

# Why Is It Important to Talk about Sex with My Kids?

The best and most important learning takes place at home. If you don't teach your kids about healthy sexuality, where will your kids get the information from? It's never too early (or too late) to talk with your child about sex. Research shows these conversations have various positive outcomes. For example:

- Adolescents who reported feeling connected to parents and their family were more likely than other teens to delay initiating sexual intercourse.<sup>1</sup>
- Consistent users of contraception are more likely to report frequent conversations with parents.<sup>2</sup>
- Adolescents who have repeated communications about sex, sexuality, and development with their parents, are more likely to have open and closer relationships with them, in addition to being more likely to talk with their parents in the future about sex issues.<sup>3</sup>

## What Should I Talk About?

A simple rule is to stick to topics based on your child's stage of Sexual Development. Here are topics we suggest based on each stage.<sup>4</sup>

### Ages 0-5:

- Children should be aware of their body. Caregivers should name all body parts accurately and convey that the body, its parts, and its functions are natural and healthy.
- Help children understand love and how it can be shared by giving them the attention and affection that they need.
- Help children understand the difference between public and private behaviors (i.e., picking one's nose or touching one's genitals are private).
- Teach children that they can say no to unwanted touch, regardless of who is attempting to touch.
- Describe bodily processes, such as pregnancy and birth, in very simple terms.
- Talk to your kids about not touching people without asking first and not letting other people touch them when they don't want to be touched. \*\*\*
- Don't force your child to hug friends and relatives when they don't want to. Let them know they can choose what they want to do with their bodies. \*\*\*

### Ages 6-8:

- Continue to provide information about sexuality, even if a child does not ask for it. At these ages, children may ask fewer questions, but still have lots of curiosity and need information.
- Explain that there are many different types of families and all types are equal & deserve respect.
- Provide very basic information about important sexuality issues, especially those in the media: HIV/AIDS, abortion, marriage, and sexual abuse.
- Inform children about the changes that will take place when they begin puberty.
- Recognize that everyone does not have the same sexual orientation.

### Ages 9-12:

- Help young people understand puberty, including that menstruation and nocturnal emissions (ejaculation), are normal.
- Discuss the important relationship between sexual and emotional feelings.
- Be open to conversations about contraception and condoms and respond honestly and accurately when young people ask about them.

### Ages 13-17:

- Clearly articulate your family values regarding sex.
- Express that we all have a variety of options for experiencing intimacy and expressing love.
- Discuss the many factors, including age, mutual consent, contraceptive use, love, intimacy, etc., that should be a part of decisions about sex.
- Reinforce teens' ability to make decisions and their right to privacy. Provide accurate information and help them identify where they can go for sexual healthcare services.
- Discuss contraceptive options and talk about the importance of condom use.
- Discuss teens' options, should unprotected sex and/or pregnancy occur—including emergency contraception, abortion, adoption, parenting and STI testing. Help them locate the closest clinic.
- Discuss the differences between a healthy and unhealthy relationship.
- Use inclusive language that recognizes that some youth may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.
- Talk about sexual assault and what to do if they or a friend experiences sexual assault. Provide them with resources such as clinics, therapy, and a trusted adult to talk to.\*\*\*

## Tips for Talking with Your Teen:

1. Be open and honest. Keeping in mind when your child asks you personal questions such as, "how old were you when you had sex?" This is also a time you can talk about privacy.
2. If you don't know the answers, it's okay. But don't give wrong information or make something up. You can say you don't know and do some research together to find the answers.
3. Use the media. A TV show, an ad, a news story, or a song can help you start a conversation just by asking your child what they think about it.
4. Make it normal. It's normal to feel uncomfortable or awkward. Acknowledging the awkwardness usually helps relieve some tension for both of you.
5. Listen. Pay attention to what they are saying, and ask questions.
6. Be supportive. You want your child to be comfortable talking to you about their experiences and how they feel. Be supportive of their journey and acknowledge other aspects of their changing selves.
7. Educate yourself. Learn about slang vocabulary, sexual orientation, sexual violence, social media, national and state laws that impact teens, and what support services are available at your child's school and in your community.
8. Identify other supportive adults. Help your child identify other caring adults in their lives that they can talk to privately about their lives in general as well as sex and sexuality.

## Where can I learn more?

### Websites:

- Advocates for Youth - [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)
- Planned Parenthood - [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- Teenwise - [www.teenwisemn.org](http://www.teenwisemn.org)
- Scarleteen - [www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com)
- Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network - [www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)
- PFLAG - [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- Sex, etc. - [www.sexetc.org/states/minnesota](http://www.sexetc.org/states/minnesota)
- Annex Teen Clinic - [www.annexteenclinic.org](http://www.annexteenclinic.org)

### Books:

What Makes A Baby (up to age 8).

Silverburg, Cory. Seven Stories Press, 2012.

It's Not the Stork (ages 4+). It's So Amazing! (ages 7+).

It's Perfectly Normal (ages 10+).

Harris, Robbie H. and Michael Emberley, Candlewick Press,

How to Talk with Teens About Love, Relationships  
and S-E-X: A Guide for Parents.

Miron, Amy G. and Charles D. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit  
Publishing, 2001.

The Underground Guide to Teenage Sexuality.

Basso, Michael J. Fairview Press, 2003.

### DVD:

The Talk: An Intercourse on Coming of Age (ages 12 to Adut).

[www.youthperformanceco.com](http://www.youthperformanceco.com) 612-623-9180

### Citations:

1. Resnick MD, et al. *Protecting adolescents from harm: finding from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health*. JAMA 1997; 278: 823-32. Advocates for Youth.
2. Hacker KA et al. *Listening to youth: teen perspectives on pregnancy prevention*. J Adolesc Health 2000;26:279-88.
3. Martino SC, Elliot MN, Corona R et al. *Beyond the "Big Talk": The Roles of Breadth and Repetition in Parent-Adolescent Communication About Sexual Topics* Pediatrics. 2008;121:e612-e618.
4. Advocates for Youth, Parents' Sex Ed Center, "Growth and Development." [www.advocatesforyouth.org](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org)

\*\*\* Information not from cited resources.

**Pro-ChoiceResources**  
528 Hennepin Ave S., Suite 600  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55403  
[www.prochoiceresources.org](http://www.prochoiceresources.org)  
612.825.2000



Have a Question?

Contact us at 612-825-2000 or  
[pcr@prochoiceresources.org](mailto:pcr@prochoiceresources.org)

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