How to Talk to Your Kids About Sexuality and Healthy Sexual Choices

Young people need to hear about sexual health issues in different ways—by talking with parents and other trusted adults, through books, and in class discussions. Resources and books like *SEX? : A Healthy Sexuality Resource* can give information, but talking with family helps young people create values that will guide their choices.

As a parent, you are your children’s first and best teacher. You have the opportunity to make sure that your children know about sexual health and healthy sexual choices. Young people want to make the right choices and they need information that will help them to do so. You are their best source of information, guidance, and support.

Be available and easy to talk to

Start conversations about sexual issues. Ask your children what they are learning about in health class, what they’ve heard from their friends, what they’ve seen and heard in the media (movies, TV, videos, magazines, etc.). Your children will be more willing to come to you for information if they know you’re willing to give it. Let them know you’re willing to talk about difficult issues. You may feel uncomfortable talking about topics like abuse, assault, dating violence, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual orientation, but it’s likely that your children or someone close to them will face one of these issues at some point.

Listen to your kids without judging them

Accept that your children may see things differently. Share your opinions, values, and views in a non-threatening way. You can disagree without criticizing or belittling your child. Your children won’t open up to you if they’re afraid of being put down.

Help your kids learn to make decisions and accept responsibility

Children who have experience in making decisions and accepting responsibility for the results of their choices will be better prepared to make responsible sexual choices.

Aussi disponible en français : Comment parler aux enfants de la sexualité et de l’importance de faire des choix sains (FF85-1882)
Look for accurate, up-to-date information to share with your kids
The more you know, the more you will be able to help your children, and the more comfortable you’ll be with the topic of sexuality.

There are many up-to-date resources that are accurate and respect young people’s intelligence and ability to make decisions. These include books, videos, magazine articles, television, and the Internet. Local professionals like public health nurses, your family doctor, or community agencies are also good resources.

Leave resources where your children can find them when they need information. Keep in mind that before your children come to you with a question, they’ve probably already looked for information about it. Do your best to give them honest and straightforward answers and give accurate, respectful, and up-to-date resources.

Don’t forget about boys
Often sexual health information focuses on young women. This can give young men the message that they don’t need information and don’t have to accept responsibility for their actions. Young men need to hear about male sexuality and sexual responsibility too.

It’s never too late
Talking about sexuality and sexual issues with your teens will seem more natural and comfortable if you’ve been answering their questions since they were young. But it’s never too late to share your values, beliefs, and experiences with your children. It’s never too late to let them know you care about them and the choices they make. Fathers and adult males offer important perspectives and can contribute a lot to these discussions.

If you don’t feel comfortable talking about sex and sexuality with your children, help them find other adults or professionals they CAN talk to. Questions and curiosity are a normal part of growth and development. If you’re uncomfortable with the topic, let your children know it’s OK with you if they ask for information from other accurate, reliable sources.