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NEWS

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**Adults must help teens learn responsibility.

DALLAS--Teenagers are really adults with inept survival skills, says a specialist in adolescent medicine. And he believes it's up to adults to help teenagers acquire the skills they need.

Dr. Drew Alexander is pediatric consultant for Cherish the Children: Facing the Problems of Teenage Pregnancy in Dallas during the month of March. The community emphasis is planned by a coalition of 35 agencies and organizations.

"Too often," says Alexander, "our society is critical of the irresponsible behavior of adolescents without considering the fact that society itself is not fulfilling its responsibility in educating these young people to become responsible adults." He sees two specific areas for improvement in the care of teenagers. One is regular checkups by a physician after children enter school. The other is that adults close to adolescents need to act as positive role models.

The physician has worked with both clinical and teaching programs at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, where he received his adolescent specialty training. He currently sees school-age children and teenagers in his private practice and serves as clinical assistant professor at UTHSCD, consulting with Parkland Memorial Hospital's Young Adult Clinic and the West Dallas Youth Clinic.

"All teenagers deserve health assessments on a regular basis," says the physician. "These assessments should include the young person's medical health and their social health. These include their relationships with peers and with authorities, their feelings, including what they do with anger, how they handle it, whether or not they are forming loving, caring relationships, whether they are handling freedom and responsibility.

"The adolescent specialist is concerned with the physical, social and emotional development of young people and is trained to help them make a happy, healthy transition from childhood to adulthood," says Alexander.

He believes these developmental areas should also be the concern of all adults in our society, not just the physician. Adults close to a teenager should communicate their values to the teenager--through actions as well as through words. Adults can help a young person become more skilled in terms of life experience without having to suffer negative consequences.

Through gaining understanding, the adolescent is prepared to decide how to act in a given situation and be ready for the consequences, says Alexander. Being able to do this is what makes the difference in irresponsible and responsible behavior in anyone at any age.

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"Young people must recognize that they are responsible for the ways they choose to express their sexuality," says the physician. "Every young person, as well as every adult, has the option of saying 'no' to sexual intercourse, an activity that is designed to reproduce the species."

He says both adolescents and adults should also realize that there are other ways of expressing their sexual feelings and it's important to know and understand these many ways short of intercourse.

"The key is managing your life so you will be happy with the outcome," he says. "Remember that sexuality is an important expression and decisions about it are far-reaching and should be made first on an individual basis and then shared as a couple."

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