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# The Health Reformer

## Sexual Content on TV Incites Teen Pre-marital Sex

**Adolescents who watch, or even hear, characters talking about sex on a show are twice as likely to have intercourse within a year's time, new research shows.**

Teenagers who view sexual content on television, even if it only involves characters talking about sex, are twice as likely to start having intercourse in the ensuing year compared with peers who do not watch such content.

Sexual content on TV was also more likely to hasten adolescents' movement from one "base" to another, in other words, from kissing to breast fondling to genital touching and on to oral sex, new research found.

"Regardless of which level kids were at the beginning of this study, watching more sex on TV was associated with a much higher probability of moving up along the continuum," said Rebecca Collins, senior author of the study, which appears in the September issue of *Pediatrics*.

"The effect was strongest for kids moving into the genital category [known in earlier generations as "heavy petting"]. They were about twice as likely to make that leap if they watched a lot of sex on TV, compared to their peers. The effect was weakest for kids moving in the very first stage," added Collins, a senior behavioral scientist at the Rand Corp. The only effect that was stronger was for those who engaged in actual intercourse, Collins added.

She said she was surprised by the magnitude of the effect. "Just making small reductions to what kids are exposed to could make a significant difference in how quickly they develop sexually," she said.

According to the journal report, 46 percent of all high school students in the United States have had sexual intercourse. For every four sexually active teenagers, one case of a sexually transmitted disease (STD) is diagnosed. The rate of teen pregnancy in the United States is among the highest for all industrial countries. Both unplanned pregnancies and STDs are more common among individuals who start sexual activity earlier. The author also stated that most sexually active teens say they wish they had waited longer to have sex.

And while about two-thirds of programs currently on television contain sexual content, from talking to doing, there is little research on the subject.

Collins and her colleagues surveyed 1,792 adolescents aged 12 to 17 from across the nation

about their TV viewing habits and sexual experience. The participants were surveyed twice, about one year apart.

While factors such as age, having older friends, getting lower grades and rule-breaking behavior were all associated with initiating sexual intercourse, television had the strongest effect.

Adolescents who watched the most sexual content-oriented TV at the beginning of the study were more likely to initiate intercourse during the following year. They were also more likely to advance in their "making out" stages.

...."This is an important study because it fills a very important hole in what we know," added Bill Albert, spokesman for the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy in Washington, D.C.

The problem could be attacked from a number of different directions, including getting kids to watch less TV and persuading the TV industry to show less sex, or at least to show the potential consequences of sex.

"If the media is a powerful force in shaping the social script for adolescents, it is also true that the media can be a force for good," Albert said. "I think you are seeing some major media outlets stepping up to the plate and addressing the sexual issue in a more responsible way."

"When we did a survey last year, it was very clear that a huge percentage of teens and adults say that they wish the media showed more or talked more about the consequences of sex, so there is a great support for these sorts of responsible messages," he added. *By Amanda Gardner, HealthDay Reporter*

Note: "Parents should endeavor to keep out of the home every influence that is not productive of good. In this matter some parents have much to learn."

AH 411

## Housework Benefits Kids

....According to Dr. Ed Wimberly, author of *Raising Great Kids* (Journey Publications), "Kids who are a part of completing chores grow up feeling like they are an intricate part of a team, feeling needed, and that they matter. Without this sense of relevance that comes as a result of helping, kids have a hard time believing in their worth and value."

This sense of their own worth then feeds into their ability to care for others. "Good self-esteem," says Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, in an article in *Family Circle* magazine, "gives a child the capacity for empathy."

(Over, please)

...Our kids resist housework for obvious reasons, primarily because some things—okay, most things—are more fun than scrubbing a toilet. But we parents do our part to sabotage our efforts to gain the cooperation of our children as well. Experts point to two main reasons today's parents have a hard time instituting regular family chores: less time and parental guilt.

