



Talking to Teens About Sex

Young patients want information from their physicians about sex, but they don't want to start the discussion.

We offer some strategies for opening this crucial dialogue.

by Andrew A. Skolnick

"Sex makes clinicians nervous," says David Rosen, MD, MPH, director of teenage and young adult health at the University of Michigan Health System in Ann Arbor, MI. Physicians are often reluctant to counsel adolescents about sex, for both personal and practical reasons, he says. The subject often hits the health care provider's own hot buttons. Most physicians haven't received adequate training in sex counseling. Many may believe that these issues are less medical and so are best left for parents, teachers, or clerics to discuss. Some fear opening a Pandora's box, not knowing what to do with the information they find. As a result, many clinicians who care for teenagers don't counsel them about sex at all, and countless opportunities to encourage safer behavior are missed.