

Sex and Media

This discussion guide will help you facilitate a conversation with parents about sexual messages in the media. Use the following questions and stories to get parents thinking and talking about this issue. You may also want to show the Sex and Media parent tip video and hand out the Sex and Media parent tip sheet to help spark the discussion.

What's going on with your kids?

Questions to encourage parents to share experiences, concerns, and solutions

1. What picture do the media paint for teens about how sex should be?
2. Have you used sexual content in the media as a gateway conversation to share your values about sexual behavior with your kids? If so, how?
3. The media act as “super peers” when it comes to sex. Teens turn to the media to learn about gender roles and sexual issues, but often these depictions are glamorized, are unrealistic, are irresponsible, and lack consequences. How can you help your child understand that sex on screen is not all it's cracked up to be?
4. What challenges have you experienced with your own kids in dealing with sex and the media?

What would you do?

Stories to discuss, role play, and deepen conversation

Elementary school child

Sharon finds a porn Web site listed on the Internet history of her ten-year-old son's computer. Although they have filtering software, it doesn't always block what's inappropriate. Giving her son the benefit of the doubt, she asks him if he came across the site accidentally. The son admits that while surfing online he clicked on and then saw some inappropriate stuff. He didn't want to tell his mom because she might not believe him, and would then make him get off the computer.

- » What would you do if you found out your elementary age child had seen a porn site online? What would you do differently if it were your preteen or teen?
- » Are you aware of filtering and blocking techniques to help prevent your child from encountering porn and porn spam? If so, which have you used?

Middle school preteen or teen

Thirteen-year-old Jenna loves the book series and TV show *Gossip Girl*. Her dad caught the last half of the TV show and was surprised by the edgy material shown about sex, not to mention the values promoted about partying, drinking, and materialism. He suspects Jenna is becoming more interested in boys and in sex, but he doesn't want the glamorization and unrealistic portrayal of sex in *Gossip Girl* to influence Jenna's expectations.

- » How can Jenna's dad use *Gossip Girl* to talk about how sex and relationships are portrayed in the series versus in real life?

High school teen

Seventeen-year-old Pat is planning a spring break trip to Cancun with a group of students from school. He has a good head on his shoulders and is a good student. However, his parents know spring break isn't what it used to be. They know he's seen MTV's Spring Break specials and Girls Gone Wild ads, and wonder whether this media imagery might influence his expectations of spring break. TV shows and movies often portray "hooking up" and acting in sexually promiscuous ways as normal spring break behaviors. They're not sure if Pat is sexually active, and they're worried that he might take sexual risks. They're even more concerned about what could happen if alcohol is involved.

- » Do teens mimic the spring break images they see in the media? Or does the media reflect how teens behave during spring break? Or how they MIGHT act?
- » How should Pat's parents set expectations for behavior that are different from what he's seen in the media?
- » How can parents use sexual scenes in the media to open up conversations about the consequences of sex?
- » How might this situation be different if Pat were a teen girl?

High school teen

While driving home from a family dinner at a restaurant, Christina overhears her two high school boys chatting in the back seat. "Did you get that text of Melissa that everybody was talking about today?" her older son said. The other son replied, "Yeah, my friend forwarded it to me at lunch. Do you think her ex sent it? Dude, it's hilarious. You can see everything — like she's totally, you know..." Christina had watched a news report on sexting earlier that month and wondered whether her sons were talking about the circulation of a nude picture text at their school.

- » How might Christina join this conversation and encourage her sons to take this situation more seriously?
- » What are some of the social and legal consequences of sexting that teens may not be aware of?
- » How can parents talk to their teens about the objectification of women? Would this conversation be different with boys than it would with girls? If so, how and why?