talking to their kids but also questions they might have regarding sex. It could be a place where parents and people from the community – including physicians, and agencies that work with youth around this topic – could discuss openly. It give parents a opportunity to find out the facts and help them decide if they want to talk about abstinence only or open it up. By giving parents the facts and information, it may help lessen the fear that they have about talking to their kids, which in turn would allow them to be another resource for their children.

In such a sexually driven culture, teens find themselves flooded with ideas of sex. The need for youth to have a wide variety of people to talk to about this subject becomes that much more important. The more resources they have available the better. “By valuing their opinions, we demonstrated to them that adults can and do want to listen to what they have to say about

sex” (Fay & Yanoff, 2000, pp. 177). Even with teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other youth related sex issues on the way down, there is still a need for an open line of dialogue between parent and child. With a program that gives parents the tools to talk with their children, it will give youth another option where they can get the facts about sex.

References

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