

Tips for Talking with Your Child about Sexuality

- *Start* conversations about sexuality. Don't *wait* to be asked. If you never bring it up, neither will your child.
- Use *teachable moments* when sexuality-related topics or events come up in real life, books, news, or jokes. Lots of little talks are better than one big one.
- Treat sex like any other topic — as a *normal, natural* part of life.
- Give short, *simple*, but *specific* and complete answers. Don't leave out important information. Information will not hurt your child or promote sexual behavior.
- Use proper terms for body parts and sexual activities. Explain slang terms so your child knows what they mean.
- *Ask* what your child knows when a specific topic comes up — children might pretend to know. Ask their opinions about various topics.
- *Listen* to your child's opinions, concerns, and feelings.
- Be *nonjudgmental* but provide information, guidance, and reasonable limits.
- Don't laugh at or tease your child about sex-related matters (body, relationships).
- Talk at a time when you are alone and won't be interrupted (in the car).
- Be honest about any discomfort you have. It's okay to say, "I feel a little uncomfortable talking about this, but I care about you so I want you to know..."
- It's okay not to know everything your child asks. If you're not sure, look it up in a book or on the Internet together.
- Tell your child stories about your own experiences. You don't have to tell everything, but be as honest as you can.
- Explain your values, expected behaviors, and reasons for your expectations.
- Talk about the positive aspects of sex, as well as the risks.
- Give reassurance that your child's feelings are normal.
- Talk about feelings and relationships, as well as the biological aspects of sex.
- Don't make assumptions or jump to conclusions about your child's sexual behavior, in general or when a question is asked.
- Role-play or practice with your child how to handle positive (asking someone on a date) or challenging (dealing with pressure to have sex) situations.
- Take your child to the drugstore and point out the pads, tampons, condoms, etc. Take your teen to a clinic for contraception and exams, or let your teen know where to go for help to prepare to be sexually active.
- Keep a sense of humor about all of this.
- Praise your child daily.
- Assign responsibilities your child can be successful with.

- Find at least one thing your child is good at and build on it.
- Tell your child you love her or him at least once a week.
- Arm your child with knowledge, skills, supplies, and self-confidence. These are the best protectors against risky behavior.

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