

Brochure for parents

SEX, STD'S AND AIDS  
LET'S TALK!



STD

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We wish to thank the Fédération des comités de parents de la province du Québec for their cooperation as well as the numerous parents' committees for the benefit of their insightful comments.

Ce document est aussi disponible en français sous le titre:

SEXUALITÉ, MTS et SIDA

PARLONS-EN

Une brochure à l'intention des parents

Legal deposit

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 1996

ISBN 2-550-30458-6

**Condyloma epidemic**

**69% of parents favor  
condo machines in high  
schools**

**18% of students in first high and over 50%  
in their final year have had sex at least once**

**One out of every three teenagers  
always uses a condom when having sex**

**About 10,000 Quebecers  
are infected with HIV**

**Chlamydia mainly strikes  
teenagers**

**8,000 teenage pregnancies a year in Quebec**

**S**exually transmitted diseases (STD's) are nothing new, but still a serious problem even though the number of cases has declined in recent years. Because the STD's can sometimes have tragic consequences, they remain a public health priority. Quebec's young people are already receiving information on how to prevent the spread of STD's. This brochure is intended to complement the measures already in effect. It is not intended for young people, but for you, their parents, who may have already talked about sex and STD's with your children, or will one day have to.

In the following pages, we discuss the phenomenon of STD's in light of your experience as a parent and the realities facing today's youth. This information should enable you to help your teenage children come to terms with their sexuality and protect themselves against STD's.

This brochure is not meant to be glossed over and put aside. Rather, we hope it serves as a guide that you and your teenager often turn to when talking about sex and STD's.



## WHAT IT WAS LIKE FOR YOU

Do you remember what it was like when you were young, before you became a parent? In those days, not many people gave a second thought to what was known as “VD”. The invention of birth-control pills launched a sexual revolution. The traditional couple became a thing of the past. Remaining faithful to your partner and staying together “forever” no longer mean what they once did. Nowadays, people have all kinds of lifestyles: married couples, living together, divorced, separated, gay, single parents, blended families... Nowadays, a sexually transmitted disease can strike anyone.





## WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR TODAY'S TEENAGERS

Since adults often feel uncomfortable talking about sex with each other, it should come as no surprise to find parents at a loss when it comes to discussing the subject with their teenagers. "What do I say to them?" "How should I raise the subject?" "At what age?" "Whose job is it æ the mother's or father's?" "Do you say the same thing to boys as to girls?"

On the other hand, television, movies and advertising treat sex so casually that concepts such as love, respect and faithfulness come across as old-fashioned. Those are values you want to teach your children and believe they really need, but how do you go about it without begin told: "You don't understand!" "I don't need a sermon!" "Not another lecture!"

Meanwhile children learn about sex and STD's at a very young age. They talk about sex with each other and at school. But when parents want to have their say, they're afraid of being brushed aside. You'd almost think sex education had become the exclusive domain of scholars and experts...

In any case, it's hard not to think about teenagers and sex without asking yourself a lot of questions. What will it be like for them the first time they fall in love? Or have sex? And yet you might feel they're still so young and vulnerable.

Then too, how can you not start worrying when you come across statistics on teenage pregnancies? A pregnancy at that age usually means a crisis and can have a heavy impact:

- \* More underweight or premature babies;
- \* Teenage girls who decide to keep their babies run a higher risk of dropping out of school, becoming single parents, or living in poverty;
- \* Psychological and relationship problems.

And as if that weren't enough to worry about, there's the spread of STD's and how easy it is for teenagers to get them.

STD's can have serious consequences such as sterility and ectopic pregnancies (fetal development outside of the uterus). They also increase the risk of cervical cancer and foster the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

How do you talk about the pleasure of sex at the same time as the dangers? How can you do it without blowing things out of proportion or scaring your child? Yet with the risk of sterility and the threat of AIDS, can you really afford to say nothing and just hope for the best?





## UNDERSTANDING TEENAGERS

Let's look at a few facts about adolescence that help us understand the sexual development of teenagers as well as the influences that determine today's sexual practices and attitudes towards STD's.

### Physical Development

Puberty now occurs earlier than in the past. For example, in 1900 the average age at which girls began menstruating was 14; today it's about 12 and a half.

Hormonal and physical changes æ voice deepening, breasts growing, body and facial hair appearing etc. æ are accompanied by the first stirrings of sexual desire. Teenagers, however, go through puberty at various ages.

### Psychological Development

The psychological development of some teenagers is smooth and calm; in other cases, it's hell. The process can be described as a series of phases that lead to becoming independent and having your own identity. One of the big questions teens wonder about is, "Who am I?" They have to get to know themselves, learn how to express themselves, acquire their own values and opinions æ in brief, develop their own personality. The parental values adopted during childhood are now challenged; peer pressure, friends, the gang become more important and their influence is felt.

Another question that troubles many teenagers is, "Am I normal?" "I have such tiny breasts æ is that normal?" "My penis is so small æ when will it start growing?" "I'm still a virgin æ am I normal?" They have to learn how to live with a changing body, to cope with feelings that suddenly come out of nowhere, to go through a whole series of firsts: first love,

first kiss, first touch, first time having sex. They have to deal with sexual advances and sometimes do something about them. They also have to prove their masculinity or femininity and sometimes reluctantly come to terms with their sexual orientation æ "Am I straight or gay?"

At the same times as their personality is talking shape, teenagers learn how to get closer to someone else and become involved in a two-way relationship in which each person has something to give to the other. Naturally, this process takes on sexual overtones. Teenagers begin discovering themselves through their first friendships. Gradually they learn to think about other people and their needs and views. They get boyfriends or girlfriends, then fall in love for the first time. With that comes a desire to be closer to the other person, to care for them, to touch them. They go through various experiences, some happy and others disappointing, as they try to find the right person. Their ideas also mature and influence their sex lives.

Teenagers may be inclined to talk risks when it comes to birth control or exposure to STD's because they live so intensely for today without thinking about tomorrow. Only gradually do they learn how to realistically weigh the consequences of their actions. Their understanding of the world and willingness to accept their responsibilities becomes apparent through better control of their behavior and emotions.

