



being
a
teen

EVERYTHING TEEN GIRLS & BOYS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT
RELATIONSHIPS, SEX, LOVE, HEALTH, IDENTITY & MORE

JANE FONDA

FOREWORD BY MELISSA KOTTKE, M.D.

Being a Teen

Everything Teen Girls & Boys Should Know About
Relationships, Sex, Love, Health, Identity & More

Jane Fonda

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As you read through (or dip into) the pages that follow, please remember that no book can replace the diagnostic expertise and medical advice of a trusted physician. It is extremely important to consult with your doctor before making medical decisions, particularly if you are or think you may be pregnant, if you are experiencing pain or other symptoms of illness, or if you have ever been diagnosed with a medical condition that requires ongoing care.

In putting this book together, I have included some references to resources (including online resources) that I hope may be helpful to teenage readers and their families. As of press time, the URLs displayed in this book link or refer to existing websites on the Internet, but of course Web addresses do change over time. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee that any given resource will be useful or appropriate to you, and neither I nor my publisher should be understood to endorse the content of any third-party website or recommend the services of any particular provider. These references are intended for your information and to encourage you to begin your own search for resources that work for you.

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Author's Preface

A Word About This Book

For about seventeen years I've been working with teens around issues of sexuality, self-esteem, and relationships. I have a passion for this work, partly because when I was a teen I was very confused about all of this and didn't know where to go for answers. I also know that it can be hard for adults and teens to talk about some of these important subjects. I've seen the bad things that can happen to a person—physically and emotionally—when he or she is not properly informed.

In the 1990s, I founded the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (now called the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Power & Potential) and the Jane Fonda Center for Adolescent Reproductive Health at Emory University School of Medicine. This book grew out of that work, and all my net proceeds from this book will go to these organizations.

I kept meeting teens across a wide economic and social spectrum who didn't understand enough about how their bodies worked, or didn't know who to ask, or how they could prevent getting pregnant or getting someone else pregnant, or didn't know how to avoid getting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). We were asked, over and over again in the program, questions like "How do I know if I'm in a real relationship?" and "How can I say 'no' and still be popular?" and "When is it okay to have sex?" There is so much misinformation about these things floating around that I felt that the health of many teens I met—their future happiness, even—was on the line. I wanted to write an honest book for teens that would be a frank and straightforward resource for them, for both boys and girls, and an aid for parents, teens, teachers, librarians, and others, in talking about sex, health, identity, and relationships. This book, written for teens, provides access to information that we found in the Georgia programs that many teens need today.

In the Georgia project, we found that one big reason many teenagers don't know all the things they need to know about sex, relationships, and bodies is that people tend to worry about the things that can go wrong when it comes to sexuality, especially when a person is young. This can make the focus seem to be on the negatives—the dangers of sex, and how to avoid them.

However, most experts on sexuality and adolescence—the teenage years—think it is a mistake to focus just on the negatives and not talk about communication, relationships, and how beautiful and exciting sexuality *can* be. There is no evidence that talking about the realities of sex encourages a person to have sexual intercourse. In fact, when you understand how precious and beautiful sexuality *can* be, you are less likely to engage in sexual activity you're not ready for or that make you uncomfortable. You are also more likely to make healthy decisions and use protection when you do choose to have sexual intercourse. The pleasurable aspect of sex is also discussed here, as a key to making healthy decisions about whether or when to have sex, and to knowing whether the people in one's life are respecting you, your wishes, and your needs.

Many schools offer classes about sexuality and the changing teen body. Some provide

information about the body, birth control, and STIs. This book is about those things, and more—about feelings and fears, about the culture in which we live, and about what a real loving relationship is.

Jane Fonda
September 2013

Foreword

by Melissa Kottke, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A.

Every person has a unique path to understanding his or her body, sexuality, health, and relationships. Jane Fonda has been linking young people to essential information about these topics for decades. She has spent more than twenty years educating herself on health, sexuality, and relationships, and has worked with doctors, health professionals, educators, program directors, policymakers, religious and spiritual leaders, other advocates, and teenagers themselves on these important issues. Most people know of Jane Fonda as an Academy Award–winning actress, fitness guru, and advocate, but this book gives readers the opportunity to know her as a guide and teacher. In *Being a Teen*, Jane takes on one of her most important roles, and one that means a great deal to her: that of giving facts to young people to help them succeed.

Already a longtime advocate for young people’s health, Jane Fonda founded the Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (GCAPP) in 1995. GCAPP has been the central organization championing teen pregnancy prevention in the state of Georgia, working through education, training, and special programming. A few years later, Jane started the Jane Fonda Center for Adolescent Reproductive Health at Emory University, to join academic partners in research to advance the field of adolescent sexual and reproductive health. In 2001, she dedicated a special teen-clinic space at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, where best practices in clinical care and education are delivered to teens in need. Jane fosters the work of these organizations and institutions through direct involvement and cultivation. Through these three organizations, tens of thousands of teens have directly received clinical care and programming and at least a dozen curricula and educational tools have been developed. Hundreds of thousands of people have benefited from the education and training delivered by these organizations. Thanks to the work that Jane has spearheaded regarding teen pregnancy in Georgia, our state has witnessed declines in teen birth at a rate that is among the highest in the country!

