

# GET | REAL

Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

As you know, your child is attending a program called *Get Real: Comprehensive Sex Education That Works* in health class. The program gives young people the facts, in an age-appropriate way, on a range of sexual health and relationship topics. *Get Real* is based on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). It teaches students five skills that lead to healthy behavior: self-awareness, self-management, awareness of others, relationship skills and responsible decision making.

*Get Real* recognizes and supports parents and other trusted caregivers as the primary sexuality educators of their children. The teen years and changes of puberty can bring lots of questions and concerns for both parents and their kids. For many reasons, it can be hard to talk with children about sex. But results of a national survey show that parents have the most influence on their children's decisions about sex. A recent study from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (currently publishing as Power to Decide) found that 87% of U.S. teens said it would be easier to put off having sex if they were able to talk more openly about sex with their parents. But 37% said they had never had a talk with their parents on this topic.

Like last year, students in the *Get Real* program will bring home Family Activities for each class. These are designed to help families start conversations and share information. Please complete the homework with your student, sign, and return the sheet to class. Students who can't do the homework with a parent can work with a guardian or other trusted adult.

These Family Activities give parents a way to explore their own values about sex and sexuality. They'll help you provide facts and information your child can understand, and build skills for having ongoing talks about this important topic. Good information and other resources can also be found on the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts parent education website. Just visit [www.pplm.org/education](http://www.pplm.org/education) and click on "Parent Education."

Good communication between parents and children helps families share their values and enables young people to make healthier, safer and wiser decisions about sex. The themes below can help with your ongoing talks. Remember, it's your right and responsibility to share your values and the facts about sex with your child!

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**Themes for Parents to Think About**

**Rights and Responsibilities**

- As a parent, you have the right and responsibility to be your child's primary sexuality educator.
- Children *will* get information about sex from the culture around them.
- Taking action to teach your children about sexuality gives you the best chance of having a positive effect on their choices and experiences.
- Children have a right to get information from their parents. They also have a responsibility to understand that their choices about sexuality can have risks.

**Values**

- Think about your own beliefs and values, so you can clearly share them with your child.
- Look at where your beliefs and values come from. Which are universal? (For example, all children have a right to be safe.) Which are more individual? (For example, people differ in their beliefs about when it's OK for young people to become sexually active.)
- Honest communication between parents and children is key.
- It's OK for parents and children to disagree about values. Examining values can be a powerful, positive influence on a child's developing sexuality.

**Feelings and Self-Esteem**

- Explore your own feelings around sexuality. Share some of these with your child. Encourage your child to share feelings too.
- Practice how to listen closely. Don't judge or criticize. This will build trust and help your child feel comfortable coming to you with questions or concerns.
- Help your children feel good about who they are. This will build healthy self-esteem and lead to good decisions.

**Facts and Knowledge**

- Find the resources you need to give your child clear and accurate information about sexuality.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Promise to get back to your child with the answer. Or look for it together.
- Connect. Keep talking in an ongoing, open way.

## What's Different? What's the Same?

**Instructions:** Student and parent or other caring adult should share answers to the following questions with each other. See if you can learn something new about each other!

1. What are two things that are different about you this year, such as hairstyle, friends, job or height?

2. What are two things that are the same or similar about you this year?

3. What is something you hope will change for you this year?

4. What's something you hope will stay the same for you this year?

5. What's a question you still have about sexuality? (It might be about body changes, reproductive anatomy, gender identity, sexual orientation or love.)

6. What's a worry you might have about growing older or growing up?

### *Tips for Parents*

The goal of this activity is to promote conversations between *Get Real* students and caring adults in their lives. It provides a great chance to review material covered in class, research resources for additional information, and share your feelings and values.

*Note:* If it's embarrassing to discuss these issues with one another, you can decide to:

• Say so—and do the exercise anyway.

• Skip parts of it.

• Write down your answers and then read each other's answers.

• Laugh, giggle, blush, and go right on talking.

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Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature

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Student Signature

# GET | REAL

Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

Often parents wait for their kids to ask a question about puberty or sexuality rather than starting the conversation themselves. But many children and teens won't ask their parents questions about sexual topics, and parents may avoid these talks because they feel uncomfortable with the subject. A study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (currently publishing as Power to Decide) found that while 87% of U.S. teens said it would be easier to postpone sexual activity if they were able to talk more openly about sex with their parents, 37% had never had a conversation with their parents on this topic!

Media plays a big role in the lives of today's teens. So it's no wonder many of the messages young people get about sexuality come from the media they read and view. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than 75% of prime time TV programs had sexual content, but in only 14% of the cases were any risks or responsibilities of sexual activity shown. According to the Committee on Public Education, the average U.S. teen views nearly 14,000 sexual references each year, but only 165 of these will deal with birth control, self-control, abstinence or the risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.

