



B3706-8

Whose kids? Our kids!

Teens, sex and sexual victimization

Mary Huser, Donna Doll-Yogerst, Karen Hintz, Stephen Small

Today, many teens are sexually active. As uncomfortable as you may be with the idea of your teenager having sex, even worse is the thought that your child might be sexually assaulted or victimized. How can parents help prevent early sexual activity and protect their teens from becoming sexual victims?

Sexually active teens

Studies have found several factors that increase the odds a teenager will be sexually active. These are:

- ✓ Excessive use of alcohol or illicit drugs like marijuana. Alcohol abuse impairs a teen's ability to make good judgments about sex, placing them in danger of serious sexual risks and assault. Rape and other forms of violence are often linked to alcohol because the perpetrator, the victim, or both were drinking.
- ✓ Having a steady boyfriend or girlfriend. In fact, a recent study showed that having a boy- or girlfriend was found to be one of the most common risk factors for sexual activity. This underscores the importance of knowing where teens are, what they are doing and whom they are with.
- ✓ Having been sexually or physically abused. In studies of adolescents, teens that had been sexually or physically abused were more likely to be sexually active than teens that had not been abused. This factor was especially significant for girls.

- ✓ Having parents who do not monitor them. Recent research has found a very clear association between lack of parental monitoring and teen sexual activity. Monitoring means knowing where your teens are, who they are with and what they are doing.

Parents make a difference!

Parental monitoring is one of the most powerful tools parents can use to prevent early sexual activity and other problem behaviors, such as alcohol use and delinquency. While parental monitoring is important for teens of all ages, it's particularly important for younger teens.

Monitoring is especially important during the hours after school when many youth may be home alone. Consider the following: Researchers found that teenage sexual intercourse is now most likely to occur after school at the teen's home, when no one else is there. It's no longer the back seat of a car or some location away from home. Do you know what your teen does at home alone after school? On weekends? On school vacations? At night?

Monitoring refers to parents keeping track of their children's activities, whereabouts and companions. It differs from supervision in that a parent isn't physically present. Effective monitoring isn't overly intrusive; it means being interested, aware and actively involved in your teen's day-to-day life.

Sexual victimization from peers

Unwanted touching, kissing and sexual intercourse (rape) are all forms of sexual violence. Teen girls are much more likely to experience sexual violence than boys.

Who commits these unwanted acts towards adolescent girls? Girls report that boyfriends are the most common perpetrators, followed by a friend or someone the girl was dating for the first time. In fact, only 3 percent of teens who have been sexually victimized report that the perpetrator was a stranger.

"It's easy to get away with stuff when my parents have no clue where I am. I could be most anywhere doing most anything—and sometimes I am!" —9th grader

Parental monitoring: Help protect your teen from sexual assault

- ✓ Know your teen's friends
- ✓ Know the parents of your teen's friends
- ✓ Know where your teen is and where they are going
- ✓ Talk with other parents to confirm the plans your teens have together
- ✓ Know what your teen is doing after school
- ✓ Be aware of how your teen spends his/her money
- ✓ Require your teen to call you if they are going to be late

According to the American Medical Association (AMA), adolescents are especially vulnerable to acquaintance rape. One report found that approximately 61 percent of all female sexual assault victims are younger than 18 years old. Why such a high rate of sexual assault among adolescents? The AMA believes that the high rates of alcohol and other drug use among teenagers contributes to the high rate of sexual assault among adolescents.

Excessive alcohol use is not the only factor that may make youth more vulnerable to unwanted sexual contact. A recent study revealed that the strongest predictor of teens being the victim of unwanted sexual activity was low parental monitoring. In other words, youth that reported no unwanted sexual activity (they had never been victimized) were more likely to come from families that closely monitored their behavior.

The following conditions place your teen at higher risk of being the victim of sexual assault:

- ✓ Lack of parental monitoring
- ✓ Excessive alcohol use
- ✓ History of sexual abuse
- ✓ Willingness to submit to negative peer pressure
- ✓ Parents who don't involve teenagers in decision-making

Ask yourself these questions about your child's boyfriend or girlfriend

Could it be that your teen is in danger of being victimized? The following questions are often red flags of abuse by a boyfriend or girlfriend.

- ✓ Is your teen often frightened by their girl- or boyfriend's temper?
- ✓ Is your teen afraid to disagree with him or her?
- ✓ Is your teen always apologizing for his or her bad behavior?
- ✓ Does he/she constantly insult or embarrass your teen?
- ✓ Is your teen dating someone who is constantly jealous of your teen's friends or family?
- ✓ Does your teen always seem to be justifying his/her actions to their girlfriend or boyfriend? Is your teen always accounting for their whereabouts to that person?
- ✓ Has your teen had bruises they can't or won't explain?

UW
Extension

Authors: Mary Huser, prevention specialist, University of Wisconsin–Extension; Donna Doll-Yogerst, family living agent, University of Wisconsin–Extension, Oconto County; Karen Hintz, family living agent, University of Wisconsin–Extension, Door County; Stephen Small, professor, Child and Family Studies, School of Human Ecology, University of Wisconsin–Madison, and human development and family relations specialist, University of Wisconsin–Extension.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, University of Wisconsin–Extension, Cooperative Extension. University of Wisconsin–Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements. If you need this information in an alternative format, contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity Programs or call Extension Publishing at (608)262-2655.

© 1999 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System doing business as the division of Cooperative Extension of the University of Wisconsin–Extension. Send inquiries about copyright permission to: Director, Cooperative Extension Publishing, 201 Hiram Smith Hall, 1545 Observatory Dr., Madison, WI 53706.

You can obtain copies of this publication from your Wisconsin county Extension office or from Cooperative Extension Publications, Room 170, 630 W. Mifflin Street, Madison, WI 53703, (608)262-3346. Outside Madison, **call our toll free number: 1-877-WIS-PUBS (947-7827)**. Before publicizing, please check on this publication's availability.

To see more Cooperative Extension publications, visit our web site: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pubs/>

Whose Kids? Our Kids! Teens, Sex and Sexual Victimization (B3706-8)

I-7-99-5M-300