

Talking to Your Kids About Sexuality

10 Communication Tips

Parents are the primary sexuality educators for their children. The following tips can help increase our effectiveness.

1. Be an “askable parent.” Reward questions.

Don’t worry about knowing all the answers to your children’s questions; what you know is a lot less important than how you respond. If you can convey the message that no subject, including sex, is forbidden in your home, you’ll be doing just fine.

2. Find “teachable moments.”

If your child hasn’t started asking questions about sex, look for a good opportunity to bring it up. Say for instance, the mother of a 10-year-old’s best friend is pregnant. You can say, “Did you notice that David’s mom’s tummy is getting bigger? That’s because she’s going to have a baby and she’s carrying it inside her. Do you know how the baby got inside her?” then let the conversation move from there.

3. You don’t need to wait until they ask a question.

4. It is okay to feel uncomfortable. Relax.

Even if you can’t quite overcome your discomfort, don’t worry about admitting it to your kids. It’s okay to say something like, “You know, I’m uncomfortable talking about sex because my parents never talked with me about it. But I want us to be able to talk about anything—including sex—so please come to me if you have any questions. And if I don’t know the answer, I’ll find out.”

5. Be sure to talk about the joys of sexuality.

Being honest about the positive aspects of healthy sexual relationships will build trust between you and your children. They know that sex has risks and benefits and need to learn that from you.

6. Listen, listen, and listen.

Practice “active listening.” Encourage your child to open up to you, find out information from him/her by asking questions, make sure you understand what your child is saying (you may want to repeat what you think he/she is saying back to them for confirmation), and talk about your feeling and his/her feelings about the situation. Always encourage further communication.

7. Facts are not enough.

It’s our responsibility to let our children know our values about sex. Although they may not adopt these values as they mature, at least they’ll be aware of them as they struggle to figure out how they feel and want to behave. Think about the values you want your child to hear from you about many different aspects of sexuality and work them into teachable moments when you can.

8. Know what is being taught about sexuality in your schools, churches and youth groups.

9. When you talk to your children about sexuality, you are telling them that you care about their happiness and well-being.

10. Be aware of the “question behind the question.”

Look at body language and think about events going on in the current moment or in the child’s life that might be prompting the question(s). Ask questions to find out what your child really want to know. It may be that your child wants to know something else but isn’t sure how to ask.