I first met Jane Fonda in 2005, when I was interviewing for a job as Director of the Jane Fonda Center. I had just finished a fellowship in family planning and contraception at Emory and prior to that a residency in obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. At first I was a bit intimidated to meet her, but that feeling faded quickly as Jane and I talked about what motivated us both—giving young people the information and tools they needed to navigate the transition to adulthood safely and healthily. Her level of engagement and her detailed knowledge about adolescent reproductive health immediately impressed me. We have been working together ever since.

In *Being a Teen*, Jane covers every topic young people need to know about, from puberty to bullying and beyond. She addresses a wide spectrum of subjects, from basic concepts to more advanced and abstract ideas, providing details about physical “stuff,” like body parts, hormones, periods, hygiene, contraception, and STIs, as well as nonphysical “stuff,” like

dealing with parents, values, friendship, gender issues, the media, self-esteem, sexual orientation, abuse, and eating disorders. Additional resources for more information are provided throughout the book, frequently at the end of a chapter. This broad approach makes *Being a Teen* a useful guide for any teen that can be referenced again and again as new questions arise.

Jane knows that young people need reliable information and that facts are crucial to their health and happiness. In *Being a Teen*, as in her day-to-day life, she is fearless and straightforward. Jane is bold in her support of happiness, communication, and honesty. She writes for males and females, and shows how one needs to understand the other. She talks about pregnancy and STI prevention and sets high expectations for personal responsibility. She also presents the building blocks toward understanding one's self, and beginning down the path of incorporating one's sexuality in a healthy and positive manner. Jane offers the sage advice "If you have a good relationship with yourself, it's easier to have a good relationship with others." This is a truth that takes most of us years to learn.

Jane has a deep understanding of how important it is for young people to understand the changes they are experiencing, how to protect themselves, and how to love themselves. Jane operates with the belief that knowledge is power. Through *Being a Teen*, she continues this important work and expands her reach. This thorough, frank, and necessary book will be an indispensable tool for both young people and their parents.

Melissa Kottke, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A.

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Medical Director, Teen Services Program at Grady Memorial Hospital

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What This Book Is All About

Your Developing Identity

This is an important time in your life. Who you are as a person—your identity—is being developed, and you are beginning your lifelong journey of personal sexual understanding and expression. By identity, I mean your values, your beliefs, what you like and don't like, how you treat others, and how you treat yourself. Yet this is also a time when there are so many pressures to be how others want you to be. You may be tempted to be different from who you really are so that you'll be popular with a certain group, or seem cool.

Sexuality is not just about body parts, STIs, and contraception. It is also a large part of a person's identity, and that is why this book is also about relationships and feelings. How you understand and deal with them will help form your identity. I also write about the media and culture because they, too, can influence your identity—and not always for the good.

Adolescence is the gateway to adulthood, a stage of life filled with changes, with its own unique joys and challenges. In this book, I've tried to address the *whole* you, all the different parts—the physical, mental, and emotional things that are part of the adult person you are becoming.

Key Ideas I Hope You'll Learn

Here are the key ideas I hope you'll learn from this book:

1. This is the time in your life when you should begin to really know who you are as a person, who you want to be, what values you claim for yourself. Knowing who you are will help you make decisions that are right for *you*.
2. Your body is still developing and you have a right to understand how it is changing. Your body is not to be feared, nor should you feel shame or guilt about it, no matter what.
3. Abstaining from sexual intercourse when you are young is the best way to reduce your risk of pregnancy and infection—of course!
4. Do not start having sex just because your friends say they are sexually active.
5. You can say “no” to any form of sex—kissing, touching, anything—*anytime you feel like it, for any reason*. Boys and girls are both responsible for seeking each other's permission before any sexual touching advances.
6. If you start having sex, be sure you are able to discuss contraception with your partner and use it correctly *every single time*.

7. Being with someone you trust and can communicate with, besides someone who turns you on, helps ensure your experience will be pleasurable. Young men and women are both responsible for talking about feelings and asking about feelings.
8. If you have been sexually abused, assaulted, or harassed, it was not your fault. You need to talk right away with a trusted adult and tell them what has happened to you.

This Is a “Dip-in” Book

You don't need to read this book from start to finish—although I hope you will. You may prefer to dip in and out of this book, or read the parts you most want to know about. Flipping to topics of particular interest to you is fine, and I've structured the book that way. I hope you enjoy it and learn from it.

