FACTS. FACTS. FACTS.

As a Parent, Family Member, or Teacher, you can help STOPTHESILENCE.

As American Indian and Alaska Native parents we must stand up and have a voice. We owe it to our children; our future generation. For more information about speaking to your children about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, please visit www.stopthesilence.org

HIV/AIDS:

- The same activities that put young people at risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases also put them at risk for HIV infection.
- AIDS is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).
- The four body fluids known to transmit HIV are: blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and breast milk.
- A person infected with HIV can pass the virus during unprotected vaginal or anal sex, by sharing needles, and under certain conditions, through oral sex. HIV can also be passed from mother to baby during pregnancy, birth or breast feeding.
- Even with no obvious symptoms, an infected person can still pass HIV.
- HIV is not transmitted by casual contact like hugging, kissing, or sharing food or clothing.
- Currently there is no cure for AIDS. Medications can greatly help some HIV+ people, but not all… and these medications are not a cure.
- HIV does not discriminate. It affects people of all ages, races, and religions. It is not confined to gay men or injection drug users. Anyone engaging in risky behaviors can be exposed to the virus.

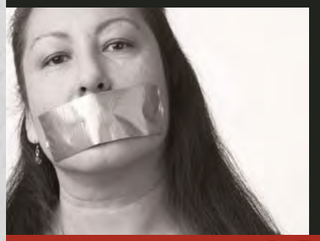
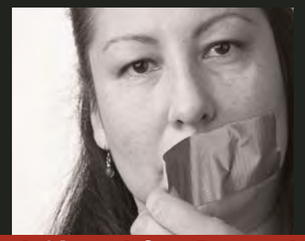
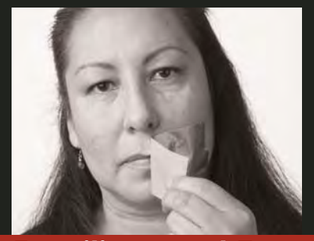
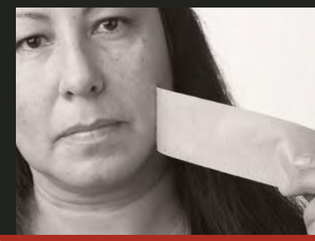
Reduce the risk of contracting STDs and HIV by:

- Abstaining from sex
- Using latex condoms when having vaginal or anal sex, using latex barriers with oral sex, and using water-based lubricants with latex condoms. Polyurethane condoms are recommended for those who have latex allergies.
- Limiting your number of sex partners.
- Not sharing needles (for drugs, steroids, tattoos or body piercing).
- Communicating with partners. It's important to know the sexual history of any sexual partner; anyone who has engaged in unsafe sex practices should not be considered a safe partner.
- Avoiding alcohol or drugs, which can alter decision-making.

Project Red Talon, Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board
Original text by: Mary Gossart, MS. There's No Place like Home for Sex Education, www.noplacelikehome.org
Adaptation for American Indians by: Jacqueline Sequoia, MPH (Cherokee/Creek/Oconee)

Contact your tribal health department or www.stopthesilence.org for more information.

stopthesilence

A Fact Sheet for Parents, Families, and Teachers

Our young people face a difficult challenge. Sexuality and reproductive health have become more complex than they were in the days of our ancestors. For many of us, talking about sex is an uncomfortable topic. Because of this, we have remained silent. In turn, our children and grandchildren have grown up not knowing how to talk about these issues.

Talking about sex may be uncomfortable, but last year over one third of high school students were sexually active.

Our silence will not stop the devastating impact of sexually transmitted diseases on our tribes. Our young people need help facing changes in sexual attitudes, behaviors, and values. As Native people, it is important for our children to learn healthy sexual attitudes in an atmosphere that supports our own cultural values.

As a Parent, Family Member, or Teacher, you can help STOPTHESILENCE.

Give Teens Access to Accurate Information and Resources- When it comes to sexuality, accurate information is important. Suggest to your teen that they talk to teachers, parents, school counselors, or community health educators. Young people will be less likely to accept their peers as "sexperts" if there are other alternatives.

Likewise, make sure teens know where and how to access condoms and reproductive health services, should the need arise. All states allow minors to consent to STD testing and treatment. As sovereign nations, tribes may choose to establish their own policies. If you are unsure, talk to your clinic about your teen's access to confidential reproductive services.

Draw Strength from your Culture and Traditional Teachings- Many tribes still practice ceremonies that celebrate the transition of a child to a young adult. Learn about how your tribe honors the natural processes of growth, and share those traditions with teens in your community. Native elders also suggest that parents and teachers use words from their Native language to communicate about sex.

Listen- Make it safe for teens to express personal thoughts with you and other trusted adults. If you get angry, they may not come back to you a second time.

