

# Tell It To Me Straight

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## Program Evaluation

**Pierre, SD**

**2/13/2012**

Straight Forward presented a training session entitled “Tell It To Me Straight,” on February 13, 2012 in Pierre, SD. The results of that event are presented in this program evaluation.

## INTRODUCTION

Straight Forward presented a training session entitled “Tell It to Me Straight,” on February 13, 2012 in Pierre, South Dakota. Pierre serves as the capital of South Dakota and has a population of approximately 13,650 (U.S. Census, 2010).

The goals of the event were to: (a) equip parents with confidence to have “the talk” with their teen(s); (b) be reassured they are not alone in their concerns; (c) identify a group of high school students who are willing to risk talking to parents about sensitive topics; and (d) hear the benefits of listening to young people talk about what they need regarding communication rather than a professional journal or advice column.

## METHODS

To evaluate the Tell It to Me Straight training session, three evaluations were used. Based on a conceptual model, the pretest and posttest were created to examine parental relationships with their teen(s) and individual capability and confidence to communicate effectively with their teen(s). The pretest and posttest evaluation questions were based on a survey created by the Kaiser Family Foundation.<sup>1</sup> Some questions from the survey were modified and additional questions were added. Session attendees completed the pretest at the beginning of the training session. The training session evaluation or posttest was given at the end of the dinner event. The third evaluation, referred to as the Impact Evaluation, was an evaluation of the session to obtain feedback on its impact and suggestions for future training sessions. Attendees were contacted approximately 3 weeks following the event and asked to complete the Impact Evaluation via the Internet.

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## Pretest

Forty-nine attendees completed the pretest evaluation. Of the respondents, 30.6% (n=15) were male and 69.4% (n=34) were female (Table 1). The majority of respondents were married with 87.8% listing their status as married. Approximately 93.7% of those who completed the pretest had two or more adults living in the household and 93.9% had one or more children living at home. The majority of respondents had pursued some postsecondary education with 18.4% having a postgraduate degree.

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents to training session pretest evaluation. (N=49)

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	15	30.6
Female	34	69.4
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married or Living as Married	43	87.8
Divorced	3	6.1
Never Married	2	4.1
Widowed	1	2.0
<b>Number of adults living in household</b>		
1	3	6.3
2	40	83.3
3 or more	5	10.4
<b>Number of children at home</b>		
0	3	6.1
1	11	22.4
2	21	42.9
3	10	20.4
4	2	4.1
More than 4	2	4.1
<b>Education Level</b>		
Some High School	1	2.0
High School/GED	6	12.2
Some College	12	24.5
College Graduate	21	42.9
Postgraduate Degree	9	18.4

When asked if attendees have ever talked about computer and Internet use with their teen(s), 97.9% of respondents answering this question indicated yes, they had talked about computer and Internet use (Table 2). Of those who said yes, it was the parent in 87.5% of the

cases that initiated the conversation about Internet usage. Forty-seven parents (97.9%) noted that they have talked to their teen(s) about alcohol or drugs, with 87.2% of those conversations being reported as initiated by parents. Forty-one (85.4%) of respondents said they talked about the topic of sex with their teen(s). The majority, 64.6%, of those conversations were started by the parent with 14.6% sharing they had never had the discussion. Thirty-two of 48 (66.7%) responded to a question about discussion of safe dating and indicated they have talked about issues regarding safe dating relationships with their teen(s) and only 31 responded that they have talked about pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections/disease.

Ever talked about...	% (frequency)		
	Yes	No	No response
Internet	47	1	0
Alcohol and Drugs	47	1	0
Sex	41	7	0
Safe dating relationships	32	16	0
How to prevent pregnancy and STIs	31	17	0

Thirty-seven of the participants responded to the question about the age of their child when they had their first conversation about sex. More than half (59.4%) indicated that their children were approximately 10-12 years of age when they first had a talk related to sex. Of those responding, 13.5% indicated their child was younger than age 10 at the time of this conversation, and 27.0% indicated their child was age 14 or older when the conversation took place. When asked how they felt about talking with children about sensitive subjects, 100% (n=49) of those responding indicated that children are better prepared to make wise choices when parents talk to them openly about sensitive subjects from an early age.