Children need to be shown how to do a task, which takes time. They need supervision (at least at the beginning) and encouragement—both of which also involve a big investment of time. Parents who have spent most of their week juggling schedules, heading to the office, or keeping the household running have minimal energy or desire to spend the free hours they have with their kids as nagging disciplinarians.

In addition, parents tend to feel guilty about asking their children to help around the house when the kids seem to have enough on their plates already. Or we have a hard time requiring our kids to participate in chores because we want them to have fun and be happy.

However, these excuses, which seem perfectly legitimate on the surface, actually backfire. "It's ironic," says Dr. William Damon, author of *Greater Expectations* (Free Press), "that the real self-esteem kids need comes from achievement that requires hard work, including the drudgery of chores."

Knowing the importance of family chores in developing our children's self-worth and compassion can give parents a firmer base on which to stand when challenged by outside demands or kid resistance. It allows us to see family chores as something we are doing for and with our children, not just work that has to get done. It can also lead us to be more intentional in our approach to family chores.

Rather than just announcing that it's time to clean up and randomly assigning tasks, we can make a plan and give our children jobs that are targeted to their character formation. For example, if my son is struggling with patience, I might give him a job that takes a little effort to do well, like weeding the garden or cleaning the mirrors. If my daughter is getting bossy, I might give her a job that entails following a sibling's directions.

Still, no one likes housework, so you'll need to find ways to entice your children to participate a bit more willingly. Dr. Robert Brooks, a clinical psychologist at Harvard Medical School, suggests changing the name of what you are doing and therefore changing the perception. Brooks refers to family tasks as "contributions" to the family rather than "chores." This kind of subtle shift in language can give kids the message, "We need your help." It elicits a more positive response than telling them they must do chores. Brooks says, "Children are more willing to do things and more likely to develop a responsible attitude when they feel that they are being helpful."

Experts also suggest involving your kids in the process of determining when and how chores (I mean, contributions) will be done. One way is to have weekly family meetings where jobs can be divided up, giving children a sense of being part of a team. Allowing the kids some say in how chores are handled is a wonderful way for them to learn that housework is a family responsibility, something we do with each other, for each other.

It also can be helpful to have a visual aid so it's clear what the chore is and who does what. Some families use stickers that go up when a job is completed. In our family, the most successful method was a chart taped on the refrigerator with the job listed across the top and the kids' names down the side. Naturally, there were chores no one wanted and others everyone hoped for. Setting and clearing the table was regarded as much more

desirable than loading the dishwasher, for example. The chores were organized on a weekly rotation schedule with a month or two worth of dates listed, so that a child who had a job he loathed knew he'd be free of it in a week.

Be sure the chore is something that children can accomplish in a reasonable amount of time; the younger the child, the simpler and shorter the chore. On the other end of the scale, teenagers may need a lighter load as outside activities and jobs require more of their time. Take your cues from your kids (within reason, of course). If they seem overwhelmed by a task even after repeated help and encouragement, help them find a new job to do instead. You want them to gain confidence and a sense of accomplishment, so don't let them get overwhelmed.

Parents are often surprised that children don't automatically know how to make a bed or sweep a floor, so give the necessary instructions and equipment to complete the job. The best way to do this is to work with your children at first. It's also a good idea to write down the steps to follow or draw pictures for younger children.

You should be as specific as possible about what constitutes task completion. The concept of clean will mean something very different to your 6-year-old son than it does to you. If you want a child to tidy up his room, be clear about what that means—bed made, toys picked up and put away, clothes in the laundry or back in their drawers, etc. The extra time it takes to explain a job not only increases the odds that the job will get done correctly; your children are less likely to become frustrated when they know what's expected of them and know they have the tools and ability to pull it off.

Provide lots of praise and encouragement, but be specific. Praise the accomplishment, not the child. For example, rather than saying, "What a good boy!" comment on how well the silverware is lined up with the plate, or how neatly the napkins are folded. Emphasize your appreciation for your children's contributions to a home atmosphere everyone can enjoy.

