



# “SPEAK UP!” A Look at **Sex** and Communication

October 9, 2002  
by Jon Platner

**S**weaty palms, wandering eyes, stammering speech...It's what happens to many of us when sex suddenly becomes the topic of discussion with parents, health care providers, and even *sexual* partners. No one likes feeling nervous and uncomfortable — most of us try to avoid talking about “it” at any cost, and a new study confirms that.

According to a new series of surveys by the Kaiser Family Foundation, one-in-four teen girls (25 percent) and one-in-two teen boys (50 percent) who have had sex say their parents are in the dark about it, and many of those who do talk to their parents about a sexual experience wait until after it's happened.

Of all the teens surveyed — both those who have had sex and those who haven't — half have never talked to a parent about how to know when you're ready for sex, and even fewer have talked to a parent about issues like *birth control*, *condoms*, and protecting yourself from *sexually transmitted infections*. And it's not just parents making us nervous! The survey also suggests that few teens talk about sexual health with their health care providers or partners.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Alicia Silverstone, step aside — when it comes to their kids having sex, many parents are just plain clueless. Among sexually active teens surveyed**

- More than a third think their parents don't know they're having sex.
- Another third have discussed sex with their parents, but only after having sex.
- Twenty percent have had their parents find out they were having sex, but not from them.
- Only 11 percent have discussed sex with their parents before having sex.
- And four percent either don't know if their parents know they are having sex, or didn't answer the survey question.

**Don't be shy. You've got something important to say to mom and dad! Among all teens surveyed**

- More than half have never talked to a parent about how to discuss issues like *pregnancy*, birth control, and sexually transmitted infections with a partner.
- Just under half have never talked to a parent about sexually transmitted infections like *HIV/AIDS*, methods of birth control like condoms, or how to know when you're ready for sex.

**Excuses, excuses, excuses...What's yours? The top reasons, in order of popularity, that teens use for not talking with their parents about sexual health are (drumroll, please...)**

- They worry about their parents' reaction.
- They're worried their parents will think they're having sex.
- They're embarrassed.
- They don't know how to bring it up.
- They don't think parents understand.

**Even health care providers are in the dark! It's time to ask, “What's up Doc?” (Who knew Bugs Bunny could be a source of wisdom?) Among all teens surveyed.**

- Most have never talked to a *clinician* about how to know when you're ready for sex.
- About three-quarters have never talked to a clinician about condoms or other methods of birth control.
- About two-thirds have never talked to a clinician about HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections.

**And you've got to speak up with partners too! Among all teens surveyed**

- Thirty-six percent have never talked to a partner about what they feel comfortable doing sexually.
- About half have never talked to a partner about condoms or other methods of birth control.
- More than half have never talked to a partner about HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections.

**More excuses? The only one missing is, “My dog ate my condom!” The top reasons, in order of popularity, that teens give for not talking to a partner about sexual health issues are (drumroll again...)**

- They're worried about what their partner might think.
- They don't know how to bring it up.
- They're embarrassed.
- They don't know enough.

**So what do all these findings mean?**

We already know how important it is for teens, whether or not they are sexually active, to stay informed about sexual health issues. But it's also important to communicate with our parents, health care providers, and partners about sex, and this study shows we're falling far short of that.

Some teens find it really intimidating or embarrassing to talk to their parents or other adults about sex. But many parents can give their kids better information, advice, and support than they could get anywhere else. Of course it's true that some parents don't even want to “go there” with their kids.

First, think about how your parents may react. If you think they might freak out, you may want to wait to have this discussion until you are all ready for it. In this case, you could turn to another trusted adult. Talking to another adult whom you trust can give you the opportunity to rehearse what you want to say to your parents.

Adults must do their part to want to stay informed and encourage a comfortable environment, and teens must do their part to take communication up a notch and be more open.

Break down those barriers in communication — it's time for all of us to speak up!

