



TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT...



AIDS

Education Can Help Protect Them

AIDS looms large in the minds of most Americans. Even those who don't belong to one of the "risk groups"—intravenous (IV) drug users, homosexual and bisexual men and their sex partners—may know someone at risk for the disease. For many parents, that someone could be their child.

All teenagers are vulnerable to AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) if they experiment with sex and drugs without fully understanding the consequences of their actions. Scientists have learned a great deal about the disease, but there's still no known cure. It's crucial that parents discuss AIDS with their children and tell them how to avoid it.

Make It Clear and Simple

The best approach is a direct one when it comes to talking about AIDS. First, tell your children how they can get AIDS: by having sex or sharing drug needles or syringes with a person carrying the AIDS virus. That person doesn't have to show any AIDS symptoms to be infectious. It's possible for someone infected with the AIDS virus to be

unaware that he or she is carrying the disease. And anyone, no matter how "nice" or "intelligent," can be infected with AIDS.

Dispel Teenagers' Myths About AIDS

It's also important to tell your teenagers how they can't get AIDS. Tell them they can't "catch" AIDS the way you catch a cold, the flu or the chicken pox. An infected person can't spread AIDS by coughing, sneezing, touching or hugging, or by sharing a sandwich or a soda with someone else. You can't get AIDS from public drinking fountains, washrooms or swimming pools, either.

The Only "Vaccine" Is Knowledge

Just as there's no cure for AIDS, there's no vaccine to protect against it. Sexual abstinence and avoiding drugs are the only sure defenses against AIDS. Limiting the number of sexual partners, knowing your partner's sexual history and knowing how to use condoms correctly during sex greatly reduces the risk of contracting AIDS.

Make the Effort

Talking frankly with your kids about sex, drugs and AIDS may be difficult and embarrassing. But taking time to discuss these issues with your kids is well worth any embarrassment if it prevents them or their friends from contracting this deadly disease.

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