Parent Goal 8: Sensitive Topics

[Sensitive topics can be difficult for many parents of adolescents to talk about]

I. Eye-Catcher

A. Video Messages from Stay-Connected: (see Appendix 8A).
   a. Be Available: daughter: demonstrates a daughter practicing in front of a mirror how to bring up dating a boy whom her parents may not approve of (i.e., practicing bringing up a sensitive topic).
   b. Be Available: son: demonstrates a son practicing in front of a mirror his feelings regarding the new school and the students that attend. The son feels like the dad won’t care about the son’s feelings (i.e., practicing bringing up a sensitive topic).

B. Show a Brief clip from the “Lost Children of Rockdale County.” This video deals with teens in Conyers, GA who became involved in risky sexual activity. See http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/georgia/ for more details.

C. Select another video clip of your choice that focuses on a sensitive topic (e.g., sex, violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, depression/suicide).

II. Mini Lecture/Discussion (Powerpoint slides can be found on the CD; see speaker notes in the slide show for additional information)

III: In-session Activities

A. Tough Topics: What are they? The goal of this activity is to identify the sensitive topics and to discuss why parents find these topics difficult to discuss with their teens. In addition, reasons why it is important that parents do discuss these sensitive topics with their teens are addressed. Materials needed are a flip chart and markers. Have the participants generate a list of topics they feel are difficult/sensitive to talk over with their teens. While the participants are calling out different topics, write their answers on a large post-it or flip chart. Next, on a second flip chart, write down the participants’ fears/concerns they have about discussing these topics with their teens. (Participants should be calling out their fear/concerns.) Third, have the participants brainstorm ways to deal with these fears/concerns so they can talk with their teens. Feel free to choose whether or not to write this on a separate flip chart. Finally, discuss why it is important to discuss tough topics with teens even though parents may be anxious about doing so.
Process Questions: Why is it difficult to talk about contraception (sex, drugs, suicidal thoughts) with your teen? How does remaining calm help when talking with your teen? How might you practice before talking with your teen so the conversation will flow more smoothly?

B. Parent Role Models: The purpose of this activity is to have participants share with each other what they do to effectively discuss sensitive topics with their teens. Parents learning from each other can increase receptiveness to possible solutions and helps parents not feel they are alone in the challenges they face. Ask for volunteers from your group who feel that they can talk openly with their teens about sensitive topics? Have them explain “how they talk” with their teens.

Process Questions: What do you do that makes it easier for you to talk about the sensitive topic with their teens? What kind of relationship do you have with your teen? What kind of pointers can you give to your fellow group members that will make this discussion easier for them?

C. Practicing: Learning to bring up the sensitive topic:

This task is designed to help parents practice discussing sensitive topics with their teens. First, review steps for how to begin talking about a sensitive topic. See appendix 8B. Next, have the group of participants break up into pairs. Have each team role-play talking with a teen about a sensitive topic: one person plays the parent and the other person plays the teen. After the allotted time, have the participants switch roles and discuss another sensitive topic. Have them start with a more comfortable topic that is not too sensitive for them. Once they feel comfortable, have them begin working on more difficult topics. They should pick topics from the list they generated earlier. You may decide to have a parent who finds it easier to talk about sensitive topics pair up with a parent who finds it more difficult to talk about sensitive topics with his/her teen. You also can have participants engage in role plays that address sensitive topics; see Appendix 8C for example role-plays.

D. Fishbowl Activity – Eves dropping on discussions among teens about parents and among parents about teens (See Appendix 8D).

IV. Wrap-up: Review the main points of the session; check for understanding and questions (it can be useful to have the group generate the main points and for the facilitator to write them down on a flip chart or overhead). The main points covered include: Identifying important sensitive topics and discussing why they can be difficult to talk about with teens, generating ways that parents can prepare to discuss sensitive topics with their teens, and increasing comfort level of parents for talking about tough topics.

If you plan to have more sessions on “tough topics” – have participants indicate which topics they would like to have covered.
V. Handouts

Principles of Parenting (HE783)- Communicating with Your Teen: Talking about Sex (a draft of this publication is included - the final copy is not available yet, but will be soon). Other Extension Handouts (see www.aces.edu/teens/parenteen/links/ for many different resources available for talking about tough topics; StayConnected Tip card (see Appendix 8E).

