

Parents fear sex advice will fall on deaf ears

7 January 2011, by Christe Bruderlin-Nelson



Kids learn a great deal about sexuality from friends and from the media, but parents and teens agree: Parents should be the most important providers of information about sex and sexuality.

In a new study, researchers interviewed 1,605 parents of primarily white, school-aged children in Minnesota, asking where they thought kids should get their information about sexuality compared to where they actually get sex information.

While 98 percent of parents felt youth should receive their sex education from parents, only 24 percent believed they were the main providers of sex education information. Most parents - 78 percent - believed that kids received the majority of information about sex from friends and 60 percent saw [media](#) as the main source.

"Based on previous research, however, youth indicate that parents are a primary source of sex information for them and that parents most influence their decisions about sex," said study co-author Debra Bernat, Ph.D., at Florida State University.

The study "begs the question of why youth cannot get the information that they seek - and prefer - from their own parents," said Nancy Irwin, Psy.D., a clinical psychologist and cognitive behavioral

specialist in Los Angeles who addresses childhood and adolescent [sexuality](#). "This should be a wake-up call to parents: you and your kids want the exact same thing. What's missing are the proper tools."

The study appears online in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Although there has been much controversy about sex education in schools, the majority of parents listed teachers as the second preferred source of information, followed by health care professionals and then religious leaders.

"School-based [sex education](#) programs are very important since this may be the only source of information for some young people," beyond peers and media, Bernat added.

The study did not differentiate between types of media, which might explain why only 3.5 percent of parents accepted it as a good source for teens. "The proportion of [parents](#) endorsing media might have been different had we separated out movies, television, books and the Internet, and specified who provided it to the young person." Bernat said.

More information: Lagus KA, et al. (2010) Parental perspectives on sources of sex information for young people. *J Adol Health* online, 2011.

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