

CHAPTER 8

# Helping My Adolescent Deal with HIV



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Why is adolescence such a difficult time for teens and parents? .....	8-2
How can I help my teen get through these difficult years? .....	8-5
How do I talk with my teen? .....	8-8
How can I teach my teen about health risks and preventing the spread of HIV? .....	8-11
How can I help my teen resist peer pressure to have sex? .....	8-18
How can I talk to my teen about sex? .....	8-20
What does my teen need to know about sex and HIV? .....	8-23
How does HIV add to the stress of the teen years? .....	8-24
How can I help my teen cope with adolescence and HIV? .....	8-26
What if my teen stops taking HIV medicines? .....	8-29
Who can give permission for my adolescent to get medical care? .....	8-31
What kind of medical care does a teen with HIV need? .....	8-32
When should I call my teen's doctor? .....	8-35
When should I take my teen to the emergency room? .....	8-37
How can I tell if my teen is depressed? .....	8-38

Teens go through major physical changes and mental stresses.

## Why is adolescence such a difficult time for teens and parents?

Adolescence is the stage when children develop into adults. It usually begins between the ages of 11 and 13, and ends around the age of 21. During these years, teens go through major physical changes and mental stresses. Teens usually test limits, question authority, and distance themselves from their families. This is not an easy time for teens or their families. . . especially when a teen has **HIV**.

### Remember when. . .

You may better understand and help your teen if you keep in mind those awkward and out-of-place feelings you had as a teen. Now, think how it might have felt if on top of everything else, you also had a life-long health condition.

### Sexual development (puberty)

Sexual development is a big part of adolescence. The process of sexual development is called **puberty**. Although the rate of sexual development varies from child to child, the pattern is generally the same.

#### Girls

Girls often start developing earlier than boys, sometime between the ages of 8 and 13. Their breasts get bigger and they get underarm hair, hair on their legs and hair in the genital area. **Monthly periods** (menstruation) often begin around age 12 but can start earlier. Once a girl gets a **period**, she can get pregnant if she has sex.

Sexual development varies from child to child.

**HIV** may cause your daughter to develop at a later age. If your teen had HIV as an infant or young child, she may also be smaller and look younger than other girls her age. If your teen has serious concerns about the way she looks or feels, talk to her doctor.

### Boys

Boys develop sexually sometime between the ages of 11 and 14. Their voices get deeper, and they get whiskers on their face. They get hair in the genital area, underarm hair, and sometimes chest hair. Their penis and testicles become larger and they get **wet dreams** (nocturnal emissions). Wet dreams mean that a teen's body is making sperm. Once this happens, if he has sex with a girl, she can get pregnant.

**HIV** may cause your teen to develop at a later age. If your teen had HIV as an infant or young child, he may also be smaller and look younger than other boys his age. This can be very difficult for your teen. Physical height, weight and strength are a big deal for a boy. Body size plays a big part of how your teen sees himself and how others see him. Watch for signs of **depression** or acting out behavior. If your teen has serious concerns about the way he looks or feels, talk to his doctor.

### The need to “fit in”

To cope with a changing body, teens turn to their peers who are going through the same changes. At no time in life does it seem more important to “fit in” and belong to a group. Being part of a group helps teens develop their independence. Teens in the peer group may wear the same clothes, listen to the same music, and speak the same slang. But it can go much deeper than that. Teens in the group

Your teen's behavior can be influenced by his/her peers.

may also have the same behaviors. This could mean joining the basketball team or joining a gang. It could mean doing well in school or dropping out of school. It may mean smoking, using drugs, or having sex.

Your teen may be smaller and look younger than other teens. He/she may also have to limit eating some of the snacks and junk food other teens eat during social activities. He/she may also feel cut off from peers if many school days are missed. If fitting in does not seem to be happening at school, talk to your teen about joining a group or club outside of school. This will give your teen a chance to be with peers and help boost his/her self-esteem. Programs such as Karate, Tai Chi, and weight lifting may be good choices, especially for boys. If physical activity is not a good choice for your teen, encourage him/her to develop other skills or talents, such as music, art, or cooking. Check out your church or community center for teen activities.

**Adolescence is a time of testing limits.**

### **Taking chances and testing adult authority**

Adolescence is a time for practicing to be an adult.

- To learn how to make decisions, your teen must question your decisions and those of other adult authorities.
- To learn how to be an independent adult, your teen will distance himself/herself from you and your family.

As teens practice their new freedom, test limits, and experiment, they will take chances — sometimes dangerous chances. Teens may live in the moment and have trouble understanding the link between an action and its consequences.

## How can I help my teen get through these difficult years?

### You wear many hats.

As a parent, you wear many hats to help guide and support your teen through these difficult years. Not only are you the parent or caregiver, but you are often called upon to be the counselor, teacher, nurse, and anything else your teen needs. Even though your teen may not say it or show it, you are probably the most important person in his/her life. Never doubt the power of your words and actions.

There are many ways to support your teen as he/she goes through the difficult process of becoming an adult.

- **Let your teen know you will stand by him/her now and in the future.** Make it clear that nothing your teen can say or do will threaten your love.
- **Recognize your own feelings about your teen's independence.** You may have feelings about:
  - wanting your teen to still need you as before.
  - wanting to protect your teen from making mistakes and getting hurt.
  - wanting your teen to do things with you and the family.
  - knowing your teen will be on his/her own soon.
  - reliving your own teen experiences.

