



shoulder to shoulder  
Raising Teens Together



[www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org](http://www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org)

## “TOUGH TALKS” WITH TEENS

It's not easy talking about sex, drugs, gangs and violence with our teens. But it's a “must do.” Here are a few pointers and tips for talking with teens about the very real issues they face.

### **TIMING IS EVERYTHING.**

Know that teens will catch us off guard when they decide to ask questions about sex or other “tough” topics. Resist the urge to flee. Try saying, “I'm glad you came to me with that question.” This gives us time to think of a response, and will let teens know they can come to parents for advice. It's important to answer the question right away, rather than put off a teen by saying something like – “you're too young to know that!” Chances are, the subject has already come up at school and they're already getting “advice” from their friends. When teens ask questions, look at it as an opportunity to help them learn by sharing our thoughts.

### **PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.**

As parents, anticipation is our best friend. Anticipate what teens' questions may be about sex, drugs or alcohol, then think about your responses ahead of time. What to say? It's different for each family, but become familiar with typical questions and behaviors that occur during the teen years. Do a little digging around popular teen Web sites to find out what's hot in a teen's world.

### **IS IT HOT IN HERE?**

If you're feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable about a question your teen asks, say so. Acknowledging your own discomfort allows your kids to acknowledge theirs – and may make everyone feel a little less awkward all around. It's also ok for parents to set limits. For example, you do not have to give specific answers about your own teen behaviors.

### **STICK TO THE BASICS.**

Teens know hundreds of names for various body parts that would make us blush. We shouldn't try to be cool by using these “hip” terms when talking to teens about tough topics. It won't work. Stick with specific and correct terminology that everyone understands.

### **INITIATE THE CONVERSATION.**

When our kids were young, we didn't wait until they asked if they should look both ways before crossing a busy street. We taught them. Now it's our job to teach teens how to grow into adulthood by educating them about possible risks – sex, drugs, racial profiling and more. Decide what is important for your teens to know, and then teach them early and often. Use everyday, naturally occurring events to initiate conversations with teens about tough topics. For example, books, news articles and TV shows can be good discussion starters.

### **WATCH FOR HIDDEN MEANING.**

Be aware of the “question behind the question.” For example, a question such as “Does this look ok?” may often be a teen's first attempt at trying to solve a specific problem such as feeling “normal”. Keep your radar up and trust your instincts – if you sense your teen is dealing with a larger issue, you're probably right. Learn about organizations that can help at [www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org](http://www.shouldertoshoulderminnesota.org).

### **BE CLEAR ABOUT YOUR VALUES.**

This doesn't mean “be judgmental.” Teens (*although they will protest*) want to and should know their family's values around sexual issues, alcohol use, dating, etc. They also should know that their opinions and feelings are respected.

### **RESEARCH THE SOURCES.**

Know what is taught about teen issues in your schools, churches, temples and youth groups – and Use this information as a way to talk with teens about your family's values. Are topics on sexuality, drug and alcohol use covered? Are they talking about depression, racial profiling or gang violence in these programs? If not, you should be filling in the holes as you see fit.

### **ACT NOW.**

Better “too much, too soon” than “too little, too late.” Talking to teens about tough issues in an open, honest and loving manner shouldn't cause fear, nor does it lead to experimentation among teens. Teens are hearing about sex, drugs and violence everywhere else. They deserve to hear it from us.

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