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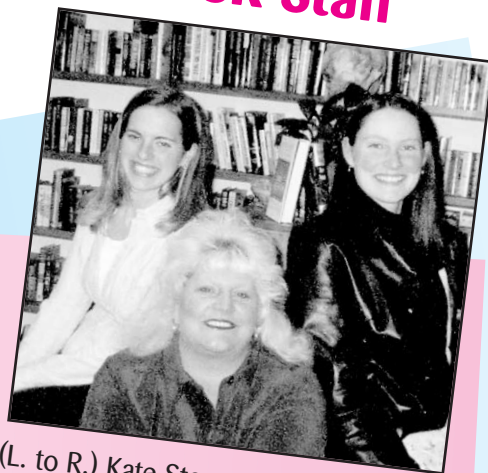
# “Auburn TATF Raises Awareness!”

## Auburn TATF Safe Sex Night 2003



Auburn TATF hosted a safer sex/AIDS Awareness night at “A Novel Idea” bookstore in Auburn last month. They handed out lots of information and some Halloween candy, too, donated by the Cayuga County AIDS Council (Chairperson - Rose Homick). It was a night of great music by a live band along with a lot of fun!

## ACR Staff



(L. to R.) Kate Storm, Rose Homick & Marissa Rice

# Morrisville TATF Officers



FRONT LEFT:

Erin Johnston - **President**

Allen DeGroat - **Vice President**

Sarah Dunn - **Public Relations**

Kelsey Morris - **Treasurer**

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Poland HS  
West Canada HS

**ONEIDA:**  
Camden HS  
Oriskany HS  
Rome Free Academy  
Whitesboro HS

**MADISON:**  
Canastota HS  
Chittenango HS  
Hamilton HS  
Morrisville-Eaton HS  
Oneida HS

**JEFFERSON:**  
Indian River HS  
Watertown HS  
Belleville-Henderson HS

**OSWEGO:**  
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"Teen AIDS Task Force is a program  
of AIDS Community Resources."

Steering  
Clear of

# Genital Warts

March 6, 2002  
by Susan Yudt

**GENITAL WARTS** — it's not the prettiest topic of conversation, but it's definitely something that needs to be discussed. Why? There are many different kinds of human papilloma viruses (collectively referred to here as *HPV*), only a couple of which can cause genital warts. Because HPV transmits easily from one person to another, it is the most common *sexually transmitted infection* in the U.S. — but almost three-quarters of us have never heard of it!

Actually, HPV is also responsible for those pesky warts that sometimes pop up on your hands or feet (yup, it's a virus that causes those... not touching a toad!). But let's stick to the sexually transmitted version for now — one that could lead to genital warts.

## DETECTION AND TRANSMISSION

HPV is transmitted by skin-to-skin contact. So, it can be transmitted through any type of *sex play*, including unprotected oral, *vaginal*, or *anal sex* with a partner who has it. But, just like *herpes*, these things are sneaky — if your partner has the virus, she or he can pass it on to you whether or not warts are present at the time you have *sex play*. Many people who have HPV don't even know it, because they don't have warts.

So what do genital warts look like? Unlike herpes, which are usually painful, blistery sores, genital warts are usually painless, although they may be a little itchy. They usually start off as small bumps and grow into larger warts that look sort of like cauliflower. (Not my favorite vegetable to begin with — and definitely not something I'd want growing in my nether regions!) They can be single warts or break out in clusters. Women usually get them on the *vulva*, the *vagina*, the *cervix*, or the anal area. Men get them on the *foreskin*, head or shaft of the *penis*, the *urethra*, the *scrotum*, or the anal area. Women and men can also get them in the throat from having *oral sex*.

Genital warts aren't deadly, but they are super-contagious — if you have unprotected sex with someone who's infected, there's a 30-to-60 percent chance you'll catch the virus. And here's the not-so-great news — like herpes, there is no cure for HPV infections. But the good news is that most genital HPV infections go away by themselves within six months.

## TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

So what can you do if you're infected? Treatment for genital warts focuses on controlling future outbreaks. This could be through prescription creams that you apply to the warts or by removing the warts with surgery. Sometimes they even go away on their own in a few months — but remember, just because you don't have any visible warts, you may still have the virus that causes them, so you still have to be careful about protecting yourself and your partner.

So how can you stay away from genital warts? *Condoms* don't eliminate the chance of contracting genital warts entirely, but they do reduce the risk. It's important to avoid direct skin-to-skin contact with anyone you know has an outbreak of genital warts. But there is only 100 percent way to make sure you don't catch genital warts, and that is *abstinence*.

Something else to keep in mind — some other types of HPV can put a woman at risk for cervical cancer or men at risk of cancer of the penis. The changes in the cells of the cervix caused by certain HPVs that could lead to cancer are easily detectable by a *Pap test*. Early treatment of precancerous growths can prevent cancer from developing. So it's very important to see a *clinician* once a year for a gynecological exam and Pap test if you're sexually active or over 18 years old.

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# Does Sex

By Lori King

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# Love?

“We had such a great relationship,” says Karen, a high school senior who asked that her real name not be used. “I loved him so much.”

And so she had sex with him. Not because she physically wanted to have sex, but because she believed, on some level, that she needed to give sex in order for her boyfriend to keep loving her back.

Unfortunately, Karen has plenty of company.

Many teenage girls believe that sex earns them love, according to Sharon Thompson, a journalist and author who has interviewed more than 400 teenage girls about their sexual and romantic experiences.

“The way teen girls think about sex is tied to their ideas about love,” says Thompson. “Some think, for example, that sex proves love.”

*SEX, ETC.*'s informal survey of girls who have had sex confirms this idea. The girls interviewed said that, looking back, they know they had sex hoping that their boyfriends would fall in love—forever. But it didn't work out that way.

“He fell out of love with me,” says Karen. “And now I'm left here with nothing but memories. It's been over five months, and I still don't know how to get on with my life.”

## Protection for the Heart?

“A condom offers a very high percentage of protection against disease and pregnancy,” adds Jane, a sophomore whose relationship ended after her boyfriend left for college. “It can make you feel safe. But, there is no way to protect your heart. You can't put a piece of rubber over that.”

“Last year, if someone would have told me about all the emotional hurt and responsibilities that come with sex, I probably wouldn't have listened and would have done it anyway,” adds Jane.

“But I wish someone would have told me. Maybe then I would have stopped and thought about it, or at least I would have been better prepared to deal with things,” she says. “Not in the fantasy world of true love, but in the realistic world where love and pain often go together.”

## Ask Tough Questions

Sharon Thompson offers some advice. “It is important for teens to recognize that ideas about love, sex and reproduction have a history—and that they can be questioned.” In other words, says Thompson, girls need to ask themselves some tough questions before deciding to have sex: Am I having sex because I want sex or because I think it will make my boyfriend love me more? Am I having sex to please myself or someone else? What do I want—now and after?

Take the time to figure out how you feel and then stand up for your feelings, says Thompson. If his love is real, he'll love you for who you are—whether or not you decide that sex is what you want.

Spring, 1996

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# Rejecting the Media's

# Gender Stories

*Christina Corea, 18, Staff Writer*

*"I don't know how to live without your love*

*I was born to make you happy*

*'Cause you're the only one within my heart ...*

*That's the way our life should be ...*

*I was born to make you happy."*

**W**hen I hear the ever popular, singer-turned-actress Britney Spears sing these lyrics, I'm reminded why I stopped listening to pop music. I'm not a feminist, but the words "I was born to make you happy" sure do invalidate the meaning of girls' lives. They make girls into objects to please guys, reminding me of magazine covers of models/actresses wearing barely enough fabric to be clothes.

I can criticize these images and words all I want. I can call them "stupid" or "sexist," or acknowledge that they damage my self-esteem. But the truth is, like the rest of the teen population, I can't really escape the media's messages about gender.

## Gender Stories

How do we learn to be girls or guys, feminine or masculine? Gender roles have little to do with biology and more to do with the media's influence on society.

