



## THE SCOOP ON SEX

Teen peer educators tell all.

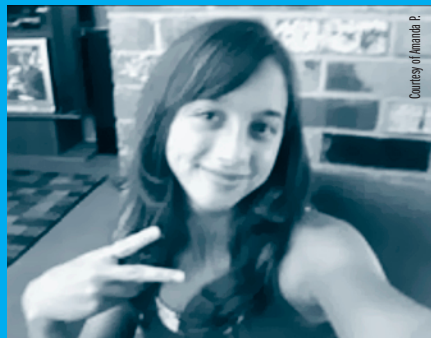
By Amy Levine

**T**o whom do you turn when you want answers to questions about sex or sexuality? Family members, teachers, and other trusted adults are good sources of information. If you're like many teens, however, you probably turn to your friends—who may or may not have correct information.

However, some teens are trained to field questions on a range of topics, such as anatomy, abstinence, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Peer educators learn about sexuality through various health, youth development, and

other organizations across the country. For this issue, we surveyed peer educators from three different programs—Teen Outreach Reproductive Challenge (TORCH) at the National Institute for Reproductive Health in New York City, the Peer Education Program at Planned Parenthood Mar Monte (PPMM) in San Jose, Calif., and Teens Talking with Teens (Triple T) at Planned Parenthood of Northeast Ohio, in Cleveland. Here, they share the most common questions they're asked by teens—and their knowledge—with you.

# Peer Educators: THE REAL DEAL



As a peer educator, Amanda P. helps teens learn the facts about sex.

Hey, I'm 16 years old, and my name is Amanda P. I've been part of the Peer Education Program at Planned Parenthood Mar Monte in San Jose, Calif., for about a year.

## WHAT IT TAKES

To become a peer educator, I received training in reproductive health. I learned about anatomy, contraception, pregnancy, STIs, and a ton of other topics. We were also taught about outreach, which is when we go out into the community to educate in a variety of settings, like schools and health fairs.

## WHAT I LEARNED

The training made me [aware of] all the myths ... that teens think are true. I also couldn't believe how many teen girls get pregnant each year and other high statistics that affect my age group. Mostly, I learned about topics that will be useful for the rest of my life.

## WHAT I LOVE

As an educator, I love knowing the facts about sex and being able to share accurate information with my peers. Whether I'm talking with someone I just met or a friend that I've known for a long time, it makes me feel so good to know that I'm answering their questions and making a difference in their lives. Even better, teens at my school know they can come to me with their sex-related questions. This is especially important to me because we don't have sex ed classes at my school.

## Bodies

### Q: What are "blue balls"?

**A:** "When a guy gets sexually excited, the amount of blood flowing to his penis and testicles increases," says TORCH educator Taylor, 15. That makes his penis erect and his testicles swell. If he ejaculates or has an orgasm, the extra blood leaves the genitals, and the penis and testicles return to their natural size. If he doesn't, the buildup of pressure can cause sensations ranging from slightly uncomfortable to unbearably painful. Have no fear—"blue balls" aren't harmful and shouldn't be a reason for coercion into sexual activity. A guy can deal with the condition on his own by masturbating to ejaculation or orgasm, or waiting until his blood flow returns to normal and his erection goes down.

### Q: Is a girl's hymen proof that she's a virgin?

**A:** No. Not all girls are born with this thin sheath of skin partially covering their vaginal opening. Besides, "A girl can break her hymen without having sex. It can happen simply from riding a bike or using a tampon," says Florence, 16, from TORCH.

### Q: What is douching? Do girls need to douche?

**A:** Douching isn't necessary or healthy. "It's when a female cleans or flushes the inside of her vagina with ... water, vinegar, or over-the-counter products," says Assata, 17, a TORCH educator. "Some females douche if they think their vagina has an odor; others douche after sex because they think it will decrease their chance of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) or prevent pregnancy—both of which are false. The vagina naturally cleans itself out." In fact, douching can lead to infection because it can upset the balance of necessary bacteria and secretions that are inside the vagina.

## Sex

### Q: Does oral or anal activity count as sex?

**A:** Many people consider sex to be penis-in-vagina intercourse, so it depends on the person answering the question. "There are plenty of teenagers who engage in both sexual activities, and they don't consider it sex," says Chris, 17, from TORCH. It's important for you and your partner to be in sync on definitions—one person's definition of "sex" might be another's "just hooking up." So, if

someone says he or she is a virgin, ask what that means to him or her.

**Q: Is having sex during a girl's period OK?**

**A:** “It’s perfectly fine to have sex during a girl’s period so long as she’s not infected with HIV or another infection that can be transmitted through blood,” says Denisse, 17, a TORCH peer educator. It can be a bit messy, but a towel can keep the sheets clean. Just know that a woman can get pregnant if she has unprotected sex during her period. “Sperm can live for five to seven days inside a female’s body,” says Gloribel, 14, from Triple T. Using a condom correctly from start to finish every time sexual activity takes place is very important.

