

**SEX**  
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"I have seen cases where a young woman takes out a restraining order against a young man in her school, and the administrators remove her from the class and leave him in," said Maria Moscaritolo, a domestic violence expert and licensed clinical social worker with Bayview Associates in Plymouth.

Hingham psychologist Barbara Green, who works with adolescents, said there is more intimidation in teen dating relationships than adults acknowledge, a fact supported by a Patriot Ledger survey of 527 South Shore high school students.

Among the survey findings that concern Green: Twenty-three percent of girls said they had been emotionally or physically abused in a relationship; and nearly 50 percent said they "knew someone" in their school who had been abused.

"Those numbers are pretty high," Green said. "Twenty percent is just too high. It clearly shows intimidation in the dating relationships," behavior that is often carried over into adulthood, she said.

Teachers, parents and psychologists describe a general acceptance of sexuality at a younger and younger age.

Body chemistry might have something to do with that. Kids are hitting puberty at a younger age today than they were decades ago, with many girls getting their period by age 11.

"While their bodies may be maturing, it doesn't mean they're emotionally or cognitively more mature than they were a generation ago," Green said. "It's like having a race car and having no idea how to drive it."

Many teens are confused about the line between appropriate and inappropriate sexual behavior.

"There is a bravado about it, and the line between what is acceptable and what is coercion is always a moving target for kids," Green said. "Kids cross the line, and they don't always even know it. They say they know it's not OK to force sex, but what does that mean? And drinking continues to be an issue, when they have no control over impulses and judgment is distorted."

In Gill's Cohasset classroom discussion about the two girls at the party, teens debate what they would do, depending on the circumstances.

How well do they know the kids involved? Should that matter if a date rape is clearly possible? Should they tell the boy he is legally at risk even if they have consensual sex because she is drunk and cannot form consent? And why is the boy more at fault if they both have been drinking?

Gill believes by discussing the possibilities beforehand, teens will be better prepared to make the right choices when the time comes.

To really change risky or harmful behavior, parents, teachers and media must examine how culture portrays sexuality and domestic violence, experts say.

"It's one thing to push abstinence; it's another to encourage dialogue" about what is really going on, Green said.

All said the media, particularly movies, music and television, are a powerful influence on teenage behavior.

Teens in The Patriot Ledger's survey admit as much. Twenty-five percent of high school students said teen sexual behavior is primarily influenced by movies and television; nine percent said music is a primary influence.

Movies and television can give teenagers a distorted idea of what is normal behavior for their age group, said Alan Jacobson, a psychologist and director of Bayview Associates, a large outpatient clinic at the South Shore Mental Health Center. "The line has been blurred because we find that our teenagers are now 11 and 12 years old. By the time they are 15 or 16, they are trying to live adult lives," he said.

Jacobson cited characters on TV sitcoms and in movies who "are supposedly in high school but have adult

behavior. They routinely are shown drinking, using drugs, in sexual situations," he said.

Teens have a hard time resisting risky behavior or intervening when their friends do something wrong because they fear retaliation from peers, Jacobson said.

"Their standing with their peers is so vital to them. They have an exaggerated fear sometimes of what will happen to them, but it is very real to them," Jacobson said.

In the small-town social structure of the South Shore, the need for peer approval is even greater, said Jacobson. Here, generations of families have attended the same high school, formed long-term friendships, and handed those down to their children.

"The kids know each other really well, and they know their parents have been friends, and you have these very tight peer groups," he said. "It can be a very lonely place if they get kicked out of their peer group."

Experts stressed that parents and schools need to keep lines of communication open with teens as they traverse the turbulence of adolescence.

"Parents and teachers should literally have time set aside for conversation," Jacobson said. Teenagers may act uninterested, but they often say later they appreciated what their parents were trying to do and even drew strength from it, he said.

By talking to teens, adults can present risky scenarios, get a sense of how teens would respond, and present alternatives. The goal: Getting teens to recognize danger and respond appropriately.

"So many young people don't consider the possibility that someone would hurt them, and to get out of a violent relationship once you are in it is so difficult," Moscaritolo said. "If you can recognize the red flags and avoid it, you have a much better chance of staying safe."

Dating and sexual violence "is about sexism, and sexism is about power and control," Moscaritolo said, adding that those same issues occur in same-sex relationships. In role playing possible situations with teens, she helps them think in advance about what is acceptable behavior. "You want to reinforce the idea that the kids have a choice in how they respond," she said.

Counselors and psychologists say it is disturbing but not surprising to see teens shun the victim and take the side of the offender.

"The kids feel so horrible about what has happened that they need to find someone to share the fault with," he said. "They want to think it is not that big a deal."

Barbara Fuyatt, director of South Shore Women's Center in Plymouth, said that secrecy around dating violence and date rape create intense isolation for the victims.

Despite all efforts at public education, Fuyatt observed, "it is still so much easier for people to say, 'Why did she walk there or wear that?' than to focus on the perpetrator."

National surveys suggest that one in three young women in this country will be sexually assaulted before her 18th birthday, said Moscaritolo. "Put three beautiful faces of girls you know and love in front of you and think of that," she said. "Hopefully that will motivate you."

You can E-mail reporter Sue Scheible at [sscheible@ledger.com](mailto:sscheible@ledger.com).

