How to talk to your kids about sex

Be Prepared

- Even very young children may have questions.
- Give age-appropriate answers. Younger children need fewer details.
- Learn all you can and keep learning, so your information is current.
- Decide what you will talk about (example: how to keep from getting infected), and what you won't talk about (example: your own personal sexual behavior).
- There may be issues too difficult, or inappropriate for you and your child to discuss together. Encourage your child to talk to another respected adult (school counselor, trustworthy family member, etc.).
- Think about your own values (not just what you say but what you do) and be ready to discuss them.
- Use "teachable moments" - those times when something is going on that makes your child really ready to talk and listen.
- Be ready to start a talk if your child never brings it up.

Be Comfortable

- Practice what you want to say and how you want to say it. Use other adults and parents to listen to you and help you use words that are right for your child.
- Listen and learn from other adults and experts to get ideas about ways to say what you want to say.
- Other adults can help you decide how much of your own history is appropriate to share with your child.

Listen!

- Too often we don't really hear the question because we are busy rehearsing our answer. Listen carefully and think about what your child really wants to know before you begin to answer.
- Give your child the space to say what s/he means and respect what s/he says.

Give the Full Picture

- Talk about what sex can mean in a relationship, not just about the risks.
- Talk about the physical changes that happen as someone grows up and how that can change how the child feels about him/herself.
- Talk about how to deal with friends, how to handle pressure from others to have sex.
- You are the model your child looks to. Without giving details about your sexuality, talk about decisions you've made and how you made them.
- Talk about the challenges of making decisions–not just about sex.

Parents and other adults can make a big difference in how kids think and behave as they grow up.

- Parents can give good information.
- Parents know their kids and what is important to them.
- Parents can give the kids time to think about things, and later take up where they left off.

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How parents talk to their kids is very important.

Kids do better when:

- parents tell the truth, using language that is right for the age of the child;
- parents can talk about many important things, not just sex;
- parents have good attitudes and the ability to talk about sex;
- parents understand and are sensitive to the needs of the child; and
- the timing is right. When kids and parents talk about sex before the kids begin having sex, the kids are less likely to have risky sex.

Learn more about talking to your kids from:

The National Campaign to Prevent Pregnancy
www.teenpregnancy.org
1776 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20036

Children Now and the Kaiser Family Foundation
www.talkingwithkids.org
1212 Broadway, 5th Floor
Oakland, California 94612

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)
www.siecus.org
130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350
New York, New York 10036-7802

If you know - or suspect - your child has been sexually abused, seek professional help.

When parents don't talk to kids, kids get their information and attitudes from other kids.

Talk to your kids early and often!

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd

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