

Teen mom urges parents to have 'the talk' with their children

DEAR ABBY: I am concerned about the number of teens who write to you about whether or not to have sex. I am a mother of four, and I'm only 22.

My first child was born when I was 14. Only two of my biological children live with me, and I have taken my stepdaughter in as my own.

Teens everywhere should be educated about sex and the consequences of having sex at a young age. Many parents still do not have "the talk" with their children — leaving it up to the educational system, which is inadequate in this area.

I would like to urge teen parents to volunteer at local schools to educate these teens about what "might" happen. I see more and more teens every day heading down the road I went down, and it scares me.



Abigail Van Buren

● Dear Abby

I was lucky that I now have the chance to further my education and provide a stable life for my children, which, I might add, did not happen until I was already the mother of two and 18 years old.

I had to give one child up for adoption, and it was heart-wrenching. To teens out there, PLEASE do not be like me. You might not be as lucky as I was.

— WISER NOW

DEAR WISER NOW: Thank you for wanting to warn other teens not to venture down the

same path that you did. You are right: You are lucky you have a chance to further your education and provide a stable life for your children, because most teenage mothers are not so fortunate. Sadly, only one-third of teen mothers receive a high school diploma, and only 1.5 percent have a college degree by the time they reach 30. (Nearly 80 percent of unmarried teen mothers end up on welfare.)

Although teenage pregnancy, birth and abortion rates in the

United States have declined over the last decade, our country continues to have a higher rate of teenage pregnancy than most other developed countries. (It's nearly twice the rate as in Australia or Canada — and more than four times higher than the rate in France.)

Although we all wish that teens would remain abstinent until marriage, the fact remains that many don't. And those young people need accurate information about how to prevent unplanned pregnancies and avoid sexually transmitted diseases. Parents who leave sex education up to the schools should be aware that since 1996, the federal government has poured \$1 billion into abstinence-only sex education programs that do not include complete information on birth

control methods or even sexually transmitted diseases.

I have always believed that what people don't know CAN hurt them, and that anyone old enough to ask deserves straight answers to their questions.

And that is why I offer a booklet, "What Every Teen Should Know," to answer some of the questions that many teens are afraid to ask their parents regarding sex, STDs, drinking and drugs. Many parents and grandparents have given the booklet to their teenagers or used it to foster discussion.

It can be ordered by sending a business-size, self-addressed envelope, plus check or money order for \$6 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Teen Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. Postage is included in the price.

DEAR ABBY: I always read the advice you give everyone. I am depressed. Since childhood, I have always been a problem child. I always have this sense of loneliness in me.

Due to that, I'm not very active. I never want to marry. I wish to remain alone. According to our customs here in Kuwait, marriage is compulsory. But I do not want to marry!

I am a business student, and I wish to take a psychology course so I can be away from my parents and family. I want to be by myself. I just hate being with them. Am I doing the right thing?

— MIDDLE EASTERN GIRL

DEAR MIDDLE EASTERN GIRL: I agree with you that the reason you feel the way you do could be depression. Depression and feelings of isolation often feed upon each other — each making the other worse.

I see no harm in your taking a psychology course; such courses can be helpful. However, if there is a student health center at your school, my advice is to talk to a counselor there about your feelings. You need professional help beyond what I can offer in a letter.

Editor's note: Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

State reports record year in delinquent tax collections

TOPEKA (AP) — The state collected a record \$108.8 million in delinquent taxes during its recently ended 2006 fiscal year, the Department of Revenue announced Tuesday.

Such collections increased by 29 percent, or \$24.4 million over fiscal 2005, the department said.

Secretary Joan Wagon attributed the increased collections to an expansion of the agency's enforcement staff. In 2005, the department sought permission to hire more employees, and legislators approved the addition of six auditors and 18 field agents, which increased compliance staff by 49 percent.

Also, she said, the department focused on collecting delinquent taxes as quickly as possible because such debts become harder to collect as time goes on.

"We've started collecting first on current and reasonably new debt, rather than worrying about stuff that's been hanging around since

'89," Wagon said during an interview. "The goal is to try to keep people from getting in so much trouble that they can't get out of it."

The previous record for delinquent tax collections was \$100.1 million in fiscal 2003. Wagon noted that it was high that year because the state waived any penalties

or interest charges for taxpayers who caught up their bills — something it didn't do in fiscal 2006.

The department has 37 auditors and 36 field agents who investigate reports that persons or businesses aren't paying the taxes they owe or collecting taxes from consumers and remitting them to the state.

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