Your Identity: Who You Are and How You Feel About Yourself

Your Relationship with Yourself

There is no doubt the most important relationship we have is our relationship with ourselves. By that I mean having a sense of your own values; starting to have a sense of what your strengths and weaknesses are; feeling that your actions accurately reflect who you are and not just things you do because other people want you to or just to please others. There's nothing wrong with pleasing others, but not if that betrays who you are. If you have a good relationship with yourself, it's easier to have a good relationship with others. Later in the book we'll talk about relationships with family and friends.

Puberty

Your awareness of self as a separate individual usually begins during puberty. Puberty is the biological part of the early adolescent years, when the sexual and reproductive systems start to mature. For some, puberty starts even sooner and for others it can start later. Some of you in high school will still be going through puberty. Boys usually go through puberty one or two years later than girls do—between ages eleven and fifteen. Each person goes through puberty in different ways at different times, which is normal.

Your Teen Years

Your teen years begin at age thirteen and end around nineteen or twenty—when you have a completely adult body, though not yet a completely adult brain. The final development of your brain—the really important part in the front of your brain that handles decision making and planning—won't be complete for a few more years, around ages twenty-four or twenty-five.

Besides all the visible and invisible changes that are happening to your body, your personality is changing as well—how you think, how you feel, and how you relate to other people.

Thoughts and Feelings

At your stage of life, there is a lot of worrying about how you look, whether you come across as cool or nerdy, whether you are dressing right, whether your hairstyle is what it should be to make you look your best, whether your body is developing fast enough or too fast.

whether you are popular, whether you should start hooking up.

Thinking in New Ways

During early puberty, a person's thoughts are likely to be mainly about what is happening right at the moment, not what might happen someday—what is known as “concrete thinking.” In puberty, it's common to begin to think more about big things, such as your future. Arguing positions, exploring possibilities, considering new ideas and moral issues, called “abstract thinking.” Abstract thinking has a lot to do with your developing identity.

Thinking About Who You Are: Your Identity

Maybe you've begun to examine the values and beliefs that you've been brought up with. You are starting to think more for yourself and, as you continue to learn and grow over the years, you'll notice that things you feel sure of today may change many times.

During your teenage years is the time when your identity is being developed—who you are as a person, on your own, separate from your parents and friends. Because you are just getting to know who you are, it's easy to be influenced by what others think of you—classmates, teachers, coaches. It's a good time to appreciate who you really are instead of what others want you to be. Think about the ways that you are different from your friends and family and the ways you are the same. Try writing them down, in a notebook just for you. Sometimes, when you write things down, it's easier to think about them, analyze them, and feel sure of opinions.

What kind of person are you, or do you want to be? Do any of these words come to mind: kind, considerate, generous, honest, loving, funny, smart? I didn't ask what you wanted to do in your life; rather, my question is about your *being*—how you'd like to *be* in the world. Write down the things you'd like to be and from time to time think about whether or not your actions, the friends you choose, and the things you do are contributing to your becoming this person.

Self-Esteem (Confidence)

Your adult identity is being created and you are developing self-esteem. *Self-esteem* means having positive feelings about yourself. This is different from what others think about you. Self-esteem comes from inside yourself. What are you good at? Sports? School? Music? Making people laugh? Putting things together? Cooking? Writing? Helping others? Drawing? Being a good friend? Think about trying to get better at the things you're already good at. It helps our self-esteem when we know we have skills and qualities that are valuable no matter what anyone else says.



People who say mean things to other people have their own problems. They may not be nice people or they may just be having a bad time themselves. Maybe you've said mean things yourself.

Ask yourself if maybe the person who's being mean is jealous of you or has a reason that's upset you. Maybe he or she doesn't feel very good about him- or herself and acts mean to feel more powerful. What we can do at times like these is think about our good qualities—think positively. Positive thoughts can become a habit and help develop self-esteem. What we mustn't do is base our feelings about ourselves on what other people say or do to us.

Young people who are passionate about things like music, drama, drawing, robotics, horseback riding, writing, and volunteering, and are involved in those activities, show more self-esteem. Girls and boys who engage in sports and fitness are less likely to have low self-esteem or engage in risky behaviors.

Everyone in the world has times of self-doubt, but this is a good time to learn ways to begin to overcome self-doubts and raise your self-esteem. For one thing, try to notice the people and situations that make you feel bad, and avoid them. Take different routes. On the other hand, think of the people and situations that make you feel good, and try to make them more a part of your life.

You may meet people who seem to have too much self-esteem. This probably means that underneath their cocky "I'm the best" attitude, they don't really have a lot of confidence.

Don't let anyone make you feel ashamed of who and what you are. Whatever your gender, race, beliefs, body shape, sexual orientation, economic status, or religion, no one can or should make you feel less than anyone else.

Moods

Your body is producing a lot of new hormones—*estrogen* in girls and *testosterone* in boys.

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