### Outside influences

A teenager's sexuality is also strongly influenced by outside factors which are worth briefly discussing.

Today's teen have to come to terms with sex amid an open and permissive society. Suggestive rock videos, TV series that flaunt sex, sexy ads everywhere – all these influences can affect a teenager's behavior and convey what is very often a biased image of sex. Teens often have to deal with contradictory messages and tend to forget those contradictions come from adults. For example, sex is often



associate with drinking, or with violence and pornography, or with romantic ideals.

Moreover, for various reasons (a divorce, both parents working, the hectic pace of modern life), teens may end up spending more time with each other than with their families. This can lead to them having their first sexual experience at a younger age.

Finally, friends are very important to teenagers and can have a strong influence on how they express their sexuality. Teenagers don't want to be labeled "a nerd"; they want to be liked by their friends. This can lead to them having a sexual experience before they're really ready, simply because "everyone else is doing it".

## THE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OF TEENAGERS

A teenager's sexuality is also strongly influenced by outside factors which are worth briefly discussing.

The sexual behavior of teens has changed considerably in recent years. It's important for you to know what these changes are so that you can realistically help prevent the spread of STD's.

The average age at which teenagers lose their virginity has been declining since the 60's. Today, about 50% to teenagers (both boys and girls) have sex for the first time before they turn 15.

Often their first experience with sex occurs spontaneously. In that context, it's hard to think about using a condom or contraceptive device. But this situation has been changing over the past few years & so much so that the percentage of teens who use a condom the first time they have sex has climbed from 50% in 1988 to 75% in 1996. This is highly significant because, if they use a condom the first time, they're more likely to use the next time.

Nonetheless, teenagers tend to have sex sporadically & weeks or even months may go by without them having sex. This makes preventing STD's and pregnancy much more complicated. About

one third of sexually active teenagers always use a condom. This might be considered a practice they adopt the moment they become romantically or sexually involved and most see using a condom more as a means of birth control than of preventing the spread of STD's or the AIDS virus (HIV). The use of birth-control pills, however, is associated with limited use of a condom.

Most sexual relations occur in a romantic context. Teens often look forward to going out on dates and falling in love long before their first sexual experience. It appears that boys more easily accept casual sex than girls. Contrary to what some people think, teenagers remain sexually faithful to their partners as long as they're still in love. Yet teens can fall in and out of love every few weeks or months. It's estimated that 12 to 22% of sexually active Quebec 15-year-olds have already had sex with six or more partners. This fact of having sex with different people puts teenagers at risk of getting an STD.

Finally, the sexual behavior of teenagers varies considerably from one person to the next. One reason for this is personality differences: an aggressive teen, for example, is likely to start having sex at an earlier age than one who's shy. Another reason is the different rates at which adolescents develop. Other factors include social environment, financial status, family life and values.

## TEENAGE ATTITUDES TOWARD STD'S

Teenage attitudes toward STD's have changed. In the 80's, teenagers tended to ignore the risk of pregnancy and had a hard time imagining the possibility of getting an STD; they felt they were protected by some sort of magic shield & "It only happens to others." Today's teens are much more aware of the risk. They know it could happen to them and weigh the chances of it happening more realistically. Although some teenagers manage to stay out of trouble, many tend to

take chances. This stems from the characteristics of teenagers:

- \* They're at a stage of psychological development in which they don't really think about the consequences of their actions;
- \* Their desire for new experiences may interfere with their ability to weigh the real risks;
- \* They may find it difficult to adjust to their changing bodies & to accept a body that's becoming different;
- \* Sexual inexperience and shyness may make them feel uncomfortable about taking their clothes off or clearly saying what they like and don't like.

So how can you expect them to find it easy to talk about using a condom or engaging in sexual activity without intercourse?

Moreover, teenagers like to give the impression that they know all about STD's and how to prevent them. Many studies have proven that they do know a great deal about STD's, but remain troubled by a number of questions: "How do you really get an STD?" "Am I too young to buy a condom?" "How can I talk about it to my boyfriend (or girlfriend)?" "How do you use a condom?" "Is there really a risk the first time you have sex?" "How can I trust my boyfriend (or girlfriend)?"

It's not easy to talk about STD's to the person you love, especially since STD's are still considered embarrassing. For a teenager, taking precautions means they suspect the person they love is infected and don't trust them. And suspicion implies guilt. What an ugly thought when you're burning with desire or madly in love!

There's also another factor to consider: it has been proven that girls know more about birth control than boys. If you apply this finding to STD's, you realize that the best means of prevention & the condom & has to be used by boys, who are precisely the ones less concerned about preventing their spread than girls.

All these observations make all the more important for parents to become involved in educating their children about STD's.

