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UrbanTrends

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Engaging Parents to Help Support Their Teens



Many of today's caregivers don't know how to talk to their teens – especially about intimate issues that can have life-and-death consequences. Aware that communication and education are essential to building positive relationships within families, MEE has conducted research that led us to offer a series of parent-driven workshops that provide caregivers struggling to raise the "hip-hop generation" with support and guidance — in a format that delivers information on *their* terms.

While parents are often willing to admit their needs, they are not willing to be preached to. Instead, MEE has found that parents, when asked, would prefer that their peers, not so-called "experts," be the primary facilitators of their own workshops. They also want a setting in which parents can openly share what they've learned — sometimes by trial and error — in raising teens. An interactive workshop experience allows parents to develop their own solutions to complex family issues, building their capacity for long-term problem-solving far beyond the workshop.

In MEE workshops, where parents lead many of the discussions, delivery of in-depth information and resources related to a particular topic is interspersed between parent "rap" sessions, role-playing, presentations, and other group activities. Other sponsors of workshops dealing with teenage sexuality, could, for example, begin their workshop with an overview of basic sex education and provide information on strategies to get started on a dialogue with one's child about choices and consequences. Then, parents would have an opportunity to role-play various scenarios and share what has worked with their own children.

MEE has found that for parenting workshops to gain a positive reputation in a community, they need to be easy to get to, and should be offered in the evenings (preferably during the latter part of the week) or on Saturday afternoons. They should also include refreshments, incentives like door prizes and childcare options for participants. In addition, giveaways such as take-home "kits" with

a cross-section of parent resources support not only knowledge-building, but also rapport-building. Parents who participate leave empowered and those who haven't, (but hear about it) eagerly await the arrival of the next workshop.

To fully impact a neighborhood, workshop promotion should appeal to both fathers and mothers. MEE has found that using the term "parents" on recruiting and promotional materials is limiting — predomi-

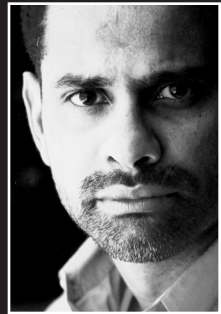
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This is the second issue of UT to look at parenting from an urban perspective. Last time, we looked at the youngest end of the child-rearing spectrum. Now, we'll take a look at what some parents see as the hardest part—raising a teen or adolescent.

As children get older, parents' fears and struggles can become more intense. Trying to guide your child into adulthood in the face of street violence, poverty, racism and other urban realities raises challenges that can keep parents awake at night. "How do I keep my child safe from the violence in the streets?" "When is it too late to have 'The Talk' about sex?" Any parent knows that what to say and when to say it can be tricky.

Over the years, MEE has tried to help hundreds of service providers and CBOs create materials and programs that support parents, who we know want to be able to guide their kids on this journey called life, but are not always sure how best to do it. In this issue, we share some ideas about how low-income parents and caregivers can be empowered to help their teens navigate the tricky waters of adolescence. The goal is to put support, guidance and tools into the hardest-hit communities, to help raise the new generation that will someday lead the way.

Ivan Juzang, President
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Engaging Parents

continued...

nantly attracting mothers. On the other hand, advertising that uses the words "mom" and "dad" is equally compelling to both sexes, making male parents more likely to participate. It is also important to specifically encourage other caregivers to attend. Another word to use carefully in workshop advertising is "hip-hop." For many adults, hip-hop is primarily associated with African American culture, even though its impact on the mainstream is undeniable. Diverse or non-urban populations may more readily identify with broader terms such as "new gen-

eration teens."

The bottom line: getting parents of teens motivated and ready to deal with youth issues works best when you bring parents together collectively. Parents need a supportive place where they can share both the joys and challenges of raising teenagers in the midst of today's realities. Workshops that aim to get parents to talk to their children in an open and knowledgeable manner must create a space where parents themselves are heard and respected. **UT**

Parenting Our Youth: What the Experts Say



Families are really stretched—they have had all their energy drained to try to just survive. They're not always able to spend time with their kids talking about sex or dealing with a kid who you think is involved in risky behavior. [But] peers have never really been able to do what parents or grandparents could do. Social service providers can't do

what people's "people" can do. We're going to have to fill in the gap somehow, teaching peers to talk to each other or making sure services [providers] stay open and do good work." —**Beth Richie**

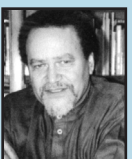


We talk a lot about why boys need fathers. Little girls need them, too. When girls have not been hugged and nurtured by a man, a father, then [as they reach adolescence] they begin to look to young males to give them some direction. What we need is for men to stay at home with their children. Fatherlessness is a demon greater than racism or poverty.

