

# ***Why Is It Important that Parents Take an Active Role in Our Children's Sexuality Education?***

As parents, we already play a major role in our children's sexuality education and we can't change this fact even if we wanted to. Our children grow up in our homes and learn from us by observing. We become models of how to be men and women, have relationships, show affection and resolve conflict. In these ways, we are the most important sexuality educators of our children.

In order to take advantage of our role, we need to take action, especially if our children don't ask questions. The way to do this is by talking with our children about sexuality. By making it an open subject at our house, we teach our children that sexuality is like everything else - natural, real, part of life and something that is okay to talk about. When we don't talk about sexuality we give them the message that this topic is not proper to discuss, to learn about, or to have questions about.

While we are being silent, our children are picking up the commercial and exploitive messages of the advertising industry and the media in general. They will also pick up a lot of misinformation from their friends. Children and teens need people in their lives who can help them sort out all the different messages they will be given by the world around them.

Parents sometimes worry that giving information to children at too young an age can be harmful in some way. Answering a child's question with an honest answer gives the message that they can come and talk to you about sexuality issues whenever they need to. Providing sexuality information to teens does not encourage them to go out and experiment with sex. Research shows that adolescents who are well informed and comfortable in talking about sexuality with

their parents are most likely to postpone intercourse. And, if they do have intercourse, these teens are more likely to behave responsibly – showing respect for themselves and their partners and taking care to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

As much as we might want our teens to postpone sexual intercourse until they reach a certain age, level of maturity, or until they get married, we have to accept that the decision is theirs – not ours. Once we can accept that fact, our role as sexuality educators becomes one of providing information and guidance rather than trying to control behaviour.

The messages we give our children, at every age, are important because a positive sense of their own sexuality is important to their overall well-being as they grow and develop into adults. A person with a positive sense of their sexuality is able to:

- ❖ feel comfortable with their body because they know that none of its parts are "nasty" or "dirty",
- ❖ feel comfortable giving and receiving physical affection such as kisses, hugs and pats on the back with friends and family,
- ❖ make caring and responsible decisions about their sexual behaviour, because they are comfortable talking about that part of their life. This means that they won't manipulate others or allow others to manipulate them.
- ❖ form loving relationships because they are comfortable with love and affection, and
- ❖ enjoy sexual expression, fulfillment and fun.