



the facts

of

LIFE

Scary but true: Teens get many of their questions about sex answered by their friends—and most of the info is wrong. But studies show that when you take the time to talk to your kids about birth control and STDs, they actually listen.

by Norine Dworkin-McDaniel

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ost teens are good with the whole sperm + egg = baby concept. But when it gets to down-and-dirty details, like how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, things start to become a little vague. *Family Circle* recently surveyed teens (and moms) about their beliefs and attitudes concerning sex and we found that there's a whole lot of misinformation out there. This is a subject that shouldn't be ignored. By the time kids turn 19, 70% have had sex at least once. And when 1 in 4 sexually active young people contract an STD every year and 3 in 10 teen girls have gotten pregnant, it's clear there are gaps in what sexually active teens actually know and what they *think* they know. To help fill in some of the blanks, *Family Circle* asked Mehmet Oz, M.D., host of the new daytime talk program *The Dr. Oz Show* and father of four kids (ages 10, 14, 19 and 23), to tackle some of teens' biggest misconceptions and set the record straight.

TEENS BELIEVE: AFTER YOU'VE BEEN DATING A WHILE, IT'S TIME TO DO IT

The Facts from Dr. Oz: Kids are under enormous pressure to have sex these days. Sixty-two percent of those responding to the *Family Circle* teen survey feel that they are under more pressure to have sex than their parents were as teenagers. Many teens said that if they were dating someone for three to six months, there would be some expectation of intercourse. Parents need to make it very clear that it's okay for both girls and boys to say no. This is perhaps one of the most important times to get across to your teen the importance of being true to him or herself and not just following the crowd. I've explained the biology of sex to my kids so they are informed, but I've

also suggested a moral compass of what I think is right and wrong so they have a context and criteria for making one of the most personal decisions. Research shows that teens think more of their friends are having sex than actually are. As a father, I remind my children that no matter what it seems like, not everyone is having sex. And that there's no written rule that says you have to have sex after you've been dating for a certain period.

TEENS BELIEVE: YOU CAN TELL IF SOMEONE HAS AN STD

The Facts from Dr. Oz: I always tell teens that it doesn't matter what you can or can't see. STDs often thrive without any visible symptoms, and that means they can be passed on without anyone realizing

it. For instance, HPV (human papilloma virus) and HIV can be detected only with a blood test. Genital herpes is visible only during an outbreak, though it can be transmitted when dormant. Most people with chlamydia have no symptoms at all. This is why it's so important to teach safe sex. Many kids don't realize that condoms help prevent STDs, and some teens even believe that they're being "safe" if they just avoid intercourse. But it takes only one unprotected sexual encounter of any kind (even heavy petting) to get an STD and some, like HIV, HPV and herpes, can last a lifetime and may lead to death.

TEENS BELIEVE: ORAL SEX ISN'T SEX

The Facts from Dr. Oz: A third of the teens surveyed don't consider cunnilingus or fellatio sex. Truth is, any kind of genital contact is considered sexual activity and can spread serious diseases.

TEENS BELIEVE: ONLY PEOPLE WITH MANY PARTNERS NEED CONDOMS

The Facts from Dr. Oz: One in three sexually active high schoolers didn't use a condom the last time they had sex, according to a recent CDC study. Many kids have the mistaken belief that if they want to use protection they're either sending the message that they're hiding an infection or they believe their partner is hiding something. I stress to my children that their health is their own personal responsibility and no one else's; their lives are too precious to gamble on statistical odds or the untested honesty of a romantic crush. No matter how embarrassed they may feel, they must always speak up about contraception.

TEENS BELIEVE: IF ONE CONDOM IS GOOD, TWO ARE BETTER

The Facts from Dr. Oz: Condoms are very effective for preventing pregnancy and protecting against STDs when used correctly. Some teens think that doubling up adds extra protection, but because condoms are very thin, trying to pull a second one over the first may actually tear both of them.

What Moms Think: **4%** of moms know their child has sent an e-mail or text message of a sexual nature. **18%** say it's a possibility. But **78%** are sure their teen has never sexted.

What Teens Say: **45%** are sexting.



TEENS BELIEVE: EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION (THE "MORNING-AFTER PILL" OR PLAN B) IS LIKE THE ABORTION PILL

The Facts from Dr. Oz: They're very different. Emergency contraception is like extra-strong birth control pills. When used within 72 hours of having unprotected sex, there's a 90% chance of preventing pregnancy. The FDA requires a prescription for Plan B for those under 17. The abortion pill, on the other hand, causes the body to flush out a fertilized egg that's already implanted. It can be used only during the first nine weeks of pregnancy.

TEENS BELIEVE: A GIRL CAN'T GET PREGNANT IF IT'S HER FIRST TIME

The Facts from Dr. Oz: When you hear that 4 in 10 sexually active adolescents have had a pregnancy scare and 3 in 10 sexually active teen girls have gotten pregnant, it's obvious there's a disconnect between what kids picked up during their "birds and bees" talk and what they're actually doing now. The simple fact to make clear: The "first time" is no protection against pregnancy.

TEENS BELIEVE: A GIRL CAN'T GET PREGNANT IF HE PULLS OUT

The Facts from Dr. Oz: This is another common misconception. Teens need to

What Moms Think: 77% of moms believe they are their kids' number one source for sex information.

What Teens Say: Their friends are their main source. Only 30% say they get some of their information from their parents.



What Moms Think: 8% of moms know their child is sexually active.

What Teens Say: 67% admit to being sexually active.

know that even before the big moment, guys release pre-ejaculate fluid that also contains sperm. Since males don't feel anything when this fluid gets released, they can't stop it. And, of course, it takes only one swift swimmer.

TEENS BELIEVE: A GIRL CAN'T GET PREGNANT DURING HER PERIOD

The Facts from Dr. Oz: About 85% of the time this is correct. But a period should never be relied upon as a "safety zone." For starters, a girl may think she has her period, when it's really breakthrough bleeding and a very fertile time. In addition, sperm usually hang around for 3 to 5 days but can live as long as 7 days. So if a girl has sex on day 7 of her cycle when she still has her period, and her partner has hearty sperm that linger till her ovulation on day 14, it could result in a pregnancy.

TEENS BELIEVE: SEXTING (SENDING PROVOCATIVE PICTURES OR TEXTS) IS HARMLESS

The Facts from Dr. Oz: I've cautioned my daughters to think carefully about what they share because a photo on a cell phone or the Web can go anywhere in the world. And once it's sent, it's in cyberspace forever. I like to say that your cell and the Internet are like open windows with the world passing by. If you wouldn't do something in front of that window, then don't do it on a cell or the Web. I stress one simple principle: respect, for themselves and others. Sending even semi-clothed pictures as a joke can be considered illegal when people involved are underage. There have been cases in which kids were caught sending explicit pictures to each other and were prosecuted for the production, distribution and possession of child pornography. ●



Tune In For more details on the Family Circle surveys, which examine teens' and moms' feelings and beliefs about sex and dating, tune in to *The Dr. Oz Show* in late October. Visit familycircle.com/droz for more information or check your local listings.

Photo (top): Roy Hsu/Corbis.