Respect your teen's confidentiality. In small communities like ours, and especially on reservations, things travel fast by word of mouth. Your child's trust is on the line. Try your best to keep sensitive conversations confidential.

Think HIV/AIDS is not an issue in Indian Country? Think again! AIDS is on the rise. AIDS has been diagnosed for over 3,084 American Indians and Alaska Natives since the beginning of the epidemic. And 1/2 of all new HIV infections in the U.S. occur in young people under the age of 25.

When talking about sexual issues, teens suggest that you:

- Start slow. Stay simple.
- Be relaxed.
- Listen. Discuss the issues rather than preach.
- Respect differences of opinion.
- Don't get angry. If you do, they won't want to talk to you again.
- Don't be afraid to come out and say it.
- Don't force them to talk if they don't want to. Let them know that your door is open whenever they're ready.
- Don't assume they're clueless. They know more than you think.
- Make yourself available.
- Ask open ended questions that require an answer.
- Pick a comfortable, casual, private setting for talks about intimate issues, or set aside a special time. Go on a walk, go driving, or go out together.
- Use times when topics come up on TV to initiate discussions, not dinner time.

Communicate about Sex- Teens today are exposed to a lot of sexual messages from their peers and the media. These messages can be wrong or irresponsible. As an adult, you are in an ideal position to correct misinformation, share your personal and cultural values around sexuality, provide accurate information and resources, and express positive attitudes toward sexuality, love, trust, and relationships.

1 of every 5 sexually active teen females will get pregnant this year.

Many teens are already experimenting with sexual behaviors, but it's never too late to talk about sex.

Discuss a wide range of topics, including: relationships, puberty, sexual orientation, sexual decision-making, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, sexual protection, birth control, sexual abuse, rape, masturbation, negotiating skills, and more. Teens are also curious about sexual emotions, values, and morals; they want support with relationship pressures and expectations; they're confused about sexual feelings and urges; they wonder about love. Don't be scared to broach these subjects - They want and need to hear from you about these important topics!

Each year, 1 in 4 sexually active teens gets a sexually transmitted disease.

Express your opinions about each of these subjects- A genuine exchange of ideas can allow young people to sort through the issues and draw conclusions on their own. Giving kids information about sex and access to condoms does not encourage experimentation. Research shows that teens are far more likely to become sexually active when they have been given little or no opportunity to talk openly about sex, or when their sex "education" has been left to the media. Talking with teenagers about the pleasures, responsibilities, and risks of sex does not mean that you approve of teen sex.

Being honest when discussing sexual topics can help young people develop respect for intimate relationships. Whether you wish to emphasize marriage or a mature, committed relationship, reinforce that sex (at the right time) can be a sacred expression of love and connection. By focusing solely on the horrors that result from teen sex, we neglect to share the rest of the story – that sex is a sacred gift from the Creator.

Teach Skills- In a nationwide poll, teens named peer pressure as the primary reason young people don't wait longer to have sex. Eager for acceptance and popularity, young people often go along with the crowd.

Help teens decide on acceptable ways of expressing their love, affection, and sexuality. If you believe that sex is not OK for teens, by all means, say so... then discuss what types of sexual expression is OK.

Over 60% of high school seniors have had sex.

Help teens build skills around sexual decision-making before they are confronted with a choice. Ask them to weigh the consequences of saying "no" and "yes" to sexual activity. Describe situations and ask them to consider the outcomes. "What if Diane decides to spend the day at her boyfriend's when no one else is home?" or "What if Kurt and his girlfriend go to a party where they drink alcohol or do drugs? How might that affect their decisions about sex?"

Support their Decisions- If a teen is sexually active, ask them to examine the reasons and circumstances surrounding that choice. Discuss the relationship and level of commitment. Why has sex become part of it? Is there pressure for sex? Does he or she see any drawbacks?

2 U.S. teens are infected with HIV every hour of every day.

Always reaffirm that you love and support your teen even if you disagree with their behavior. Ultimatums and threats can cause resentment, anger, and resistance - creating a barrier to open communication. In the end, teens will make their own decisions about sex. Adults can only do their best to inform, offer guidance, and share values.

stopthesilence.org

Conversation Starters:

- "You know, talking about sex is a little uncomfortable for me. I imagine it's hard for you too. I do think it's important that we talk, so... maybe we can help each other out, ok?"
- Broach the subject by using "teachable moments" like a news story on HIV or teen pregnancy. Watch TV together and discuss the sexual messages.
- "Your father and I believe that teenagers are not ready for the emotions, responsibilities, and risks that go along with sexual intercourse. We believe in waiting until... (you fill in the blank: marriage, a particular age, a committed relationship, whatever you're comfortable with). If young people do have sex, they need to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy by using effective birth control and reduce the risk of infection by using condoms."
- "I've told you how I feel. I'm interested in hearing your thoughts about this."