

## PARENTING

## Let's talk about sex, experts advise

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

**HAMLIN** — When the subject is sex and your children, silence is anything but golden. In fact, silence can be downright disastrous, according to Dennis Boike and Cookie Waller.

Boike, a Rochester marital and family therapist, and Waller, a parent educator with Rochester's Prevention Partners anti-drug program, conduct free workshops for parents as part of Monroe County's "Not Me, Not Now" campaign. The workshops are state-funded. "Not Me, Not Now," begun in 1994, advocates for sexual abstinence among teens.

In their workshops, such as one at Hamlin's St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church Dec. 12, Boike and Waller urge parents to communicate with their kids about sex even when the prospect may seem difficult.

By having open discussions about sex, Boike and Waller emphasized, parents can help reduce the odds that their kids will engage in sexual activity before marriage. Otherwise, they said, their children's actions are much likely to be guided by peer pressure and media influence.

"Listen to what the radio and TV and adolescents are saying," Waller said. "TV doesn't show the relationship between sex and love. Teens don't understand that emotions are involved."

Added Boike: "Do you hear songs saying 'Thank you, Jesus, for my family; thank you, Jesus, for my chastity?'"

Because chastity is not promoted by mainstream society, Boike said, it's vital for parents to issue this message. "Kids are less likely to get involved in sex if we talk to them. Otherwise, hype wins," Boike stated. "The better informed they are, the more responsibly they act."

Boike warned that adolescents may initially coil at any conversation that discourages premarital sex. He added that teens may also disregard the threat of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.

"Teens often think they know the risks of drinking, drugs and sex, and can get through the challenge unharmed," Boike said. However, drawing a parallel to *Titanic*, he remarked, "They don't have the experience to tell the difference between an iceberg and an ice cube."

Therefore, Boike stressed, "We've got to initiate conversations no matter how they react. If they don't want to talk about it, fine. But we're going to talk about it."

Boike urged that parents avoid the temptation to lecture, saying, "Don't try to control them. Try to talk to them. Leave out your agenda, and key into their agenda." One good communicating tool, he said, is for parents to describe how they acted as teens when they were in situations that could have led to sex.

Meanwhile, Waller said that parents should "stop whispering with other adults" and not dodge any sex-related subject with their children. "Children should really be comfortable saying 'Mom, Dad, guess what happened,'" Waller commented.

Waller also encouraged parents to persist in raising these conversations. "They

## Family Events

Family Fun: permanent exhibit "Adventure Zone"; learn about natural forces that impact daily lives; Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 ages 3-18; 716/271-1880.

**JAN. 20-JUNE 3** — Exhibition: "Requiem: By the Photographers Who Died in Vietnam and Indochina"; more than 300 photographs on view; Brackett Clark and South Galleries, George Eastman House, 900 East Ave., Rochester; Tues. Sat. 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Sun. 1-4:30 p.m.; adults \$6.50, \$5 seniors/students, \$2.50 children 5-12, children 4 and under free; 716/271-3361.

**SUN, JAN. 21** — Cabin Fever Sunday: "Live Bird of Prey Presentation"; Ron Walker and Friends with Feathers; includes live hawks and owls; Cumming Nature Center, 6472 Gullick Rd., Naples; 1-2 p.m., 3-4 p.m.; \$4 adults, \$3 seniors, \$1.50 students, preschoolers free; 716/374-6160.

**WED, JAN. 24** — Program: "Coin Collecting: Money Used in Irondequoit Over the Last 200 Years"; Gerard Muhi, presenter; Helen McGraw Branch, Irondequoit Public Library, 2180 Ridge Rd. E., Irondequoit; 7 p.m.; to register call 716/336-6060.

**WED, JAN. 24** — Lecture: "Advances in Improbable Research"; Marc Abrahams, speaker; an unusual seminar/slide show considers the funny side as well as the importance of science; Eisenhart Auditorium, Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; 7:30 p.m.; \$35 for 4 lecture series, also Feb. 28, Mar. 21, Apr. 25; 716/271-4320 ext. 602.

**JAN. 27, 28** — Opening celebration: "Arthur for President"; part of "Arthur's World" exhibit; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; Sat. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sun. noon-5 p.m.; adults \$6, seniors \$5, ages 3-17 \$4, under 3 free; 716/265-2700.

**JAN. 31, FEB. 7** — Wednesdays for Tots: Jan. 31: Bill Mehl performs action songs, 9:30 a.m.; Feb. 7: Gary the Happy Pirate entertains with songs and puppetry, 9:30-10:30 a.m.; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; \$6 adults, \$5 seniors/students, \$4 children 3-17, under 3 free; advance tickets recommended; 716/265-2701 ext. 314.

**SAT, FEB. 3** — Science Saturday: "The Wonderful World of Robots"; meet Newton, winner of 1997 & 1999 Robot Olympics; Bausch Auditorium, Rochester Museum & Science Center, 657 East Ave., Rochester; 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.; free with museum admission; for group reservations and rates call 716/271-4352 ext. 342.

**SAT, FEB. 17** — Children's show: "Do the Write Thing"; Child's Play Touring Theatre; performing works written by children that address problems in their personal and family lives; Nazareth College Arts Center, 4245 East Ave., Rochester; 2 p.m.; \$9; 716/389-2170.

BOBBY'S ROOM  
KEEP OUT!

Photo illustration by Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

might not say things you agree with. And if you don't think you're making an impact, that's okay," she said, explaining that teens are probably listening even if they don't want to admit it. And, she said, it could be that voice in their head that will cause them to refrain from sex when they're being pressured.

Boike and Waller observed that these talks may need to begin even before adolescence, saying the children are aware of sex — and engaging in it — at an increasingly younger age.

"It's not just teenagers. I can't believe some of the stuff my 9-year-old daughter comes up with," said Terri Kondolf, a St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parishioner who at-

tended both sessions by Boike and Waller at her parish.

Kondolf and her husband, Steven, also have a 14-year-old daughter. Kondolf said she's candid with her children about sex because she doesn't feel she got enough information when she was growing up.

Attending the presentations by Boike and Waller, she said, helped reinforce in her that "I'm doing something right."

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**EDITORS' NOTE:** Dennis Boike and Cookie Waller will present six free parent workshops in Monroe County during the upcoming months, including an April 24 session at St. Christopher's Church in North Chili. For further details, call 716/428-4293.

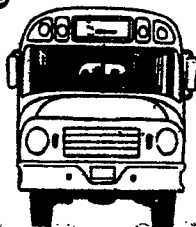
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