# THE FACTS ABOUT STD'S

THE MOST PREVALENT STD'S	MEANS OF TRANSMISSION	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT
 <p><b>CHLAMYDIA</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Sexual contact<sup>1</sup> with a person who has the disease.</li> <li>* Women who have the disease can transmit it to their infant during childbirth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Often none, but may include vaginal discharge, abnormal discharge from the penis, abdominal pain, pain during urination or sexual relations.</li> <li>* The throat and anus may also be affected.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Antibiotics prescribed by a doctor.</li> <li>* Continue treatment until completed, even if symptoms have disappeared.</li> <li>* Abstain from sexual relations for the duration of treatment.</li> </ul> <p>N.B.: Chlamydia and gonorrhoea are treated with different antibiotics.</p>
 <p><b>GONORRHEA</b> (the clap, the dose, the drip, gono)</p>			
 <p><b>CONDYLOMAS</b> (venereal or genital warts, the bumps)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Sexual contact<sup>1</sup> with a person who has the disease.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Small wartlike bumps on the genitals, the anus and in rare cases inside the mouth.</li> <li>* Generally painless.</li> <li>* Sometimes itching, irritation of affected area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* See a doctor (treatment will be prescribed in accordance with severity of the condition).</li> <li>* Treatment requires patience and must be followed conscientiously, since healing often a long time (condylomas can be very persistent).</li> </ul>
 <p><b>GENITAL HERPES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Sexual contact<sup>1</sup> with a person who has the disease.</li> <li>* Women who have the disease can transmit it to their infant during childbirth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* When visible, painful water blisters on the genitals, the anus and sometimes inside the vagina.</li> <li>* Burning sensation during urination.</li> <li>* Vaginal discharge.</li> <li>* Sometimes abnormal discharge from the penis.</li> <li>* Fever, aches and pains, headaches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* No effective cure yet, but a vaccine is now being tested.</li> <li>* Symptoms may appear periodically.</li> <li>* Medication is used to relieve symptoms and reduce the number and duration of relapses.</li> <li>* Abstain from sexual relations whenever symptoms are present.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>SYPHILIS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Sexual contact<sup>1</sup> with a person who has the disease.</li> <li>* Contact with contaminated blood.</li> <li>* Women who have the disease can transmit it to their infant during childbirth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Painless chancres (mouth, throat, genitals, anus) that eventually disappear, though the disease persists.</li> <li>* Later, a rash (sometimes accompanied by other symptoms) that eventually disappears, though the disease persists.</li> <li>* Very serious long-term complications if left untreated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Antibiotics prescribed by a doctor.</li> <li>* Continue treatment until completed even if symptoms have disappeared.</li> <li>* Abstain from sexual relations for the duration of treatment or at least use a condom.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>HEPATITIS B</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Genital contact or contact with the blood, saliva, sperm or vaginal secretions of a person carrying the virus.</li> <li>* Contact with contaminated blood (e.g., through contaminated syringes).</li> <li>* Women who have the virus can transmit it to their infant during childbirth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Some people get symptoms, others don't.</li> <li>* Fatigue</li> <li>* Fever</li> <li>* Abdominal pain</li> <li>* Loss of appetite</li> <li>* Sometimes nausea, vomiting, jaundice.</li> </ul> <p>N.B.: Some carriers of the virus do not develop the illness, but can transmit to others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Medication is not prescribed. Infected persons need to have regular medical check-ups, get plenty of rest, follow a balanced diet and avoid drugs and alcohol.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>AIDS</b> (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is transmitted through genitals or an open cut or sore coming into contact with the blood, sperm or vaginal secretions of a person who carries the virus.</li> <li>* Contact with contaminated blood *(e.g., through contaminated syringes).</li> <li>* Women who have the virus can transmit it to their infant during pregnancy or childbirth.</li> <li>* Since 1985, the risk of HIV transmission through blood transfusions is minimal.</li> </ul>	<p>The symptoms may not appear for several years during which the infected person can still transmit the virus. The first signs are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Heavy sweating at night</li> <li>* Extreme fatigue</li> <li>* Significant weight loss</li> <li>* Swollen glands in the neck, armpits or groin</li> <li>* Persistent diarrhea, fever or cough.</li> </ul> <p>These are followed by more severe manifestations such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Pneumonia</li> <li>* Certain forms of cancer.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* No cure to date.</li> <li>* Medical care can control certain infections that may develop during the course of the disease, but AIDS itself remains incurable.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup>SEXUAL CONTACT: \*Vaginal ou anal intercourse  
\* Contact of the mouth with the partner's mouth, genitals, anus

<sup>2</sup> SAFE SEX: \* Hugging, petting  
\* Kissing without exchange of saliva  
\* Kissing the body except for the genitals, and staying clear of open cuts or sores  
\* Individual or mutual masturbation  
\* Massage  
\* Erotic devices for use by one person

## PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF THE DISEASE

## HOW WIDESPREAD IS IT?

## MEANS OF PROTECTION

## COMMENTS

<p>* Advise sexual partners to see a doctor and get treatment, even if they have no symptoms.</p>	<p>* From 1990 to 1994, some 12,000 cases of chlamydia and over 1,000 cases of gonorrhea were reported to the Quebec STD monitoring program. These figures only represent the tip of the iceberg because of unreported cases. One can reasonably think the real numbers are substantially higher than the official statistics.</p>	<p>* Abstain from sexual relations          * Engage only in safe sex<sup>2</sup>          * Use a latex condom correctly          * Go for screening tests if you are or were an individual at risk<sup>3</sup>          * See a doctor if a partner has the disease.</p>	<p>* These diseases can lie dormant for several years          * Sterility (inability to have children) is the primary complication of these diseases.</p>
<p>* Advise sexual partners to see a doctor, even if they have no symptoms.</p>	<p>* This is the most widespread sexually transmitted disease in Quebec.</p>	<p>* Abstain from sexual relations          * Engage only in safe sex<sup>2</sup>          * Use a latex condom correctly (the condom only protects the area it covers so that the disease can still be transmitted by condylomas on the pubis, for example)          * Examine your partner's genitals          * See a doctor if a partner has the disease. Women should undergo a PAP test during the check-up.</p>	<p>* Condylomas can generally be seen with the naked eye          * Regular examination of the genitals will increase the chance of early detection.</p>
<p>* Advise sexual partners to see a doctor, even if they have no symptoms.</p>	<p>* About ten thousand Quebecers get herpes each year.</p>	<p>* Abstain from sexual relations          * Engage only in safe sex<sup>2</sup>          * Use a latex condom correctly (the condom only protects the area it covers, so herpes can still be transmitted if the pubis, for example, is infected) choice of a partner          * Examine your partner's genitals          * See a doctor if a partner has the disease.</p>	<p>* Genital herpes can generally be seen with the naked eye          * Regular examination of the genitals will increase the chance of early detection.</p>
<p>* Advise sexual partners to see a doctor, even if they have no symptoms.</p>	<p>* Contrary to popular belief, this disease has not been eliminated.</p>	<p>* Abstain from sexual relations          * Engage only in safe sex<sup>2</sup>          * Use a latex condom correctly          * Don't share syringes          * See a doctor if a partner has the disease.</p>	<p>* People who have the disease remain contagious unless treated, even if the symptoms have disappeared.</p>
<p>* Advise sexual partners to see a doctor, even if they have no symptoms.</p>	<p>* 6,000 new cases occur in Quebec every year.</p>	<p>* Abstain from sexual relations          * Engage only in safe sex<sup>2</sup>          * Use a latex condom correctly          * Go for screening tests if you are or were an individual at risk<sup>3</sup>          * See a doctor if a partner has the disease.</p>	<p>* Like other diseases of the liver, hepatitis B is sometimes called "jaundice"          * There is only one effective vaccine for hepatitis B, which children get in grade 4. It is also recommended for persons at risk.</p>
<p>* Advise sexual partners to see a doctor, even if they have no symptoms.</p>	<p>* As of 1996, there were nearly 4,000 AIDS cases in Quebec.          * The number of HIV-carriers is estimated to be about 10,000.</p>	<p>* Abstain from sexual relations          * Engage only in safe sex<sup>2</sup>          * Use a latex condom correctly          * Don't share syringes          * Go for screening tests if you are or were an individual at risk<sup>3</sup>          * See a doctor if a partner has the disease.</p>	<p>* Both men and women can contract the virus, regardless of sexual orientation          * There is absolutely no risk of contracting the AIDS virus through casual contact or from living with someone who has the disease.</p>