You are probably  
the most  
important person  
in your teen's life.

- **Stay open to your teen's questions and concerns.** Do not be afraid to ask your teen what is bothering him/her, and take your teen's feelings and concerns seriously.
- **Do not be upset by your teen's push toward independence.** Try to keep in mind that he/she must question and even reject your advice at times to get a sense of independence.
- **Allow your teen to make decisions — within limits.** Give your teen a chance to practice making decisions in areas that do not put him/her in danger. For example, let your teen decide what clothes to wear or how to wear his/her hair. It is **not OK** for teens to decide whether or not they want to take their **HIV** medicine from day-to-day.
- **Do not be surprised if your teen makes some bad decisions.** Avoid "I told you so" statements. This will only put you at odds with your teen. Try not to be too hard on your teen when bad decisions are made. But do not always protect him/her from the outcome of a bad decision. Living with the outcome of a bad decision is a part of becoming an adult and can help your teen learn more responsible behavior.
- **Remember that teens still need limits set for their behavior.** Any activity that may hurt your teen or someone else is an area where you should set limits and enforce them the same way every time. If possible, talk with your teen about issues, like the need to take medicine, before problems start. Decide together what is appropriate and what is not. Also talk about what will happen if inappropriate behavior occurs.

## Values and family rules

Your family values and rules help set standards for your teen's behavior. You may have talked with your teen about values such as respect, honesty, and personal boundaries. Your teen may understand that the family follows certain rules, like letting you know where they are going, who they are with, what they will do, and when they are coming back.

Your teen may also have some sense of your feelings based on your comments or reactions to some topics.

**But unless you talk directly with your teen about specific rules and behaviors, do not assume he/she knows and understands them.**

Everyday, your teen is bombarded with value messages from the media. TV, movies, magazines, music, and video games have powerful, in-your-face messages that are not easily ignored. These images often show that violence and sex as entertainment are OK. Peers also have the power to influence your teen's behavior. So, if you do not make your values known to your teen, someone else will. Foster parents need to remember that their foster child may have lived with other families whose rules and values may be different from their own. It is important to talk about these differences and explain your family's values to your foster child.

The good news is that you still have the most influence in your teen's life. You must be very clear about what you think is appropriate behavior. But make sure your actions match your words because your actions may say far more to your teen.

Express your  
values through  
words and actions.

## Walk the Walk!

I'd rather see a sermon,  
Than hear one any day;  
I'd rather one should walk with me  
Than merely lead the way.  
The eye's a better pupil,  
And more willing than the ear;  
Fine counsel is confusing,  
But example's always clear.

I soon can learn to do it,  
If you'll let me see it done;  
I can see your feet in action,  
But your tongue too fast may run,  
And the lectures you deliver,  
May be very fine and true.  
But I'd rather get my lesson  
By observing what you do.  
For I may misunderstand you,  
And the high advice you give,  
But there's no misunderstanding  
How you act and how I live!

*Anonymous*

**It is important to be there for your teen and willing to talk about his/her issues.**

## How do I talk with my teen?

Having a talk with your teen about any subject may feel like an impossible task sometimes. But what you say and how you say it can start a conversation or stop it in its tracks. Remember how you felt the last time someone said, "I need to talk to you." It can make the hair stand up on the back of your neck. You want to let your teen know you are open to his/her questions and willing to talk about them.



Here are some tips that may help you talk with your teen.

- **Take time to talk.** Everyone is busy. . . you, your teen and the other family members. **STOP.** Be there for your teen and be willing to talk with him/her. Try talking while doing things together, like cooking or riding in the car.
- **Be open and honest.** Let your teen know you are really interested in what he/she has to say. Let him/her know with your words. . . with your listening skills . . . and with your body language. If you do not know an answer, tell your teen you do not know. If possible, work together to find the answer. If not, you find the answer and talk about it with your teen.
- **Show respect.** Let your teen talk without being interrupted. This can be very difficult, but be patient. **Never** laugh at, put down or make your teen's concern or issue seem small. **Never** make your teen feel like his/her issues are not important. Even if you do not think your teen's issue is a big deal, it is to him/her. Remember, emotions run high and a lot of time and energy can be used to work out big and small issues. The same issue is bound to come up again and again, so try to be patient and understanding.

Be careful how you say things. If you respond with, "That's stupid," or "All kids go through this, it's no big deal," chances are that your teen will not come to you with concerns in the future.

- **Be understanding and trustworthy.** Try to understand how your teen feels. Stay calm, and be patient. Try not to judge him/her and do your best not to lecture. It is also important to know when your teen's concerns should be kept between the two of you, and when other help is needed. Your teen probably does not want

**Take your teen's concerns seriously.**

his/her concerns told to neighbors, teachers, brothers or sisters. On the other hand, if these concerns are harmful to your teen or someone else, you need to get help. This may mean talking with your teen's doctor, **mental health professional**, **social worker** or **case manager**.

### Special Note for Foster Parents:

If you have any questions or concerns about the things your foster child tells you, call your caseworker.