**Get involved**

If you will be a high school student in a South Shore town in September, and wish to become a member of the 2002-03 Patriot Ledger Teen Focus Group, please E-mail us at [ratedrisky@ledger.com](mailto:ratedrisky@ledger.com). Be sure to include your name, address and phone number so we can contact you. The group will meet several times during the year to discuss issues of importance to teens. A parent's permission will be required.

**SETTING LIMITS**



■ Cathy Torrey and her daughters, Anna, 14, left, and Mary, 12, talk about clothes that are suitable for school. Cathy Torrey says she is sometimes amazed by what she sees girls wearing to school.

Parents struggle to keep **TEENS SAFE**

By **SUE SCHEIBLE**  
The Patriot Ledger

Cathy Torrey realized her two daughters were growing up in a different sexual culture than she did when they were as young as 5 or 6, and she took them to buy shoes.

"They were all like miniature adult shoes, with slip-in sandals or clunky heels," said Torrey, whose daughters are Anna, 14, and Mary, 12.

Then came the TV shows "which I hated, that presented children with very adult feelings. I'd tell them 'That's not the way kids are.'"

As co-chairwoman of the Weymouth town-wide parent council, Torrey has spoken with many parents about their concerns on how to keep their kids safe from drugs, alcohol and sexual situations.

It often comes down to mundane daily decisions. One of the toughest calls she's faced recently, she said, was "when my older daughter, who is 14½, wanted to go to the mall with her friends, and I finally let her go." They take a cell phone. A parent drives them, and she knows both

the friends and their mothers. Their time is limited.

Ruling out skimpy bikinis or belly shirts is also an issue.

Parents today are aware that they should talk to their kids about sex, drugs and alcohol abuse and start at an early age, but Torrey said they often have difficulty doing it, or knowing just what to say and when to say it.

"I think a lot hope the schools will do it," she said.

"It isn't just sexual intercourse that you have to talk to your kids about - it is also all the diseases they might get, and that is scary," Torrey said.

The average teenager sees 14,000 sexual references a year, and only 165 of them mention birth control, abstinence or sexually transmitted diseases, according to "The Sex Lives of Teenagers," by Dr. Lynn Ponton.

"It can be really hard for kids to go to their parents around this issue, and it's important for parents to understand why," said Barbara Fuyatt, director of the South Shore Women's Center.

An invitation to parents:

The Patriot Ledger will host a parents' roundtable discussion about teen sex in the coming weeks. How do parents convey their values to teens? When should they begin talking about it? What should schools be teaching, and when should they leave sex education to parents? Some of the discussion will be used in an upcoming story. If you are interested in participating, E-mail us at [ratedrisky@ledger.com](mailto:ratedrisky@ledger.com). Please include your name and phone number so we can contact you with a date and time.

**TEEN SEX: RATED RISKY**



Eschbacher Gerdeman Walker Daly Scheible

Team for this series

**Reporters:**

Karen Eschbacher, 23, is a graduate of Boston University. She has been a Patriot Ledger reporter for two years and covers Braintree.

Dina Gerdeman, 34, has been a general assignment reporter at The Patriot Ledger since 1998. She primarily covers education.

Christopher Walker, 25, was hired as an intern for The Patriot Ledger in 1998 while a student at Boston University. He was hired full-time in 1999 and covers Rockland and Abington.

Jim Daly, 36, has been a Patriot Ledger reporter for two years. He formerly taught English at Boston College High

School, the Pierce Middle School in Milton, and Massasoit Community College in Brockton.

Sue Scheible, 58, is a general assignment reporter who also writes a weekly column on aging, covers health care and social services, and has been at the newspaper since 1968.

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**TIPS FOR TALKING TO TEENS:**

- Find a quiet, private place to talk. Be honest about feeling uncomfortable with the conversation if you are.
- Ask questions sparingly - avoid an interrogation.
- Do not allow interruptions. Show teens the conversation takes priority.
- Ask teens how they define sex and what words they use.
- Avoid preaching. Your teens will develop their own beliefs and values through your modeling, integrity and instruction over time.
- Make your values clear. Tell teens how you feel about sex and relationships.
- Be clear about your expectations and encourage teens to come to you if they ever struggle to meet those expectations.
- Tell your teens they can use you as an excuse not to engage in certain activities.
- Apologize if, in the past, you have not been clear about your expectations, have not exhibited integrity yourself, or have been quiet about the issue.
- Be prepared to answer some tough questions.
- Be sincere in wanting to listen to learn.

Source: The National Coalition for the Protection of Children & Families, based on interviews with more than 600 teens.

**CALL FOR HELP:**

■ The National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families can be contacted by mail at 800 Compton Road, Suite 9224, Cincinnati, OH 45231; by phone at 513-521-6227 or by visiting [www.nationalcoalition.org](http://www.nationalcoalition.org). The E-mail address is [contact-nationalcoalition.org](mailto:contact-nationalcoalition.org).

The video and parent guide, "Sex & Young America: The Real Deal," costs \$14.95 plus shipping and handling, and can be ordered online at [www.sexandyoungamerica.com](http://www.sexandyoungamerica.com) or by phone at 513-521-6227.

The coalition also sponsors a Victim Assistance HelpLine. All services are confidential and provided by trained master's-level mental health therapists. The HelpLine is available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

The coalition has a national referral network of therapists and support groups. Call 1-800-583-2964 or e-mail [sue@nationalcoalition.org](mailto:sue@nationalcoalition.org).