

THE SECRET LIFE
OF THE
AMERICAN TEENAGER

DISCUSSION GUIDE



EPISODE 19—“Money for Nothing and Chicks for Free”

FOR TEENS

Stuff to talk about:

- When Amy's mom is insisting they look harder for jobs, Amy resists and says she'll just rely on the government for help. It's understandable that Amy's so overwhelmed right now, but Anne says no way—she doesn't want Amy to be on welfare. What do you think? Should Amy be contributing financially, given all the other responsibilities she's about to have, or should she go on public assistance? What would you do if you were Amy right now?

FACT: More than half of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager. The public tab for teen pregnancy is staggering—more than \$9 billion every year is spent on costs associated with teen pregnancy and its aftermath.

- When Ben and Ricky are talking in the hallways at school, Ben reminds Ricky of his financial responsibilities once the baby is born. Do you think guys ever consider child support when they take chances with unprotected sex? Why or why not? What are some of the other consequences for guys when it comes to teen pregnancy?

FACT: If you're the father of a baby, you can be held responsible for child support payments until that child is 18. It doesn't matter if you move out of state or join the military or get married and have children with someone else. If you don't make child support payments willingly, the government can force you to—they can even take money straight from your paycheck.

- After her date with Max, Adrian tells him she's a virgin, which he knows isn't exactly true. He also says that, since this was their third date, he was sort of thinking maybe they'd be intimate that night. Does three dates seem like enough time? And what about Adrian's interest in reclaiming her virginity? Is there a rule about how soon or when people should first sleep together? What's the common standard among your friends? Is the first date out of the question? What if you don't go on actual dates but just hang out with someone or in groups? How do you decide when the time is right? Do you talk about that with your friends?

FACT: There's no one-size-fits-all rule about when it's appropriate to have sex. Some people wait years before having sex. Some have sex but then decide not to anymore. Others wait until they're married. The key is to do what's right for you. If you aren't sure, that's a definite sign that it's not the right time. There are lots of good reasons not to have sex—like avoiding pregnancy, avoiding STDs, protecting your feelings, and protecting your reputation. And no matter when you have sex, you always need to use protection.



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.

- When the Sausage King overhears Ben and Amy's conversation about work and money, he's alarmed and disappointed by how lazy Ben is. He thinks Ben has an inflated sense of entitlement just because his family's wealthy. Leo says he's going to make Ben get a job—do you think he's trying to give Ben a reality check about what it's like to be a parent and have real responsibilities? Why does Ben sound so sure about marriage and raising a baby, and yet he doesn't feel ready for a job?

TIP: Many young men say that they define "responsibility" as buying diapers when the baby comes. Teach your sons that real responsibility means not getting someone pregnant in the first place.

- When Max and Adrian are talking about the possibility of having sex, he says they need to talk about it before they do it. He wants to talk about safe sex, past partners, birth control, etc.—which is surprising to Adrian, because even though she's had sex with a lot of people, it doesn't seem like she's had many conversations about it beforehand. Is it easier for her to just do it, rather than talk about it? How can you give your kids the confidence to talk about things like this before the moment arrives (whether they're going to have sex or not)? How can you discuss these topics with your kids without feeling like you're giving them permission to be sexually active?

FACT: Research shows that giving teens information about contraception and talking to them about sex and its consequences doesn't make them more likely to have sex—in fact, it makes them more likely to use protection when they do eventually have sex. Whether you choose to teach your kids to abstain from sex or to use protection, talking to them early and often is the best protection of all.