

Educating Your Teen About Unprotected Sex

An Interview with Therapist Heather Marchman LMFT

By **Jaleh**

Are you unsure on how to go about in educating your teen about unprotected sex? Are you afraid how your teen may react if you approach him or her about the topic of sex? If so you're not alone. Many parents feel nervous and a bit awkward about talking with their teen about unprotected sex. To help understand common mistakes parents make when it comes to their teen and sex and how a parent can educate their teen about unprotected sex, I have interviewed therapist Heather Marchman LMFT.

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

"I have been working as a counselor since the mid 1980's with a whole spectrum of folks including teens and their parents. I have been a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist since 1991. I received a Bachelors degree from the University Of Ottawa and a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology from Antioch University. Much of my clinical training came from working at nonprofits centers that catered to high-risk youths and their families. I currently have a full time private practice in Danville, California, partially populated by teens and their families."

What common mistakes do parents make when it comes to their teen and sex?

"Probably the biggest mistake I see parents making with their kids is their reluctance to even brooch the subject of sex with their teen. And the ones that do talk openly with their teen about sex often tend to lecture and demand that that their kids "just say no". Another problem I have encountered is parents that try and control their teen's lives, so as to attempt to run interference on any sexual escapades. However, as we all know, teens are very creative and can come up with ingenious ways to "hook up". Bottom line, I find if a parent thinks they can keep their teen from having sex, they are run a much higher chance of having a teen that will do it anyway and possibly in a risky manner."

How can a parent go about in educating their teen about unprotected sex?

"When discussing the issue of unprotected sex, I suggest parents consider approaching their teen in a nonjudgmental, understanding and compassionate way. The minute a parent has an agenda; a teen will usually shut down. Teens are uncomfortable enough and so parents need to be very considerate. Being matter of fact tends to really help. The less emotionally charged the parents are, the more likely the teen will listen. Occasionally, I've had parents request that I talk privately with their teen on this subject. Certainly this can be effective but on the other end the parents need to be supportive and open to the idea that their teen is potentially sexually active."

Are there any resources, books or websites that would be helpful for the parent to use when educating their teen about unprotected sex?

"These days there seems to be a plenty of resources out there to help guide parents in talking to their teen about unprotected sex. I tend to refer parents to some basic parenting books like Parenting Teens With Love And Logic by Dr. Foster Cline and Jim Fay. Another old time favorite is, How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. I find these types of books teach parents the importance of good

communication with their teen. Without effective dialogue and a good emotional connection, there is less likelihood a parent can educate and influence their teen to practice safe sex."

What last advice would you like to leave for a parent who wants to talk to their teen about unprotected sex?

"By the time our kids have reached their teens, we can only hope we have taught them to make good choices despite their need to experiment. Trust is certainly a big deal between parents and their teen. If parents can be supportive and see their job as consultants, then I think statistically they run a better chance of having a teen that understands the need to be safe if they engage in sexual activity. To me, an ideal situation is when a parent has rational discussions and interactions with their teen. That hopefully translates into the teen then being more mindful when it comes to the 'heat of the moment'."

Thank you Heather for the interview on educating your teen about unprotected sex. If you would like more information about Heather Marchman you can check out her website on www.DanvilleCounseling.com.