



Tips for Talking to Your Child About Sexuality

1 Remember that children first learn about sexuality from the hugs and cuddles we give them as babies and our attitude about their bodies. When children are learning to talk, teaching them the correct names for body parts and functions gives them a language they can use even as adults.

Most children use some slang terms that they learn from friends, e.g. wiener instead of penis. You can decide which words are acceptable to use in your home. Explain to your child why a certain word is unacceptable to you.

2 Young children frequently ask questions about how the world works and they will ask questions about how people's bodies work. Take advantage of their curiosity. Answer the question with a simple answer and tell them that you will answer any other questions they may have. By doing this your children learn that it is okay to talk about sexuality issues in their family and, as they get older, will come to you when they need to "check out" information they've gotten from other places.

3 Give your child correct information when answering a question. Sometimes parents worry about giving too

much information. Most three-year-olds can understand that "The baby grows in a special place called a uterus. The baby will come out of an opening called a vagina." (Talking about babies growing in stomachs or being brought by the stork causes confusion.)

4 If your child has not asked any questions by 5 or 6 years of age, bring the topic up yourself. You can use books or television programs to help you. For example, you can ask a question about something that is happening in a television program you are watching together. You could also borrow a book from the library and read it together.

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5 Listen carefully to your child to make sure you understand the question s/he is asking. Respond with “That’s a good question ...” and then give them an answer. If it’s embarrassing to you, it’s alright to say so. If you don’t know how to answer the question, it’s alright to say so. The important thing is to answer the question as best you can and get the information you need. You and your child can also look for the information together.

6 You will probably need to answer the same questions several times as your child grows up. (Isn’t it wonderful that they give us so many chances?) Children learn about sexuality in the same way they learn about many other things - in stages, as their ability to understand grows. They learn to add and subtract simple numbers before they learn about multiplication.

7 Talk about your family’s values and beliefs. Decide what standards of behaviour are okay in your house and share them with your children. However, make sure that your children understand that other families may have different standards. For example, if it is okay for your child to walk around your home with no clothes on they do need to understand that it is not okay to do the same at someone else’s house.

8 Once your child is going to school, get to know their environment - who their friends are, what jokes are popular, which TV shows they’re watching etc. Being interested and discussing these things in a nonjudgmental way can tell you a lot about what your child sees and hears. Talk about whether this is the same or different than when you were growing up.

9 As your child gets older, she may try to put

you off with “Oh, Dad!” or “That’s gross!” but that doesn’t necessarily mean she knows it all or doesn’t want to talk. As children approach puberty they may begin to feel a bit embarrassed by the topic. Don’t force the issue; you can say “That’s alright ... we can talk about it another time.”

Messages Worth Repeating

- ◆ All of us are growing and changing throughout our lives.
- ◆ Everyone develops in his/her own way.
- ◆ Everyone’s body is private and deserves respect.
- ◆ Sexuality is a beautiful gift - something to be handled wisely.