<sup>3</sup> INDIVIDUAL AT RISK:

\* A person who has sexual contact without using a condom with someone who is infected and doesn't necessarily know they have the disease.  
 \* Someone who shares syringes to inject drugs or steroids.



## THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF PARENTS

Many parents wonder whether they still play an important role in the lives of their teenage children. All the signs point in the opposite direction: teens keeping their distance, becoming more independent and private, harder to talk to. Friends now seem to be the only ones who matter.

Despite appearances, however, the bond between parent and child remains strong during adolescence. This intense relationship, built up over many years, can weather many a storm. It may be harder to say "I love you" to a teenager, but the truth is you still deeply love them.

Considering all the time a parent and child have spent together, it should come as no surprise that parents are still an important rolemodel for teenagers. Through their actions, values and reactions, parents influence the choices their children make. Moreover, surveys show that 9 out of 10 teenagers would prefer to learn about sex from their parents. Teenagers don't always come right out and ask their parents for information. Instead, they ask general questions or talk about what their friends are doing. This makes it more difficult for parents to see through the smokescreen and take the initiative.

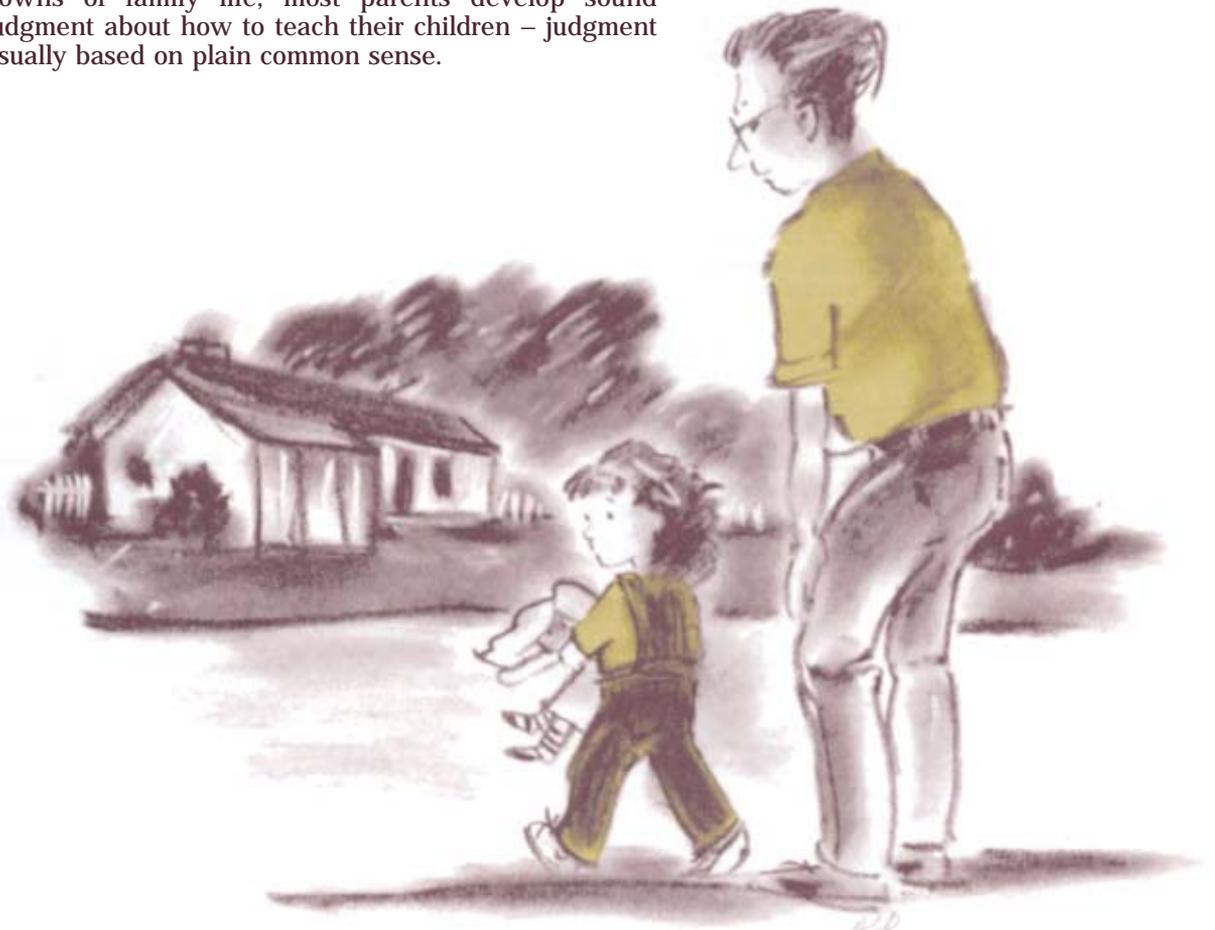
Sex education programs at school certainly provide useful information, but are only intended to complement what children learn from their parents. You don't have to be an expert to talk about sex. From all the ups and downs of family life, most parents develop sound judgment about how to teach their children – judgment usually based on plain common sense.

