

Talking to Your Children about Sex

*Helpful Hints
for Caring Parents and Guardians
from*



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Talking to your kids about sex can be tough, especially when you are not sure what they need to know, when they need to know it, or how to tell them.

The first step is to get comfortable with the subject. You may need to:

- think about your own feelings about sex
- read some information
- talk with friends
- practice what to say and how to say it

Think about the questions your kids might have. How do *you* feel about the subject?

Decide ahead of time what messages you want to give your child.

What is the right information at each age? Sex education is a life-long experience. Your child needs different information at different stages of development. A four-year-old needs a lot less information than a teenager does. A teenager needs (and can understand) much more detailed information to make healthy decisions.

To help you talk to your kids about sex, this booklet gives you topics to cover at each stage of your child's development. Young people need information, skills and support to make healthy choices. Begin the conversation today!



Birth to 5 years old

Infancy/Early Childhood

- From the day they are born, children begin learning about themselves and the world around them.
- It is normal for infants to explore their bodies. Toddlers are curious about the bodies of their parents and other children.
- Teach them that their entire body is important, and that each body part has a correct name and a job to do.
- They are becoming more aware of the differences between males and females and the roles of each.
- Be prepared for questions and help them feel comfortable about asking questions.
- Find out exactly what your child is asking about before you answer, to avoid giving more information than they want or need.
- Punishing children for self-discovery (touching themselves) sends a message of shame.
- By the time they reach age five, children should know:
 - the correct names of their body parts
 - the difference between males and females
 - the basics about where babies come from
 - that the body is private and special





Middle Childhood

Ages 5-8: Early Elementary School

- During this stage, children have both positive and negative feelings about their body and the bodies of others.
- Reinforce that bodies are different in size, shape and colors and that it is normal for your body to change as you get older.
- They are hearing about sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, pregnancy and other issues from friends and television.
- Correct names should be reinforced, i.e., girls and women have a vulva, clitoris, vagina, uterus, and ovaries, and boys and men have a penis, scrotum and testicles.
- They should know how a woman gets pregnant; men and women have reproductive organs that allow them to have a child, and reproduction requires both a man and a woman.
- They should know that sex, or intercourse, is when a man and a woman place the penis in the vagina.
- Explain how the fetus grows inside a woman's body. A baby grows inside of a woman's uterus, and babies usually come out of a woman's body through an opening called a vagina.
- A man cannot become pregnant.



preadolescence

Ages 9-12: Upper Elementary School

- Puberty (becoming sexually mature) usually starts at the age of 10 for girls and 11 for boys, but it can occur earlier or later for both.
- There are many physical, mental and emotional changes during this time for your child.
- Children worry about whether their body is developing normally. Reassure them that they are normal & everyone is different.
- Children at this age need to know the facts about menstruation, wet dreams, and other changes of their body.
- They are ready to know more about how babies are conceived and born.
- They need to know that sexual feelings are normal & natural, and that having feelings does not mean you have to act on them.
- They need to know that sexual intercourse has consequences, that it is adult behavior and it is not for young people.
- They need to know how sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) and HIV are transmitted and how they can be prevented, including the use of abstinence and the use of condoms.
- Males and females should be educated about each other: during puberty girls begin to ovulate & menstruate, and boys begin to produce sperm & ejaculate.
- Children get more curious about their sexuality as they become older.
- As a parent, be aware of the many influences in their life and keep the lines of communication open.
- Reinforce your own values and encourage your children to talk to you.



Adolescence

Ages 12-18: Middle/High School

- Preteens & teenagers want and need to know about social and sexual relationships.
- Give clear and consistent messages about your values.
- They should know at this age that sexual relationships bring responsibility.
- Reinforce that the best way to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STD's is not to have sexual intercourse.
- Talk about the methods to prevent pregnancies and diseases, including birth control and condoms.
- Help your child evaluate the risks of sexual behaviors shared by partners (for example: kissing, hugging, touching, and intercourse).
- Explain that some young people engage in sexual intercourse, but many do not.
- Sexuality affects our lives in many ways, including spiritually and culturally. Help your child understand your views and values in all these areas.



- Encourage positive self-esteem. Children with confidence and goals for the future make healthier decisions.
- As a parent, know where to get resources in your community for health and social services.
- Remind your teenager often that you are there for them.

Keeps in Mind...

- It is not just one “Talk”—start early and keep talking
- Listening to your child is important too
- Talk about values and relationships, not just plumbing.
- Focus on media influences: watch TV with your child, and talk about what you see
- Talking openly about sex helps children learn what they need to know
- Talking appropriately with children about sex or birth control does not “put ideas in their heads”



Remember...

- Parents are the MOST important influence on their children
- Spend time with your kids
- Close relationships with parents PROTECT children
- Be a good role model. Children learn from what you DO, not just what you say
- Nobody's perfect! Even if you stumble, teaching your kids about sex is too important to leave to their friends...or to television!





Wants YOU to know:

- ABSTINENCE (not having sex) is a teen's healthiest choice
- PARENTS are the most important teachers about sex
- Young people who do have sex should use PROTECTION EVERY TIME
- Young people who have had sex need to be CHECKED for STD's (sexually transmitted diseases)

For more information

Visit our Website at:

www.SanAntonio.gov/ProjectWORTH

or Call our TEEN CLINIC:

(210) 207-8850