

**Talking to your Kids About Teen Pregnancy and Sex
Child & Family Resources interview on September 7, 2009 on KVOA-TV**

Kristi Tedesco- In our raising kids segment – talking to your children about teen pregnancy and sex is not the most comfortable conversation but one of the most important. So how do you get the dialogue going? Renee Hartje from Child & Family Resources joins us with some ideas.

Kristi- Talking about the age, what's appropriate? I think it was fourth grade when everybody was funneled into the auditorium at my elementary school and we all sat there and got our sex education instruction. Is there an age?

Renee Hartje- They are actually saying that puberty for girls starts at about age 8 right now. All of that is happening much earlier so those kinds of discussions should be probably be happening earlier, probably by age 9.

Kristi- When did that happen?

Renee- That's what the studies are now saying. We have just sped it up in some way.

Kristi- So if you have open dialogue and good communication with your child all of the time, then I would think that a lot of the times the dialogue and the opportunity to discuss all of this would come to you and fall in your lap. Maybe in a way where they're saying hey my friend has this going on, what do you think?

Renee- Absolutely. You have to be honest and open, you have to always have those lines of communication open because you not only want them to come to you with that information, you want to give them that specific and adequate information that they're looking for, so they're not getting it someplace else.

Kristi- And how should your demeanor be because it can make you anxious?

Renee- Well it's not an easy topic. I have two children ages 9 and 14 and we've talked a little bit more to the 14 year old than we have the 9 year old at this point. It's not easy but you really just have to keep those lines of communication open and give them the information that you think they need without being so graphic. You don't want to scare them but you want to let them know what's going on, that it's normal and if they have any questions that they can definitely come to you as a parent.

Kristi- What happens if your child has a friend who is sexually active and you feel like maybe the influence is not so great. Is it smart to say "I don't want you hanging out with that child"? What do you do?

Renee- If you have set that foundation for your child to begin with, they're going to come to you and have that open dialogue. Some people say that if we talk about sex then that means that we are giving permission or that it's going to happen sooner or more often, and that's not necessarily the case. I think that if we talk to them and give them specific information, that's the best thing we can do.

Kristi- You're out there and seeing kids and what they are talking about. What's resonating with them with regards to abstinence versus contraception? What's the word there?

Renee- I work with teen mothers, I run a teen parent program at Child & Family Resources and lot of the times I have talked to them about that and they said if only someone had been available to them to talk to them about sexual experiences. We've got to be realistic, they are out there and they are having sex. If somebody would have talked to them they might have made different

choices for themselves, they might have waited. They might have made difference or better choices.

Kristi- This is what the kids are saying?

Renee- Absolutely

Kristi- And what exactly would resonate- what can you say? Don't do it?

Renee- Well not necessarily, maybe just the open communication. Nobody ever talked about it because it is one of those taboo types of conversation. Nobody wants to have the conversation so when you don't then you have the issues of early teen pregnancy happening.

Kristi- How important is it to go beyond what you say and pay attention to what you're doing because you're an example right? As a parent leading by example because your kids are watching you.

Renee- I think the bottom line is we have to be realistic. This is happening and if we want them to make good choices and better choices for their lives we have to keep those lines of communication open, we have to know the studies and absolutely be open with them.

Kristi- So that's the bottom line – talk all the time.

Renee- Absolutely, communication.