

THE SECRET LIFE
OF THE
AMERICAN TEENAGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



EPISODE 15—"That's Enough of That"

FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- What's up with Ben? No matter what Amy does -- something as simple as calling him on the phone or as complicated as telling him he's not welcome at her doctor appointment -- his response is usually the same: "I love you." Does he really love her? Is he trying to convince himself of something? Is he afraid to admit to himself that his feelings might be more complex? Does she love him, even if she's not "in love" with him? Is love the same for everyone? If you're in love, how often should you say it to the other person? Who says it first? How do you know what love is, anyway? Have you ever been in love?

TIP: *An important part of being in a healthy relationship is balancing what you need with what someone else needs. Sometimes it's tough to do, but real love involves generosity and can mean that you do what's best for you as a couple, not just what's best for you as an individual.*

- Ricky tells Grace and her parents that he shouldn't see her anymore because his dad is a threat. That seems pretty considerate of Ricky -- going to her parents with his concerns for her safety and all -- and later on in the show he even apologizes to Dr. Bowman for hurting Grace's feelings. But on the other hand, he is still totally hooking up with Adrian. Like THAT isn't going to hurt Grace's feelings? What's the deal? Why do some people stay in unhealthy relationships? Has a friend of yours been in a relationship that's not good for them? Did you say something? What advice would you give Grace?

FACT: *While most teens (68%) say that their friends are in healthy relationships, one in five (17%) say most of their friends are in unhealthy relationships. What about your friends?*

- Ashley wants her parents to stay together, and she wants the Juergens family to keep the baby. She goes to some great lengths to do this: meeting with Rev. Stone and getting a job as a waitress to earn money to support the baby. Even though she can be sarcastic and have a big attitude for such a young girl, Ashley



clearly values her family and wants to make it work again. Is Ashley in danger of falling through the cracks? Do Amy and her parents realize that Ashley needs some support? In your own experience, how do older siblings shape your views? Your decisions? Your values?

FACT: *Younger siblings of teen parents are 2 to 6 times more likely to become pregnant as teens than are the younger siblings of teens who are not parents. Younger siblings of teen parents also are more likely to be sexually active during early adolescence than are teens whose older siblings are not teen parents.*

- Dr. Bowman has quite an emotional conversation with Ricky in this episode -- telling him the sad story about his own brother's sexual abuse and suicide. In addition to giving Ricky some solid advice about stopping the cycle of violence in his family by learning to love himself and make good choices, Dr. Bowman also offers him his ear without fear of judgment. Do you think having someone to talk to other than his therapist -- someone like Dr. Bowman, who has a history with this issue and knows Ricky already -- will be helpful to Ricky? Do you know an adult who isn't your actual parent in whom you can confide? An aunt or a friend's mom or a neighbor? How is that relationship different from the one you have with your parents?

FACT: *Many teens just can't talk to their own parents about sex and relationships, but do feel comfortable talking with a counselor, older relative, or family friend whom they trust. Talking to someone is better than talking to nobody. Some reasons teens say they don't feel comfortable talking with their parents about sex include: concern about their parents' reactions (83%); worry that their parents will think they're having sex (80%); embarrassment (78%); a feeling that they don't know how to bring the subject up (77%); and the belief that parents won't understand (64%).*

FOR PARENT'S

Watching a show like "The Secret Life of the American Teenager" with your teens is a good way to start a conversation about sex, love, and relationships. 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.

- It's obvious the Sausage King does the right thing when he tells Ben that he'd be overstepping his bounds with Amy by going to the doctor with her. Ben and his dad generally have a close, loving, and connected relationship, so Ben trusts his dad's advice. But sometimes it's not so easy to know when to get involved in your teens' relationships. How do you know when your input is appropriate? Do you and your teen agree? What kinds of things do you do to be an approachable parent?



FACT: *It's never too late to improve a relationship with a child or teenager. Don't underestimate the great need that children feel -- at all ages -- for a close relationship with their parents and for their parents' guidance, approval, and support. If you try to have a conversation and it doesn't go well, try again the next day and acknowledge the awkwardness.*

TIP: *Communicating with your children about sex, love, and relationships is often more successful when you're certain in your own mind about these issues. To help clarify your attitudes and values, think about the following kinds of questions:*

- *What do you really think about school-aged teenagers being sexually active -- and perhaps even becoming parents?*
 - *Who's responsible for setting sexual limits in a relationship, and how is that done, realistically?*
 - *Were you sexually active as a teenager, and how do you feel about that now? Were you sexually active before you were married? What do such reflections lead you to say to your own children about these issues?*
 - *What do you think about encouraging teenagers to abstain from sex?*
 - *What do you think about teenagers using contraception?*
- If one of your teen's friends was struggling with a problem like Ricky's sexual abuse or Amy's pregnancy, would your teen know how to be a good friend to them? Does your teen know when to involve an adult in a serious situation? Do they know how to listen rather than judge? Do they have empathy for others? What do you think your teen would do in a situation like those on the show?

FACT: *If teens have been mistreated and physically abused by their families, then they are much more likely to have sex at an early age or to become pregnant. Prior sexual abuse is highly related to early initiation of sex, greater number of sexual partners, poor condom use, poor contraceptive use, pregnancy, and STDs. Family abuse of alcohol or drugs increases the chances that teens will have sex more frequently and with more partners.*