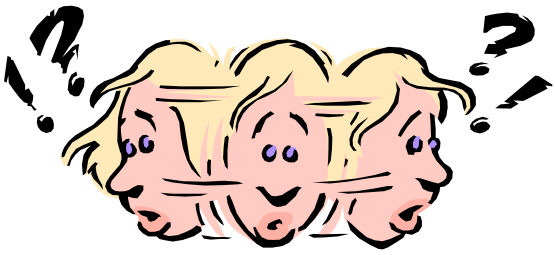


Let's Talk!

Tips for discussing
sexuality with your
children.



Planned Parenthood® of Indiana
Protecting, providing and promoting reproductive health



Do you remember how your parents talked to you about sexuality?

If you are like most people you may not have learned all you wanted to about sexuality from your parents. Maybe your friends filled you in on all the details, or perhaps you learned about sexuality from movies, TV, and music. Regardless of your past experience with this subject, **YOU** can choose to become the primary source of information about sexuality and sexual health for your own children.

Now that you have decided that you want to help educate your child about sexuality, you may have some concerns or questions.

- *Will I say too much too soon?* Probably not, there is no evidence that says this should be a concern.
- *How do I talk to my child when I am not an expert on sexuality?* No parent needs to be an expert on sexuality to have meaningful conversations with their children, and every parent can share their values about sexuality, relationships, and respect for others.
- *Where do I begin?* This packet can help. In these pages you will find tips on how to talk to your child about sexuality and how to use the media as a jumping post for conversation. A reference list of books and websites to help you along is also included.

Did You Know...

Most teenagers would like for their parents to be their main educators about sexuality!



Talking About Sexuality Tips for Parents

Recognize that your children are sexual beings.

Sexuality is an important part of every person's life from the moment we are born until the day we die. It is perfectly normal for children of all ages to have sexual thoughts and feelings. This can make parents uncomfortable and worry about giving their children too much information too soon. But studies show you can't harm children by giving them information about sexuality. In fact, according to the former Surgeon General, David Satcher, MD, "Close, warm parent-child relationships are associated with postponement of sexual intercourse and more consistent contraceptive use by sexually active adolescents."

Reassure your kids that they're normal.

No two children of the same age develop at the same rate. Kids need to know that what they are going through is normal. This is especially important for children who are going through puberty. Puberty is a time of profound physical, emotional and social changes for kids. You can help them understand that it's natural for everyone to be different and that what they're experiencing are exciting signs that they are becoming men and women. Encourage them to take pride in their growth and their transformation into adolescents.

Be receptive to your child's questions.

You don't need to be an expert to be an effective sexuality educator for your children. In fact, whether you know it or not, you've been teaching them about sexuality since they were babies, by the way you touched them, spoke to them, and taught them what it meant to be a good friend and person. Not knowing all the answers can be the perfect opportunity to spark discussion about sexuality by looking for the answers together.

But don't wait to be asked!

Many parents often wait for their children to approach them with questions about puberty, relationships, and sexuality. But children may not always feel comfortable making the first move. Don't assume that if your child hasn't asked you about sexuality he or she isn't interested in talking about it. Sometimes they're shy or uncomfortable and are just waiting for you to broach the subject. There are many situations in the news or on television that can prompt discussion.

Talking About Sexuality

Tips for Parents

Always use correct terms.

Often families use alternative names for sexual body parts. By using the correct terms you give your child a vocabulary for future discussions. This can begin early. During potty training is a great time to teach your child correct term for his or her body parts. Using other names can give your child the idea that these body parts are “dirty”. If any of the correct words embarrass you, practice saying them alone or in front of a mirror.

Encourage your children to express their ideas openly.

Everyone makes judgments - especially when we disagree with someone. But when you disagree with your child, let them know that you respect them and their ideas, you just don't agree with them. Don't be afraid to ask your child to explain why they feel a certain way. Young people who feel they are being judged or talked down to will be less likely to talk in the future. Parents shouldn't assume that questions or interest indicates any behaviors are happening. Listen - and be sure to keep the lines of communication open.

Examine your values about sexuality.

Sometimes parents are unsure how to communicate their values in family discussions about sexuality. It's hard to communicate your values without dictating how your children should live their lives. Remember, actions speak louder than words. Set good examples that show your kids values in relationships, relating to honesty, equality, and responsibility.

Keep the conversation going.

One big talk won't convey all the information and your values about sexuality. Kids need information as they develop, and they need to feel comfortable asking you as they grow. Start early and let talking about sexuality be an ongoing part of your evolving relationship with your entire family.

More great ideas for discussing sexuality with your children!

- **Seek “teachable moments” to share your values.** Take time to discuss sexuality when the moment arises instead of only having the “big talk.”
- **Remind yourself that it is okay to feel uncomfortable.** This is a normal reaction. You are not the only one, many parents report feeling nervous.
- **Be “ask-able.”** The more your children feel comfortable asking you questions about sexuality the more often they will come to you with questions.
- **Remember the facts are not enough.** Children need, and want, to learn about the spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of sexuality, not just “the basics.”
- **Keep in mind that you are talking to your children because you care about their happiness and well-being and tell them so.**
- **Know what is taught about sexuality in your schools, faith communities, and youth groups.** If you know what is being taught in your community you can decide what you want to discuss further and what additional information you may want to teach your child.