Parents who responded to the pretest get information or advice about talking with children from a variety of sources (Table 3). Notably, 59.2% of participants get a lot or some information from books. Parents shared they get the majority (some or a lot) of information

from other parents (77.6%), followed by the school (47.9%), church (40.8%), the Internet (44.9%), doctors (38.8%), and media (36.7%).

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of respondents who get information about talking with children from different sources.

Source of Information	% (frequency)			
	A lot	Some	Only a little	None
Books	18.4	40.8	20.4	20.4
Other Parents	18.4	59.2	16.3	6.1
Church	2.0	38.8	26.5	32.7
Doctors	8.2	30.6	34.7	26.5
School	2.1	45.8	33.3	18.8
Media	6.1	30.6	32.7	30.6
Internet	10.2	34.7	28.6	26.5

Respondents reported spending differing amounts of time listening carefully to their teen(s), finding out where their teen(s) is going, talking with their teen(s) about sex, spending time with their teen(s), and involving their teen(s) in decisions that affect him/her in the past two months (Table 4). Of interest, all respondents shared they always or usually find out where their teen(s) is going, approximately 91.3% of respondents indicated that they always or usually listen to their teens, and 91.3% try to assist them to make good decisions. Parents appear to find it difficult to talk with their teen(s) about sex of all of the topics listed with 40.9% sharing they only sometimes have talked with their teens about sex and almost 29.5% shared they never do.

Table 4. Percentage of respondents who indicate degree of responding to specific activities.

Source of Information	% (frequency)			
	Always	Usually	Sometimes	None
Listen carefully to your teen(s)	26.1	65.2	8.7	0
Find out where your teen(s) was going	87.0	13.0	0	0
Talk with your teen(s) about sex	11.4	18.2	40.9	29.5
Spend time with your teen(s)	52.2	37.0	10.9	0
Help your teen(s) to make good choices	45.7	45.7	8.7	0

When asked in the pretest how confident they are that they could have a conversation about sex with their teen(s), 69.6% of respondents indicated they were very confident, while

28.3% were somewhat or only slightly confident. One respondent shared they were not confident at all in having a conversation with their child.

Respondents were asked why they attended the Tell It to Me Straight training session. The largest response given as a reason for attending by parents was to find out that they were not alone in their concerns.

Reason	Number of respondents choosing indicated reason
To calm fears about having “The Talk”	10
Find out that not alone in feelings/concerns	26
To prepare self for “The Talk”	14
To deal with child who is making bad choices	11
To do a better job with younger child than done with older	16
To learn how to deal with child’s computer and Internet usage	23

### **Training Session Evaluation**

Twenty-seven attendees completed the training session evaluation at the end of the evening’s program. When asked to list some of the session’s highlights or parts they most valued, attendees overwhelmingly agreed that what they learned was helpful. Having the teen facilitators share their thoughts and experiences was helpful to most participants.

One parent shared that what they most took away from the event was viewing things from their child’s vantage point and that children do want to talk about these topics. Another shared that understanding technology and discussions about oral sex are very important.

Several parents felt the event helped them understand that kids want to communicate and many were surprised to learn that kids were sexually active at a much younger age than they realized. Many were also surprised to learn some teens don’t consider oral sex to be sexual activity.

The goal of the evening was to help parents feel more comfortable in listening to and communicating with their teens. One parent shared “We need to listen.” Another shared that

one of the key things they took from the night was “talking is more important than anything”. Yet another shared that not “hovering” was also important.

Most left the event agreeing that they would have a conversation about sex within the next few weeks. The challenges parents shared they will likely face in having these conversations included find the time, starting the conversation, and getting their child to listen.

### **Impact Evaluation**

Ten follow up Impact Evaluations were received. All of the Impact Evaluations were completed by females and 80% of them were currently married. Parents were able to complete this evaluation via the Internet. The Impact Evaluation is designed to gather data about the number of adults who followed up and had a conversation with their child within a 2-4 week period following the training event and which topics were covered in those conversations. Six of the 10 reported that they had had a conversation with their child(ren) about sex since the first event. Seven of ten had had a conversation about computer and Internet use, 8 of 10 a conversation about alcohol and drug use, and 4 of 10 about pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted infections.