Our gender roles are not created naturally, according to Sut Jhally, Ph.D., a professor of communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, MA, and executive director of the Media Education Foundation, in Northampton, MA.

"Gender isn't with us when we pop out of the womb. It becomes a part of the social process in which we grow up," he says. In this process, according to Jhally, the media creates "stories" for us. These stories become models for what we consider "normal behavior." They pigeonhole genders into narrow categories, which often negatively influence our behavior.

So, what's a common story about the female gender?

"Girls are being defined almost exclusively through their bodies and their sexuality, and this creates a strong relationship between thin images and eating disorders, unhealthy dieting and exercising," explains Jhally.

"Beyond that, they hear the story that the only important things for them are bodies and sex," he adds.

Jhally says that girls are also told two "conflicting stories" by the media. One story says that they should be "virgins," the other that they should be "sluts."

"The stories put women into an impossible situation. Sexuality is everything, but the moment you express it, you're a slut. This causes men to draw a fine line between adoration and contempt of women," he says.

These "virgin/slut" stories still pervade our culture, even though "psychologists will say that trying to live under these double standards will drive a person crazy and keep him or her anxious all the time," explains Jhally.

Girls aren't the only ones hit by narrow gender categories. According to Jhally, the media's stories force guys to focus mainly on having a toned, athletic body, which can cause them to use or abuse steroids.

The stories also portray guys mainly as heterosexuals who must "keep their women in line." This attitude can contribute to the rise of teen dating violence, explains Jhally.

"In the media, men see women portrayed in terms of sexuality so often that they think they're entitled to women's bodies, and girls who don't comply with this idea become 'teases,'" he adds.

## Talking Back

All this negative influence makes some teens reject the media's stereotypical gender roles.

"I distance myself as much as possible from a lot of the images of girls I see on TV and in magazines because it's definitely disturbing. I mean, should teen magazines really be telling young girls to flaunt their sex appeal?" explains Acacia, 17, of Edison, NJ.

"I don't consider myself prudish, but I don't think it's OK for Seventeen magazine to give a 12-year-old girl a replica of one of the outfits Britney Spears wore in a video as a sweepstakes prize," she adds.

Amy Haack, 18, of Stockton, CA, definitely feels influenced by the media.

"The media makes me feel like I have to be skinny and dress in a way that exposes myself to get attention. The smaller the shirt, the better. ... It takes a lot of tight pants and shirts to look as good as the girls portrayed in the media on a daily basis," she says.

The media's gender stories affect guys, too.

"Guys can't run around arm-in-arm with their friends, like girls can. You always see commercials where girls are all fun and fancy-free, skipping around and giggling. Guys have to be stern and controlled," explains Mike, 15, of New York City.

"Guys are told they are sweet around girls. But they shouldn't act that way when they're with their boys, though," adds Jason, 14, of New Brunswick, NJ.

The media's stories about guys also show a bias against homosexuals, according to Dyana, 16, of Edison, NJ.

"You watch a lot of movies, like *Bring It On*, where male cheerleaders constantly spend their energy in school defending their sexuality. What the media says is masculine goes, and if you don't fall into that category, people think you're homosexual," she explains.

## Challenging the Stories

So, how can teens break free of these narrow gender roles?

Jhally stresses the importance of education, which helps us see these images for what they are: pictures that don't represent reality at all.

"A very famous media scholar once said: 'We're not too sure who discovered the water, but we're pretty sure it wasn't the fish,'" notes Jhally. This means that the fish can't recognize its own environment because it's so used to the water surrounding it. Similarly, we can't stop paying attention to these images because they've become the water that we swim in.

But we can continually ask questions and challenge these media stories.

As for me, I've stopped looking at magazines and watching music videos, and I feel much happier now about my own looks than I did as a 14-year-old engrossed in *Seventeen* and *MTV*.

Back then, I used to go to the drugstore every day to waste money on a new hair or makeup product, until I finally realized that I was being tricked into buying products that didn't do anything. I was trying to be someone that I wasn't.

