

Summary Report Results of the Family Communication Survey

This study helps us to understand how families can support teens' health. Below we share our findings, and talk about how families can support teens' health

The Family Communication survey

This survey asked teens about conversations with their parents and extended family about dating, sex and relationships, like talking with teens about teen pregnancy or the risks of sex. The goal of this research project is to see if and how talking with extended family relates to teen health and wellbeing.

Our research team surveyed 952 11th and 12 grade students in 5 urban high schools in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Fifty-four percent of the sample described themselves as female, 44% were male and 1% as other. Most teens identified their race/ethnicity as Latinx (53%), with fewer Black (17%), White (16%), Asian (7%), Middle Eastern (4%), and Biracial (2%). Fifty-eight percent of the sample reported living with two parents.

Teens' sexual behavior and family communication

- 35% of teens have had vaginal sex
- 50% of teens talk to at least one *parent* about dating, sex or relationships
- 46% of teens talk to an *extended family member* about dating, sex or relationships
 - o 24% with older sisters
 - o 21% with older female cousins
 - o 16% with older brothers
 - o 13% with aunts

How can talk about sex and relationships support adolescents' health?

- *Teens who talk with extended family about protection from STDs and teen pregnancy had sex with fewer people*
- *Teens who talk with extended family about the risks of sex had sex with more people.*

Take-home messages

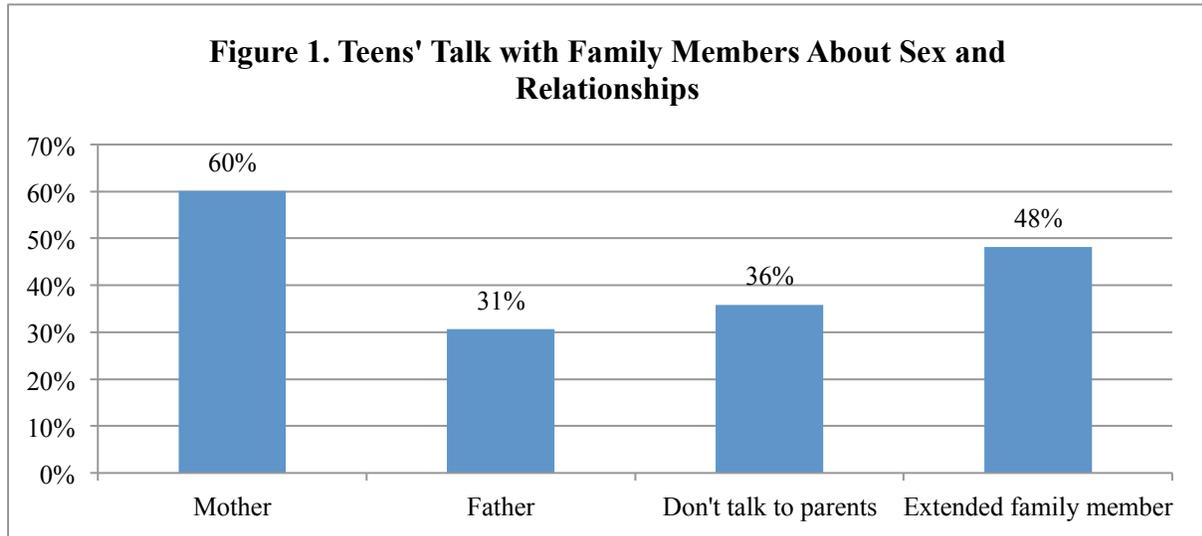
- Family conversations about dating, sex and relationships can protect teens from sexual risk behavior, but only half of teens talk with their parents about these topics.
- Extended family can support teens' sexual health
- If teens have had sex, it is important to talk to them in ways that fit with their experiences,
 - o talk about safer sex can encourage them to make thoughtful decisions about their sexual behavior.
 - o talk about reasons not to have sex may not be effective and miss a chance to give them tools and skills to make healthy decisions about sex.
- It's important *what* you talk about, not *who* you talk to.
 - o Talk with older siblings and cousins is just as useful as talk with grandparents or aunts and uncles
 - o Talk with extended family is just as useful for male and female teens

