

## TIPS & TOOLS FOR TRUSTED ADULTS:

# Pre-Teen/Early Adolescent



### Key Facts about this Age Group:

- They are experiencing the physical changes of puberty, perhaps more slowly or quickly than their peers (puberty starts anywhere from age 8-14, in general).
- They have a heightened interest in friends, cliques, and romantic partners.
- They are concrete thinkers.

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

- Very few youth in foster care report that someone is talking to them about sex, love, and relationships.
- Talking to your teen about healthy relationships and sex is normal. You should be incorporating elements of these discussions into your conversations with pre-teens in order to facilitate an easier conversation in the years to come by normalizing it earlier.
- Review policies on sex education. It is important to assume that no one else is addressing these topics with the child, so why not you?

### It is Never Too Early to Start a Conversation About Sex and Relationships.

- The conversation can begin with topics like consent, puberty, and healthy vs unhealthy relationships.
- At this age, youth are increasingly concerned about what their peers think. It is important to ask about peers and other relationships early, normalizing the conversation as a foundation for more in years to come.

### Use Pop Culture to Start Talking.

- You could begin a conversation by incorporating music, movies, or TV shows that the youth enjoys. You might ask about friends, possible romantic relationships, or future romantic relationships
- **Script:** "I want to know more about who you spend time with because I care about you and I care about the things and people that are important to you. Most of all, I want to make sure that the people around you, support you, respect you, and appreciate you."

A trusted adult should be someone a youth can speak with openly and honestly. Use the tips and guidelines below to start important conversations early, plan for the future, and build trust with pre-teens.

### You Don't Have to Be an Expert But You Should Be an Askable Adult.

- An askable adult may not know all the answers, but they are a trusted adult with an open door for questions and conversation. (Remember: *Youth who have disclosed past sexual trauma may be triggered by such discussions. In this case, it is best to ensure that the youth has access to a mental health professional and meet them where they are in order to facilitate appropriate conversations about sex and parenting.*)

**17%** of foster youth reported age at first intercourse between 10 and 12 years old.



Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Charles, P., Mikell, D., Stevenson, B., Park, K., Kindle, B., Harty, J., & Feng, H. (2016). *Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of Youth at Age 19*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.



### **Know Where to Look for the Answers.**

- Check out [StayTeen.org](http://StayTeen.org) for games, media, Q&A, and educational materials for your youth.
- Try [LoveIsRespect.org](http://LoveIsRespect.org) for great resources on healthy relationships—consider doing the ‘Relationship Spectrum’ activity together to spark a conversation.

### **Put Yourself In Their Shoes!**

- Youth get much of their information on sex from peers and online sources that are not always reliable. Open the door for conversations so that you can correct misinformation and learn together if it's a topic you are unfamiliar with.
- Youth learn about relationships from what they see. This can include biological parent or foster parent relationships, extended family, siblings, TV shows, and movies. Utilize conversations about positive relationships to navigate other influences the youth may experience.

### **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 adults in the youth's life to encourage activities that motivate the youth.
- Ask open ended questions and provide support:
  - "What do you want to be when you grow up? How can we make that dream a reality?"
  - "Do you want a family someday?"
  - "How do you want to be treated?"

### **Don't Impose Your Values.**

- Young people—especially adolescents—are very sensitive to judgment and won't be as open or confiding if they feel as though you are judging them. Try your best to leave your personal values at the door and know that being objective is in the best interest of the youth.