

THE SECRET LIFE
OF THE
AMERICAN TEENAGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



PILOT EPISODE

SUMMARY

Ben has a crush on Amy. She's a fifteen year old "good girl" who plays French horn in the high school marching band and has nice friends and a caring family. She's also pregnant. She had sex at band camp with a boy she barely knows and now she's trying to figure out what to do. Meanwhile, beautiful cheerleader Grace is wearing a new a purity ring to show the world how serious she is about her vow of abstinence until marriage. Her football hunk boyfriend, Jack – also a Christian who says he's committed to waiting – is conflicted. Adrian and Ricky look like they're about to get hot and heavy while Alice and Henry look like they're going to wait a while before having sex. And the new guidance counselor wonders why everyone keeps asking him for condoms. Welcome to "The Secret Life of the American Teenager."

FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- As Alice tells Ben and Henry, fewer than half of all teens in high school are actually having sex. Does that surprise you? Did you think it would be higher? Lower? Among your friends does that seem about right? What about for your school? Do you think everyone is truthful about what they do? Are you?

FACT: 48% of high school students are sexually active.

- Ricky complains to Adrian that he can't handle the starting and stopping of their physical relationship -- "especially the stopping" – and says he knows of someone who had to go to the hospital as a result of such teasing and is now sterile for life. What's the most outrageous line you've heard about from someone who wanted to have sex? How would you respond to pressure like that?

FACT: 58% of teen boys say that they often receive the message that they are expected to have sex.

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- When Amy is telling her friends that she had sex she says she isn't even sure if they really did it and that it wasn't anything like you see in the movies. Why do you think people have such unrealistic expectations about the first time they have sex? And if the first time isn't so great, why are some people in such a hurry to do it?

FACT: *One in seven teens has sex for the first time before age 15.*

- Grace wears a "promise ring" given to her by her parents as a sign of her religious vow to remain abstinent from sex until marriage. What are some other reasons, in addition to religious ones, to wait?

FACT: *75% of teens say it isn't embarrassing for teens to admit they are virgins.*

- Amy and her friends think it would be a relief to have "the monkey pox or a flesh-eating virus" or some other serious condition causing her to test positive pregnancy – rather than actually being pregnant. Do you agree? If pregnancy is so undesirable at this point in her life, why didn't Amy do something to prevent it? Why do teens who aren't ready to start families and who don't want to get pregnant neglect to take steps to prevent pregnancy?

FACT: *Half of all teens say they have never thought about what kind of impact it would have on their lives if they got pregnant or got someone pregnant.*

- When Amy's father is lecturing her sister at the dinner table about wearing provocative clothing he says that not only is her outfit in violation of her school's dress code rules, but also in violation of the family's rules. What kind of rules and values do you have in your family about what's appropriate? Is sex against the rules? What about pregnancy?

FACT: *Only 3% of teens say they don't know their parents' values about sex.*

- Jack and Adrian secretly hook up and afterward he regrets it and asks her to join him in praying for forgiveness. Have you ever done something sexual that you regret? How did you handle it? What lessons did you learn as a result?

FACT: *60% of sexually experienced teens say they wish they'd waited longer to have sex.*

- Even though he doesn't play an instrument, Ben decides to join the school band in order to get to know Amy better. Have you ever done something out of your comfort zone to get closer to someone you had a crush on? How far are you willing to go in that situation? How far is too far?

FACT: *Nearly one-fifth of teen girls who had sex for the first time before age 15 describe the experience as non-voluntary.*

- Condoms are available in the high school guidance counselor's office on "The Secret Life of the American Teenager." What's the policy at your school? Do you think condoms should be available? What about prescriptions for birth control pills? Should it be confidential or should parental consent be required? If you needed to get contraception how would you go about it?

FACT: *Less than three-quarters of high school students say they used a condom the last time they had sex.*



Good-girl band geek Amy (Shailene Woodley) is smart, talented...and pregnant.

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- After she gets a positive pregnancy test result, Amy's friends urge her to go to her pediatrician for real medical care. Do you talk to your doctor about sexual health issues? Would you be comfortable asking your physician for advice about birth control? Who do you get your information from when it comes to pregnancy prevention?

FACT: *Half of all teen girls say they've visited a medical provider for reproductive health services within the past year.*

- In the first scene at the high school Amy (and the viewer) sees various displays of affection in the school halls: couples walking hand in hand, talking closely against the lockers, blowing kisses to each other before class, etc. Do you feel like you are surrounded by sexuality and other people's relationships all the time? How does it make you feel? Does it matter if you're in a relationship or not? Are you demonstrative with your feelings in public like that? How does it make you feel to hold hands or kiss in public?

FACT: *More than half of teens (57% of girls and 61% of boys) say that teen girls often get the message that attracting boys and looking sexy is one of the most important things they can do.*

FOR PARENT'S

Watching a show like "The Secret Life of the American Teenager" alongside your teen 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.

- After her family finishes dinner, Amy asks her parents if she can talk to them privately, possibly to discuss her pregnancy. That conversation never actually happens because she's interrupted by a phone call from Ben, leaving the audience to wonder if she would have told her parents and how they would have reacted. Do you think your teen would feel comfortable coming to you to discuss a pregnancy or something equally challenging? How would you have reacted if you were Amy's parent?

FACT: *Teens say parents influence their decisions about sex more than any other source.*



Molly Ringwald plays Anne Juergens, the mother of a pregnant teen.

- When Grace's brother Tom says he wants to go to the dance with Grace and Jack, their father says sending him as a chaperone doesn't exactly send a message of trust to Grace and Jack. Grace says it's fine and that they'd be happy to take Tom along so her parents acquiesce. What kind of messages do you send your teens about trust and responsibility? Do you trust your teenager and his or her girlfriend/boyfriend? What do you think they do when you're not around? How do you think they behave publicly when they're in a relationship?

FACT: *Most teens (64%) say they share their parents values about sex.*

- In this episode we see teens confiding in various adults -- the high school guidance counselor, a therapist, and to a lesser extent, their parents. Who are the trusted adults in your teen's life? If your teen isn't talking to you about sex, love, and relationships, who are they talking to? What kind of messages and advice are they getting?

FACT: *65% of all teens say that parents send one message to their sons and another message to their daughters when it comes to talking about sex.*

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- The character of Alice seems to know a lot of information and statistics about teen sexuality, even though she's not ready to have sex yet. How do you think she got so smart? Is it helpful or harmful in your opinion for teens to know so much?

FACT: *When asked if they wish they were getting more information about abstinence or birth control or both – more than half of teens (56%) said “both.” When adults were asked what they think teens should be getting more information about, 73% said “both.”*

- Condoms are available to students at this high school – what is the policy at the school in your community? Do you think condoms or birth control pills or other contraceptives should be available to students? Should parents be involved or informed? How do you think you teen would go about getting contraceptives? Would they talk to you? Would you want them to?

FACT: *When asked what they think the main reason is that teens don't use birth control, the most popular response (from one-fifth of teens) was that they're afraid their parents might find out.*

- What about sex education in schools? What kind of sex education program does your child's school have? Do feel it is appropriate or too much or too little? Should the schools be in charge of teaching kids about sex?

FACT: *When asked if this message: “Don't have sex, but if you do you should use birth control or protection,” encourages teens to have sex, more than half of teens (53%) and more than half of parents (52%) said no, it does not encourage teens to have sex.*

- What do you think about the way the media handles teen sexuality and relationships? Is it realistic? Does it encourage teens to be engage in sex? Does it show them the consequences? Is it helpful for teens on TV to be dealing with these issues or does it set unrealistic expectations? What about the coverage of celebrity pregnancies? Can teens tell the difference between Hollywood make-believe and real life? How can you make sure your teens are able to distinguish between fact and fiction?

FACT: *76% of teens say they wish the media show more or talked more about the consequences of sex, including teen pregnancy.*

- What do you think about the name of the show “The Secret Life of the American Teenager?” Do all teens have a secret life? Who are they keeping secrets from? Do you worry about what your teen does that you don't know about? How do you make it so that your son/daughter is comfortable confiding in you?

FACT: *Half of parents of sexually experienced 8th-11th graders are unaware that their sons and daughters have started having sex.*

**For more information, please contact web@thenc.org
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