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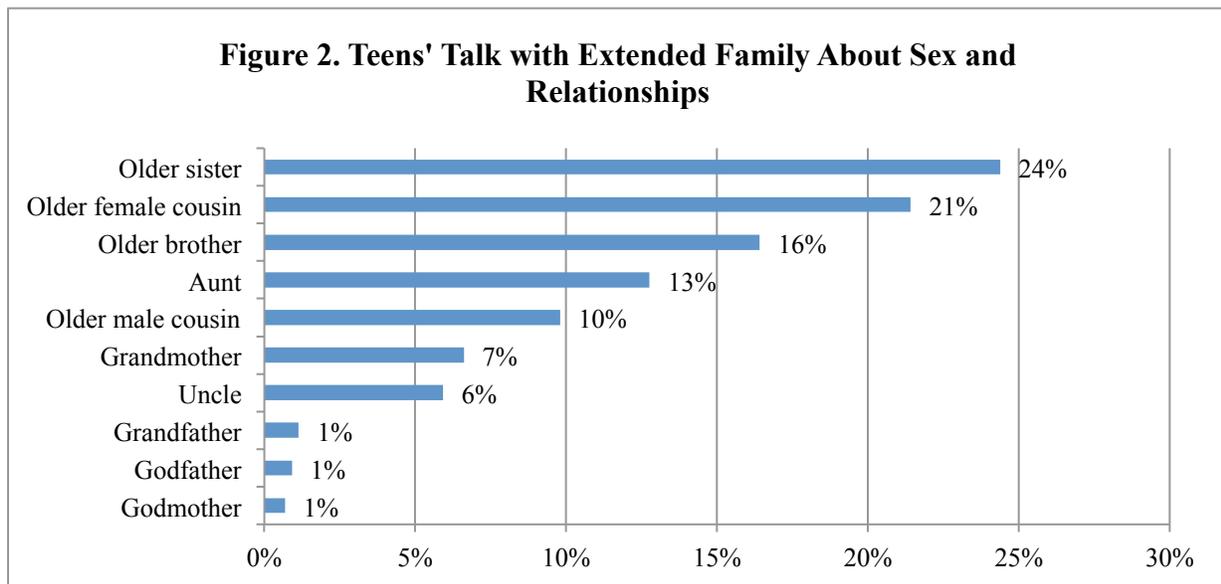
At the participating high schools 952 11th and 12th grade students took the Family Communication Survey. Fifty-four percent of students identified as female, 44% as male, and less than 2% as other. The majority of students identified their race/ethnicity as Latinx (53%), with fewer Black (17%), White (16%), Asian (7%), Middle Eastern (4%) and Biracial (2%) students. About half of students live with both parents (58%).

Who do teens talk to about sex and relationships?

60% of students at all high school students talk with their mother, 31% talk with their father, and 36% did not talk to their parents at all about dating, sex or relationships. Almost half of the teens reported talking to an extended family member (48%) (See Figure 1).



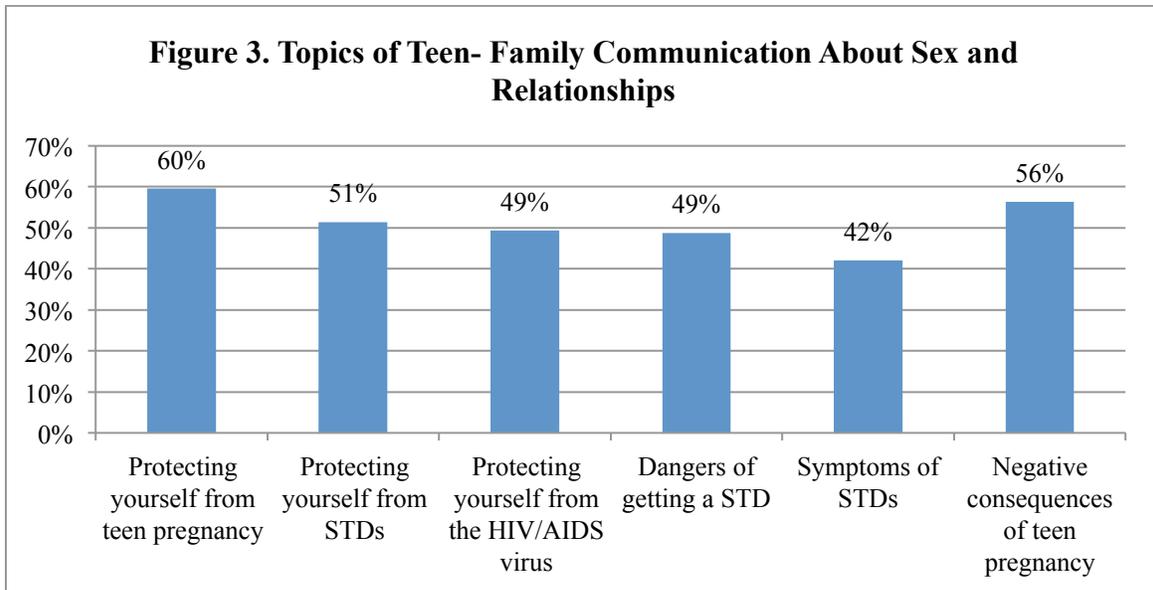
High school students are most likely to talk about dating, sex or relationships with an older sibling (sister=24%, brother=16%), cousin (female=21%, male=10%), or aunt (13%) (See Figure 2).



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What sex and relationships topics are teens talking about with their family?

Students who talk with their families about sex or relationships are most likely to talk about teen pregnancy, protection, and STDs. 60% of teens talk with family about protecting themselves from teen pregnancy and about half (56%) talk about the negative consequences of teen pregnancy. Close to half of teens talk with family about protection from STDs and HIV/AIDS, and the dangers of STDs (See Figure 3).



If you have questions about this study, you can visit our website wcwonline.org or contact the Project Director, Jennifer Grossman, Ph.D., at jgrossma@wellesley.edu; 781-283-2521.