Why not take advantage of the tremendous value of knowing your own child? You can teach children about sex in exactly the same way you teach them about other things. When you taught them how to cross the street, you told what the dangers were without exaggerating. You have a responsibility to protect your children from the dangers you see, and talk about them calmly and realistically. Given the real risk of getting an STD, you, as a parent, have an obligation to talk about it with your teenager.



## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR TEENAGER

Here are a few important tips that might make it easier for you to talk to your teenager.



## Be Honest

Honesty always makes communication easier. First of all, being honest means expressing your real feelings. For example, if you're worried, come right out and say so – don't disguise it with anger or annoyance. Honesty also means conveying your values as well as any doubts or concerns you may have about your teenager's sexual behavior. When you do this, however, remember that teenagers have their own opinions and deserve respect, and that you can get your ideas across without ramming them down your teenager's throat.

## Listen Closely

Effective communication doesn't just mean talking; it also means knowing how to listen. Listening is something you can do every day by taking a genuine interest in and paying close attention to your child's experiences. Whether you look at your children without really seeing them or take an active interest in their lives – even though that sometimes requires making an effort – can make all the difference. For example, to take the time to listen to the story of a quarrel between friends, or to share their serious concern over what to wear for a date.

The ability to listen is something you have to develop over time, i.e. in every conversation you have with your child. There's nothing that can happen that's so important that it justifies a total breakdown in communication. Naturally, a serious talk can sometimes be interrupted or put off until later, but the lines of communication must always remain.

Being a good listener also means having a good sense of timing. Wait for the right time to have a good conversation: take advantage of a quiet moment around the house, plan a one-on-one talk, or use a TV show or an article you recently read to get the ball rolling.

Listening also means recognizing the fact that your teenager, like every other human being including you, has their own inner sanctum – a private world where they keep their secrets and thoughts they're not ready to share with you right now, or may never be. Accepting this means trusting your child

and being able to say to yourself as a parent: "Even though I don't know everything about my child's life, I know they'll do the right thing to find happiness and uphold the basic principles I taught them."

## Keep an Open Mind

To get a teenager to open up, you have to keep an open mind, which means:

- Listening to your child's ideas and opinions while making a real effort to understand them;
- Believing that your child's ideas and opinions could be as valid as your own, even though you don't necessarily have to agree with them;
- Realizing, without making a big issue out of it, that what your teenager is saying what he or she thinks right now, and that those opinions (like your own) can change.

Parents have to be equally open to the changing world in which their teenager is developing. Moreover, by sharing their ideas with their parents, teens often help adults keep in touch with social change. When this happens, the two generations give each other something.

## What You Shouldn't Do

To achieve good communication, make every possible effort to avoid the following mistakes.

**\* Don't criticize or blame:** "You're too young!" "Your acting like a tramp!" Although statements like this can often leap out of your mouth when you're furious or feel utterly powerless, all they do is provoke hostility in a teenager and they could lead to a breakdown in communication.

**\* Don't preach:** "If I were you..." "When I was your age, we'd never have done that!" Parents who preach aren't listening, but rather talking and acting as superiors. Teenagers particularly don't like being talked down to. Besides, you can tell your children about your own experiences without forcing them to imitate you. For instance, you might start off by saying, "You wanna hear a good story? It's something that might never happen to you, but I once..." Sharing experiences in this way can lead to a good talk.



\* **Don't snoop around:** Some parents can easily be inclined to get suspicious and ask their child too many questions. It's better to say exactly what's on your mind and give your teenager a chance to come out with a straight answer than to go fishing for evidence by sneaking around or using other similar ploys. Remember; communication is always more effective if you're honest and sincere.

## **Talking to Your Child about Sex**

All through childhood and adolescence, sex should be treated as something good and natural. Yet it's not always easy to talk to your children about sex. Here are few helpful tips.

\* Start talking about sex with your children at an early age. Even very young children can be taught to respect and take care of their bodies, and to feel good about begin a boy or a girl.

\* If you feel uncomfortable talking about sex with your child, say so. Children inevitably sense that kind of embarrassment and might even think they're reason for it. Admitting that it's hard for you to about not only reduce the level of tension, but also makes you more human in the eyes of your children.

\* Always answer the questions about sex that your child asks and never make fun of them. If it's an awkward moment promise you'll answer later and stick to your promise. If your child never asks questions about sex, take the initiative and start talking about it.

\* Admit it if there's something you don't know. Joining your teenager in a quest for information might even bring you closer together.

\* Don't limit discussions with teenagers to physical growth and development. There are other important things to talk about: how boys and girls the same age as theirs act and what they feel, sexual attraction, what makes for a healthy, loving relationship. Also, avoid talking about sex solely in terms of warnings and taboos: this could create a negative impression of sex and erect a wall between you and your teenager.

\* Before your child becomes sexually active, tell them about the reproductive function of their bodies as well as the responsibilities and consequences involved. Encourage them to see this responsibility as something positive that can give them control over their own lives and help them blossom into adulthood.

