



What does media have to do with teenagers' sexual behaviors and beliefs?

Adolescence is a time when many children explore and define their sexual identity. During this stage, the messages they receive from media can play a large role in shaping their sexual behaviors and beliefs. This tip sheet can help you monitor and guide your teens' media choices in order to optimize their health and development.

How can media affect sexual behaviors and beliefs?

- * Frequent exposure to overt and inappropriate sexual content in media may lead to early initiation of sexual activity or other risky sexual behaviors.
- ❖ Sexual content and referencing in media can often be glamorized and contain inaccurate portrayals of sex, love, relationships and gender roles.
- ◆ Teens may believe that the often superficial relationships portrayed in the media are normal and healthy, and that sex is casual and risk-free. They may also believe that the majority of their peers are sexually active given the emphasis many media place on sex at this age.



What can I do?

- * Supervising and limiting media content at this stage can be difficult; however, you can help guide their choices and exposure by keeping TVs and computers in common areas of the house (not in bedrooms) and charging internet connected devices such as smartphones in *your* bedroom overnight.
- ❖ Many teens are capable of analyzing the content they see and hear. Encourage them to critique the media they consume and make available a variety of factual and developmentally appropriate resources about healthy sexual behaviors and beliefs.
- ◆ Make yourself available to help teens navigate relationships by listening, and offering advice and support. Be sensitive to teens' developing individuality while also taking the time to talk about sexual health values, and respectful romantic relationships.

Where can I find more information?
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