- **Find out what your teen needs.** Listen and ask a few questions to make sure you know what your teen needs. Sometimes, he/she may just need to talk. So do not try to fix the concern. Just listen. Sometimes, your teen may need some information or advice. Do your best to give the facts in a way your teen can understand.

Together, choose a few adults your teen can go to for information and talk about concerns.

### Your teen may need to talk with other people.

Even if you say you will be there to talk about any topic, including sex, chances are that your teen may not feel like he/she can bring up certain topics with you. Talk with your teen, and together pick a few adults he/she can "go to" for information. To choose the best people:

- Make sure your teen feels OK talking with each person.
- Make sure you trust each person to give your teen correct information.

You and your teen might want to think about an aunt, uncle, godparent, grandparent, doctor or neighbor. Make sure that anyone who is picked will be comfortable and willing to talk with your teen.

## How can I teach my teen about health risks and preventing the spread of HIV?

It may be best for the doctor, you, and your teen to discuss precautions all teens need to know about their health. These include such things as basic **hygiene** (hī' jēn), smoking, drinking, using street drugs, piercing, tattooing, and preventing the spread of diseases. You also need to discuss how to safely handle items that have blood and other body fluids on them.

### The bottom line for your teen is to:

- keep his/her body fluids out of other people's bodies.
- keep other people's body fluids out of his/her body.

## Basic hygiene for girls

### Monthly periods

Before your teen has her first **period** (menstruation), help her prepare. Chances are that her period will not start at a convenient time or at a convenient location. Make sure you show her how to use and dispose of tampons, pads, and panty liners. If the plumbing in your home or elsewhere allows tampons to be flushed down the toilet, flush them. If not, put them in a plastic bag and put them in the trash. Pads and panty liners should not be flushed. Show your teen how to fold the used pad or panty liner, wrap it in toilet paper and put it in a plastic bag, waste basket or restroom container. Help her by

You and the doctor can teach your teen about HIV and other health risks.

keeping a supply of tampons, pads and/or panty liners, along with plastic bags in the bathroom. Tell your teen to always wash her hands and under her finger nails with soap and water after using the toilet.

### Handling body fluid stains

Carefully handle items that have blood on them, such as clothing, sheets, and towels. Soak them in cold water and detergent, then wash them in hot water and detergent.



### Makeup

If you and your teen decide that makeup is OK for her to wear, here are a few tips to help avoid infections and skin reactions.

- Teach your teen to wash her hands before putting on makeup.
- Germs can grow quickly in eye makeup, especially mascara. Experts recommend that mascara should be thrown out 3 months after you buy it.
  - If mascara gets dry, throw it out.
  - Never add water or saliva (spit) to moisten mascara.
  - Never share mascara. The germs will grow faster.
- Never use any makeup near the eyes unless it is intended for that use. For example, do not use lip liner as an eye liner.
- If your teen gets an eye infection, throw out the eye makeup and call the doctor.
- Close all makeup lids or containers between use.

- Never store makeup in places with high temperatures or in direct sunlight.
- Throw out makeup after the expiration date, if a date is noted.
- If your teen gets a skin rash or reaction from any type of makeup, stop using it and call the doctor.

### Hair dye

The **FDA** (Food and Drug Administration) does not oversee the safety of most hair dyes. If you and your teen decide it is OK for her to dye her hair, take these precautions to avoid a skin reaction.

- Wear gloves when applying hair dye.
- Test the dye on a patch of skin behind your teen's ear. Do not wash that area for two days. If no itching, burning, redness or other **allergic** reaction occurs, it is probably safe for your teen to use the dye product.
- Always follow the hair dye package directions.
- Never let your teen dye her eyebrows or eyelashes.
- If your teen gets an allergic reaction from the dye, call the doctor.

### Razors and toothbrushes

If your teen decides to shave her legs and/or underarms, get her shaving supplies for her own use. Your teen should also have her own toothbrush. Tell her never to share razors or toothbrushes with anyone because there might be blood on them. **HIV** can be passed from person to person by infected blood.



## Basic hygiene for boys



### Razors and toothbrushes

When your son begins to get whiskers, get him his own shaving supplies and show him how to use them. Whether he uses an electric razor or a disposable razor, tell him that he must not share it with anyone. Even though it may be easy to use a family member's razor for a quick whisker touch up, he must use his own razor. Your teen should also have his own toothbrush. Blood may be on razors or toothbrushes, so it is important to tell him never to share them. **HIV** can be passed from person to person by infected blood.

### Handling body fluid stains

Bed sheets and other items that have semen or blood on them should be handled carefully. Items with blood should be soaked in cold water, then washed in hot water and detergent.

## Smoking, drinking, and street drugs

Smoking, drinking, and using street drugs affect a person's health and can lead to risky behavior. These may be tough issues for your teen to face. These are especially tough issues for your teen if you smoke, drink, or use street drugs. Your actions are very important to your teen. Do your best to be a good role model. Remember, your actions speak louder than your words.