Finally, resist criticism, no matter how tempting. And don't do the chore if your child forgets or refuses, don't redo, and don't nag. Instead, suggests Brooks, ask, "What's the best way to remind each other if we forget our job?" and model a response, such as, "This is how I would like you to remind me." Provide logical consequences if the chore isn't done in a timely manner. A logical consequence might be additional work: "I see you need practice helping out. Why don't you clear the table, too." Let the kids have some say in what the consequences might be. That will make consequences a bit easier to swallow when the time comes to dole them out.

By whatever name you call them, household tasks are often boring, repetitive and, well, work. Take a break; have a day designated "No Chore Day," or, periodically lighten things up. One of my kids' favorite memories is "Mom's Fun Camp," which was born out of Mom's Desperation one summer. From 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. we had Camp House Patrol, when we tidied up designated rooms. Then we had Free Time, followed by Mess Hall, followed by Camp Activities, which were outings suggested by camp members. The result was a relatively neat house and a good time, too!

Sometimes, though, kids just have to do the job even when it is boring, and that's part of the process. "Learning to work in our families," says my friend June, whose grown children are involved in active ministries, "really means learning to express an active love. In other words, when we love each other, we

help each other." *By Pamela Shires Sneddon*

Note: "In some cases it would be better if children had less work in the school and more training in the performance of home duties. Above all else they should be taught to be thoughtful and helpful. Many things to be learned from books are far less essential than the lessons of practical industry and discipline." *AH 288, 289*

## **Alcoholic Drinks are Fueling the Abortion Growth**

Alcohol is being blamed as one reason for a doubling in the number of abortions carried out on girls as young as 11.

In the year to December 2003, 89 girls aged 11-14 had abortions, up on 78 in 2002, and 43 in 1991, according to latest figures released by Statistics New Zealand.

There does not appear to be any legal age limit for abortions, and Abortion Supervisory Committee chairwoman Lesley Rothwell said there was no requirement to inform parents that their child was having an abortion.

Alcohol Advisory Council chief executive Mike MacAvoy said one of the factors fuelling the abortion growth was likely to be young people having sex while drunk.

In the year before the legal drinking age was lowered in December 1999, there were 56 abortions in the 11-14 year age group and 2846 in the 15-19 year age group. The year after the reduction, there were 74 abortions in the 11-14 year age group and 3107 in the 15-19 year age group.

Family Planning Association national medical adviser Christine Roke said it could not be blamed on any one reason but some young people who had risky sex said they could not remember it happening or had been at a party.

"You can have all the education in the world but if you happen to have taken some drugs or alcohol it's less likely you will remember those safer sex messages," Dr Roke said.

....Abortion rates for all ages of women have grown over the past decade.

There were 18,510 abortions performed last year – a rise of 1130, (6.5 per cent) on 2002. *By Leanne Bell*

Note: "The nutritive grains, the healthful, delicious fruits, are converted into beverages that pervert the senses and madden the brain. As a result of the use of these poisons, thousands of families are deprived of the comforts and even the necessities of life, acts of violence and crime are multiplied, and disease and death hurry myriads of victims to a drunkard's grave." *Temperance, p. 31*

## **The Media Often Mislead Readers on Important Public Health Issues**

Here's an example of how the media often misleads readers on important public health issues:

A study based on the tobacco industry's own documents shows the extent of the tobacco industry's efforts to influence the print media on the health effects of secondhand smoke.

This study was co-authored by Mayo Clinic researchers Richard Hurt, M.D., and Monique Muggli, along with Lee Becker, Ph.D., at the University of Georgia. It involved a review of previously secret internal tobacco company documents that revealed the tobacco industry launched an extensive, multifaceted effort to influence the scientific debate about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke.

The study purports that the tobacco industry attempted to derail public perception of the Environmental Protection

Agency's (EPA) risk assessment on secondhand smoke by recruiting a network of journalists to generate news articles supporting the industry's position and public relations messages about the secondhand smoke issue.