—**Jawanza Kunjufu**



Many Black parents have a tendency to say, "Don't do this because I said so" and that's the end of the dialogue. We can't just tell children "this is it," because there's no room for questions, there's no room for dialogue.... Sharing stories is a really good way to educate. —**Maisha Hamilton-Bennett**



We have this pattern among adults that may be unintended leadership, by our behavior...more what we do than what we say. Few adults are saying anything, but their behavior says everything. If adults are not there to pass the [positive] messages on, then what messages are young people getting, from whom are they getting those messages, and how do they value and respond to the messages that they get? —**Asa Hilliard**



Warnings and threats are not successful in helping kids to know what to do. It's like saying, "Honey, I want you to go to Cleveland today." Well, how do you get there? That's what we need to be teaching kids. —**Gail Wyatt**

Young Black Girls: Getting "Dissed" on Many Fronts

The teen years are never easy, and today's young females are bombarded with negative messages that make the journey into womanhood even tougher. Today's parents of teenage girls must help their daughters successfully navigate a landscape that has changed dramatically. Even the memories of relatively young mothers and fathers of their teenage years are often very disconnected from today's reality.

For many young women growing up in low-income households, using sex to get goods is acceptable; playing the field with multiple partners is a way to avoid getting "played;" and sexual experimentation, even with the same gender, holds less stigma and more "choice."

While the idea of transactional sex is nothing new between men and women, the exchange used to gain women the necessities—food, clothing and shelter. Now, the bargain may be over a fresh hairdo or the latest "fly" outfit. In some neighborhoods, it is common practice for teenage girls to indirectly barter sex for material goods or services. As a young Baltimore woman said recently, "If they [males] don't have money to buy me some 'Tims' [Timberland boots], take me out...they don't get no rap!" Many want to own the items that support a "ghetto fabulous" lifestyle, but are unable to get these items on their own or from their parents.

Often times, what's driving teen girls to resort to using sexuality as a tool is the desire to be like the girls in music videos. "I do [try] to copy the clothes and the hairdos," said one Baltimore teen. "The guys on TV like that type of stuff [provocative clothing]" agreed another. Yet, few of the young women MEE spoke with saw themselves as being exploited by the media; nor do they think they are

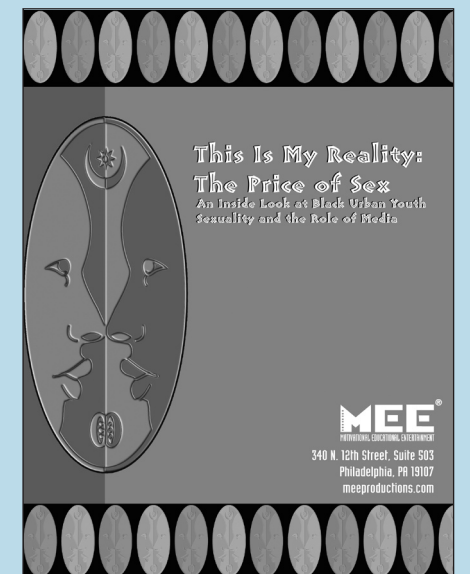
exploiting themselves. Some males, however had a different opinion of women who have sex in order to get something in return: "Technically, they're prostitutes," one explained.

Many girls who are sexually active are more frequently opting to "play the man's game." As a teenager from Los Angeles explained, "Some girls are like, 'I'm tired of getting hurt, so I'm not gonna have one boyfriend – I'm gonna have more than one.'" Out to protect their hearts more than their bodies, these girls have changed the rules as a way of gaining what they feel is control. Many are ready for revenge: "This year, it's my turn...I'm playin' these n*gg*s, like they play me." Girls today are also much more comfort-

able than teens of past generations with "hitting on" mates or initiating sex, both in and out of committed relationships.

To make a difference in the life of a young woman struggling to deal with the new realities, parents and caregivers first need to be aware of the pressures today's teen girls confront. Then they need to be willing to talk to their daughters about values, self-esteem and healthy relationships. After all, these teen girls will be the mothers of the next generation. A parent who is open to discussing these types of topics can make the difference between a teen making a thoughtful and guided decision and a teen who makes a hasty and ultimately self-defeating choice. **UT**

The devaluation of Black girls is just one of the tough issues MEE takes on in **This Is My Reality: The Price of Sex: An Inside Look at Black Urban Youth Sexuality and the Role of Media**. The 180-page report and documentary video illuminate how the "hip-hop generation" navigates its way through sexual situations and responds to today's sexually-explicit media messages. It also shows how current behaviors put youth at risk for negative, even deadly, health outcomes.



This Is My Reality can kick-start the dialogue necessary to raise broader awareness and influence public policy related to the sexual and reproductive health of urban youth—a group with the least access to credible, accurate and life-saving information. It is available for purchase online at www.meeproductions.com. The Website also includes streaming audio and video from the documentary, along with a link to an executive summary co-produced by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Get the "Reality" by calling MEE toll-free at 1-877-MEE-PROD.