

Get Involved

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

Spring 2008

Greetings!

Harrisonburg-Rockingham Teen Pregnancy Prevention is dedicated to delaying sex and avoiding pregnancy among teenagers.

We hope that this newsletter will provide you with the latest news concerning teen pregnancy, both locally and nationally.

*Thank You
For Your Support*



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“Hooking Up”: What does it mean?

The term “hooking up” no longer means getting together with someone to do a project or meeting up to grab lunch, at least not for today’s youth. Instead, it refers to an ambiguous act occurring between two people, no strings attached.

Ranging from kissing or “making out,” to sexual intercourse, hooking up has no concrete definition. Nonetheless, the term’s use is prevalent among teens and young adults. One constant factor of hooking up though, is the lack of commitment between the people engaging in the activity. So, what are some young peoples’ meanings of hooking up?

First, the expression has a variety of definitions. These can vary depending on personal or peer opinions of the phrase, along with other variables such as geographic location and age. Thus, the term applies to a variety of activities. One teen can state that he or she hooked up at a party last weekend and mean kissing. Another can use the

same phrase and be referring to oral sex. The range of activities hooking up describes covers the whole spectrum of physical contact. In many cases, though, hooking up entails some kind of sexual activity. According to MSNBC, more than 35% of “hook ups” involve sexual intercourse.

Also, regardless of the specific actions occurring between those hooking up, there is a “no strings attached” understanding. Whether the individuals involved in the hook up are complete strangers or good friends, emotional attachment is supposed to be nonexistent. A “purely” physical relationship is the result, or at least that’s the idea.

Adopting the mentality that physical relationships are better when casual and short-term can be dangerous in many ways for teens. Not only can this attitude have negative effects on young peoples’ ideas of what a healthy relationship is, but it can also lead to reckless sexual behavior and the consequences of such behavior.

A healthy relationship is one in which trust, respect, and honesty are valued. Hooking up relationships, on the other hand, devalue and actively restrict these and several other qualities characteristic of healthy relationships. Adolescents who participate in these relationships can develop unhealthy relational behaviors. They may find commitment to one person to be unnecessary and abstaining from sexual activity pointless. Unfortunately, they may also engage in casual flings for years, greatly increasing their risk of unwanted pregnancy or STI infection.

Teenagers who “hook up” with random partners are significantly more likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection. Although some STIs are treatable, others such as herpes, HPV, and HIV/AIDS are not. Unwanted pregnancy is another risk of hooking up. The more hooking up one does, the greater the chance of engaging in sexual intercourse. Having sex with several non-committed partners raises the risk of becoming a teen parent as well. In order to help protect the teens in your life talk to them about the risks of hooking up.

“Ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, ‘hooking up’ has no concrete definition.”

Local Teens: Harrisonburg's & Rockingham's stats

Teen pregnancy rates in the United States are the highest in the industrialized world. Nationally, 47% of high school students are sexually active and every year 822,000 teen girls get pregnant. Virginia's rate of teen pregnancy per 1,000 females is 25.2, while Harrisonburg's is almost double, at 45.7.

Of adolescents in the area that are sexually active, most first had sexual intercourse at age 15. Additionally, 1 in 5 Harrisonburg-Rockingham youth are sexually active by age 15, and more than 1 in 4 by 16 years of age.

100 adolescent girls became pregnant in Harrisonburg in 2005. In Rockingham County 91 became pregnant. There is good news, however.

In the past several years the percentage of local teens choosing abstinence has risen. Although pregnancy prevention programs are offered in schools and the community, such as those by Harrisonburg-Rockingham Teen Pregnancy Prevention, parental action is always required. Getting involved early is the best prevention.

In order to help prevent teen pregnancy, make sure you talk to your teens about delaying sex. Start having conversations with your children at an early age and be ready to answer questions they have. Be available to them as well. Many teenagers feel as though they cannot talk to their parents about sex, so let them know you are open to discussion. For more tips on talking with your kids, visit www.findyourreason.org.

Sources: Harrisonburg-Rockingham Teen Pregnancy Prevention, www.findyourreason.org; 2005 Harrisonburg-Rockingham Youth Data Survey

Media, Teens, and Sex

Every year the average young viewer is exposed to over 14,000 sexual references on TV alone. Of those references, only 165 mention abstinence, birth control, or the risk of pregnancy or contracting an STI. An article by Todd Zwillich from WebMD stated that seven out of ten television shows viewed by teen audiences include some form of sexual content.

