

THE SECRET LIFE
OF THE
AMERICAN TEENAGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



EPISODE 14—"The Father and the Son"

FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- For the first time since she found out she's pregnant, Amy seems to be considering adoption as an option. Why is she coming to this decision now? Is she starting to take her role as a mother more seriously? What do you think about that? Do you know anyone who is adopted? Do you think adoption is a good solution for Amy, given her relationships with Ben, Ricky, and her family? Why do some teen mothers choose adoption while others don't? What role do you think the parents of these teen parents play in a decision about adoption?

FACT: *Even though there are many, many families interested in adopting babies, fewer than 3% of teen mothers choose adoption. An unplanned pregnancy that causes turmoil for one family can end up answering another family's prayers for a baby.*

- When Amy and Ben are talking about the possibility of adoption, Amy says she wants the baby to have a "better chance at happily ever after." She says babies need two adult parents and a stable, loving home -- which she and Ben are not and cannot provide, even if they are married. Ben still wants them to keep the baby. What do you think a baby needs in order to get this better shot at "happily ever after"? What would it take for Amy and Ben to really make it work as parents right now?

FACT: *Half of all mothers on welfare had their first baby as a teenager, and two-thirds of families begun by teen mothers are poor. Daughters of teen moms are more likely to become teen moms themselves, and sons of teen moms are more likely to end up in prison than are the sons of older mothers.*

- Some of the dads in the show, like the Sausage King and Dr. Bowman, seem really committed to being involved in their teens' lives and try to talk with their teens about what they're going through. Other dads,



like George Juergens, seem totally self-involved and don't realize the influence they have over their teens. Do you talk with your dad openly about what's going on in your life? What makes him an "askable parent" -- or not? If you could tell your dad one thing about your life that you think he doesn't totally understand, what would it be?

FACT: *More than 25 million children live apart from their biological fathers. That's 1 out of every 3 (34.5%) children in America. Children in father-absent households are more likely to drop out of school and are at greater risk for alcohol use, drug use, and poverty.*

- Now that Ricky's dad is back on the scene, a lot of people are talking about the abuse that went on when Ricky was younger. Some people think it's embarrassing for others to know information like that about somebody else. Others think the only person who should be embarrassed is the abuser -- and that by talking about it, you bring the topic out into the open and hopefully diminish the shame the victims might feel. How do you feel about this? If you went to Grant High and heard about Ricky and his dad and how his dad ended up in prison, what would you think? Would you talk about it or keep it quiet? Do you think Amy was right to tell her parents? Was Lauren right to tell Amy in the first place? Do you think what Ricky went through as a kid had an impact on his sexual behavior now?

FACT: *In the United States in 2006, local and state child protective services investigated 3.6 million cases of child abuse or neglect. Nine percent of those were sexual-abuse cases. If you do the math, that means 324,000 alleged cases of sexual abuse that year -- and those are just the ones the authorities know about. If you or someone you know has suffered sexual abuse, you can get help. Go to www.nsvrc.org.*

FOR PARENT'S

Watching a show like "The Secret Life of the American Teenager" with your teens 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.

- Do any of the dads in this show remind you of people you know? How do the fathers' relationships with their wives (and ex-wives) influence their teens' views about sex, love, and marriage? When Ricky and Ben both think about being the father of Amy's baby, what are they imagining? What would you say to each of them about what it means to be a dad? Teens need their dads now just as much as they did when they were toddlers. They may not always act like it, but they're listening to you.

FACT: *Whether they realize it or not, fathers are important role models for their kids. A girl who spends time with a loving father grows up knowing she deserves to be treated with respect by boys, and what to*

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look for in a husband. Fathers can teach sons what's important in life by demonstrating honesty, humility, and responsibility.

- The return of Ricky's dad is scary. He easily tracks down Amy's family, he gets Tom to tell him where to find Grace and Ricky, he has bad intentions for the baby, he's menacing and threatening and just an all-around bad guy. He is also a reminder that not everyone has good, caring, stable parents. Talk to your teen about parenthood. Ask them about the families their friends come from. Talk about the kind of parents they want to be someday.

TIP: *Know your children's friends and their families. Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teenagers become friends with kids whose families share your values. Some parents of teens even arrange to meet with the parents of their children's friends to establish common rules and expectations. It's easier to enforce a curfew that all your child's friends share rather than one that makes him or her different -- but even if your views don't match those of other parents, hold fast to your convictions. Welcome your children's friends into your home and talk to them openly.*