The authors also found that tobacco companies are attempting to influence journalists by financially supporting a U.S. school of journalism and planning to communicate their position through education programs targeting the media.

Dr. Hurt says that he is "no longer shocked at the extensive reach of the tobacco industry and what it does, but I am quite surprised that parts of the institution we call journalism can be so swayed to purposely mislead their readers on such an important public health issue as secondhand smoke."

The results of this study highlight the important but precarious role of the media in educating the public on secondhand smoke, says Dr. Hurt. The authors suggest that more scrutiny is warranted by media organizations of articles written by their reporters to insure the public is accurately informed.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as a result of exposure to secondhand smoke an estimated 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 35,000 coronary heart disease deaths occur annually among adult nonsmokers in the United States. Each year, secondhand smoke is associated with an estimated 8,000-26,000 new asthma cases in children, and an estimated 150,000-300,000 new cases of bronchitis and pneumonia in children aged less than 18 months, 7,500-15,000 of which will require hospitalization. *Mayo Clinic*

## **Parents Should Watch Teen's Friends, Dating Practices**

The more sexually active friends a teen has and the more time a teen spends with a boyfriend or girlfriend, the greater the risk that teen will smoke, drink, get drunk or use illegal drugs, according to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse IX: Teen Dating Practices and Sexual Activity, an annual back-to-school survey conducted by The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

This ninth annual CASA survey found:

- Compared to teens with no sexually active friends, teens who report half or more of their friends are sexually active are more than six and one-half times likelier to drink; 31 times likelier to get drunk; 22.5 times likelier to have tried marijuana; and more than five and one-half times likelier to smoke.

- Teens who spend 25 or more hours a week with a boyfriend/girlfriend are two and one-half times likelier to drink; five times likelier to get drunk; 4.5 times likelier to have tried marijuana; and more than 2.5 times likelier to smoke than teens who spend less than 10 hours a week with a boyfriend/girlfriend.

..."The message for parents from this year's survey is clear – the thunder of teen sexual activity and dating behavior may signal the lightning of substance abuse," said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA's chairman and president and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

Other striking findings in this year's survey:

- Teens, half or more of whose friends regularly view and download Internet pornography, are more than three times likelier to smoke, drink or use illegal drugs, compared to teens who have no friends who engage in such behavior.

- Forty-four percent of high school students think that boys at their school often or sometimes "push girls to drink alcohol or

take drugs in order to get the girls to have sex or do other sexual things."

"This year's survey reveals a tight connection between teen sexual behavior and substance abuse," said Califano. "This is not to say that teen sexual behavior causes substance abuse or that substance abuse causes teens to have sex, although we know that alcohol and drugs like marijuana and cocaine are sexually disinhibiting. It is to say that parents who become aware of certain dating and sexual behavior by their children should be alert to the increased likelihood of substance abuse."

....Other Key Findings:

- Forty-five percent of teens attend parties where alcohol is available; 30 percent where marijuana is available; 10 percent where prescription drugs are available; and nine percent where cocaine or Ecstasy is available.
- Drugs have rebounded as the number one concern of teens.
- Forty-five percent of teens have friends who regularly view and download pornography from the Internet; such teens are at increased risk of smoking, drinking or using illegal drugs.
- ...Teens who attend religious services weekly are at less than half the risk of smoking, drinking or using illegal drugs as teens who do not attend such services.

"Parents, make sure you are aware of the dating practices of your child and get to know your child's friends," said Califano

*CASA News Release*

Note: "It is inevitable that the youth will have associates, and they will necessarily feel their influence. There are mysterious links that bind souls together so that the heart of one answers to the heart of another. One catches the ideas, the sentiments, the spirit, of another. This association may be a blessing or a curse. The youth may help and strengthen one another, improving in deportment, in disposition, in knowledge; or, by permitting themselves to become careless and unfaithful, they may exert an influence that is demoralizing." *AH 455, 456*