### Smoking

Tobacco products include: cigarettes; cigars; bidis; chewing tobacco and powdered tobacco (snuff); and any other tobacco products. Teens may start using tobacco to "fit in" with their friends, act like popular music or movie stars, lose weight, or feel like an adult. No matter what

the reason for using tobacco, the impact on your teen's health is huge. Did you know:

- Illnesses caused by tobacco kill more Americans each year than alcohol, cocaine, crack, heroin, homicide, suicide, car accidents, fire, and **AIDS** combined.
- There are more than 4,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke.
- Bidis are not less harmful than cigarettes.
- Children who breathe second-hand smoke from their parents are more likely to get **pneumonia** (nū mō' nē a), **bronchitis** (brong kī' tis), ear infections, and **asthma** (az' ma).

It is best not to start smoking, but if you or your teen already smoke, it is never too late to quit. Here are some tips from teens who have quit smoking.

- Throw out your lighters, ashtrays, cigarettes, cigars, etc.
- Chew gum instead of smoking.
- Get involved in an after school or community activity to keep busy.
- Get someone to quit with you. You and your teen or your teen and one of his/her friends could quit together.
- Save the money you would have spent on tobacco for something special.

You and your teen can talk to the doctor about methods to quit. You can also get information by calling the toll-free **New York State Smoker's Quitline at 1-888-609-6292**; the



hearing impaired can call **1-800-280-1213**. You can also contact the Quitline website at **www.nysmokefree.com**. Trained specialists on the Quitline can answer questions about stop smoking medicines, withdrawal **symptoms** and stop smoking programs. All Quitline calls are free and **confidential**.

### Alcohol and street drugs

Alcohol and street drugs affect a person's health in many ways. Alcohol or street drugs will affect your teen's brain, liver, heart, kidneys, and other body organs. Using drugs can also lead to unhealthy and risky behavior by clouding your teen's judgement. This could:

- stop your teen from taking his/her **HIV** medicines.
- stop your teen from using **safer sex** methods, like using a condom.
- expose your teen to HIV, **hepatitis**, **STDs** and other infections.

If your teen needs help to stop drinking or drugging, your teen's doctor can help. The doctor can talk about programs to help your teen and find out why your teen feels the need to drink or drug to feel better. A mental health assessment may be done and your teen may be referred to a **mental health professional** for more help.

### Piercing and tattooing

Even though piercing and tattooing may be the "in" things to do, they are a health risk to your teen. Piercing or tattooing should **never** be done by your teen or one of his/her friends. Any activity involving blood and needle-sharing, such as piercing or



tattooing, has the chance of passing **HIV, hepatitis,** or other infections from person to person.

### **Piercing**

The doctor can talk with you and your teen about the health risks linked with piercing. If your teen insists on getting his/her body pierced, the doctor's office may be able to suggest how to choose a piercing studio or recommend a piercing professional. Your teen's doctor or nurse can show you and your teen how to clean the jewelry and pierced area, as well as explain what to do in case of an infection.

### **Tattooing**

Your teen's doctor can also talk about the health risks linked with tattoo needles and dyes. The doctor's office can give advice on how to check out a tattoo artist and parlor or recommend a tattoo professional.

If your teen is determined to get his/her body pierced or tattooed, it is a good idea for you to go with him/her.

#### **Special Note for Foster Parents:**

If your foster child wants to get pierced or tattooed, be sure to talk with your caseworker first.

Help your teen deal with peer pressure to have sex.

Explain why waiting to have sex is important.

Teens need to know that they have a right to say "no" to sex.

## How can I help my teen resist peer pressure to have sex?

Dealing with peer pressure to have sex is a problem for most teens. Your teen has the added pressure of knowing he/she has **HIV**. Studies show that teens who talk about sex with their parents or another adult are more likely to wait longer before having sex.

### Your teen needs to know that he/she has a future.

Your teen will become a young adult and have boyfriends/girlfriends. He/she may get married and may even have children. Like any parent, you want your child to be in a loving relationship with a partner who is willing to make a lifetime commitment. Your child's partner must be able to physically and mentally deal with **HIV** issues, and be able to handle a relationship with a person who has a life-long health condition. For these reasons, it may be best to stress to your teen the importance of waiting to choose a partner and have sex.

### Everybody is not doing it.

All teens need to know that they have a right to say "no" to sex. Even though some teens think all of their friends are having sex, they are not. In fact, more and more teens are choosing not to have sex to avoid unwanted pregnancy, **HIV**, and other **STDs**.

You can help your teen deal with peer pressure by listening to his/her concerns, discussing sexual issues, building your teen's self-esteem, and talking about things to do instead of having sex.

Your teen needs to know:

- It is important to be true to yourself and not let anyone talk you into doing anything you do not want to do.
- Having sex will not make your teen a grown-up, a movie star, or a music star.
- Having sex is not the test of a loving relationship.
- Not having sex protects him/her from **STDs** and getting pregnant.
- There are many ways to show how much you care about a person without having sex. For example, go to a movie or rent a movie, help each other study, hang out at the mall or cook dinner together.

Although they probably will not say so, most teens want limits. It gives them an easy way to have control in their relationships. You can help your teen avoid situations he/she may not be able to handle:

- Give your teen a time when he/she needs to be home.
- Set limits about where boyfriends/girlfriends can be (for example, not in parked cars or in rooms with doors closed).
- Set rules about not drinking or using street drugs.
- Set rules about being with friends who are drinking or using street drugs.
- Make sure responsible adults oversee parties.

**Set limits to help your teen avoid situations that might lead to sex.**

Talking to your child about sex is an ongoing process.

