

ADHD Sex and Dating

By Louise Levin

When is it too early to address sex and dating? This question has been tirelessly examined, discussed and fought over by parents, educators, governmental officials and, of course, teens. The suppression of sexual impulse is as American as the NRA, and it wasn't too long ago that young women in the UK were told to "close your eyes and think of England" when engaging in intercourse (with their husbands, naturally). Though the moral roots of English Victorianism and American Puritanism survive today, nurtured by both Capitol Hill and Parliament, an undercurrent of frustration subsists. Sexual revolution is not a new idea—think the "love-ins" of the 70's—but its course has changed to suit the times. In the 80's, we found out that AIDS was a sexually transmitted disease, not just "gay cancer." In the 90's we tentatively embraced protection and contraception. Today? Turn on the television. We are bombarded by sex, and adolescents have become more confused than ever.

Every teen undergoes what society likes to call "changes"—hormonal, emotional, physical, and sexual— and with these changes come erratic emotions and a new set of impulses. For the eighteen million Americans diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a neurobiological disorder that directly affects impulse control, physical and emotional stimulation is more a "need" than a "want," or desire. Sexuality is an issue that engages the minds of teens already; for an ADHD teen, a need for immediate gratification often finds release in sexual activity, and can lead to a recurring pattern of multiple partners, risky behaviors and erratic emotional elasticity.

During this time of social and cultural change, sexual independence is perceived as a right rather than a privilege. But, because emotional maturity tends to lag behind the physical in the ADHD adolescent, about three years, they are less likely to ignore urgent physical needs than their peers. Impulses will consistently override reason, judgment, and appropriate restraint, leading the ADHD teen to commit indiscretions more often, and to a greater extent, than their peers.

Though young adults with ADHD share a lack of impulse control, males and females may act upon their sexual impulses in different ways, and for different reasons. Young men generally exhibit a strong need for constant stimulation, acting upon it indiscriminately and sometimes with multiple partners. Young women, on the other hand, are prone to engage in sexual activity as proof of their worth, or competence, to a partner.

A teen's sexual feelings, an adult would say, are *natural*, though the general rule of thumb is to lock it up, don't do anything stupid and perhaps wait until marriage. However you feel about abstinence, your teen may feel differently. Sexual urges are inevitable, anticipate rather than ignore your teen's potential actions. Failure to properly educate modern teens about sex, INCLUDING preventative measures, can lead to serious problems. Unplanned pregnancies,

STDs, dangerous encounters with strangers and/or social alienation are all equally probable once sexual license and licentiousness begins to spiral out of control.

ADHD adolescents need to realize the unique role of their disorder in their lives. Developmental delays, lack of impulse control and the physical need for stimulation can all contribute to a dangerous sexual lifestyle. Coaches, therapists and supportive family and friends can all help prevent, modify and/or manage self-destructive behavioral patterns that may in time prove dangerous. This can all be done without risk of losing those better character traits that are unique to the ADHD community; among them: creativity, foresight, the ability to effectively multitask and, perhaps, the capacity to be a wonderful lover.