

LETTER OF THE DAY

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Parents, talk to your children about sex

EDITOR: Parents are not hiding anything from children that they cannot find out themselves. The best example is not talking about sex. In some cultures, it is taboo, but at the end of the day, all the negative effects of lacking this talk come back to haunt parents.

As a parent, I'm sure you have recognised the transformation in the ways we receive information. Today, children access television, radio and also the Internet. So, parents should start giving their children sex education before they land in trouble.

Parent-child communication about sex can help young people to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to protect themselves when they do become sexually active. Research shows that young people who spoke with their parents about contraception before they

became sexually active were more likely to use protection when they become sexually active. Further research shows that talking about sex does not cause young people to become sexually active.

Although young people aged 15 to 24 make up only a fraction of the sexually active population, they bear a disproportionate burden of sexually transmitted diseases. The "sex talk" isn't easy for parents, but research shows that adolescents who have talked to their parents about sex are more likely to use condoms and birth control.

The finding stems from a large analysis of adolescent health research, based on more than 50 studies involving 25,314 teens over the course of 30 years. The link between parental communication and safer sex practices, while modest overall, is strongest for

girls and for teens who talked with their mothers. The problems that come from parents not being confident to speak freely about sex with their children are numerous. Contraction and spread of HIV/AIDS is among them. In villages, children of 15 years are already mothers despite the existence of the Constitution. Education about using contraceptives would help them.

I suggest parents keep it casual. Don't make talking about sex a special, solemn occasion. If you are uncomfortable with talking about your own sexual experiences, say so honestly. Explain that people need their privacy. Ideally, you and your child could research the answers together, but make sure you talk.

Arthur Musinguzi,
Kampala

PICTURE BY NANCY NANYONGA