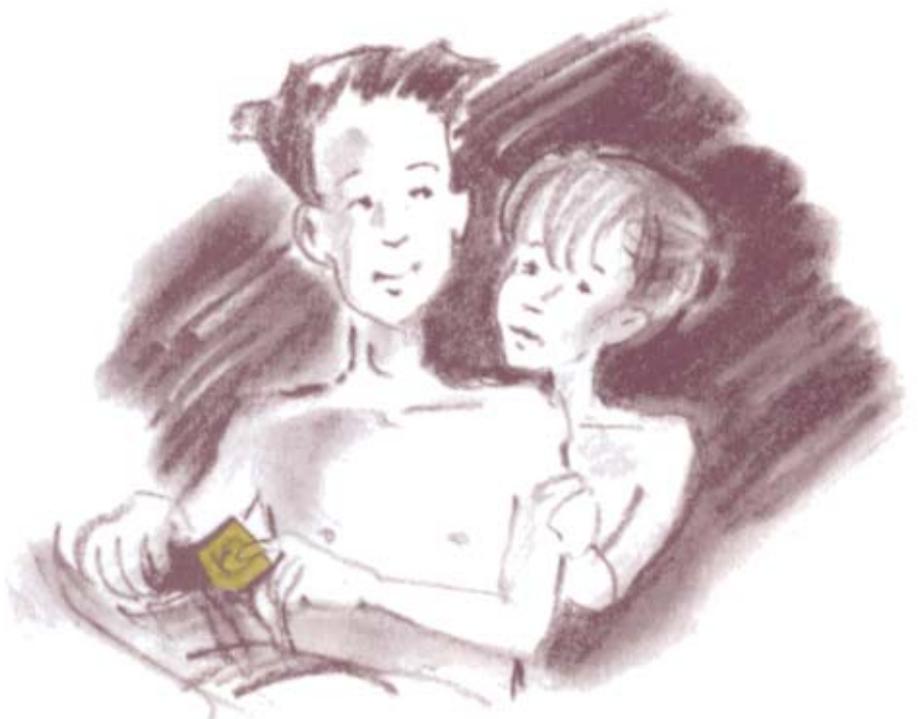
## **KNOWING ABOUT PREVENTION**

The old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", is particularly appropriate when it comes to STD's. And effective prevention involves a long-term process of education and dialogue.

## **Teaching Your Child about Freedom and Responsibility**

Since you can't always be there to hold your child's hand, you have to guide them towards becoming adults who act responsibly in every aspect of life, including sex. Here are some way of helping your teenager develop a sense of freedom and responsibility.

- Encourage children to think for themselves rather than echo what other people say; for example, ask your children what they think about this or that.
- Give your children a chance to make choices at an early age (making decisions about clothing , friends, what to do).
- Encourage your children to discover their talents, likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses.
- Teach your children how to say "No" in certain situations, such as when friends urge them to do something they don't want to do or don't agree with.
- Help your child to develop a sense of responsibility and to accept the consequences of their actions.



- \* Talk about why some teenagers decide to have sex: because everyone else is doing it, to avoid losing a friend, not to be labelled a “nerd”, to prove they know what it’s all about, to express their love, to have an intimate relationship with someone, simply out of curiosity, etc. Discuss the advantages of get involved in a sexual relationship only when you feel you’re really ready for ti, feel good about the decision and trust the other person. Since teenagers can interpret what it means to be ready in different ways, you should delve into this and reinforce a decision to postpone sexual intercourse. Finally, don’t give them the idea that sex is some sort of obstacle course (pregnancy, STD’s); instead, present it as a life experience from which we can learn, grow and fulfil ourselves with both self-respect and respect for the other person.

### Talking about STD’s

- \* Once you’ve talked about sex in general with your child, you can start thinking about discussing STD’s. This can be done when he or she is 10 or 11, if not sooner. A TV show, ad or simply one of the brochures listed on the page 19 can be used to get the conversation going.
- \* Your grade-four child’s vaccination against hepatitis B could be an opportunity to talk about STD’s because its purpose is to protect children before they become sexually active. The vaccine, however, only provides protection against hepatitis B and not other STD’s.
- \* Make your child aware of the fact that STD’s can be transmitted even by a close friend. Don’t wait until your teenager falls in love because he or she may be less willing to listen to what you have to say.
- \* Some parents may be tempted to use STD’s as a means of putting a clamp on their teenager’s sex life. Bear in mind, however, that a straightforward talk and accurate, realistic information

are more likely to get a friendly reception. For example, it’s better to talk about postponing sexual intercourse to a time when your teenager is really ready for it than simply to forbid it outright.

- \* In talking about ways to avoid STD’s (abstinence, postponing sexual intercourse, safe sex, remaining faithful to one person who doesn’t have an STD, using a condom, screening tests, etc.), take into consideration your child’s stage development.

- \* Make it clear that you’re willing to talk about STD’s whenever your child wants to; but also make sure you raise the subject yourself from times to time.

- \* There are many myths about STD’s floating around. Making sure your teenager knows the real facts is another way of starting a conversation about this subject. Here are few examples of these misconceptions:

**\* People get STD’s because they don’t wash enough. (FALSE: Contracting a sexually transmitted disease has nothing to do with cleanliness.)**

**\* Only people with many sexual partners get STD’s. (FALSE: One infected partner is all it takes.)**

**\* People who have a sexually transmitted disease always know it. (FALSE: Some STD’s present no signs or symptoms.)**

**\* It’s mainly women who transmit STD’s. (FALSE: Both men and women transmit STD’s.)**

**\* Only prostitutes and gays (male ou female) get STD’s. (FALSE: STD’s can be contracted by anyone who doesn’t engage in safe sex.)**



# TEENS AT RISK

The risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease increases if:

- \* Your teenager has sex without using a condom with someone who has or has had an STD, who has HIV, or who has or has had numerous partners without using a condom;
- \* Your teenager (or their sexual partner) share needles or other equipment to inject drugs or steroids;
- \* Your teenage (or their sexual partner) gets a tattoo with unsterilized needles.

A teen who fits into one or more of these categories is considered to be at risk.

## Take Action

If you have any doubts or solid reasons to think your teenager is at risk, you should talk to them about it if only because they may not realize the dangers involved.

## Make Your Child Aware of the Risks

- \* Find out how much your teenager knows about STD's and protection against them. Often teens may not have fully understood the information they received or only retained part of it.
- \* Tell your child that many STD's still strike Quebec teens.
- \* Make sure your child knows that, with some STD's, the signs only turn up years later. For instance, only half the people who have chlamydia, gonorrhea, herpes or condylomas show symptoms.
- \* Make your child aware of the consequences of certain STD's (painful sexual intercourse, relations, sterility caused by chlamydia or gonorrhea, cancer of the uterus sometimes associated with condylomas, no cure for AIDS, etc.).



## Talk about How to Reduce the Risk

- \* Tell your teenager what the opinions are so that they can make a well-informed decision. These opinions include postponing sexual intercourse, engaging in sexual activity without intercourse, or having safe sex by using a condom.
- \* Help your teenager when it comes to thinking about their choice of a sexual partner and assessing whether that person is at risk.
- \* Remind your teenager of the importance of discussing preventive measures with their partner. Talk about how hard it is to raise this subject when you're in love.
- \* Make sure your teenager knows about risky and safe sex, and knows into what category their own sexual behavior falls.