Additional information was found by a study of popular prime-time TV programs viewed by young audiences. The study determined that sexual references accounted for up to 50% of character interactions in the shows studied. Particularly unsettling was the discovery that, in general, sex was portrayed not as something relating to relationships or reproduction, but a "recreational" activity. The sexual references also supported gender stereotypes; men as aggressors and women as sexual objects.

Further, when media sources such as music, movies, the web, and magazines are added, the number of sexual references becomes staggering. This sexual content influences not only teenagers' sexual attitudes, but behaviors as well.

Adolescents' thoughts concerning sex are heavily influenced by the

entertainment industry. In fact, mass media is cited as teens' second leading source of sexual information; sex education programs are the first. Sadly, much of this media exposure can negatively persuade them.

Hours kids spend watching TV:
Per day: 4
Per month: 122
Per year: 1,460

Media portrayals of sexual activity may convince youth that teen sex is acceptable and commonplace. The lack of consequences displayed, such as pregnancy or an STI infection, also misleads teens. Adolescents who buy into such media depictions of sexual interactions are influenced by the sexual stereotypes, norms, and double-standards presented as well.

Adopting this type of media-based attitude about sex can negatively influence young girls' and boys' sexual behaviors. Recent studies have concluded that the amount of media consumed by young viewers indeed relates to their sexual actions.

Compared to teenagers who are rarely exposed to sexual media

content, those who see and hear a lot of it are more than twice as likely to engage in early sexual intercourse. Even after accounting for aspects known to reduce the probability of sexual relations among teenagers (like parental disapproval), researchers found that exposure to sexual entertainment still increases the risk of sexual activity.

To develop positive TV viewing habits, the American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that parents:

- **Set limits**— allot amount of TV time per day
- **Plan your child's viewing**— help them choose appropriate shows
- **Watch with your teenagers**— get an idea of what they like to watch
- **Find the right message**—
- explain why certain scenes are inappropriate or perpetuate stereotypes
- **Give other options**— reading, learning a hobby, or playing a sport
- **Set a good example**— limit your own TV time and don't watch shows with inappropriate content
- **Express your views**— let your teens know why you disapprove of a show

Sources: American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org; www.medialiteracy.net; "Talking About Sex: Common Themes About Sexuality in the Prime-Time Television Programs Children and Adolescents View Most," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*; "Abstinence – More than a

Kids of Adolescent Parents

Extensive research has found that having a baby is detrimental to young parents. They suffer a myriad of burdens, including social, educational, and financial ones. These burdens affect their children as well.

Even before birth, the babies of young parents encounter problems. Oftentimes teen mothers receive late or no prenatal care. This lack of necessary care correlates to the instance of low birth-weight among babies born to teenage mothers.

Next, since these children are significantly more likely to live in poverty than those born to women in their 20s and 30s, it is no surprise that they tend to have more health problems. Although these kids are less healthy, they receive only half the level of health care and treatment than their peers born to older parents.

The living conditions of children born to young parents present more issues.

They are more likely to be neglected, abandoned, or abused. This may explain why tens of thousands of kids born to adolescent parents end up in foster care.

Additionally, the research shows that children with younger parents perform more poorly in school. They are 50% more likely to repeat a grade and less likely to graduate. Actually, compared to high schoolers of older parents, those born to young parents are 11% less likely to attain a high school diploma.

Boys born to teenage parents are almost three times more likely to be incarcerated than sons of older parents. Yet another statistic states that these kids are two to three times more likely to run away from home.

Finally, some of the most concerning findings have shown that these problems

are often cyclical. Perhaps a result of the previously stated reasons, kids of adolescent parents are more likely to become teen parents themselves. They are more likely to be sexually active by 14 years old, less likely to use contraceptives, and therefore, more likely to become parents in their youth.

This cycle of teen parenthood is breakable though, and preventing a cycle from ever beginning is possible. Through teaching teenagers about abstinence, healthy relationships, and the consequences of sex, parents and educators can protect today's youth. Talking with your kids about sex is the first step. Talk early, talk honestly, and encourage good decision-making.

“Kids of adolescent parents are more likely to become teen parents themselves.”

Source: Healthy Teen Network
www.healthyteenetwork.org

Teenagers & Oral Sex

Merriam-Webster defines oral sex as *oral stimulation of the genitals*. This type of sexual contact is becoming increasingly common among today's teenage population.

Current adolescent views of oral sex are quite casual. It is occurring early-on in a relationship or even in the absence of one at all. Teens' thoughts about oral sex are shocking as well. Many young people believe that oral

sex is not as intimate as sexual intercourse, nor as risky. Perhaps this explains why over half of 15-19 year olds are engaging in oral sex.

