

THE SECRET LIFE
OF THE
AMERICAN TEENAGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



EPISODE ELEVEN

FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- Amy and Ben have decided they're not going to have sex yet. Partly because of the pregnancy (Ben says he'd feel like he was "trespassing") and partly because they just don't feel ready. This doesn't mean they're not in love or committed to each other; it just means they don't feel ready to take the next step physically. What do you think of that? Why do you think they both feel this way? Do you know people who are in relationships who haven't gone all the way? What are their reasons for waiting?

FACT: *About half of all high school teens have had sex. About half haven't. The majority of those who have say they wish they'd waited longer.*

- When Henry is talking to Ben about the first time he had sex with Alice, he says that, for all her expert knowledge about sex, Alice really didn't know what she was doing. Are you surprised? When Amy is talking to Madison and Lauren, she says that no one wants to feel stupid about sex but she feels like she has "stupid" written all over her because she's pregnant. Why would she say that? What do you think it means to be smart about sex? Do people put too much pressure on themselves and each other when it comes to sex?

FACT: *75% of teens say it's not embarrassing for teens to admit they are virgins. Most teens who have had sex by age 18 say they wish they had waited longer.*

- Grace has taken off her purity ring but is still committed to abstinence before marriage. When Jack asks her about it, she tells him she doesn't need a ring to remind her of what she knows in her head. Jack then tells her that "decisions about sex are not made with your brain." Do you agree? Do you think it's easy to get caught up in the heat of the moment and to forget about what you know to be the right thing? If so, what do you do to make sure you won't make a mistake or do something you might really regret? Have you ever thought about what you would do "in the moment"? Do you know anyone who did plan to wait but then didn't stick to their plan? Why? What happened?

TIP: *Have a plan. Know what you will do and say when the time comes. Will you say no? How will you say it without hurting someone's feelings, including your own? If you have sex, what kind of protection will you use? Where will you get it? How will you know to use it correctly? It's a lot easier to figure these things out beforehand.*

- When Mr. Juergens is telling Ashley about the day she was born, he says, "It's really different having a baby when you're married and when it's a happy thing and everyone's excited." The vast majority of teen pregnancies are unplanned, and among single women in their 20s, about 70% of pregnancies are unplanned. How do you think that



affects the child? The parents? Do you think unplanned pregnancy is a big deal? Will you know how to prevent a pregnancy before you're ready to be parent? Have you thought about what it would be like to be a parent some day? What do you imagine is the ideal situation for you when you become a parent? What do you hope to have in place before then?

FACT: *About half of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned. Three-quarters of those occur to teens and to women in their 20s. Children born of unplanned pregnancies face many challenges -- including higher school-dropout rates, lower test scores, high incidences of abuse and neglect, and poverty.*

TIP: *The only foolproof way to prevent an unplanned pregnancy at any age is to abstain from sex. But if you do have sex, use protection carefully and correctly every single time. It's that simple.*

FOR PARENT'S

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.

- Madison has a bit of a reputation as a gossip. She thinks one of the reasons she feels compelled to tell everyone everything is because she never talks to her parents about anything. Do you have an open relationship with your kids? Do you talk about things that are of concern to them? Do your kids feel they can trust you with their feelings and thoughts? What would they say about that?

TIP: *Express love and affection for your kids clearly and often. Hug your children, and tell them how much they mean to you. Praise specific accomplishments, but remember that expressions of affection should be offered freely, not just for a particular achievement. Listen carefully to what your children say, and pay thoughtful attention to what they do.*

TIP: *Many teens wish their parents would pay attention to them BEFORE they get into trouble. All too often, teens feel that the kids who take risks and get into trouble are the ones who get all the attention from parents and other adults.*

- Amy and Lauren are finally talking about the rift in their friendship, which has been caused in part by the fact that Lauren's parents have forbidden her to see Amy, owing to her pregnancy. Lauren says her parents might think that she'll get pregnant by association, or that she'll think it's OK to have sex at age 15. Amy thinks that, if anything, her situation should convince Lauren that it's NOT OK to have sex. What would you do in this situation if your teen were friendly with a pregnant or parenting teenager? How would you talk about it with your child? What would you want your child to think and feel about someone like Amy?

TIP: *Friends, media, popular culture -- many outside influences on children today are nearly impossible for parents to control. In such cases, it's important for parents to remember that they need to be the ones to provide context and meaning. Parents don't necessarily write the social script, but they're the best editors of that script that their kids have.*

TIP: *If you see something related to teen pregnancy in the media -- news or entertainment -- take that as an opportunity to ask your teens what they think. Would they have handled it the same way? What advice would they give to that teen -- fictional or real? Don't wait to address the topic until teen pregnancy is a reality for your teen or your teen's friends.*