Parents were able to write in a response to the question “What are the top 3 things you learned at the “Tell It To Me Straight” session. The following are a sampling of representative responses received.

- “(I learned) how different our generation is from our parents’ generation. Parents seriously don’t know everything that goes on which scares them because they love their kids and don’t want their kids to get hurt. Parents want to be able to communicate easily with their kids, but they’ve forgotten the language of teenagers so they must relearn it as best they can now to talk to them efficiently.”

- “(I learned) how teens will have two Facebook Account in order to hide one from parents. (And) how some teens do not see oral sex as sex.”
- “I learned to talk to kids like they are intellectual beings. Native kids distance themselves at school (don’t join in), have no sense of belonging. There is prejudice in the Pierre schools.
- “Teens need boundaries. It is my job to be a parent and friendship is not as important as being a parent. Kids will listen to what parents have to say even though it doesn’t seem like they are listening.”

Participants were also asked to respond to the open-ended question “What have you done to change how you communicate with your children? How have you changed your approach?”

- “Not sure I have changed, except to not talk about sex, drugs, drinking with our other children present.”
- “We are starting to discuss everyone’s opinions instead of telling them how it should be.”
- “When I am talking to my child I’m more aware that her feelings and level of knowledge needs to be recognized and acknowledged, even if she is just preschool. I just don’t dismiss them thinking this is a kid who hasn’t had any life experience so she doesn’t know much of anything.”

All ten parents responding shared that they always or usually listen carefully to their child and find out where they are going. In terms of additional information parents would like to receive, there were several comments related to information to share with children or to assist in prompting conversations revolving around safe dating.



## DISCUSSION

The results of the training session evaluation indicate that the Tell It To Me Straight session was relevant to the current situation of parents who attended the event. All attendees indicated they would be able to use the information learned at a personal level. The session helped ease fears and concerns parents had about having “the talk” with their teen(s), and helped them feel more confident.

The results of the pretest show that parents who attended the Tell It To Me Straight training session believe talking about sensitive subjects from an early age prepares children to make wise choices. However, the results also show that while parents are more comfortable talking about some sensitive subjects, they are not as comfortable talking about others with their children. Because the majority of parents have had conversations about Internet usage, sexuality and alcohol and drugs with their teen(s), they seemed comfortable talking about these topics. Fewer parents talked to their teen(s) about issues regarding dating relationships and sexually transmitted infections.

Parents appear to gain information from books, school, church and each other as a source of support. It might be useful for the local community or school to facilitate more opportunities for parents to gain skills in communication with their children or to gain knowledge on current issues of importance to the lives of their teens. Since books were seen as avenues for parents to gain knowledge, it might be useful for the school or community library to have some resources available or to have a resource list parents could consult. Schools can be an excellent avenue for this type of information due to their ability to reach almost all parents through things sent home with children, workshops or parent nights, and materials available at parent-teacher conferences.

## **Limitations**

A limitation to this evaluation is the low numbers of participants being evaluated. Low numbers make it difficult to generalize the results to the general population of parents in Pierre, South Dakota.

The follow up Impact Evaluation needed to be completed via the Internet so any parent who did not have access to the Internet may have not been able to respond. Additionally, only about 1/3 of overall attendees completed the follow up evaluation so the results are only representative of those who did respond.

## **Conclusions**

Encouraging parents to communicate with their teens about sexuality and other issues of importance in the lives of their children is essential to protecting them against health risk behaviors. The Tell It To Me Straight training session is designed to increase parent ability to communicate effectively with their teen(s) by providing them with accurate information, raising their awareness about talking openly rather than lecturing or threatening, and emphasizing the importance of continuous conversations about sexuality instead of a one time talk. By providing information to assist parents to have “the talk” with their children, Straight Forward achieved their goals of: (a) equipping parents with confidence to have “the talk” with their teen(s); (b) reassuring them that they are not alone in their concerns; (c) identifying a group of high school students who are willing to risk talking to parents about sensitive topics; and (d) hearing the benefits of listening to young people talk about what they need regarding communication rather than a professional journal or advice column.

## References

Kaiser Family Foundation. *Talking with kids about tough issues: a national survey of parents and kids*. Retrieved March 26, 2005, from <http://www.kff.org/youthhivstds/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14689>