

Tips for Family-Based Sexuality Education



Providing guidance for children about sexual health can be challenging for many parents, particularly given the wide ranging images and messages we receive on a daily basis about gender roles, relationships, and sexuality.



Sexuality education is not one “big talk.”

It's an ongoing discussion with your child(ren) that starts with simple concepts and gains complexity and detail as the child ages. Start as early as you can, but remember, it's never too late to bring up a discussion.



Educate yourself!

There are many resources, such as books for children, books for parents, trainings, websites, and telephone hotlines that can help. Visit your local library or bookstore with your child and pick out books together.



Use “teachable moments.”

When you see a pregnant or parenting teenager, or you're watching TV or a movie that includes a sexual topic, use it as an excuse to start a conversation. “What did you think about...?”



Learn from your own sexuality education.

What was your experience growing up? How would you like your own child's sexuality education to be different?



It's OK to be nervous.

Explain to your child “I know it's difficult sometimes talking about these things, but they're important. I love you and I care about you. I want to make sure you are getting your questions answered and you know that you can always come to me with any questions or problems you might be having.” For the first few conversations, try talking in the car or while making dinner, so that you don't have to make eye contact. Later on, when you're more comfortable, you'll be able to speak more directly.



Clarify your child's questions.

Make sure you understand your child's question before answering. The classic example is a young child who asks “where did I come from?” The parent gives a long explanation of pregnancy and birth, and the child looks puzzled. The child says, “Well, Timmy said he came from Michigan. Where am I from?” Once you've confirmed the question, determine if it's asking for facts, asking about values (what's right or wrong, and why), or asking “am I normal?”



Talk to other parents for their advice.

If friends have talked to their children about sex, what worked for them? What did they find difficult? Learn from their experiences.

Tips for Answering Questions



ENCOURAGE

"That's a really important question." "I'm glad you asked that." "That's a very smart question, I'm glad you're thinking about these things." If you need some time to think about the question or it's a very awkward time (in the middle of a dinner party!), say "I want to make sure we have time to talk about this, so let's talk about it on the car ride home (or at bedtime tonight)." Stalling or postponing an answer is okay if you follow through quickly.



CONFIRM

Confirm what the question really is. "I think what you're asking is.....Do I have that right?"



DETERMINE

Determine is this a question about **FACTS**, about **VALUES** (what you think is right or wrong, and why) or an **AM I NORMAL?** question. Fact questions need simple, straight-forward, often medical answers. For value questions, be sure to share **WHY** you believe what you do. "Am I normal" questions are looking for reassurance.



ANSWER

Answer as best you can. If you don't know an answer, say "I'm not sure, let's look that up together." Follow through quickly by looking at a website or a book together as soon as possible.



AVOID

Avoid anger, judgment, and assumptions. Work on your poker face! Your words may not be angry or judgmental, but your expression may send the message that you don't like the question! If a child asks about sex, it does **NOT** mean that they are sexually active. Of course, it doesn't mean that they **AREN'T**. Avoid jumping to conclusions or becoming accusatory. If your child senses your anger, they may not come to you later when they really need help.



CONFIRM

Confirm that you answered the question - "Does that make sense?" "Did that answer your question?"



ENCOURAGE

"I'm really glad we talked about that." "I always want you to come to me in the future, whenever you have questions, okay?"