

Nurturing Sexual Health in Adolescence: Biology, Social Context, and Culture

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Perspectives on adolescent sexuality that emphasize the risks and potential harm associated with adolescent sexual behavior are gradually being supplanted by approaches that frame sexual desire and behavior as a normal part of adolescent development, one which sets the stage for future sexual health and well-being. Such an orientation requires us to consider the factors that lead to responsible sexual behavior as well as those that create barriers to such behavior, and to consider how biological, contextual, and cultural factors operate in concert to shape adolescent sexual behavior, relationships, and self-concept. This presentation draws on recent evidence regarding adolescent reward seeking and self-regulation as well as emerging models of parenting and the role of cultural context to identify processes that may contribute to positive sexual experiences and outcomes for youth. The analysis reveals some directions for future research on positive adolescent sexuality as well as possible strategies for fostering sexual health in adolescents and emerging adults in diverse contexts.