Devaluing the risks associated with this sort of sexual activity raises many concerns for teen health. Although it is not sexual intercourse, oral sex still carries numerous risks teens should know. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, oral

sex can transmit a host of STIs. Some of these STIs include syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, and herpes. HIV/AIDS can also be passed through oral sex.

Furthermore, a recent study reports that those who have had more than five oral sex partners are 250% more likely to have throat cancer. Researchers believe this is because oral sex can transmit human papillomavirus, HPV.

Sources: www.cdc.gov; "Oral Sex Can Cause Throat Cancer," www.newscientist.com

6 Quick Facts

- In the later stages of syphilis infection, internal organs can be damaged, including the brain, eyes, heart, liver, bones, and joints
- Human papillomavirus (HPV), genital warts, has over 30 sexually transmitted strains, or types
- At least 45 million sexually active Americans, 12 and older, have genital herpes
- Trichomoniasis is the most common curable STI in young, sexually active women; every year there are an estimated 7.4 million new cases in both men and women
- Gonorrhea is the second most commonly-reported disease in the U.S.
- Untreated Chlamydia can cause infertility in women

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

Relationships between teenagers tend to be fun, exciting, and healthy, providing a foundation for future relationships. Sometimes, however, teens enter into unhealthy relationships or stay in ones that become unhealthy. Understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships can make a big difference for teens. Parents who talk to their kids about this difference can help. The first step is knowing what constitutes a healthy relationship and the warning signs of an unhealthy one.

The characteristics of healthy relationships between teenagers are the same as for anyone else. These characteristics include respect, honesty, trust, support, open communication, and so on. However, because these relationships occur at such a significant developmental time in teens' lives, parents are encouraged to monitor them to ensure they are healthy.

Encourage teens to...

Establish clear boundaries

- Teens who know their personal boundaries before entering a

relationship can more easily resist pressures to cross them

- Discussing boundaries, such as physical ones, with a partner helps teens feel comfortable in their relationships

Balance time

- Spending some free time with a boyfriend or girlfriend is typical, but maintaining independence is a great habit to start young
- Balance time spent with a partner and friends

Keep it carefree

- Adolescents should enjoy their early relationships and have fun
- Teens should avoid getting too serious too soon

These suggestions for healthy teen relationships are pretty common and recognizable in many healthy relationships. The problem occurs, then, when one or several of these relational qualities is missing or disappears and is replaced by negative ones. Parents who are aware of the warning signs of an unhealthy partner can aid their children if they find themselves with one.

Unhealthy relational partners are...

Controlling

- Tries to control what your teen does or who they see
- Frequently checks up on or acts bossy toward your child

Critical

- Constantly gives put-downs
- Criticizes, insults or embarrasses your child

Pressuring

- Tries to get your teen to do drugs or drink
- Pressuring sex or sexual activity

Jealous

- Acts possessive or jealous
- Becomes angry when your teen spends time with friends

If your child is in an unhealthy relationship let them know why it is unhealthy and encourage them to find a better partner.

Sources: Palo Alto Medical Foundation, www.pamf.org; GirlsHealth.gov, www.4girls.gov

Reduce the Risk: Talking to Teens

All teen pregnancy prevention sources say that parents should talk to their children about sex to help prevent pregnancy. This is undeniably the most important recommendation for parents, but what exactly should parents talk about? The following are some suggested topics of discussion.

Goals

Speak to your teens about their present as well as future goals. Ask them what their current ambitions are in relation to school, sports, peer groups, hobbies, etc. Next, talk to them about their aspirations for the future. Let them know that in order to attain their goals they need to act responsibly, which includes avoiding risky sexual activity.

Values

Discuss your family's values along with what morals and principles you want your kids to respect. Share what you view as appropriate behavior between teens in a relationship, particularly regarding sex. Adolescents who know their parents' thoughts and feelings about sex are more likely to value them.

Alternatives

Give your child suggestions for activities to do with his or her girlfriend or boyfriend. Recommend going on a bike ride, taking the dog for a walk, attending a school play, learning to play a sport together, or going to the movies. Teens are less likely to engage in sexual activity if they are kept busy.

Consequences

Communicating the consequences of having sex gets teenagers to consider the possible negative outcomes of engaging in sexual activity. Make sure to talk about the risk of becoming a teen parent and those associated consequences. Also discuss the dangers of contracting a sexually transmitted infection. Although some STIs are curable, such as gonorrhea and Chlamydia, others, including HPV and Hepatitis B, stay with the infected person throughout their life. Lastly, let your teens know that they can experience negative emotions if they choose to have sex. These include lowered self-esteem, feelings of being used, and even depression.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov