

Talk with your teen about risky behaviors, costs

Our daughter is 13 and I'm worried about decisions she will make in the next few years. My husband says all teens take risks and we shouldn't expect anything different. I still want to protect her, though. What's the best route to take?

It's great that you're discussing these issues now. Too many parents take the "not my kid" head-in-the-sand approach, only to realize, too late, that their children are like everyone else's. Overall, a parent's communication with their teen about these issues is one of the most influential factors in whether teens will engage in risky behaviors. It's important to face the reality that their children will likely take some risks during the teen years, and that there can be serious, long-term consequences to many of those behaviors. Parents can talk with teens about these risks and the impact they can have.

A new fact sheet from Ohio State University Extension, "Teen Risk Behavior" (online at <http://ohioline.osu.edu>) outlines many of these behaviors and offers statistics from the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, which surveyed 14,041 students from 11 to 18 years old about the types of risks they have engaged in. For example:

- About 13 percent reported smoking before age 13, nearly 20 percent smoked in the past 30 days, and 6.5 percent reported using other tobacco products. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, tobacco use as a teenager is associated with lifetime use.



- More than 20 percent of the respondents reported having their first drink before age 13, as well as binge drinking (having more than five drinks in a row) and using marijuana within the previous month. Teens who drink before age 15 are more likely to develop dependence than those who start drinking after age 21.

- Almost half of the students reported having had sex; 17 percent reported having four or more partners during their lifetime. One in three girls in the U.S. will get pregnant before they are 20 years old; one in four adolescents has a sexually transmitted disease.

Knowing that these risks are real is an important step for parents. But it's also important to realize that this is the time in your children's life when they form their identity, their sense of self. Yet, a teenager's brain is not yet fully developed; the frontal cortex -- the part of the brain that aids in decision-making and impulse control -- is often the last to develop. So, although your daughter may display adolescent behavior, she will need your guidance.

Two other fact sheets from OSU Extension might help. One, "Monitoring: Staying Involved in Your Teen's Life," offers guidance on how to stay involved in your teenager's life without coming across as the activity police. Another, "Communicating with Your Teen," offers a quick overview of effective family communication techniques that could make a difference. Both are available at <http://ohioline.osu.edu>.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Kara Newby, program coordinator in Human Development and Family Science for Ohio State University Extension.

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