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## Being an “Askable” Adult

Children and youth are very curious about the world around them, and will commonly ask adults “hard-to-answer” questions. At PPS, we believe that learning begins at home and in the neighborhoods where we live. Our PPS community is rich in diverse knowledge and experiences, playing an essential role in awakening skills and knowledge in our youth. This handout was developed to help adults be there for their young person, in whatever way they need, by being an “askable adult”.

### An Askable Adult is...

Any adult that a young person sees as approachable and open to being asked questions.

### Who is an Askable Adult, and How do I be that person for my child?

<b>A – Anyone.</b>	Any adult can be the person a child trusts and feels comfortable talking with, and anyone can positively influence a child’s health behaviors. Encourage them to seek guidance from any adult with whom they have a strong connection.
<b>S – Start early.</b>	Creating a safe and secure relationship from an early age can help set the foundation more difficult conversations later. Youth who feel a sense of being cared for, supported and belongingness with at least one adult have more positive academic success and overall health outcomes.
<b>K – Kindergarten.</b>	Health education in schools occurs every year K – 8 and two times in high school. Connect with your child’s teacher to learn more about their health education.
<b>A – Anywhere.</b>	Use moments in everyday life to start conversations naturally. Short conversations allow for a topic to be discussed multiple times, and therefore, are more likely to be remembered.
<b>B – Brush up.</b>	Be sure to learn about topics that may not be familiar to you or that you may not be comfortable with, including nutrition, mental health, and sexuality. Take some time to learn the most current information about these topics, while reflecting on your values. Practice how you will communicate with your child or youth.
<b>L – Listen and Stay Calm.</b>	You may be asked difficult, awkward or embarrassing questions. It’s okay to feel this way – your child probably feels the same as you. Stay calm by taking a breath. Validate the question with simple phrases such as, “I’m glad you asked...” Listen to what they know by asking, “What have you heard about...?” Conversations based in mutual respect, honesty, and open-mindedness reinforces the child’s thoughts on being able to ask questions.
<b>E – Explore.</b>	Explore resources in your area that may be helpful in getting more information for both yourself and the child. It’s okay to not know the answer to every question a child asks. Great resources include the local library or local professional (teachers, counselors, nurses, doctors).

## Ways to Respond to Children's Questions

Sometimes children ask questions that may truly stump us. As with most things in life, starting a conversation (or response) may be the hardest part. Below are three different approaches to start a response to a child's "hard-to-answer" or inappropriately timed question. Remember: each child is different, and it is important to tailor any response in a way that makes the most sense for you and your relationship with the child.

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**Sample Question:** "Is it okay to not be straight?"

❖ ***Validate & Affirm.***

Validation and affirmative phrases are important to use with children as it reinforces the child's curious nature and helps to make them feel comfortable coming to you for future questions. A sample response to this question using affirmations may be, "I'm glad that you came to me with this question, thank you for asking it."

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❖ ***Open-ended questions.***

These types of questions are ones that cannot simply be answered with a yes or no and are a great way to keep the conversation going. A sample response to this question using an open-ended question could be, "That's a really important question and one where people have different beliefs about it. What are some things that you've heard about other people's beliefs on this topic?"

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❖ ***Reflections.***

Reflections, or reflective listening, involves repeating back what a child says to you in a slightly different way. Using reflective listening helps to show empathy towards the child, makes them feel heard, and can be a way to find out the root cause of the question. A sample response to this question using reflections would be, "You're feeling scared/nervous because you're unsure about your sexual orientation; is that correct?"

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## Extra Practice

Below are some additional questions that children may ask for you to practice using any of the various starter responses:

- "Can someone be sick and not know it?"
- "How do babies come out of vaginas?"
- "How come there are no fruits or veggies in the house?"