

When families don't talk, friends must step up



I recently heard about a teenager who had an abortion. For the record, not my kid. And that's actually unfortunate for this kid because, instead, she has parents who frown on abortion...and on sex itself.

From what I was told, because this was a kid who couldn't talk to her parents about sex, she therefore certainly couldn't tell them she was pregnant. And I have to guess that the pregnancy happened *because* she couldn't talk to her parents about sex, so she was in no way prepared for it.

Yet as teenagers have been doing for millennia, she partook. Shrouded in that silence -- and shame, I imagine -- she then proceeded independently on a very serious and complicated path.

When I heard about this girl having an abortion under these circumstances, all I could think about was that she had to navigate that complex chain of emotion by herself. Sex is negatively stigmatized, so how must this all affect her self-esteem?

No matter how much we can tell ourselves intellectually that it doesn't matter what our parents think, their approval is emotionally and developmentally paramount. Likewise, conversely,

Lonely Navigation

Written by Jenni Person, BT Contributor
March 2019

disappointing them can be deeply crushing. So imagine you're participating in and thinking about behavior that is otherwise normal at your age, but of which they don't approve.

So there you are having had sex, a taboo subject in your family. And then imagine there is the consequence of pregnancy. This is a life-altering prospect, no matter what happens, no matter which route is followed. In the case of this kid, fearing her parents would insist she carry, give birth to, and raise a baby at 15, and the resulting impact on her entire future, she chose abortion.

Suddenly the situation represents the taboo of sex and the double immorality of abortion, as it represents both the perceived "deviance" of sex and some sort of abomination or murder or whatever it is that anti-choice believers hold so deeply that it is more important than a woman's life.

I can't even imagine the extent of this kid's painful struggle.

Add to this the fact that abortion is a medical procedure, one with internal impact and that it requires physical recovery, let alone emotional. So we are speaking about a literally *painful* struggle -- both physically and emotionally. There is

no woman who approaches abortion lightly. And here is a person, a young teen, who is relatively new to the world, to physical womanhood, and not yet independent, having to understand, physically endure, and navigate the before, during, and after of a very grown-up moment.

Naturally, no one should be alone for this. So how do I prepare my own kids to be there for that? Not only for all of the things they'll encounter as their own experiences and explorations as adolescents, but also those of the world spinning around them and impacting their friends?

As parents, we talk to our kids about their thoughts on and reactions to their own experiences, their highs and lows. We also find ourselves helping them navigate all the things being experienced and expressed -- and maybe not always expressed -- by friends.

Lonely Navigation

Written by Jenni Person, BT Contributor
March 2019

On the one hand, we're busy trying to figure out how to raise kids in the age of active shooter drills, cybersecurity, and intersectionality. Simultaneously, teens are still teens, as teen-y as they've ever been amid the whirl of sex, drugs, and rock and roll.

Yes, kids need to know how to talk about school shootings, cyber stalking, and equality. They also need to be prepared for the old-school normal teen things and to be able to support one another through these journeys. We have to encourage their compassion and patience with their friends.

There are all kinds of families with all kinds of values and cultures. Accordingly, teens must be prepared to be there for each other in their diversity as they are individuating from their families in more significant ways than they ever have in their lives.

I can't talk to this kid because she's not my kid. So I'm going to put this out to the universe in hopes of it rippling through us all back to her through the community, action, and culture we and our kids create:

I wish every kid a mentor.

I wish every kid access to safe and affordable healthcare.

I wish every kid a compassionate community.

I wish every kid a referral to someone who can help when necessary; and the confidence and strength to follow through on that referral.

I wish every kid the environment and the vocabulary in which to express their deepest uncensored hopes and fears.

Lonely Navigation

Written by Jenni Person, BT Contributor
March 2019

I wish every kid lessons from missed marks and consequences.

I wish every kid agency over her/his/their own body.

I wish every kid unconditional love.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com