VI. Out of session Activities: Pick a topic you feel you would like to talk over with your teen. Practice starting up the conversation and what you would like to say to your teen. Go talk with your teen about the topic. If you feel uncomfortable starting with a more difficult topic, pick an easier topic first and see how the conversation goes. Eventually, with open and honest communication, you will be able to start discussing the more difficult topics with your teen.

VII. Evaluation (see Appendix 8F)
Appendix 8A
Be Available Process Questions

**Teen Dating**

a. Do you think that your teen might feel like this on occasion?

b. Are you always available to discuss dating issues with your teen?

c. What do you usually do when you disagree about the importance of this topic?

d. Are there other topics that you find difficult to discuss with your teen?

e. What could you do differently to make it easier to talk about these issues? What would you like your teen to do differently?

**Dislikes School**

a. Are school issues sometimes a problem?

b. Do you think that you completely understand your teen's problems regarding school?

c. How do you deal with it? Are you available for discussions?
   - What could you do differently?
   - What your teen do differently?
Appendix 8B
How to Get Started

How Do I Begin?
- Think about what would you like to know?
  - Sit down and think about the kinds of questions you have for your teen: *Are you getting pressure from your boy/girlfriend to have sex? If you are having sex, are you using protection? Are you part of the bullying that has been going on at your school? Have you been getting high with your friends after school?*

There are several ways to begin the discussion to a sensitive topic.
- When you witness the situation occurring with someone else personally or in the media, bring it up to your teen
  - When you witness the situation, you can start the conversation about the topic in reference to the other person. This will take the focus off of your teen.
- Be calm and respectful.
  - If you begin the discussion without making accusations, your teen is less likely to become defensive. Start the conversation when both of you are calm.
- Begin in an environment that is comfortable to you.
  - If you and your teen are more comfortable talking while playing basketball or shopping, bring up the topic then. If you are more comfortable talking when the two of you are alone, begin then. If you feel more comfortable putting your thoughts, ideas, or questions into writing first, begin that way.

- No matter how you begin the conversation, the purpose is to talk with your teen.

Talking Once, Is NOT Enough
- Talking about the sensitive topic only once is not enough.
  - In order for the discussions to be beneficial, it is important that you continue to keep the lines of communication open with your teen. Talking about the issue several times is critical.
- If you can’t talk with your teen, talk to another trustworthy adult who can assist you with the problem. If you know an adult that your teen trusts, you may be able to work together to get your teen to open up about the sensitive topic. The most important thing is that your teen is talking to someone who is knowledgeable and helpful.

In summary, when discussing sensitive topics:

a. Be open & honest
b. Explain what you are thinking and feeling
c. Listen to what your teen is saying
d. Ask questions, if necessary
e. Stay Calm throughout the conversation
Appendix 8C
Example Role-plays for Sensitive Topics

Choose from one of the following two options: (a) Have the participants try one of the
topics and then create their own, (b) Have two volunteers role-play the examples in front
of the entire group and then have the participants generate their own.

**Drug/Alcohol Use/Abuse:**

Jose’: Dad, can we talk about something really important? I would like your advice on something.

Dad: Of course, what is it?

Jose’: I think I may have a problem.

Dad: You do? With what? How can I help?

Jose’ Don’t get mad. I’ve been going to a lot of parties lately where kids are drinking a lot, and I’m one of those kids. And, I know you don’t want me to be drinking, but I have been. But now, I think I have a problem. I don’t remember what happens after I’ve had a few beers and I get sick all of the time. My friends say that I pass out sometimes, but other times they say I start fights with people. I don’t remember doing any of it.

Dad: Ok. I’m glad that you came to me about this. I want to help you, not punish you about it. You’ve obviously learned that drinking can cause problems, so let’s focus on getting you some help.

Jose’ and Dad continue talking until they find a solution. During the whole conversation, Dad is calm, open and supportive.
Teen Pregnancy:

Trisha: Mom, can we talk? I’ve got something really important that I need to tell you.

Mom: Sure, honey, what is it?