Think about your own values related to sex, sexuality, and relationships.

It does not matter if your teen is a boy or a girl. Both should get the same information about sex and how to protect themselves and others.

## How can I talk to my teen about sex?

Many parents feel uncomfortable talking with their children about sex. You may hope “the talk” is a one-time discussion, but it is not. Talking about sex, sexuality, and relationships is ongoing. Before these conversations begin, it may be best for you to think about your own values.

All teens, including teens with **HIV**, need to know the importance of waiting to have sex, and how to protect themselves and others from diseases. As the parent or foster parent, you are responsible to make sure your teen understands these issues and knows how to protect himself/herself and others. Your teen’s doctor can help by talking with you and your teen about waiting to have sex, disease prevention, and **safer sex**. This is not a “one-time” discussion. It is information that will need to be talked about again and again. Remember to talk with your teen about choosing another adult who can also talk with your teen about sex and sexuality, and answer his/her questions.

(See **Helping My Adolescent Deal with HIV**, How do I talk with my teen? page 8–8.)

If your teen is a boy, be careful that you do not give him less information than you would a teen girl. Many times girls are given the responsibility of prevention, birth control, and risk reduction. Your teen, whether a girl or a boy, should get the same information.

## The earlier you start, the easier it is.

Although it is best to begin answering your child's questions from the time he/she is a toddler, it is never too late to begin. Perhaps the most important message you can give your teen about sex is that it is OK to talk about it and OK to ask you questions.

Take advantage of teachable moments.

## Teachable moments happen everyday!

Since the media constantly hit us with messages and behaviors, you can easily find topics that will help you start talking with your teen.

For example, you and your teen are watching a TV program. Part of the story suggests that a guy and a girl meet at a party and have sex. This is a teachable moment for you and your teen to talk about character, responsibility, and the difference between love and attraction.



Do not start by preaching, "If you ever do that, I'll . . .," or by making negative comments, "What a slut." It may be best to start with a question. "What do you think about this guy and girl having sex at the party?"

## Some tips that might help you and your teen talk about sex

- Use your best listening and talking skills. (See **Helping My Adolescent Deal with HIV**, How do I talk with my teen? page 8-8)
- Think through your own values about sex, sexuality, and relationships.
- Learn the basic facts about sexual health, birth control, **HIV**, and **safer sex**. If you need information, ask your teen's doctor, **social worker**

or **case manager**. You can also get information from your local family planning provider.

- Ask questions to check your teen's understanding about sex, sexuality, and **HIV**.
- Make sure your teen understands the facts and emotions related to sex and sexuality.

### Teens may believe myths about sex.

Some teens think:

- Some sodas can prevent pregnancy.
- Sex means only **vaginal sex**.
- **Oral sex** is not really sex.
- Oral sex is something to do with your partner before you are ready to "go all the way".
- **Anal sex** is not really sex.
- Anal sex is a birth control method.

Teens need to understand that sex is oral, anal, and vaginal, and all 3 can pass **HIV** from one person to another.

Make sure your teen knows the facts about sex.

## What does my teen need to know about sex and HIV?

Sometimes, even when parents, foster parents or teachers discuss the importance of waiting to have sex, teens choose to have sex. Before teens have sex, they need information about how to protect themselves and their partners.

- Not having sex is the safest way to prevent the spread of **HIV** or other **STDs**.
- Hugging, kissing, and touching are ways to show affection without having sex.
- HIV is found in blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk of people with HIV.
- HIV can be spread when infected blood, semen, vaginal fluids or breast milk gets inside a person's body.
- HIV can be spread through **vaginal sex**, **oral sex**, or **anal sex**.
- **HIV** can be passed from mother to infant during pregnancy, during child birth, and through breast feeding.
- Even if your teen has a **low or undetectable viral load**, HIV can be spread to others.
- Using a latex condom (also called a "rubber" or a "glove"), can greatly lower the risk of spreading HIV.
- **Safer sex** (using a condom) also protects your teen from coming in contact with STDs and other **strains** (strāns) of HIV.

Before teens have sex, they need information about how to protect themselves and their partners.

### **WARNING**

*If you think your teen is putting himself/herself or others at risk through sex or needle-sharing activities, ask your doctor or case manager for help.*

- Condoms (male condoms or female condoms) only work when used correctly. Help your teen learn how to use them. You, your teen's doctor, or your teen's family planning provider can show your teen how to properly use condoms and properly throw out used condoms.
- Vaseline or oil-based lubricants should never be used on latex condoms because they cause them to break.
- Using alcohol or drugs can cloud judgement and increase risk-taking, like having sex without using a condom.

HIV can make a teen feel different from other teens.

## How does HIV add to the stress of the teen years?

Teens want to be like all of their friends. They do not want to be different. But, having **HIV** may make teens look and feel different from their peers.

### Taking medicine may interfere with peer group activities

A teen with **HIV** who has to take medicine during time spent with friends may feel embarrassed. You and your teen can work with the doctor or **pharmacist** (far´ ma sist) to get the most appropriate medicine schedule.



