

Young Adult (18+)

A trusted adult should be someone a youth can speak with openly and honestly. Even if the youth decides to leave care at age 18, they might stay connected with you. Use the tips and guidelines below to start conversations, plan for the success, and create stability.

Key Facts about this Age Group:

- They are capable of thinking abstractly and thinking about how their current actions will influence their futures, but they still need support in developing this skill.
- They are almost fully developed physically and much more mature emotionally than in previous stages.
- They are clarifying their own values and beliefs.

Assume No One Else Is Talking to Them About Sexual Health.

- Very few youth in foster care report that someone is talking to them about sex, love, and relationships.
- Talking to your teen about healthy relationships and sex is normal and should be incorporated into discussions about life and transition planning.
- Review policies on sex education. It is important to assume that no one else is addressing these topics with the child, so why not you?
- No state explicitly requires parental consent or notification for contraceptive services. However, two states (Texas & Utah) require parental consent for contraceptive services paid for with state funds.

Let's Talk About Sex, Baby!

- Sex isn't a bad thing. While it is fair to encourage your teen to wait until they are mentally and emotionally ready for sex, don't imply negativity or associate guilt with sex. Teens are sensitive to such connotations and this can influence their future relationships. *(Remember: Teens who have disclosed past sexual trauma may be triggered by such discussions. In this case, it is best to ensure that the teen has access to a mental health professional and meet them where they are in order to facilitate appropriate conversations about sex and parenting.)*
- De-stigmatize the discussion of sex, sexual and reproductive health, and contraception. By encouraging and engaging in candid, open conversations with your teen you can normalize the topic and build trust.

- Sex is an act that can create physical and emotional connections with other individuals. Sex, in the context of healthy behaviors and relationships, should be included in the discussion of health and life planning.

Fact vs Fiction.

- Teens get much of their information on sex from peers and online sources that are not always reliable. Open the door for conversations so that you can correct misinformation and learn together if it's a topic you are unfamiliar with.



2X

By age 19, youth in foster care were more than twice as likely as all youth to have given birth to a child.

Pecora, P. J., Williams, J., Kessler, R. J., Downs, A. C., O'Brien, K., Hiripi, E., & Morello, S. (2003). *Assessing the effects of foster care: Early results from the Casey national alumni study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs

- Youth learn about relationships from what they see. This can include biological parent or foster parent relationships, siblings, TV shows, and movies. Utilize conversations about positive relationships to navigate other influences the youth may experience.
- Medically accurate information about sexual and reproductive health is crucial to a teen's wellbeing. Talk to other adults in the youth's life and consider bringing this up in front of a judge or case worker who has the authority to mandate educational programs.

Help Teens Recognize Unhealthy Patterns in Relationships.

- Many teens are unaware of how to recognize unhealthy behaviors within a relationship. Ask about a teen's relationship and have a two-way conversation about positive/negative traits in a partner, friend, family member, or other adult. *(Tip: Admit that it might be awkward at first to talk about these things; this recognition may help build trust and break the ice.)*
- **Script:** "I know that talking to me about your relationship with your partner may be a bit awkward. But, let me be straightforward with you. I may not always have the answers and I am sure that when we talk about relationships that I will stumble and not say the right thing from time to time. Still, I promise you two things: (1) I am always here to listen and hope that you will come to me with any questions or concerns you might have, and (2) I will always do the absolute best I can to help you with the decisions you make."
- **Script:** "I am interested because I care about you and I care about the things and people that are important to you. If you are involved with someone, I want to help you make sure that person is someone with whom you are comfortable, someone who supports you, someone who respects your ideas and opinions, and someone who appreciates all the things that make you who you are."

Support Condom Use.

- Young people in foster care are at great risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy. Using condoms alongside other birth control methods is crucial for reducing this risk. Ensure that teens have access to condoms. *(Remember most health departments and family planning clinics offer free condoms.)* Consider taking your teen to buy condoms and discuss using condoms. *(Remember: Condoms should be used for oral, anal, and vaginal sex.)*
- **Script:** "I know talking about condoms can be awkward. I am bringing this up because I care about you. It's important to discuss condom use with your potential sexual partners. What do you know about condoms? If you bring up condoms and your partner refuses to wear one, this is a sign of controlling

ASK does your partner...



Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Charles, P., Mikell, D., Stevenson, B., Park, K., Kindler, B., Harty, J., & Feng, H. (2016). *Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of Youth at Age 19*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

behavior and emotional manipulation. However, not all partners will readily accept condoms and that is why condom negotiation is so important. *(Remember: Teens should mention both STI and pregnancy prevention as benefits of condom use, if not, tell them!)*

Know Your Options.

- Check out Bedsider.org and consult a physician about which birth control options may be best for your teen. If the teen discloses a romantic relationship, consider asking if they have discussed birth control methods with their partner. If not, this could be the sign of an unhealthy relationship.

Provide Helpful Resources.

- Teens often admit that they are not sure where to find trustworthy information.
- Check out Bedsider.org for games, media, Q&A, and educational materials for your youth.
- Try LovesRespect.org for great resources on healthy relationships—consider the doing the ‘Relationship Spectrum’ activity together to spark a conversation.

Plan For the Future and Celebrate Success.

- Whether it’s academic, extracurricular, or personal achievements, celebrate it! Motivation is a key tool in personal development and pregnancy prevention strategies. *(Remember to discuss the benefits of foster care, such as monetary supplements for higher education opportunities.)* Communicate with other adults in the youth’s life to encourage activities that motivate the youth. Weave in conversations about future family formation to help empower them to determine when, if and under what circumstances to starting forming a family.
- Ask open ended questions and provide support:
 - “What do you want to be when you grow up? How can we make that dream a reality?”
 - “Do you want a family someday?”
 - “How do you want to be treated by your friends, romantic partners, etc.?”

Help Them Make Pregnancy and Childbearing More Concrete.

- Ask questions specifically about how pregnancy and childbearing might impact their current situation. These conversations can emphasize that pregnancy can be planned and should be for the health of a parent and child.

Support Planning for the Future :

- Transition planning is key to a youth who is considering leaving the foster care system at the age of 18 or considering extended care. Transition planning should include topics such as: birth

ASK

potential questions...



control options, plans for pregnancy/parenting, relationships, and goal-setting. When discussing transition planning with your teen bring up these topics and utilize the resources included in this guide to help facilitate a positive discussion.

- Pregnancy can be planned and prevented! Let the youth know that pregnancy isn’t a bad thing, while also acknowledging the extreme responsibilities that parenting entails. (Tip: If the youth has younger siblings or babysitting experience, use that as a conversation starter about the responsibilities of a child.) Emphasize that pregnancy can be planned and should be for the health of a parent and child.

Be Inclusive!

- It is at this time in a teen's life when they are trying to identify themselves. Whether your teen identifies as LGBTQ, a parent, or with another identity, be respectful of that and use inclusive language. *(Remember: Having this conversation with males is equally important as females, young men should understand the personal, financial, and legal obligations of fatherhood.)*

Don't Impose Your Values.

- Young people—especially adolescents—are very sensitive to judgment and won't be as open or confiding if they feel as though you are judging them. Try your best to leave your personal values at the door and know that being objective is in the best interest of the youth.



Bilaver, L. A. & Courtney, M. E. (2006). *Science says #27 issue brief: Foster care youth*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy