

THE SECRET LIFE
OF THE
AMERICAN TEENAGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



EPISODE 23—“And Unto Us a Child Is Born”

FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- Before the baby's born, Ricky jokes about "getting fixed" and says the state should pay for him to have a vasectomy. Luckily, Ben pipes up as the voice of reason and reminds him that someday, when he's older and done with school and ready to be a parent, he might want to have a family... so getting a vasectomy is probably a bad idea.

Two things to consider here:

- 1) Is it a good idea to make a lifelong decision like that when you're a teenager? And if not, then why would someone want to get pregnant and start their family as a teenager? After all, that's the most life-changing, lifelong decision you can ever make.
- 2) Should the government be involved in paying for family planning services, like a vasectomy or birth control? After all, the government pays millions in welfare for young parents (and poor parents of every age) who can't take care of their kids. Should the taxpayer also be paying for contraceptive services for people who can't afford them?

FACT: It costs U.S. taxpayers more than \$9 billion (!) every year in programs, services, and expenses related to teen pregnancy and childbearing.

- Grace thinks Ricky and Adrian are in love. Do you agree? How do you know when you're in love? What are some of the ways you can tell? How do you know what the other person is feeling? Does sex figure into it? Should it?

TIP: It can be hard to know if you're in love — it's not like there's a test you can take to find out. Love can be complicated and messy, but it's also wonderful in so many ways. Teenagers can definitely fall in love, and many lucky ones do — but be careful not to confuse sex and love. Mistaking sex for love can leave you unfulfilled and unhappy and lead to risky sexual situations. About one in five teens say that most of their friends are in "unhealthy" relationships — those without love, trust, mutual respect, and honesty. Remember, it's OK to be friends without benefits.

- When Adrian and Ricky are talking about the baby and what kind of dad Ricky will be, Adrian says she knows he'll always be there for his son and reminds him that "it's no fun growing up without a dad." Do you agree? Do you live with both of your parents? What about your friends? What are some of the challenges of growing up in a single-parent family? What are some of the benefits? Do you think it's better for kids to live with both parents or does it not really matter?

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FACT: *In the U.S. today, half of all children will spend at least part of their childhood living apart from their fathers. Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poor, and they have higher rates of incarceration and lower rates of educational success.*

- Henry and Alice are still a little perplexed about the sex part of their relationship. It's not like they don't love each other or care about each other or trust each other — all important things to have before you take a relationship to the next level. But both agree that sex hasn't been "good" for either of them. Why do you think this is? What do you think about the fact that they're comfortable enough with one another to talk about it? Do you think it's more important to be in a relationship where everything but sex is discussed or in a relationship where the sex may be good but the emotional part is lacking?

FACT: *Teens say trust is the most important thing in a relationship. And trust is a lot harder to come by than having sex. Think about it: If you don't trust someone, it's hard to fix the emotional part of a relationship.*

FOR PARENTS

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.

- We find out in this episode that Anne had sex on the first date with her new guy, David. Obviously, Amy's mom is a grown woman and capable of making decisions about her life — but for teens, sleeping with someone is a much bigger deal. How do you talk to your kids about the differences between what's appropriate for grown-ups vs. what's appropriate for teens? Do they know the difference between adult relationships and teenage ones? How should Anne talk about her own social life with her two teenage daughters? Is it any of their business?

TIP: *When you talk to your kids about sex, love, and relationships (or anything else, for that matter), it isn't necessary to tell them all the details of your own life or even your own past. When talking to your kids, make sure you focus on them and what makes sense for them, not you.*

- Now that Amy and the baby are home (and George and Ashley have moved next door), things are going to be a lot different around the Juergens household. Talk to your kids about what having a child at a young age would mean for their lives — how it would affect their goals and free time and what kind of impact it would have on your whole family.

FACT: *Half of teens say they've never even thought about how a pregnancy would affect their lives. We know they're thinking about sex, but it's important to make sure they're thinking about the consequences too.*

- George and Anne Juergens have their own problems, to be sure, but they've really pulled together to support Amy during this difficult time. How hard must that be for them? Do you ever struggle with putting your kids' interests ahead of your own? What would you do if your teen got pregnant or got someone pregnant? What kind of impact would it have on your own relationships?

FACT: *Once a teen is pregnant, every road ahead is a difficult one. That's why it's important to talk about prevention. Make sure your teens know how to protect themselves and their partners. Make sure they know why it's important to do so and what the consequences can be if they don't.*