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Collaboration to Promote Healthy Teen Development.

Abstract

The teen years are a transitional period for both teens and parents, particularly when there are special challenges and needs. Adults have great opportunities during this period to help teens transition positively into adulthood. While the key principles of healthy teen development have not changed over the years, the context in which teens develop has changed. The period of adolescence begins earlier today than in prior years, teens have more sporadic and less intense contact with parents than they did in the past, peers provide a strong sense of social support, schools are larger and less personal, and technology has increased the amount of information available to teens and presented challenges for parents to monitor what teens are exposed to (Steinberg, 2002). However, many teens are resilient in the face of the normative challenges during adolescence, especially if they have the support of one or more caring adults (Steinberg, 2001).

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Gender and Sexuality | Maternal and Child Health

Comments

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Collaboration to Promote Healthy Teen Development

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INTRODUCTION

The teen years are a transitional period for both teens and parents, particularly when there are special challenges and needs. Adults have great opportunities during this period to help teens transition positively into adulthood. While the key principles of healthy teen development have not changed over the years, the context in which teens develop has changed. The period of adolescence begins earlier today than in prior years, teens have more sporadic and less intense contact with parents than they did in the past, peers provide a strong sense of social support, schools are larger and less personal, and technology has increased the amount of information available to teens and presented challenges for parents to monitor what teens are exposed to (Steinberg, 2002). However, many teens are resilient in the face of the normative challenges during adolescence, especially if they have the support of one or more caring adults (Steinberg, 2001).

Healthy Teen Development (www.extension.iastate.edu/teen), a national satellite program, was developed to help parents and adults, who work with teens, better understand how teens develop and make decisions, the influences on sexual development, and the important role adults play in the lives of teens. Drs. Laurence Steinberg, Robert Blum, and Jennifer Oliphant, M.P.H., shared their research findings and applications during the program.

DIMENSIONS OF TEEN DEVELOPMENT

According to Steinberg (2002), there are the four key dimensions of teen development: health, intelligence, maturity, and connectedness, that need to be nurtured to help teens grow and develop into competent, caring adults. Teens need to have facts about lifestyles that promote health. Teens also need to have opportunities to acquire and practice healthy habits and skills to manage health risks (e.g. drinking alcohol). Related to intelligence, teens need opportunities to develop life, vocational, scholastic, critical thinking and decision making skills in everyday situations with the guidance and sup-

port of adults. To develop maturity, teens need guidance, role models and opportunities to manage their behavior, and establish a positive sense of self. Adults can also help create connectedness through caring relationships with others, attachments to social institutions (e.g., school) and a commitment to the larger society (e.g., donations to community and charitable causes).

TEEN SEXUALITY

Attributes that constitute sexual health in teens include: sexual development, reproductive health, ability to develop meaningful interpersonal relationships, ability to appreciate one's own body, ability to interact with both genders in respectful and appropriate ways, and an ability to express affection, love, and intimacy in accord with personal values. Adults can promote healthy sexual development by providing accurate information about sexuality, fostering responsible decision-making, offering guidance and support in exploring and maintaining personal values, and allowing access to comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive health care services (Oliphant, 2002).

Two of the strongest predictors of delayed and less frequent sexual intercourse among teens are parent/child connectedness and parent attitudes/values disapproving of teen intercourse (Blum, 2002). Youth development and peer education are two promising approaches to healthy sexuality. By actively involving youth in education, social competence, problem-solving skills, self-worth and belonging are nurture—traits which promote healthy teen development (Oliphant, 2002).

Dr. Steinberg suggested ten principles for parenting teens (Greder, 2003). These include:

1. Parents matter. Teens need guidance and support from parents.
2. Stay warm and close. It is impossible to love and support your teen too much.

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3. Stay involved with your teen. Ask questions about school work and attend your teen's extracurricular activities
4. Set limits and provide structure. Communicate your expectations to your teen.
5. Enforce rules and consequences.
6. Be consistent each day and in every situation.
7. Discuss the reasons for rules and consequences.
8. Don't use harsh discipline.
9. Treat your teen with respect.
10. Understand adolescence is a period of change for both parents and children.

ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT FOR PROGRAM

The logic model framework (University of Wisconsin Extension, 2002) was implemented. On-campus and field Cooperative Extension staff in five states contributed to planning and produced the series. Thirteen thousand dollars in grant funds and 14,000 dollars in registration fees were secured. Extension staff across the nation promoted the series locally, downlinked and facilitated the series, and compiled and submitted participants' evaluation forms.

Program activity outputs included: 1) planning and producing the satellite series, 2) designing and implementing local site activities and evaluation tools, 3) creating a web site and marketing materials, 4) developing an extension publication and video based on the program, and 5) incorporating information from the series in two state-wide trainings for Cooperative Extension staff.

Over 2,000 individuals participated in the series at 218 sites throughout the country. Participants reported being very satisfied with the series and were interested in participating in future satellite programs. Over 3,000 individuals visited the web site monthly (ISUE, 2004).

In a follow-up survey, five months later, 70% shared information from the program with teens and parents, 58% communicated better with teens, 41% accessed

additional resources through Extension, and 35% used program materials in their work with families.

One community task force changed their approach to teen pregnancy prevention: "We are re-examining our project on bringing in an abstinence one-time speaker. We are looking at a more comprehensive program that promotes parents and teens communicating together."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXTENSION

Given the financial constraints that Extension faces today, pooling resources to support national efforts is an effective way to maximize financial staff and resources. Technology tools, such as satellite video-conferencing, allow Extension staff to collaborate and deliver professional quality educational programs to others in remote locations and across great distances.

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