Dear Alice,

A few months ago, my boyfriend and I went to get the "morning after pill." I had two extra pills in case I vomited the ones I took. Stupidly, I kept them and recently, my mom found them. She has not confronted me about them yet but I'm freaked out!! My parents are pretty conservative, so I can't possibly tell them "Oh mom! I had sex behind your back and the condom broke!" They'd flip out! What should I tell them?

Answer

Dear Reader,

While you may be second-guessing yourself, rest assured that you weren't stupid to keep the backup pills. On the contrary, it was smart to hold onto them in case the first ones didn't stay down, or in case you needed them for another condom slip-up in the future. If you're certain your mom found the pills, then it's possible she already knows that you're having sex. The next step would be to choose how (or if) you'd like to broach the topic. Parents can be a wealth of advice and support in helping you navigate your relationships and even your sexual health. While it sounds like this scenario isn't what you had wanted, this may be a healthy opportunity to be open with your parents about your sexuality. However, depending on your parents’ views on sex and birth control, this may be something you choose to avoid talking about with them altogether.

Here are some suggestions for how to talk with your parents about sex, if you choose to do so.

- It can be helpful to approach your parents at a time when you can sit together calmly without interruption or set up a time where you can talk. You might say something like, "Could we talk after dinner tonight?"
- You could make a list of what you’d like to say before you meet with them, so nervous jitters won't leave your mind blank. You might also want to think ahead about questions or comments they could have. How you might respond to them effectively, keeping in mind your family’s values, culture, and communication styles?
- If the thought of talking face-to-face makes you cringe, consider starting the conversation with your parents over email or text message. You can plan out your talking points more easily, and it avoids any in-person awkwardness.
List adapted from Planned Parenthood [2].

While confronting the topic head on might lead to a productive dialogue, there are a multitude of reasons why this conversation may not happen at all. Parents are often just as nervous as their kids are when it comes to discussing sex. For this reason, your mom may never even bring it up, and it might just fizzle out. You also mentioned that your parents are quite conservative. In some circumstances, talking about sex with parents is more than just awkward — they may react with threats or punishment. If you think that discussing sex with your parents may negatively impact your life in a serious way, you may choose to not mention it. In this situation, if you want to talk to someone about your sex life, you may find it helpful to talk with a trusted family member, friend, or health care provider.

While you may opt to bring it up with them, there’s a possibility they could still bring it up with you first. Due to this, you may want to be ready in case your mom talks to you about it. What do you feel comfortable sharing? What do you prefer to keep to yourself? If you choose not to mention it first and they initiate the conversation, you also may have less ability to steer the discussion. You may also want a plan for how you’d exit the conversation if it moves in a direction that makes you feel threatened or unsafe.

Talking about sex with parents is rarely anyone’s favorite pastime, but it could be a great chance to show them how mature and responsible you are about your health and your relationships. The fact that you knew what to do after a condom broke, and that you were able to seek and obtain the pills you needed, shows that you and your boyfriend are thoughtful and knowledgeable. If you feel there is something to be gained by sharing this fact of your life with your parents, power to you! And if you feel you don’t need to bring it up if they don’t, carry on safely!

Alice!

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Published date:
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