## Medicine side effects may cause embarrassment.

Teens may be concerned about medicine **side effects**. Some teens with **HIV** may take medicine that can cause a rash, **diarrhea** (dī´a rē´a), cramps, headaches or upset stomachs. If possible, it is best to start a new medicine at the beginning of a weekend so your teen’s body will start to get use to the medicine before he/she goes back to school. (See **Giving My Child Medicine**, What questions should I ask the doctor, nurse or pharmacist before giving my child medicines? page 4–6.)

A few teens may also lose fat in their face, arms, and legs, while gaining fat in their stomach or at the base of their neck. This may cause a teen to feel self-conscious, avoid spending time with his/her friends, or stop taking medicines.

(See **HIV: The Basics**, What other illnesses or problems do children with HIV sometimes get? page 1–15.)

## Fear of peer reactions to HIV and AIDS

Teens can be mean to one another. They often tease and make fun of anyone who seems different or does not fit in with the group. Fear of being rejected can be extremely stressful. As a teen with **HIV** begins to have sexual urges, he/she may become anxious about warning others that he/she has HIV. If your teen is concerned about what friends will say or do if they learn he/she has HIV, talk to the doctor, **social worker** or **case manager** to get your teen mental health support.

Teens with HIV may worry about being rejected by their peers.

Teens with HIV may get anxious, scared or depressed when hearing information about HIV and AIDS.

## Anxiety about having a serious life-long health condition

As your child gets older he/she will become more aware of the media reports about **HIV** treatment and survival rates. Reports of treatment failures and worldwide deaths may cause your teen to become anxious and **depressed** about having HIV. School health classes may also scare your teen. Incomplete information or scare tactics about HIV may be used to stop teens from having sex. This can cause some teens to stop taking their medicine, or start "acting out" behaviors such as failing in school, skipping school, getting involved with street drugs and alcohol, or hanging out with a rough crowd.

If you also have HIV, be a good role model for your teen.

---

## How can I help my teen cope with adolescence and HIV?

### If you also have HIV, be a good role model.

Keep your own doctor and clinic visits and take your medicines on schedule.



**Through your words and actions, you are teaching your teen how to take care of himself/herself for a lifetime.**

With your guidance, you also need to let your teen practice health care skills. A big part of your teen's health includes going to doctor, dentist, and mental health visits, talking with doctors and other professionals, as well as taking medicine.

## When possible, help your teen be a part of planning his/her health care.

Some teens want to be involved in managing their health care, talking about treatment options and making decisions. Help prepare your teen to:

- keep all doctor and clinic visits.
- talk to the doctor about his/her concerns.
- describe his/her **symptoms** (simp' toms).
- take medicines as ordered by the doctor.

## Medicine is important!

Make your teen part of the medicine-taking decisions by working with the doctor and **pharmacist** to get the best medicine schedule possible. Prepare your teen to talk about his/her activities, such as school, sports, clubs, and time with friends, as well as any concerns he/she may have. The doctor and/or pharmacist will talk with you and your teen about the importance of taking medicine as ordered. They will also talk about ways to organize and take medicine on time. It may be best for your teen to make an agreement with his/her doctor or pharmacist about what, when, and how medicine will be taken. It is your teen's job to take the medicine. It is your job to keep a supply of medicine on hand.



Help your teen be a part of making health care decisions.

### Special Note for Foster Parents:

Your caseworker and the foster teen's parents, where possible and appropriate, need to be part of the health care treatment process.

**Do your part to make sure medicine doses are not missed.**

**Work with the doctor and pharmacist to get the best possible medicine schedule.**

### **Do your part to make sure medicine doses are not missed.**

- **Be a good role model.** If you take medicine or vitamins, take them on time, as ordered. If possible, take them at the same time your teen takes his/her medicines.
- **Keep track of his/her medicine** and make sure you refill his/her medicines before they run out. Do not let your teen keep medicine in his/her room. Even if your teen has an agreement with the doctor or **pharmacist** to take medicine, you need to see that medicine is taken.
- **Help your teen to stay on track with his/her medicines** by urging him/her to:
  - work with his/her doctor or pharmacist to make a medicine schedule that works with his/her activities.
  - come to you for help if he/she wants you to help prepare the medicine or needs a reminder to take medicine.
  - learn more about how medicines help control **HIV** and keep people healthy. Suggest that your teen talk with the doctor, get booklets and brochures from the doctor's office, search the Internet or get information from the library.
- **Watch for signs that your teen may be ill or depressed.** Ask for advice from your teen's doctor or **mental health professional**.

(See **Helping My Adolescent Deal with HIV**, How can I tell if my teen is depressed? page 8-38 and **About Mental Health**, What can I do to improve my child's mental health? page 6-9.)

- **Encourage your teen to share his/her experiences with others in a safe and supportive setting.** Your teen needs to know that he/she is not alone. A support group may help your teen, if available. If a support group is not available or not working for your teen, urge him/her to join other activities. Ask your teen's doctor, **social worker** or **case manager** about camps and trips for teens with **HIV**. The doctor, social worker or case manager may also be able to help your teen buddy up with a young adult who has HIV and can help your teen talk about issues and concerns. Teens are influenced by the opinions and actions of their peers. If other teens are coping with their HIV medicine schedules, your teen may decide he/she can do it too.

Encourage your teen to join activities for teens with HIV.