Trisha: Mom, this is really hard for me to tell you. I know that you are going to be upset, but please just listen to me without yelling at me. Ok?

Mom: Trisha, what is it? You’re scaring me.

Trisha: well, umm, Joey and have been having sex and we didn’t use a condom this one time. So, uh, I’m pregnant now. I’m 2½ months along.

Mom: Ok. What do you and Joey plan to do?

Trisha: I don’t really know mom. I’m scared. I was hoping that you could help me decide what to do.

Mom: Let’s sit down and talk about what your alternatives are. We also will want to get information that will help you make the best choices.

Mom and Trisha proceed to discuss Trisha’s options. While Mom is very upset, she remains calm. Trisha is open and honest with her Mom, which allows the conversation to progress smoothly.

Process Questions: What did you learn from practicing? What kinds of tips did you learn from your partner? What should you try to remember when you begin a conversation with your teens about something that is sensitive? Who feels like they could talk with their teens now? Why? Who still feels like it may be difficult to talk with their teens? Why?
Appendix 8D
Fishbowl Activity

The main goal of this activity is to reduce the anxiety connected to discussing sensitive topics with teens. The activity helps to identify and address questions and assumptions that might make it difficult for parents and teens to talk openly.

- Divide your group in half. Assign one half to play the teens and the other half to play the parents. Give each group small slips of paper and pencils.

- Ask the teen group to write on the slips of papers different questions they have about discussing sensitive topics with parents. For example, “Why does it matter to parents if a teen wants to try weed once, just to see what it feels like?” “Why don’t parents trust us to go with our friends to the beach for the weekend?” “Why do some parents think it is strange that teenagers think about having sex?

- Ask the parent group to write down on the slips of papers different questions they have about discussing sensitive topics with teens. For example, “Why do some teenagers always get so quiet when parents bring up things like sex or drugs?” “Why can’t teenagers talk honestly about their lives with their parents?” “What should a parent say or do to let a teenager know they can talk openly about sex, drugs, dating, or other hard to talk about topics?”

- When both groups have finished writing their questions, have them fold their questions and place them in a large envelope (have one envelope for the teens’ questions for parents, and another envelope for the parents’ questions for teens). Have one group form their chairs in a small circle; have the other group place their chairs in a larger circle around the other group. Have the group in the center read and respond to the questions while the other group watches without commenting.

- For example, if the teen group is in the middle, they will get the envelope containing the parents’ questions for teens. They will take turns reading and responding to the parents’ questions. When the teens finish, they switch places with the parents (parents get in the inner circle and teens sit in the outer circle; the parents respond to the teens’ questions for parents, while the teens watch without commenting).

- When the activity is over, ask the participants to comment on what they observed and what they learned from doing the activity.
Appendix 8E
StayConnected Tip card for Goal 8
(duplicate as many as needed on card stock paper)

Talking with Teens about Sensitive Topics
- Get the facts you need so you can answer the questions your teen may have.
- If you don’t know the answer…find it out from reputable sources (books, knowledgeable professionals).
- Make sure you explain your own values…and be a good example.
- Give your teen opportunities to ask questions and voice their concerns.
- Try to be honest and patient.
- Use everyday opportunities to talk… like something you see on a T.V. shows or the news.

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Appendix 8F

**Parent Goal 8: Sensitive Topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County ___________________</th>
<th>Name of Facilitator ___________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital status: single(never married) married(first marriage) divorced remarried widowed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Status: mother father grandmother grandfather other (please write in) _______________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity: Black/African American White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latino Native American Asian American Other (please write in) _______________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many sons/grandsons do you have ___ What are their ages: _______________  
How many daughters/granddaughters do you have ___ What are their ages: _______________

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**Please circle the number that indicates how much you enjoyed the activities.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Video Messages</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tough Topics-What Are They?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Practice with Bringing Up Sensitive Topics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fishbowl activity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Please circle the number that indicates what you knew before and after participating in this session.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Before the Session</th>
<th>After the Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can identify important sensitive topics.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand why teens might feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics with their parents.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to bring up sensitive topics with my teen.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to encourage my teen to talk with me about sensitive topics.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify other helpful adults that my teen could talk to if my teen can not discuss a sensitive topic with me.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>