Planned Parenthood of Indiana also offers in-home parent workshops!

Gain information and skills to help you better communicate about sexuality with your child!

Educational staff can facilitate a session for a group of adults at your home, workplace, club or organization. To find out more and schedule a session contact us at 317-637-4340.



Books and Videos Available at Planned Parenthood's Resource Center

Planned Parenthood of Indiana's Resource Center is open to the public, and located at 200 S. Meridian St., Suite 400, Indianapolis. The following materials, and many other resources are available for check-out. Please call 317-637-4377 for more information and open hours.

Ages 2-8

Books

- Baby Brendon's Busy Day* by Donna A. Jennings
Being Born by Sheila Kitzinger
Bellybuttons are Navels by Mark Schoen
My Body is Private by Linda Walvoord Girard
A Very Touching Book by Jan Hindman
What is a Girl? What is a Boy by Stephanie Waxman
What's the Big Secret by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown
Why was I Adopted? by Carole Livingson

Ages 9-12

Books

- Growing and Changing* by Kathy McCoy
Have You Started Yet? All about Getting Your Period by Ruth Thomson
It's Perfectly Normal by Robie H. Harris
What's Happening to Me? by Peter Mayle
What's Happening to My Body? Book for Boys by Lynda Madaras
Changing and Growing by Kathy McCoy

Teens

Videos

Teen sexuality in a culture of confusion

Books

- Changing Bodies, Changing Lives* by Ruth Bell
Finding Your Way: A Book about Sexual Ethics by Susan Neiburg Terkel
Girltalk: All the Stuff Your Sister Never Told You by Carol Weston
How Sex Works by Elizabeth Fenwick and Richard Walker
The Underground Guide to Teenage Sexuality by Michael J. Basso

Parents

Videos

- Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk about Sexual Health
Talking about Sex: A Guide for Families

Books

- Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Fostering Your Child's Healthy Sexual Development in Today's World*
by Beverly Engel
Raising Sexually Healthy Children by Lynn Leight
Raising Your Children Conservatively in a Sexually Permissive World by Sol and Judith Gordon
Sex is not a Four Letter Word by Patricia Martens Miller
Straight from the Heart: How to Talk to Your Teenager about Love and Sex by Carol Cassell
Talking with Your Child about Sex by Mary Calderone and James Ramey
When Sex is the Subject by Pamela Wilson

Recommended Web sites

- **Planned Parenthood** Sexuality and sexual health information and resources. Sign up for the FREE newsletter, “There’s no place like home...for sexuality education.” www.plannedparenthood.org
- **Teenwire** Sexuality and sexual health information for teens. www.teenwire.com
- **Go Ask Alice!** Q&A site including information on relationships, sexuality, and sexual health. www.goaskalice.columbia.edu
- **Birds and Bees** Information on birth control, pregnancy, STDs and links to other sites. www.birdsandbees.org
- **Campaign for Our Children** Information for both parents and teens on talking about sexuality. www.cfoc.org
- **gURL** Information on issues that affect the lives of girls ages 13 and older. www.gurl.com
- **Iwannaknow** A safe and fun place for teenagers to learn about sexual health and for parents to receive guidance. www.iwannaknow.org
- **Sextalk** Information on safer sex, self exams, and sexual orientation. www.sextalk.org
- **SIECUS** Starting place for teens to learn about sexuality issues. www.siecus.org

How to Use the Media as a Tool for Talking to Your Kids About Sexuality

Television Tips

- **Watch what your children watch.** This way you know what messages your children are receiving.
- **Ask your child’s opinion.** This may help your children develop tools to question what they see on TV.
- **Share your opinions and values in a positive manner.** Your children need to understand your values while they begin to form their own.
- **Watch for teachable moments.**
- **Use commercial time to talk.** Your children are likely to pay more attention during a break in the show.
- **Remember that “bad” shows can provoke discussion too.** This may give you the opportunity to discuss the behavior of certain characters.
- **Be sensitive.** Your child may be embarrassed by your discussing sexuality in front of their friends or other adults.
- **Have fun!** Keep talks informal. Try to avoid lectures. Seek input and ask questions!

Let’s go to the Movies...

Watching movies with your children is also a great way to spark conversation. And not just with the teenager in your family! Here are just a few you might want to use.

- **Snow Days**, rated PG. Great for discussing issues related to self-esteem, gender roles, peer pressure.
- **Rugrats The Movie**, rated G. Great for discussing issues related to reproduction, relationships, feelings, gender roles, decision making, and values.
- **Stepmom**, rated PG-13. Great for discussing issues related to relationships, love, family, communication, assertiveness, and dating.
- **Philadelphia**, rated PG-13. Great for discussing issues related to body image, sexual orientation, diversity, STDs and HIV, relationships, family, and sexuality and society.

Did You Know...

Teens ages 13-15 years old rank the entertainment media - TV, magazines, movies, and music - as the top source of information about sexuality and sexual health.