

Tips & Tools For Champions: Transition Aged Youth (13-17)

Are you a champion to a young person in your life? A champion is an adult, like a parent, guardian, other family member or mentor, that a young person trusts to speak with them openly and honestly. Use the tips and guidelines below to start important conversations early, plan for the future, and build trust with teens.

Key Facts about this Age Group:

- They may have mood swings, and may be experiencing love or having sex with romantic partners.
- They are beginning to think abstractly but still have difficulty with decision making and navigating tough situations.
- They are experimenting with different identities, both in physical ways and with different groups of friends, all while trying to distance themselves from their families.

Assume No One Else Is Talking to Them About Sexual Health.

- Talking to your young person about healthy relationships and sex is normal. Incorporating these topics into your conversations will help facilitate an easier conversation in the years to come.
- It is important to assume that no one else is addressing these topics with your young person.
- No state explicitly requires parental consent or notification for contraceptive services. However, two states (Texas and Utah) require parental consent for contraceptive services paid for with state funds.

Let's Talk About Sex, Baby!

- While it is fair to encourage youth to wait until they are mentally and emotionally ready for sex, don't imply negativity or associate guilt with sex. Young people are sensitive to such connotations and this can influence their future relationships.
- Remember: Young people who have disclosed past sexual trauma may be triggered by such discussions. In this case, it is best to ensure that the young person has access to a mental health professional and meet them where they are in order to facilitate appropriate conversations about sex and parenting.
- De-stigmatize the discussion of sex, sexual and reproductive health, and contraception. By encouraging and engaging in candid, open conversations with your young person you can normalize the topic and build trust.

Fact vs Fiction

- Research shows that young people learn about sex from a variety of sources including school, friends and peers, and parents or other family members. Utilize conversations about sex, love, and relationships to influence the young person's knowledge about sexual health.

Help Teens Recognize Unhealthy Patterns in Relationships.

- Many youth are unaware of how to recognize unhealthy behaviors within a relationship. Ask about your young person's relationships and have a two-way conversation about positive/negative traits in a partner, friend, family member, or other adult.

Remember: Admit that it might be awkward at first to talk about these things; this recognition may help build trust and break the ice.

- **Script:** "I know that talking to me about your relationship with your partner may be a bit awkward. But, let me be straightforward with you. I may not always have the answers and I am sure that when we talk about relationships that I will stumble and not say the right thing from time to time. Still, I promise you two things: (1) I am always here to listen and hope that you will come to me with any questions or concerns you might have, and (2) I will always do the absolute best I can to help you with the decisions you make."
- **Script:** "I am interested because I care about you and I care about the things and people that are important to you. If you are involved with someone, I want to help you make sure that person is someone with whom you are comfortable, someone who supports you, someone who respects your ideas and opinions, and someone who appreciates all the things that make you who you are."

Ask does your partner...



Provide Helpful Resources.

- Young people often admit that they are not sure where to find trustworthy information.
- Check out [Bedsider.org](https://www.bedsider.org) and consult a physician about which birth control options may be best for your young person. If the young person discloses a romantic relationship, consider asking if they have discussed birth control methods with their partner. If not, this could be the sign of an unhealthy relationship.

Plan for the Future and Celebrate Success.

- Whether it's academic, extracurricular, or personal achievements, celebrate it! Motivation is a key tool in personal development and pregnancy prevention strategies. Communicate with other champions in the young person's life to encourage activities that motivate them. Weave in conversations about future family formation to help empower them to determine if, when and under what circumstances to start forming a family.

Help Make Pregnancy and Childbearing More Concrete.

- Ask questions specifically about how pregnancy and childbearing might impact their current situation. These conversations can emphasize that pregnancy can be planned and should be for the health of a parent and child.

Ask open ended questions and provide support:

- “Are you ready to take care of a baby?”
- “Are you at a point in your life to give a child the opportunities you would want to give them?”
- “Who would help you if you had a baby?” “Will the baby end up being cared for by someone else?”
- “How will your future be affected if you had a baby?”
- “Would you like to become pregnant in the future?”

Cultivate a culture of openness and allow the young person in your life to share their feelings without fear of shame or condemnation.

- Conversations about love and sex must ask the young person what they think, what they know, and what other topics they may desire to discuss. Ask what, if anything, worries them.
- Listen as much as—or more than—you talk. Again, your words are important, but equally important is making sure that the young person’s voice is being heard and respected.

Don't give up.

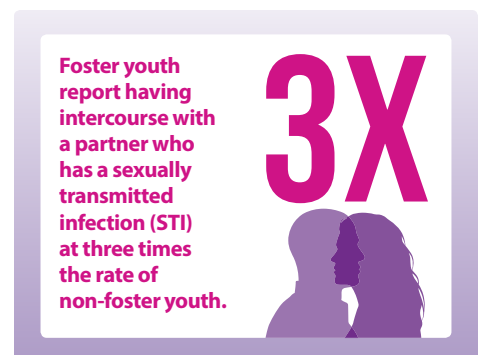
- Even if the young person in your life stonewalls you or appears uninterested in (or horrified by) these conversations, it’s your job as their champion to keep talking. Trust us—it makes a difference!

Championing for Foster Youth

Find out how to be a champion to youth in foster care using the tips below provided by [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#):

Things to Know

- Very few youth in foster care report that someone is talking to them about sex, love, and relationships.
- Young people in foster care are at great risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy.
- Foster youth report having intercourse with a partner who has a sexually transmitted infection (STI) at three times the rate of non-foster youth.



Things You Can Do to Help

- Foster parents and other champions in the lives of foster youth are key influencers. It's critical that foster youth feel empowered to make healthy decisions for themselves. It's important that you encourage your young person take charge of his or her own future—in both big and small ways— while you listen, guide, and support. During daily life, provide youth with frequent opportunities to make decisions. Use each choice as a way to incorporate messages about future story, sex, love, and relationships.
- Start early and talk often. Preparing for adulthood does not occur overnight. Don't wait until youth are nearing the date they leave your care, to jumpstart meaningful conversations. Use daily conversations to introduce important concepts, your young person is listening.
- Ensure that foster youth have access to condoms. (Remember most health departments and family planning clinics offer free condoms.) Consider taking the young person in your life to buy condoms and discuss using condoms. (Remember: Condoms should be used for oral, anal, and vaginal sex.)
- Medically accurate information about sexual and reproductive health is crucial to a young person's wellbeing. Talk to other champions in the youth's life and consider bringing this up in front of a judge or case worker who has the authority to mandate educational programs.