

SHARE Tips for Talking to Kids about Sexual Health

1. **Don't overthink it!** You are the parent. Take a deep breath and tell them what you want them to know.
2. **Don't be squeamish or uncomfortable.** You want your kids to know that they can come to you with ANY questions or to talk about ANY subject. If you act embarrassed or shocked, then they may go to someone else (or the internet) next time.
3. **Use correct terminology.** Words like penis, vagina, sperm, uterus, or testicles may be awkward to say, but the correct terms are important for students to truly understand their body.
4. **Be direct.** Don't talk about "making love" or "doing the deed." For an 8–11 year-old say something like, "Sex is when a man and woman bring their bodies so close together that they actually fit together. During these private times, sperm from the man's body can enter the woman's body. Sometimes a sperm joins with an egg in the woman's body and the woman becomes pregnant." For an older child you might say "Sex is a private time when a man and woman join their bodies together so closely that the man's penis fits inside the woman's vagina. During sex, sperm from the man can be ejaculated and enter the woman's body. When sperm enters the vagina, it travels up through the uterus and into the fallopian tubes. If an egg is present in the fallopian tube (because the woman is ovulating), then the sperm will attempt to join with the egg. If a sperm cell joins with the egg cell, the woman becomes pregnant. Men and women have sex to bond and show their love to one another and to have a child."
5. **Have a continuous conversation-NOT a "one and done."** Make sure your child knows that you are willing to talk to them anytime about anything. When it comes to their body and sexual health, you want to continue the conversation over weeks, months, and even years. There are lots of chances to bring up these conversations; you can use TV or movies or music as "points of entry" to the ongoing dialogue. For example, if a song talks about sex, use it as a talking point.
6. **Be a "soft place" to land.** Do not threaten or use scare tactics with your children when it comes to their bodies and health. Threatening to kick them out if they "ever got pregnant" or "got a girl pregnant" or things of that nature could dissuade them from coming to you if they ever find themselves in a difficult situation (sexual abuse, pornography addiction, unplanned pregnancy).
7. **Keep the conversations age appropriate.** A good way to make sure you are keeping it age appropriate is to listen to your child and ONLY answer the question(s) they are asking. For example, it is possible to explain that women become pregnant when sperm from a man joins with egg from a woman. If the child doesn't ask how the sperm gets there, then you don't have to explain sex yet. Let the child's questions guide what you say, but make sure you answer their questions. Do your best to "check in" with your kids about these topics and monitor their exposure to electronics at home and at other people's homes and even school, knowing that kids can be exposed to information without your knowledge. Remember, you want to be the person they come to for this kind of information.

Suggested topics to discuss with your child:

Bullying (by 4 th grade)	Pornography (by 4 th grade)*	Puberty (by 5 th grade)**
Pregnancy (by 5 th grade)	STD/STIs (by 6 th grade)	Abuse (by 6 th grade)
Sexting (by 7 th grade OR before they get a phone)	Healthy romantic relationships (by high school)	

Revisit these topics as your child ages because the conversation will get more involved as they mature.

*The average age of first exposure to internet pornography is 11 (this is usually accidental). Remember that pornography can be written (books) or visual (videos, pictures).

**Start the conversation as soon as you notice early signs of puberty if it is before 5th grade.