

How to Talk to Your Kids About Sex

It's a different world today. Kids are growing up much faster. Television, movies, music videos, magazines and the Internet are bombarding our children with thousands of sexual messages a day. Thirty-Eight (38%) percent of Michigan's 9th-12th graders have had sexual intercourse (Preliminary Michigan Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2013), so it is critical that parents talk early and talk often to their children about sexuality. Many of us feel uncomfortable and unsure about what to say and when to say it. Hopefully, this information sheet will answer your questions and show you how to have a one-on-one conversation with your child about sex.

Get To Know Your Children

It's hard to talk about sexuality. So, if you're not having a good talk with your kids everyday, start making time for it. But don't forget that listening is just as important as talking. Ask them about school, their friends, and their teachers. Turn off the television and find out what's going on in their world. If you start early and have regular talks with your children, talking about sexuality will be more comfortable.

Begin Early

If you think 14 or 15 is a good age to begin talking about these things, think again. The dramatic rise in teen pregnancy has revealed that many girls are having sex at 14. Some boys are starting at 12. It makes good sense to start talking to our children at an earlier age. But whatever age you think is right, the important thing is to start talking before your children become sexually active.

Talk, Talk, Talk

What do you say? How do you say it? It's not as hard as you wanted to know when you were a kid. Know what you want to say. Then set aside some time and talk one-on-one. In the kitchen, the living room, or the front steps - wherever you feel comfortable. Teens are most comfortable having discussions side-by-side while doing something like taking a walk together or traveling in a car. Keep it informal and relaxed. When the time comes to talk about sexual intercourse stay away from "the birds and the bees" terminology. Call a penis, a penis; a vagina, a vagina. Once your children know that you're concerned about their feelings, that you're willing to have an open and honest conversation about sexuality, the dialogue will flow naturally.

Listen, Listen, Listen

Communication is a two-way street. Listening is just as important as talking. Let your children say what they feel. Every question is a good question. Let them question your beliefs. That way they will know that they're allowed to express themselves without fear of losing your love, or feeling that they're doing something wrong. Try to understand where they're coming from and honestly listen. It's the only way your discussion can lead to some kind of agreement.

Speak Your Mind

If you don't want your kids to have sexual intercourse, tell them. Tell them there's a time for everything. Right now, their time is best spent doing schoolwork, enjoying family and friends, and setting goals that will help them get everything they want out of life. By taking a stand on sexuality, and communicating it to your children, they will respect you. Believe it or not, you are the most powerful influence in their lives. What you say carries more weight than what their friends, teachers or anyone else might say. So tell them what you think.

Abstinence: The Best Way

Abstinence is the best way to give dreams and goals for the future a chance to come true. It is the only way to guarantee avoiding an unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The benefits of waiting to have sex include more self-confidence, maintaining the trust of family, respect from friends and a healthier, happier life.

What To Say

Teach your family's value system. Explain to your children that sexuality is a beautiful gift—something to be handled wisely and that each person's body is private and deserves respect. Go beyond explaining the reproductive system. Help your child understand the risks of sexual activity and the many positive reasons for waiting. Help your child build good skills for resisting sexual pressure. Teach them ways to say no. Practice pressure lines and assertive responses with them.

Examples:

"If you love me, you would have sex with me."

Reply: "If you love me, you wouldn't pressure me."

"Everybody's doing it."

Reply: "Not everybody...I'm not!"

Teach your child to use body language that backs up what they say (stand tall, speak clearly, look the person straight in the eye). Teach your child how to avoid risky situations and to have a plan for getting out of them. Encourage your child to associate with friends their own age. Build their confidence and self-esteem by expressing your love and support. Praise positive actions. A confident child is less likely to become involved in risky behaviors.

Heard Enough?

Then take action. Keep your kids busy. Busy kids don't have time to drop out of school, take drugs or get pregnant. So encourage your kids to join Little League, the school band, church choir or the neighborhood community center. And then join them. Whatever you do become involved and your involvement will show them that you really care. And that can make all the difference in the world.

Do Your Homework

For more information on how to talk to your kids about sex, contact the....

National Campaign to Prevent Teen &

Unplanned Pregnancywww.thenationalcampaign.org

Parent Action for Healthy Kids.....www.parentactionforhealthykids.org

Children Now.....<http://www.childrennow.org/parenting-resources>

Kids Health.....<http://www.kidshealth.org/parents>

Source: "How to Talk to Your Kids About Sex." Michigan Department of Health and Human Services