

Talking With Your Teens About Sexuality

It is important to have discussions about sexuality issues with your children. By talking about sexuality, you are showing that it is an important issue. Teens may appear more knowledgeable about sexuality issues than they really are; and they still want and need parents' input. Remember -- when you talk to your children and teens about sexuality and related issues, you are telling them in a very real way that you care about them. It's never too late to start.

Some Suggestions:

- Talk things over with your partner/spouse or friends to help you clarify issues and the messages you want to give.
- Recognize that the cultural climate in which we live promotes a "live now, grow up fast" sexual philosophy. Share your beliefs with your teen. The values you live by, and the discussions you have, are important.
- Don't be afraid to say you're embarrassed or uncomfortable. Often just saying so will make you and your teen more comfortable.
- Respect each other's privacy. Make it clear that you want to discuss information, choices and opinions – not your sexual experiences or theirs.
- Try to listen calmly, even when there is a difference of opinion. If you really listen to your children you'll learn a lot about what they think. They'll also feel heard, and that goes a long way toward building their self esteem. Be willing to stop, and to discuss the topic again later if the discussion gets too heated.
- Sometimes we are not ready for our children's questions/challenges. It's all right to say: "That's a good question. I need to think about my answer for awhile." At other times you may need to reconsider a response you've given earlier: "I thought about what I said yesterday and I want to change something."
- Try not to jump to conclusions when your kids ask a question like: "How do you know if you're pregnant?" Answer such questions factually and in a calm manner. Ask them what they know and think about the issue.
- Learn about the facts, but be prepared to talk about more than just the facts. Teens also want to know about such things as the relationship issues involved with sexual decision making, alternatives to sexual intercourse, how to talk honestly with friends/partners about sex, birth control and condom use.
- Discuss the range of behaviours that are part of a sexual relationship, and about protection from sexual infections and pregnancy.
- Encourage your son/daughter to set his/her own limits. Stress the importance of clearly communicating those limits to a partner.
- Talk about abuse and assault with your teen. If your teen discloses abuse, remember never to blame her/him for the assault.

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Getting Started:

- ◆ Choose a time when you both are relaxed and have time to talk.
- ◆ Discuss issues when you're doing some activity together—travelling in the car, preparing a meal, doing the dishes or other chores around the house.
- ◆ Leave books and magazine articles on a variety of sexuality issues lying around the house for your children to read.
- ◆ Give a book or magazine article you've read to your teen and ask for his/her opinion.
- ◆ Post a newspaper clipping on the fridge and ask for the family's feedback on it.
- ◆ Learn about social media (eg. facebook, twitter). Also ask your teen what types they use, how they work, and what they like and dislike about using them.
- ◆ Watch a television show/movie together. Discuss the values and any (mis)information either of you think is important.
- ◆ Conduct interviews of each other to find out what each of you knows and believes. This is one way of giving both of you an equal opportunity to talk (and listen!).
- ◆ Ask about what your teen is learning at school. e.g. "Somebody at work said his daughter's class discussed condoms. What information have you received at school about condoms?"
- ◆ Find a regular time to be with each of your children so that there are built-in opportunities for discussion and sharing

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