I don't listen to pop music much anymore, but when I do hear the infamous Britney sing ridiculous lyrics like "I can't live without your love," I just laugh and write her off as another follower of the media's narrow gender roles.

Acacia Stevens, 16, a *SEX, ETC.* national correspondent from Edison, NJ, contributed to this story.

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# What You Should Know About Oral Sex

By: The Center for Disease Control

## Oral Sex Is Not Considered Safe Sex

Like all sexual activity, oral sex carries some risk, particularly when one partner or the other is known to be infected with HIV, when either partner's HIV status is not known, and/or when one or the other partner is not monogamous or injects drugs. Numerous studies have demonstrated that oral sex can result in the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Abstaining from oral, anal, and vaginal sex all together or having sex only with a mutually monogamous, uninfected partner are the only ways that individuals can be completely protected from the sexual transmission of HIV.

## Oral Sex is a Common Practice

Oral sex involves giving or receiving oral stimulation (i.e. sucking or licking) to the penis, the vagina, and/or the anus. Fellatio is the technical term used to describe oral contact with the penis. Cunnilingus is the technical term which describes oral-vaginal sex. Anilingus (sometimes called "rimming") refers to oral-anal contact. Studies indicate that oral sex is commonly practiced by sexually active male-female and same-gender couples of various ages, including adolescents. Although there are only limited national data about how often adolescents engage in oral sex, some data suggest that many adolescents who engage in oral sex do not consider it to be sex; therefore they may use oral sex as an option to experience sex while still, in their minds, remaining abstinent. Moreover, many consider oral sex to be a safe or no risk sexual practice. In a recent national survey of teens conducted for The Kaiser Family Foundation, 26% of sexually active 15 to 17 year olds surveyed responded that one "cannot become infected with HIV by having unprotected oral sex", and an additional 15% didn't know whether or not one could become infected in that manner.

## Oral Sex and the Risk of HIV Transmission

The risk of HIV transmission from an infected partner through oral sex is much smaller than the risk of HIV transmission from anal or vaginal sex. Because of this, measuring the exact risk of HIV transmission as a result of oral sex is very difficult. In addition, since most sexually active individuals practice oral sex in addition to other forms of sex, such as vaginal and/or anal sex, when transmission occurs, it is difficult to determine whether or not it occurred as a result of oral sex or other more risky sexual activities. Finally, several co-factors can increase the risk of HIV transmission through oral sex, including: oral ulcers, bleeding gums, genital sores, and the presence of other STDs. When scientists describe the risk of transmitting an infectious disease, like HIV, the term "theoretical risk" is often used. Very simply, "theoretical risk" means that passing an infection from one person to another is possible, even though there may not yet be any actual documented cases. "Theoretical risk" is not the same as likelihood. In other words, stating that HIV infection is "theoretically possible" does not necessarily mean it is likely to happen—only that it might. Documented risk, on the other hand, is used to describe transmission that has actually occurred, been investigated, and documented in the scientific literature.

### THEORETICAL RISKS

In fellatio, there is a theoretical risk of transmission for the receptive partner (the person who is sucking) because infected pre-ejaculate ("pre-cum") fluid or semen can get into the mouth. For the insertive partner (the person who is being sucked), there is a theoretical risk of infection because infected blood from a partner's bleeding gums or an open sore could come in contact with a scratch, cut, or sore on the penis.

### DOCUMENTED RISKS

Although the risk is many times smaller than anal or vaginal sex, HIV has been transmitted to receptive partners through fellatio, even in cases when insertive partners didn't ejaculate ("cum").

### THEORETICAL RISKS

Cunnilingus carries a theoretical risk of HIV transmission for the insertive partner (the person who is licking or sucking the vaginal area) because infected vaginal fluids and blood can get into the mouth. (This includes, but is not limited to, menstrual blood). Likewise, there is a theoretical risk of HIV transmission during cunnilingus for the receptive partner (the person who is having her vagina licked or sucked) if infected blood from oral sores or bleeding gums comes in contact with vulvar or vaginal cuts or sores.