### Contraception and Pregnancy

**Q: What are the side effects of birth control pills?**

**A:** “Some side effects of birth control pills include bleeding or spotting between menstrual periods, nausea, breast tenderness, and weight change that usually last only a few months,” notes TORCH educator Amanda R., 17. Other serious but rare side effects include blood clots, stroke, or heart attack. “Every female reacts to [birth control pills] differently. In fact, some don’t have any reactions at all,” Amanda adds. The other types of hormonal contraception—available as a skin patch, a ring inserted in the vagina, or an injection—can also have side effects.

**Q: What's the difference between emergency contraception and the abortion pill?**

**A:** Emergency contraception (EC) is also known as the “morning-after pill.” It’s designed to prevent an egg from being released or joining with sperm; it may also keep a fertilized egg from attaching to the uterus. If a heterosexual couple has unprotected sex or if their contraception fails, the woman can take EC up to 120 hours later to prevent pregnancy. The sequence of pills does not cause an abortion. “If a female is already pregnant, taking EC won’t affect the development of the fetus,” says Chris. The abortion pill, RU-486, is a totally different product. That medication is an alternative to having surgery to end a pregnancy.

**Q: Does “pulling out” prevent pregnancy?**

**A:** No. “The withdrawal method, also known as ‘pulling out,’ is when a man pulls his penis out of a

woman’s vagina before he ejaculates. This method is not effective because pre-ejaculatory fluid, or ‘pre-cum,’ that a man releases before he ejaculates can contain sperm. This method also doesn’t offer any protection against STIs if a partner is infected. Although the withdrawal method is very popular among teenagers, it’s not safe,” says Assata.

**Q: Will having an abortion affect a girl's ability to have a child in the future?**

**A:** No—as long as the abortion is done safely and correctly. “Legal abortions performed properly by qualified and trusted health providers in professional settings shouldn’t affect future fertility. If the abortion is done correctly, it can be one of the easiest procedures,” says Denisse.

### Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

**Q: Are crabs visible or microscopic?**

**A:** Both. Crabs—also known as pubic lice—are transmitted through sexual contact with an infected partner. Nits are the eggs of the crab that attach to the pubic hair follicle; they’re smaller than the tip of a pencil and can be seen under a microscope or magnifying glass. “When the crabs hatch, seeing them with the naked eye depends on someone’s skin complexion and pubic hair color, as crabs can easily blend in with their surroundings,” says Margo, 16, from TORCH.



**Q: Can chlamydia be cured?**

**A:** “Yes, it can be cured if it’s detected and treated,” says Leah, 16, a Triple T educator. Some signs of a chlamydia infection are a discharge from the penis or vagina or a burning sensation during urination. Frequently, though, people who are infected with

chlamydia don't realize it because they do not have symptoms. If it goes undetected or untreated, chlamydia can affect a woman's ability to have children.

## Sexual Orientation

### Q: Is bisexuality real?

**A:** "Bisexuality is when someone is sexually and/or romantically attracted to both males and females. Some people think bisexuality is ... experimental or transitional," says Margo. Although that may be true for them, bisexuality is very real for others and



**A Shot at Love** on MTV followed bisexual Tila Tequila's search for the perfect someone.

part of who they are as individuals. Sexual orientation isn't black or white in terms of being straight, gay, or lesbian; there can be shades of gray.

## Attitudes

### Q: Why do some people think porn is bad?

**A:** "Some people believe it's immoral. Other people feel the images objectify and exploit both men

and women," says Amanda R. Most pornography doesn't represent real bodies or show sex scenes that are mutually pleasurable, safe, and respectful.

### Q: Why is a girl called a slut when she sleeps with more than one person but a guy who does the same thing is considered cool?

**A:** "The media plays an enormous role in this issue," says Crystal, 17, from TORCH. Many movies and TV shows portray these stereotypes and imply that having sex is only the woman's decision. "We often hear 'all a guy wants is one thing,' so when they get what they want they can brag about it," says Amanda P., 16, from PPM. It's a double standard that "women are supposed to be pure," agrees Crystal. Sex can be pleasurable for both men and women, and no one should be judged. What's important is that people feel comfortable about their sexual choices and ignore the name-calling.

### Q: Does having sex with someone mean you're in love with him or her?

**A:** Not necessarily. Some people are in love and decide to have sex. "Other people have sex because they are horny," says Crystal. "Friends with benefits [when friends have sex and there is no romantic relationship between them] is also common among teens," says Amanda P. When someone chooses to have sex, he or she should be clear about expectations before becoming sexually involved. If someone doesn't feel right about his or her decision to have sex, it might be a good idea to take some time and reconsider the idea. **CH2**

### ■ for more info

#### Scarleteen

[www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com)

Look for sex and sexuality information on the site and in the user forums.

#### Teenwire

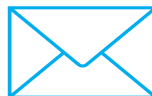
[www.teenwire.com](http://www.teenwire.com)

Find answers to your questions and health centers near you.

#### Advocates for Youth

[www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/peered/searchgroups.asp](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/peered/searchgroups.asp)

Search for a peer-education program in your state.



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