

Capture Opportunities to Screen Teens for Unhealthy Sexual Relationships

By Jane Stueve, Adolescent and School Health Consultant

Unhealthy sexual relationships are characterized by a lack of equality with regard to respect, choice and power between partners. Unhealthy relationships include consensual or non-consensual sexual relationships between teens and authority figures, and/or older sexual partners.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend that all teens be screened for the risk of unhealthy sexual relationships at every visit.

Remind teen patients that:

- Everyone has the right to feel good about themselves
- Feelings of unhappiness, pressure or anxiety may be signs that their relationship is not healthy
- They have a right to set limits for themselves

Be assured that clinic staff working with teens are:

- Knowledgeable about these issues and about resources in your community that provide counseling, guidance and protection when needed
- Familiar with Kansas' statutes on sexual abuse of minors and mandatory reporting

Screening teens for risk of unhealthy relationships may include an introductory statement such as: It is important to me that you are healthy and an important part of your health is the relationships you have with others.

Some or all of the following questions may be used to screen teens about their relationships:

- Do you have someone special in your life?
- Does this special relationship include sexual experiences?
- Are you comfortable with those sexual experiences?
- Have your sexual experiences ever included sexual intercourse?
- Has your partner ever made you feel pressured or uncomfortable about sexual matters?

These questions may be incorporated into your clinic's existing patient intake or history forms.

The primary source for information shared in this document is ACOG. For more details please visit the ACOG website at www.acog.org.

Department of Health & Social Services, State of Alaska
www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/wcfh/familyplan.htm.