### DOCUMENTED RISKS

The risk of HIV transmission during cunnilingus is extremely low compared to vaginal and anal sex. However, there have been a few cases of HIV transmission most likely resulting from oral-vaginal sex.

### THEORETICAL RISKS

Anilingus carries a theoretical risk of transmission for the insertive partner (the person who is licking or sucking the anus) if there is exposure to infected blood, either through bloody fecal matter (bodily waste) or cuts/sores in the anal area. Anilingus carries a theoretical risk to the receptive partner (the person who is being licked/sucked) if infected blood in saliva comes in contact with anal/rectal lining.

### DOCUMENTED RISKS

There has been one published case of HIV transmission associated with oral-anal sexual contact.

## Other STDs Can Also Be Transmitted From Oral Sex

Scientists have documented a number of other sexually transmitted diseases that have also been transmitted through oral sex. Herpes, syphilis, gonorrhea, genital warts (HPV), intestinal parasites (amebiasis), and hepatitis A are examples of STDs which can be transmitted during oral sex with an infected partner. The consequences of HIV infection are life-long, life-threatening, and extremely serious. You can lower any already low risk of getting HIV from oral sex by using latex condoms each and every time. For cunnilingus or anilingus, plastic food wrap (the non-microwaveable kind), a condom cut open, or a dental dam can serve as a physical barrier to prevent transmission of HIV and many other STDs. Because anal and vaginal sex are much riskier and because most individuals who engage in unprotected (i.e. without a condom) oral sex also engage in unprotected anal and/or vaginal sex, the exact proportion of HIV infections attributable to oral sex alone is unknown, but is likely to be very small. This has led some people to believe that oral sex is completely safe. It is not.

Source: [Centers for Disease Control](#)

# The Ribbon Project



Wear a red ribbon to show your commitment to the fight against AIDS. The red ribbon demonstrates compassion for people with AIDS and their caretakers; and support for education and research leading to effective treatments, vaccines, or a cure.

The proliferation of red ribbons unifies the many voices seeking a meaningful response to the AIDS epidemic. It is a symbol of hope: the hope that one day soon the AIDS epidemic will be over, that the sick will be healed, that the stress upon our society will be relieved. It serves as a constant reminder of the many people suffering as a result of this disease and of the many people working toward a cure - a day without AIDS.

## (Happy) Holidays?

For some of our clients the holidays are anything but happy. Please help us change that by becoming involved in the Holiday Angel Program. You can adopt an individual or a family, and help make the holidays brighter for people in your area affected by HIV and AIDS. Your coordinators will have information about how to become involved.

*Happy Holidays, everyone!*



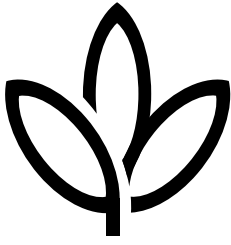
## SAVE THE DATES!!

We have designated the first week in December "TATF World AIDS Awareness Week". Make sure that your chapter completes at least one activity to promote World AIDS Awareness at some point during that week. The following is a list of a few possible ideas.

- Hand out red ribbons at school
- Give away lollipops tied with red ribbons with a statistic attached
- Have an information table set up at lunch time
- Attend one of the many events planned in your area (ask your coordinator for information)
- Hold "Grim Reaper Day" at your school
- Have your school hold a moment of silence for the lives lost to AIDS

Remember that World AIDS Day is the first Monday back from Thanksgiving break. Be sure to plan and prepare anything you need for the day before you leave for break!! If you have any questions please contact your coordinator.





## AIDS Community Resources

A Multicultural AIDS Service Agency

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# DATES TO Remember

**DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>**  
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Syracuse – Thursday Nights from 7:00-8:30pm

Utica – Sunday Afternoons from 2:00-4:00pm

*For Location and Information call 1-800-475-2430*