---

## What if my teen stops taking HIV medicines?

Your teen may forget that a decision made today can affect him/her in the future. He/she may forget that if **HIV** is not controlled by the medicines, it will grow stronger. And when HIV is given the chance to grow stronger, it will change itself so the medicines no longer work. This is how HIV becomes **resistant** to medicines.

(See **HIV: The Basics**, How do medicines slow down or stop HIV? page 1-11 and Why do HIV medicines stop working? page 1-12.)

## Do not get in a battle over medicines.

Arguing about taking medicines probably will not help. You can demand that your teen takes his/her medicines, but he/she is the one who has to swallow them.



## Find out why your teen does not want to take the medicine.

- Does your teen think the medicine is not needed because he/she feels OK?
- Is your teen having **side effects** from the medicine?
- Does taking the medicine interfere with your teen's social life?
- Is he/she embarrassed about taking medicine?
- Is your teen rebelling against medical advice?
- Is your teen trying to get your attention about another issue?



If your teen is not taking his/her medicines, call the doctor or pharmacist.

### Special Note for Foster Parents:

Keep your caseworker informed if your teen is not taking his/her medicines.

## Who can give permission for my adolescent to get medical care?

Anyone younger than 18 years old, including a child in foster care, is called a **minor**. In New York State, there may be times when a minor does not need anyone to say OK for him/her to get health care. If a minor can understand the risks and benefits of treatment, he/she does not need anyone to give permission (**consent**) for:

- emergency health care.
- certain mental health services.
- certain alcohol and drug abuse services.
- reproductive health care.

Reproductive health care includes: family planning; abortion; prenatal care; care during labor and delivery; and care for **STDs**.

Some **minors** can **consent** to all of their own health care. This includes minors who are pregnant, married or parents with children.

Minors who can understand the risks and benefits of treatment can sometimes get health care without the OK from their parent, guardian or the local commissioner of social services.

As a foster parent, you are never allowed to give your OK for your foster child to get health care.

### Special Note for Foster Parents:

When you bring your foster child to doctor or clinic visits, you are not allowed to consent to his/her health care at any time, or under any circumstances.

Be sure your caseworker gives you a letter stating that your foster teen is in the **custody** of the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) and you are the foster parent. The letter should also name the person to contact who can give **consent** for health care (have blood work and tests done, admit to the hospital, etc.).

(See **Special Information for Foster Parents**, Who can consent to health care for my foster child? page 9–14 and **Legal Issues**, Who can give permission for my child or adolescent to get medical care and treatment? page 10–8.)

---

## What kind of medical care does a teen with HIV need?

If your teen had **HIV** as an infant or child and has been getting medical care from a program that specializes in the care of infants and children with HIV, his/her medical team will probably continue to care for your teen as he/she moves from childhood to adulthood. Many pediatric clinics treat children through age 18. Some adolescent HIV programs treat young people through age 24. If your teen got HIV as a teen, he/she may be treated at an adolescent HIV program, if available, or at an adult HIV program.

If the doctor or clinic who has been caring for your child cannot continue when your child becomes a teen, ask for a referral to a doctor or clinic that specializes in adolescent or adult **HIV** care. Or, call the **New York State AIDS Hotline** at **1-800-541-AIDS** for information about qualified HIV care providers in your area.



### Special Note for Foster Parents:

Call your caseworker if your foster teen's health care team members need to be changed.

## Ongoing medical care

Ongoing medical care for teens with **HIV** is basically the same as that for adults with HIV.

- Blood should be drawn every 3 months to monitor **CD4** counts and **viral loads**.
- **Antiretroviral** (an tī' ret ro' vi ral) **medicine** may be recommended.
- Most teens will receive adult **doses** of HIV medicines (based on height and weight).
- Tests for **STDs** should be offered every 6 months if your teen is sexually active.
- Teens should receive a yearly **TB** test.
- **Immunizations** (im' yūn i zā shuns) should be up to date for **measles, mumps, tetanus** (tet' nus), **Hepatitis** (Hep a tī' tis) **A, Hepatitis B, pneumonia**, and flu.
- Adolescent girls with HIV should have yearly **GYN** (gynecological) care once they start having **monthly periods**, or when they become sexually active.

Help your teen get to doctor and clinic visits.

## Treatment for medical problems

Young people often have difficulty dealing with the **symptoms** of illness. They may complain about minor problems such as a pimple or **monthly period**

cramps. But, they often deny serious **symptoms** of illness such as **fevers** or pain. The need to be like everyone else may make it difficult for teens to accept being sick.

It is up to you to watch your teen and help him/her get medical care when it is needed. You may see that your teen is not eating normally or goes to sleep as soon as he/she comes home from school. You may hear your teen coughing at night or notice he/she is taking medicine for a headache. Do not be afraid to ask if anything is bothering your teen. Tell him/her what you have seen. Call your teen's doctor and help your teen get to his/her doctor or clinic, if needed. Medical problems, especially infections, are best treated as soon as possible.

**Be alert to changes in your teen's mood or behavior.**

### **Treatment for mental health**

You and other caregivers need to watch for any changes in your teen's mood or behavior. Teens with **HIV** may become anxious or **depressed** trying to cope with a life-long health condition. Some teens may use alcohol or street drugs as a way of helping them cope.

**Medicaid** and most other health insurance plans cover mental health services for people with **HIV**. The type of treatment will depend on the **diagnosis** but may include:

- treatment medications, such as **anti-depressant** (an' tī dē pres' ant) **medicines**.
- individual or group therapy.