- \* If you feel you can't help your child in this area, ask someone the child trusts to talk about it with them. Your CLSC or child's school can also provide assistance.
- \* If your teen is at risk, remind them to:

**\* Always use a condom to protect themselves. Moreover, a condom combined with the pill is a more effective means of birth control;**

**\* Only stop using a condom under certain conditions including a steady relationship;**

**\* Get tested for STD's and HIV;**

**\* Watch out for the slightest symptom of a sexually transmitted disease (see chart on page 8 and 9) and, at the first sign, see a doctor immediately.**

## **IF YOUR TEENAGER GETS AN STD**

When parents find out that their child has a sexually transmitted disease, the initial reaction could very normally be anger, shame or anxiety. In some cases, this could be the first time you realize that your child is sexually active. Even though you may find it hard, you have to face the fact.

You might also feel angry at your child's partner, but you have to avoid bad-mouthing that person. Your teenager already has enough to deal with: shattered trust, embarrassment, shame, the obligation to name all their present and past sexual partners. Wait until things have calmed down before talking some more about it with your child. You might even have to tone down some of the things you said earlier during an emotional outburst.

In brief, we suggest you the procedure described below.

- Make sure your child really has the disease by seeing a doctor. Since your teenager probably feels worried, confused and embarrassed, offer to go along with them.
- If your child doesn't have a sexually transmitted disease, you should have a good talk about the risks involved and how to have safe sex.
- If your child has a sexually transmitted disease, try to be reassuring because teens with a health problem can easily panic.
- Provide encouragement and support during the treatment phase, which may take some time and require more than one trip to the doctor.

- Help your child face the necessity of telling their partner so that the latter can also get treatment to prevent the disease from spreading.
- If you need support and feel the need to talk about what's happened to a friend or relative, do so with tact and discretion because your teenager probably already feels embarrassed and possibly ashamed.
- Once the situation is under control and things have calmed down, it's important for you to talk to your child again about choosing sexual partners, safe sex and risky behavior.
- \* If you need help, you can turn to someone your teenager trusts, school or CLSC staff, your family doctor, or STD clinics. There's also an anonymous, fully confidential hotline you can call 24 hours a day, seven days a week if you have any questions about sexually transmitted diseases.

### **STD-AIDS HOTLINE:**

Quebec City area: (418) 648-2626  
Elsewhere: 1-800-463-5656



To wrap up this brochure on teenagers and sex, remember that your teen's sexual behavior is part of the many discoveries and learning experiences of that stage of life. And like all other learning experiences and discoveries, it brings its share of questions, surprises and problems. As a parent, your job is to be receptive and try to understand what your teenager is going through, as well as provide information and advice. As Dr. Louise Charbonneau of the Saint-Denis de Montréal youth clinic says, "Everyone has to go through the teen years, but each person does so in their own way."

## AND TO GET STARTED...

Doing the following quiz with your teenager is a good way to start talking about sexually transmitted diseases.

### 1 Teenagers get their first sexual desires:

- A  The first time they have sex.
- B  During puberty.
- C  When they get married.

### 2 On average, teenagers lose their virginity:

- A  At about age 15.
- B  At about age 16 for boys and 19 for girls.
- C  At about age 19.
- D  On their wedding night.

### 3 One of the best forms of protection against STD's when engaging in sexual intercourse is to:

- A  Scrub with soap afterwards.
- B  Take a birth-control pill.
- C  Make sure you really love the other person.
- D  Use a latex condom.





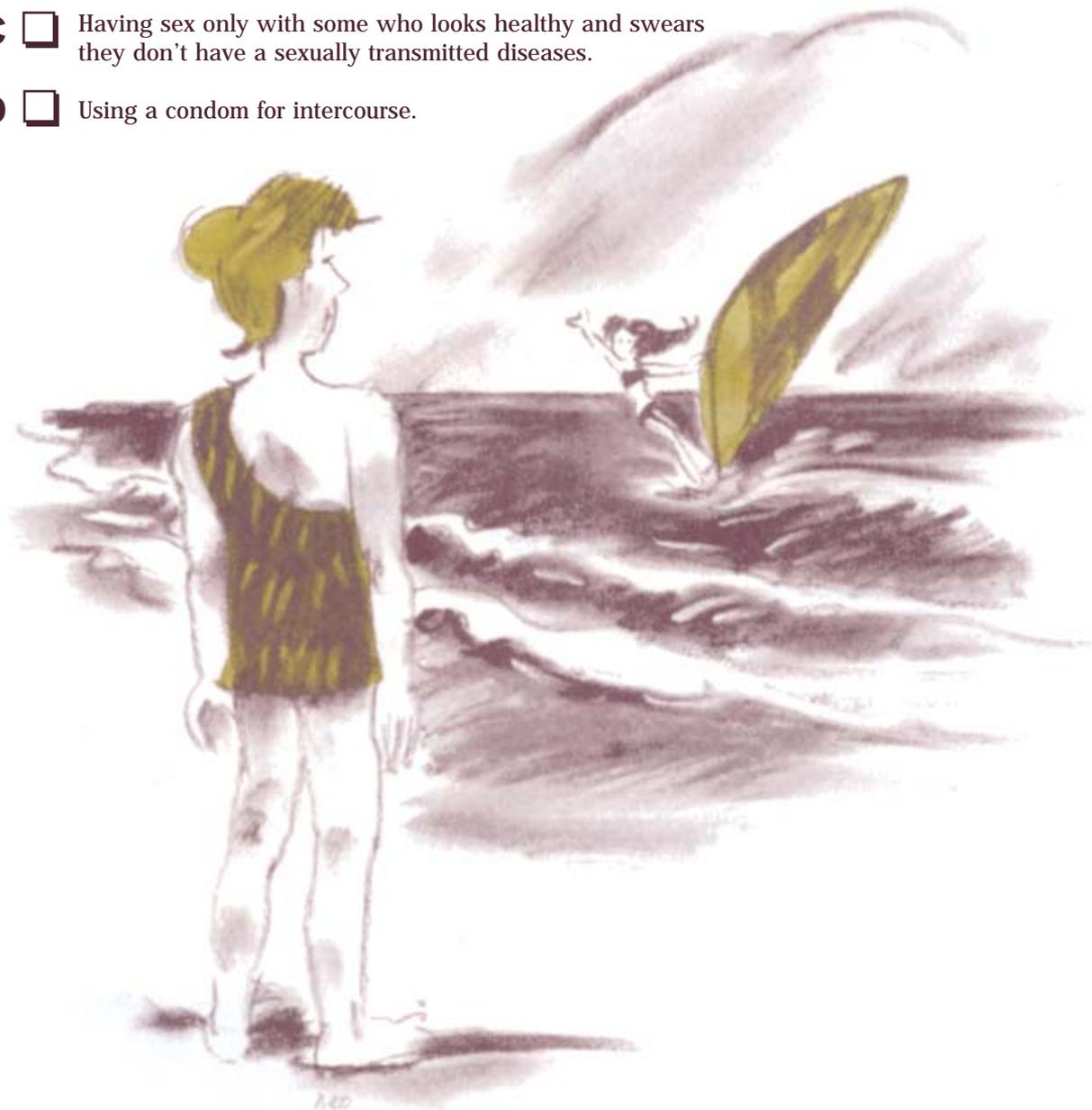
**4** *The best thing to do if you think you have a sexually transmitted disease is to:*

