

Parents & Kids, Talking About Sex ©

Talking With Your Child About Sex

"How to ..." Communication Tips

Why?

Loving parents want to protect their children from all the misinformation that bombards them. Preparing children for the physical and emotional changes enables parents to begin a dialogue of trust and respect.

Who?

Each family will be different — mother, father, grandparent, aunt, uncle, good family friend. Single moms can get a male family member to serve as their son's mentor.

When?

Children will often follow the same time schedule as their parents. If you were the first or last in your group, your child may have a similar experience

Girls can view body changes with shyness, excitement or fear. Silence often gives the unintended message that body changes and menstruation are unmentionable.

- Changes occur between 8 and 13 years of age. African-American girls often start a year earlier.
- Girls often notice some discharge six months or so before menstruation begins.
- Menstruation usually begins between 9 and 15 years of age.
- If changes occur before 8 years or not by 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ years an evaluation for early puberty or delayed puberty will be needed.

Boys are just as curious, anxious, embarrassed and worried about the changes of puberty as girls are.

- The curiosity of 9 or 10 year olds, before their bodies' begin to change, makes them more open and less embarrassed.
- Puberty usually starts at 11 or 12 years of age but may start between 10-14 years of age.
- The first change most boys notice is that their testicles feel different, are growing and while still growing, may be different sizes.
- Wet dreams usually begin at 13 years of age or older.

How?

1. Don't wait for your child to ask questions. Silence often gives the message that sexuality is not something you should talk about.

2. One formal "talk" is never enough. Casual spur-of-the-moment discussions prompted by natural situations are often easier.

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Getting Started

- First, find out what information your child already possesses. This gives you the opportunity to clarify any confusion or misconceptions. Be alert to the slang terms that are used and the messages these terms bring.
- If you are embarrassed or feel awkward, be open about it. Your child probably feels the same as you do. Try one of these opening comments.
 - "This is really tough for me. My parents never talked about this kind of thing, but I want it to be different with us."
 - "This will be kind of weird at first, but the more we talk about it, the easier it will get."
 - "I love you very much. There are things about your body that we should talk about."
 - "Because I want you to get the right information, I hope to tell you before you may get the wrong information from friends in school."
 - "If any questions come up about anything we talk about, I want you to ask them at any time. Even if you hear or think of something a month from now."
- Avoid the direct approach by asking, "Do you have any questions about sex?" This puts your child on the spot and he/she will often just say, "No." This is a closed question, a question that can be answered with a simple, "Yes" or "No." Try open ended questions, for example, "What do you think about....?" Or "What should we be talking about?"
- Humor can help relax you both. Try introducing the subject with "When I was your age...." and share an embarrassing incident or misconception you or your friends had."

Wrapping Up

Lead your child through a review of what you talked about. Praise what he/she has remembered and relayed correctly.

REMEMBER — You cannot wait to be asked. If you do not prepare your child someone else will do it.