(See **About Mental Health**, What does a mental health professional do? page 6–6.)

## When should I call my teen's doctor?

Use the **symptoms** below as a guide to decide when to call your teen's doctor to let him/her know how your teen is feeling. The doctor will let you know what to do and if he/she wants your teen to come in for a visit.

- **Pain** – severe headache or pain in other parts of the body.
- **Numbness or tingling** – feels numbness or tingling in his/her feet or hands.
- **Fever** – if you think your teen is warm, take his/her temperature before calling the doctor. Ask your doctor when he/she wants to be called about a fever. Be sure you have a **thermometer** (ther mom´ e ter) at home and know how to use it, read it, and clean it.
- **Cough** – a new cough, coughing more often, or a cough that keeps your teen up at night.
- **Short of breath** – may become short of breath when your teen does an activity like climbing stairs, walking, or carrying books or other objects.
- **Nausea or vomiting** – feels sick to his/her stomach or is throwing up.
- **Nosebleeds or bruises** – has many nosebleeds or bruises easily.
- **Change in bowel patterns** – **diarrhea**, having loose/watery bowel movements, or **constipation** (kon´ sti pā shun), infrequent bowel movements.



### Symptoms

- ✓ Pain
- ✓ Numbness or tingling
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Cough
- ✓ Short of breath
- ✓ Nausea or vomiting
- ✓ Nosebleeds or bruises
- ✓ Change in bowel patterns
- ✓ Extreme fatigue
- ✓ Change in eating habits
- ✓ Weight loss
- ✓ Change in sleeping habits
- ✓ Skin problems
- ✓ Behavior problems
- ✓ Animal bites or scratches

- **Extreme fatigue** – tired all the time, may not be able to go to school or take part in his/her usual activities or routines.
- **Change in eating habits** – eating less or eating more than usual.
- **Weight loss** – unexplained weight loss or trouble gaining weight.
- **Change in sleeping habits** – sleeping more than usual, hard to wake up, or hard to get to sleep or stay asleep.
- **Skin problems** – has sores, rashes, lumps, bumps, redness or swelling.
- **Behavior problems** – some changes in behavior are part of growing up, but some may be a sign of illness, **depression**, or stress.
- **Animal bites or scratches** – has skin broken from an animal's bite or scratch.

## When should I take my teen to the emergency room?

Take your teen to the hospital emergency room when you think he/she is very ill, or needs to see the doctor right away. **Call 911** or your local emergency number to have the ambulance take your teen to the emergency room if he/she has any of these problems:

- **Serious breathing problems**, such as unable to breathe, bad wheezing, choking, or unable to catch his/her breath.
- **Convulsions or seizures** (arms and legs jerk uncontrollably).
- **Bleeding that cannot be stopped quickly.**
- **Fainting** (passing out).
- **Unconscious** (cannot wake teen up).
- **Restless, irritable, confused.**
- **Serious burn(s).**
- **Deep cut(s).**
- **Head or eye injuries.**
- **An accident or injury** that causes broken bones



**Do your part to make sure medicine doses are not missed.**

**Work with the doctor and pharmacist to get the best possible medicine schedule.**

### **Do your part to make sure medicine doses are not missed.**

- **Be a good role model.** If you take medicine or vitamins, take them on time, as ordered. If possible, take them at the same time your teen takes his/her medicines.
- **Keep track of his/her medicine** and make sure you refill his/her medicines before they run out. Do not let your teen keep medicine in his/her room. Even if your teen has an agreement with the doctor or **pharmacist** to take medicine, you need to see that medicine is taken.
- **Help your teen to stay on track with his/her medicines** by urging him/her to:
  - work with his/her doctor or pharmacist to make a medicine schedule that works with his/her activities.
  - come to you for help if he/she wants you to help prepare the medicine or needs a reminder to take medicine.
  - learn more about how medicines help control **HIV** and keep people healthy. Suggest that your teen talk with the doctor, get booklets and brochures from the doctor's office, search the Internet or get information from the library.
- **Watch for signs that your teen may be ill or depressed.** Ask for advice from your teen's doctor or **mental health professional**.

(See **Helping My Adolescent Deal with HIV**, How can I tell if my teen is depressed? page 8-38 and **About Mental Health**, What can I do to improve my child's mental health? page 6-9.)

- street drug or alcohol use.

It is common for teens to feel unhappy from time-to-time. But if your teen has 5 or more **symptoms** listed on page 8-38 that last for 2 weeks or longer, he/she may be **depressed**.

It is important to call your child's doctor or **mental health professional** if you think your teen may be depressed. A depressed teen who does not receive

**Get help NOW  
if your teen  
shows suicide  
danger signs.**

### **Suicide danger signs:**

- threatening or talking about killing himself/herself.
- giving away personal things he/she likes.
- writing letters to say goodbye or saying goodbye to family and friends.
- acting or talking like no one cares.
- talking like there is no hope for the future.

help may turn to suicide as an escape.

If your teen shows any of these suicide danger signs, take it seriously.



- Call your doctor right away!
- If you cannot get an immediate visit with a doctor or **mental health professional**, get your teen to the hospital emergency room now!