- A  Wait for it to go away by itself.
- B  Make a doctor's appointment.
- C  Rush to an emergency clinic.
- D  Don't talk to anyone.



**5** *Which of the following situations involves the least risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease?*

- A  Having sex with someone you've known a long time.
- B  Changing sexual partners from time to time.
- C  Having sex only with some who looks healthy and swears they don't have a sexually transmitted diseases.
- D  Using a condom for intercourse.





**6** *A parent worried about their teenager's sexual behavior should:*

- A  Forbid them to go out at night.
- B  Talk about their concern.
- C  Pretend there's no problem and keep smiling .
- D  Have the child watched by a private detective.



**7** *Which of the following diseases is really incurable?*

- A  Gonorrhea.
- B  Syphilis.
- C  Genital herpes.
- D  Chlamydia.



**8** *The best way to talk with your teenager about STD's is to:*

- A  Talk about the birds and the bees.
- B  Provide accurate information about the subject.
- C  Utterly terrify the child so that they won't even try to have sex.
- D  List all the potential consequences of STD's.



**9** *Which of the following practices involve the least risk of contacting a sexually transmitted disease?*

- A  Heavy hugging and petting.
- B  Having sexual intercourse without a condom.
- C  Having sexual intercourse with a condom.
- D  Having sexual intercourse but ejaculating outside the vagina.



**10** *For someone who has chlamydia that goes untreated, the biggest danger is:*

- A  Their partner won't ever talk to them again.
- B  Eventually becoming sterile.
- C  Never being able to have another orgasm.
- D  Developing small warts on their genitals.



**Responses:**  
 1=B 2=A 3=D 4=B 5=D  
 6=B 7=C 8=B 9=A 10=B

## Have you seen our other material about STD's and AIDS?

### BROCHURES

**"C'mon... Help keep love alive"**

**"AIDS, you better be concerned"**

**"STD, be aware and beware"**

**"Play it safe"**

**"Anonymous HIV/AIDS screening test. Have you given any thought?"**

**"Safe sex for young gay and bisexual men"**

These brochures and folders are available free from your local CLSC, community groups dedicated to fighting AIDS, and the public health branch of your regional health and social services board.

**"Tips for smart love",**

available from the public health branch, Montréal-Centre

**"Jo".**

Comic book about a teenager coping with an VIH infection. French version available in public and school libraries; French and English version for sale at Éditions Sciences et Culture for \$12.95.

### TEACHING MATERIAL

#### (AUDIOVISUAL)

#### Videocassettes

#### Skills for Healthy Relationships

1994

Length: 55 minutes

Distributors:

Canadian Public Health Association (free loan)

LM Media Marketing, \$30

Lighthearted documentary about the various options teenagers have for avoiding STD's and AIDS: postponing sexual intercourse, using a condom, screening tests.

#### Talking about AIDS

1989

Length: 30 minutes

Distributors:

Canadian Public Health Association (free loan)

LM Media Marketing

Lighthearted educational documentary. Testimonials by people living with AIDS. Teenage rap song. Animated segments focusing on attitudes towards and negotiating the use of a condom through awareness of the risk.

#### AIDS: the new facts of life

1989

Length:

Distributors:

Canadian Public Health Association (free loan)

### LEARNING SOFTWARE

#### How to keep love bugs away

1990

(IBM-compatible)

Length: 60 minutes

Distributors: Logidisque inc, \$34.95

Interactive software focusing on knowledge of and attitudes towards all STD's, including AIDS. It provides information and includes a set of questions to test your knowledge and assess your personal chances of getting a sexually transmitted disease.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### Canadian Public Health Association

#### National AIDS Documentation Centre

1565, Carling Avenue, Suite 400  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1Z 8R1

**Tel.: (613) 725-3769**

Fax.: (613) 725-9826

### Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec AIDS Coordination Center

Direction générale de la santé publique

201 Crémazie Blvd, East, Room  
RC03

Montreal, Quebec

H2M 1L2

**Tel.: (514) 873-9890**

Fax.: (514) 873-9997

### Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal-centre

Direction de la santé publique

1616 René-Lévesque Blvd. West  
3rd Floor

Montreal, Quebec

H3H 1P8

**Tel.: (514) 932-3055**

Fax.: (514) 932-1502

### Éditions Sciences et Culture

5090 Bellechasse

Montréal

H1T 2A2

Téléphone (514) 253-0403

### LM Média Marketing

115 Torbay, suite 9

Markam (Ontario)

L3R 2M9

**Téléphone: (416) 475-3750**

### Logidisque Inc.

C.P. 10 - Succursale D

Montréal, Québec

H3K 3B9

**Téléphone: (514) 933-2225**

Télocopieur: (514) 932-2182

This brochure is available at your local CLSC or from the public health branch of your regional health and social services board.

For more information about STD's and testing services, call (toll-free): **1-800-463-5656**.

If you live in the Quebec City area, simply dial **648-2626**.

