

4 They're really ready. Now what?

Your teen or youth has decided that they're in a healthy relationship. They've decided they're ready for sexual activity. They know where and how to access birth control and other forms of protection (contraceptives). And they know that waiting to become sexually active is a totally acceptable option. Now what?

You may not agree with your adolescent's decisions around sex, but your teen needs to know medically accurate sexual health information. In 2016, the number of births to Iowa adolescents rose for the first time in more than 10 years, making discussions about responsible sexual behavior critical. Sexual health safety must be part of your conversations, including providing information and resources regarding sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Remember, it's never too early to start the conversations. Normalizing sex dialogue is an important part of creating healthier relationships, better outcomes and ultimately, lowering unplanned pregnancy rates.

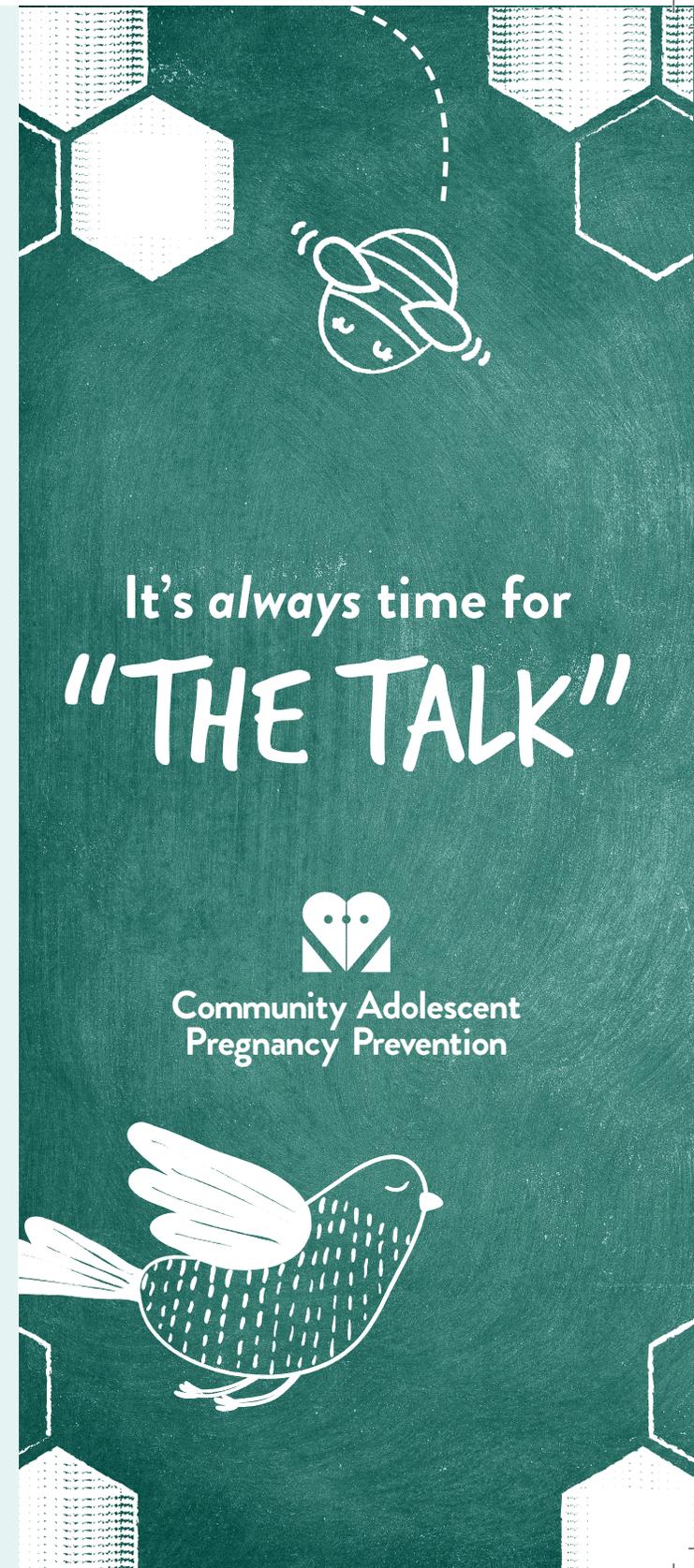


Conversation starters when talking with teens or youth.

- Does your partner consistently show respect for themselves? How?
- Does your partner consistently show respect for others? How?
- What are some signs of an unhealthy relationship?
- What would you do if you were in an unhealthy relationship?
- Have you and your partner ever talked about sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?
- Have you and your partner ever talked about birth control or other forms of protection (contraceptives)?
- How do you think a pregnancy would affect your life and future plans?

Prevent Child Abuse Iowa
501 SW 7th Street, Suite G
Des Moines, IA 50309

pcaiowa.org/prevention/capp



Starting the conversation.

Research shows that there's no magic wand to wave when it comes to preventing unplanned adolescent pregnancy. Parents and other trusted adults can have an influential role in helping teens and youth avoid negative, risky behaviors, including an unplanned pregnancy. Conversations regarding sex and healthy relationships need to start early and continue throughout adolescence. If you're not sure how to start these conversations or what to say, you're not alone!

To get the conversation started, we've provided four questions. Each one is meant to be a general starting point and should be tailored according to age and other relevant factors.

1 Are they in a healthy relationship?

It's important for young people to understand that the most important sex-related question to ask themselves isn't "Do I want to have sex?" or "Am I in love?" A healthy relationship is fundamental to sexual safety and there are several features of a healthy relationship to pay attention to:

- All activities, sexual or otherwise, are consensual
- Respect for self and others
- Roles seem balanced and fair
- They can disagree without abusive language
- They have freedom and independence
- They're good at establishing and respecting each other's boundaries

2 Are they really ready?

It's important not to wait for a teen to tell you that they're ready for sex but to instead watch for signs that they might be thinking about it.

- Are they expressing more interest in relationships?
- Are they asking questions or commenting on peer relationships?

This is the time when it's crucial to start normalizing discussions that center on safe, healthy sex practices in a nonjudgmental way. Resist the urge to talk **AT** them. Instead, be present, listen and share with them.

The key here is to have a conversation, not deliver a lecture. This won't be the only time you're going to talk about it so don't feel the need to get everything in all at once.

TIP: Talking to your teen can be uncomfortable. Don't get discouraged, just stay in the moment and know that what you say matters to them.

3 It's ok to not be ready.

It's important for teens and youth to understand that it's OK not to know when it's the "right time" to have sex or become involved in a sexual relationship. There is no certain age or magical time when they have to have sex. Even if all of their friends are in a sexual relationship, they can choose not to have sex. That is their choice.

Healthy relationships include consent. Consent is when someone agrees, gives permission, or says "yes" to sexual activity. Consent is always freely given and all people must feel that they are able to say "yes" or "no" to any sexual activity, at any point.

