

THE SECRET LIFE  
OF THE  
AMERICAN TEENAGER

# DISCUSSION GUIDE



## EPISODE TEN

### FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- Henry and Alice had sex. They'd talked about it, thought about it, and then did it. Both thought that having sex would make them feel like they were in love. But it didn't, and neither feels too good about what happened. Why do you think reality didn't match their expectations? Do you think most teens' first sexual experiences are what they expected? Why or why not? It doesn't seem like Henry and Alice are going to stay together, even after having sex, but they're still happy that they were with each other for their first time. Why do you think that is?

**FACT:** Sex isn't the same as love. Just because you do it with someone doesn't fix a relationship or make it stronger. Two-thirds of teens who have had sex by age 18 wish they had waited longer. More than two in five (42%) sexually experienced adolescents report that they were already friends with their first sexual partner before their sexual relationship began. Fully 40% of teens NEVER talked about contraception with their partner before having sex for the first time.

- Adrian's mom says she never wanted to get married to Adrian's father. She wanted someone to love her, which is why she wanted a baby, even as a single young adult. Do you think that's a common feeling among teens? Among young adults? Do you think it's OK for young adults to have babies when they're not in committed relationships? What kind of effect do you think that has on the baby? On the single parent? Do you think Adrian's behavior with guys mirrors her mother's behavior when she was younger? How? Why?

**FACT:** One-third of women who recently gave birth did so outside of marriage. Adrian's mom says she wanted to get pregnant, but among all single young adults in their twenties, 7 in 10 pregnancies are unplanned. Unplanned pregnancy is linked to family turmoil, late entry into prenatal care, infant mortality, and low birth weight. Children born to single women in their twenties, like children of teen moms, fare worse health-wise and economically than do children born into stable, long-term relationships with two committed parents who are ready and able to raise a child together.

**FACT:** Babies may give unconditional love, but even more, they require it.

- Lauren's dad, who is also Ricky's therapist, tells Ricky he can't truly be in love with anyone until he loves himself. Do you agree? What advice would you have given Ricky if you were Lauren's dad? What drives Ricky to behave the way he does with girls? Do you think Ricky would be able to be a stable, helpful father to his and Amy's child? Why or why not?

**FACT:** Youth in foster care are at greater risk for early pregnancy than teens in general. In fact, almost half of girls in foster care become pregnant by age 19; among the general population, 3 in 10 girls get pregnant by age 20. Some foster youth have a strong desire to have a child right away, perhaps to create their own family so they can have stable relationships and unconditional love.

## THE SECRET LIFE OF THE AMERICAN TEENAGER



- Why does everyone call the school for teen mothers "slut school"? Do you think that's fair? How do you and your friends define what "slut" means? Another term we hear in this episode is "man whore" -- which is what Madison calls Ricky after she learns that Lauren made out with him. Why does she call him that? Are there different standards for how you judge boys and girls when it comes to sex? Do you think parents have different expectations for their sons and their daughters when it comes to sex, abstinence, and contraception?

**FACT:** Most teens (61%) agree that, when it comes to talking about sex, parents send one message to their sons and a different message to their daughters. Most teens (62%) believe that teen boys often get the message that they are expected to have sex.

**FACT:** Most teens (59%) believe that teen girls often get the message that attracting boys and looking sexy is one of the most important things they can do.

## FOR PARENTS

Watching a show like "The Secret Life of the American Teenager" with your teen is a good way to start a conversation about sex, love, and relationships and what your expectations are. Even though teens say that parents most influence their decisions about sex, parents of teens underestimate their own influence in this area. Here are some ideas for talking to your kids after watching the show.

- In this episode, we find out that the parents have just as much relationship drama as their kids do. Adrian is having a hard time following her mom's (and now her dad's) rule that she abstain from sex because of their own past behavior. Amy and Ashley are feeling the consequences of the tension between their parents. When Grace finds out that her parents didn't wait to have sex until they were married, she changes her mind about wearing the chastity ring they gave her. She remains committed to abstinence, but now it's due to her own experiences, rather than a promise to them. Do you think it's hypocritical to tell your teens not to do something that you did at their age? Why or why not? When it comes to sex and relationships, how do you communicate your values to your teens? How do you teach your teens about healthy relationships?

**FACT:** 64% of teens say they share their parents' values when it comes to sex. Teens cite their parents as the main influence (more than friends, media, religion -- anything) in the decisions they make about sex. Still, there is a disconnect when it comes to talking: While 89% of parents say they've had a helpful conversation with their teens about sex, love, and relationships, only 71% of teens agree with that statement. Sadly, almost 1 in 5 teens say they don't know anyone who serves as an example of a healthy relationship.

- Amy blames her dad for forcing her to go to school, which led to a lot of troubles, including Ben getting beaten up. She wishes she had been able to stay home and drop school altogether, which may have made things easier for her temporarily but in the long run would have been disastrous. What do you think about sending pregnant teens to their regular high schools? Or should they attend special schools for teen mothers? Would you insist that your pregnant daughter remain in school? Would you approve of your teenager being friendly with a pregnant or parenting teen? Do your children know the importance you place on education?

**FACT:** Less than half of teen moms graduate from high school and fewer than 2% earn a college degree by age 30. Parenthood is the leading reason girls cite for dropping out of school.

**TIP:** The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright. And the future begins with education. Help them set meaningful goals, talk to them about what it takes to reach these goals, and give them opportunities to achieve and to build self-esteem. Encourage your children to take school seriously and find ways for them to feel connected to it. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood.