



LET'S TALK!

A Guide for Parents on How to Talk to Their Children About Sex and Sexual Health.

Planned Parenthood - Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Health Centre recognizes the variety of relationships that exist between adults and children. While some children may be raised by caring adults who are not their parents, the terms “parent” and “your child” are used throughout this resource for ease of language and to avoid confusion. We hope that you find this information helpful in the relationships you are building with any youth in your life.

Congratulations! By reading this article you have taken the first step to becoming an ask-able parent! We know how tough it can be to discuss sex and sexual health issues with your child. We also know how important it is that parents take the lead role as sexual health educators in their children's lives! So, that's where we come in... we are here to offer you support through education so that the experience will be more enriching for both for you and your child.

While compiling this information, PPNLSHC was fortunate enough to gather the input from a number of extraordinary youths that were more than willing to share their own advice for parents. Their comments were both enlightening and insightful, and therefore we have included many of their suggestions throughout this article as a way to bridge the gap between parents and their children.

The first question you might be asking yourself is:

"Why should I talk to my child about sex and sexual health?"

Many parents worry that teaching their child about sex and sexual health will increase their curiosity and lead to poor choices surrounding sexual health. There has been endless research on this topic. Now it is generally accepted that young people who experience open communication about sex and sexual health in their home are:

- More likely to delay first intercourse
- More likely to share their parents' values about sex
 - Less likely to become teen parents
- Less likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection
 - Less likely to be victims of sexual abuse
- More likely to have a high self-esteem and positive body image
- More likely to turn to their parents for help and advice

As you can see, there are lots of benefits to talking to your children about sex and sexual health. Keep reading for some helpful tips to help you get started!

DON'T underestimate your child's ability to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

“You have to trust that we are able to make good decisions... we can think for ourselves.”

Youth are capable of making mature, responsible decisions when they have been given all the appropriate information and options. Failing to tell your teenage child about birth control options or condoms may cause them to lose trust in you, not to mention possibly putting them in danger of STIs and pregnancy.

Give them the information along with your values- both parts are crucial.

DON'T make threats or ultimatums

“Don't say things like “if you get pregnant, I'll kill you!” Who would we go to if we did get pregnant?”

Making threats will not get you anywhere, even if you make them in a semi-humorous way. The only thing it will accomplish is making your child afraid to approach you if they do end up needing your help. DO share your values, but remember that we are all human, and your youth may make mistakes. Would you rather they go to you when they're in trouble or hurt (including when they make mistakes), or have no one to turn to?

DON'T avoid talking about the issue.

“I didn't get the information from my parents... I got it from the media and through personal experience.”

If you avoid the issue, thinking your child is too young, they may simply find out in other, less desirable, ways. Parents are the most important sexual health educators. Children receive messages about sexuality every day, from TV, movies, and music. It is important to ask yourself: whose values do you want your child to learn, yours or theirs? And, what quality of information are they getting? Is it even accurate? Do you want your kids thinking that reality show and soap opera relationships are normal and even desirable?

DON'T focus solely on the negative aspects of sex.

Yes, sex can have negative consequences. However, part of developing healthy sexuality is to recognize that sex is also a fundamental part of being human. There are many positive consequences of sex including bonding with a partner and pleasure. Young people need help to make choices that will reduce negative consequences, while enhancing the positive. Plus, they will listen and respect you a lot more if you give them ALL the information – not just the horror stories.

DO get specific.

If your child asks you “what is sexual intercourse?” telling them that “sexual intercourse is something that happens between two people who are in love...” is not going to quench their curiosity. They will most likely look elsewhere for the information. It is okay to go into more detail. How much more detail is really up to you.

If you're still wondering why it's important to talk to your child about sex, here's what one youth had to say:

“Aside from being important to kids, it is also very important for your relationship with parents. You talk about aspects of your life like school, and friends, but if you didn't talk about sex you create barriers because you're holding back such a big aspect of your life.”

DO start young

“If you're taught at a young age that [talking about sex and sexual health] is the norm, it would not be as uncomfortable [talking about it as a teen].”

If you wait until your child is into their teen years, it may be harder to discuss the issues. Also, by then they may have already learned a lot (and not necessarily accurate) information through other sources. Start young. When they are small children, teach them the correct terminology. Talk about puberty before they are already experiencing those changes. The more you talk about it while they are growing up, the easier it will be to discuss the ‘more difficult’ topics.

If your child is already a teen and this is the first time that you have talked to them about sex...Don't worry! It's never too late to start, and any information is better than none at all.

DO make sure you are up-to-date and informed

“I mentioned the [contraceptive] sponge to my mom, and she told me it was just a myth.”

If you are going to talk to your children about sex and sexual health, make sure you have accurate and up-to-date information. Things change so rapidly that what you thought was correct may no longer be the case. Read reliable books on the topic, look up information on the web (but make sure the sites are credible, like ours!), and call your local sexual health centre (like us!) for the right information.

DO answer their questions

“If they're old enough to ask, they're old enough to know the answer.”

The biggest struggle for parents is to decide what topics are age appropriate. Do I talk to my 9-year-old about how babies are made? What if my 10-year-old asks me what a condom is? The thing to remember is that, if you avoid answering a question, you may be sending the message that it is NOT okay for them to ask. Also, they may be enticed to find the answer (and not necessarily the correct answer) elsewhere. If your child asks a question and you are unsure how to respond, simply let your child know that you will get back to them and call PPNLSHC for advice.

DO be prepared for what your child may tell you.

“When I came out to my mom and she was supportive, I started to trust her a whole lot more.”

After opening the lines of communication, you may learn something about your child that may be difficult to hear. They may tell you that they have already had sex, or that they are gay, lesbian, etc. Would this information bother you? Whatever they tell you, remember that they are taking a chance by trusting you and you can make the most out of the situation by remaining calm and being understanding. If you react badly, they may not open up to you again. It may be helpful to brainstorm beforehand some

of the things they may tell you and think about how you might react and whether or not this will help or hinder the communication process.

DO take advantage of teachable moments

These moments can happen when you least expect them, perhaps you hear lyrics to a song, or your child tells you a story about someone in school. Ask your child's opinion and use it as an opportunity to talk about sexual health. These can also be great moments to talk about stereotypes, and the influence of media.

If you would like more age-specific information on how to discuss sex and sexual health with your child, please call Planned Parenthood - we have more resources for you!

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am – 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

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