



## Sex, the Media and Your Child

Radio shock jocks, television characters, movies, videos, magazines and the Internet could be your child's most influential sex education teachers.

However, the messages that the media send about sex are often confusing, misleading or wrong. Research shows that these messages play a big role in teens' decisions to have sex.

### This is a public health problem because:

- Teens in this country have one of the highest pregnancy rates in the world.
- More than half of all high school seniors in America are sexually active.
- Almost one fourth of those teens have had four or more partners.
- One in four sexually active American teens is infected with a sexually transmitted disease (STD) each year.

In film, television, videos, video games, and music, sexual messages are becoming more explicit. When children and teens see a lot of these images in the media, such behavior seems more normal to them.

### The facts on media influence:

- American children spend more than 38 hours a week using media. That includes television, videos, music, computers and video games.
- One study showed that 75 percent of all music videos include sexual images. More than half are also violent—usually against women.
- The average teen will view nearly 14,000 sexual references per year in the media. Only about one per

cent of these will talk about birth control, the risk of pregnancy or STDs.

### What You Can Do To Help Your Child:

- Know what your child is watching, listening to and reading.
- Share your family's values about sex when viewing sexual images in the media. Help your child identify improper images.
- Listen to how he or she feels about images and messages conveyed by the media.
- Teach your child how to choose good programs.
- Set time limits and enforce rules about program and music ratings.
- Ask your pediatrician for advice about how to talk with your child about sex.
- Remember, if you don't teach your child about sex, the media probably will.

### You can make a difference:

- Send e-mail and write letters to broadcast industry leaders. Urge them to put responsible sexual content in programs.
- Ask local movie theaters and video stores to enforce the movie ratings system.
- Find out if your school has a media education program. If not, start one.

*The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.*