Help your child learn to filter and assess these media messages. Teaching kids how to be media literate allows them to be an educated viewer who can notice and judge media content. Teens can learn to recognize sexual messages that are exploitive, irresponsible, and unrealistic. One good way to do this is to watch a movie or TV show, go online or read a magazine together. Then discuss the sexual content and messages you both observed.

Use the tips on the back of this letter and the *Get Real* Family Activity to encourage your child to share his or her views and start the conversation.

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**Tips for Talking with Youth About TV**

- Watch TV with your kids.
- Share reactions and ask questions. For example:
  - What do you think of the way that couple relates to each other?
  - How well did they know each other before having sex? Do you think they're making the right choice? What might happen?
  - Is that realistic? Do you think that people really act/think/look like that in real life?
  - Why do you suppose advertisers use sexy people to sell their products?
  - What do you think about the teen in that show having sex/getting pregnant/having a baby?
  - What message does that send?
- Talk about stereotypes shown on TV:
  - What do you think this says about kids? women? men? gay people? people of color? the elderly?
  - Do you think that's true about everyone? How is that portrayal inaccurate?
- Don't talk through the entire show. Look for the "teachable moments." Wait for the breaks and use the mute button.
- Do watch ads and discuss the marketing techniques:
  - Whom does the ad target?
  - What is the advertiser using to sell the product?
  - How does this ad play on people's insecurities?
- Don't have the TV on during meals.
- Listen to your kids' reactions. Try to understand where they are coming from. Don't expect them to always agree. Hearing their ideas, without judging or trying to change them, lets kids know you value them. It gives both of you a chance to think about other points of view and look at your own.

**Media Resources for Parents**

Follow the media ratings system: [www.tvguidelines.org](http://www.tvguidelines.org).

Teach kids and teens how to stay safe online: [www.netismartz.org](http://www.netismartz.org).

Read internet safety guidelines, articles and e-newsletter: [www.safekids.com](http://www.safekids.com).

Locate detailed reviews for parents on films, videos and tv shows:  
[www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org).

Research media activities by, with and for children: [www.unicef.org/magic](http://www.unicef.org/magic).

## The People on TV

**Instructions:** Together, brainstorm a list of models or actors from current TV shows and commercials that appear during popular shows your family watches. Then talk about these questions.

1. What do the actors usually look like? Be specific (hair, teeth, skin, clothes, body size).
2. Compared to the models/actors how do typical, everyday people look?
3. How might the contrast between the models/actors and other people affect viewers' self-esteem or thoughts about their own looks or bodies?
4. What helps the models/actors look the way they do in the ad or TV show? (What is the job of the make-up artist, hair stylist, clothing stylist, photographer, graphic designer, etc.)
5. Why don't advertisers use people with more realistic body types and looks in ads?
6. Rather than comparing ourselves to models/actors on TV, what are some ways we can measure our success, achievements and self-esteem?

### *Tips for Parents*

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Student Signature

# GET | REAL

## Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

This week in class, students learned more about gender identity and sexual orientation. Young people get messages about this topic from lots of sources, including peers, the media, and the internet. Parents and caregivers can help support the idea that all people deserve respect, no matter what their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity might be. Beliefs about sexual orientation vary and are often based on religious, cultural and family values. Some families already talk about this topic, while it may be challenging for others.

When talking about sexual orientation and gender identity, many different terms may be used. These definitions can help make the Family Activity and your ongoing talks more clear.

**Sexual orientation** refers to a person's feelings of emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to others.

- **Straight** refers to people who are emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to people of another gender.
- **Gay or lesbian** refers to people who are emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender.
- **Bisexual** refers to people who are emotionally, romantically and/or physically attracted to two genders.
- **Questioning** refers to people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Some people know from a young age that they are attracted to people of the same or another gender. For others, feelings can evolve over time.

**Gender identity** is people's deeply personal feeling of identifying as a man, a woman or some other gender, which may or may not line up with the sex assigned to them at birth.

- **Cisgender** is a term used to describe a person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Transgender** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from what might be expected based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

Being transgender is not the same as being gay or lesbian. *Transgender* describes a person's internal sense of gender identity, while *gay* or *lesbian* are terms that describe a person's sexual orientation—the feelings of emotional, romantic and physical attraction the person feels toward other people.

People who identify as transgender have some issues in common with gay, lesbian and bisexual people, such as "coming out" (when a person tells another person about their sexual orientation or gender identity), finding access to welcoming, supportive health care providers, self-esteem and being targets of prejudice or violence. But gender identity is *not* the same as sexual orientation.

## Patrick's Story

**Instructions:** Either the student or adult can read the story out loud to the other person. While reading or listening to the story, think about how Patrick felt before and after he talked to his parents. After the story, talk about ways that your family is respectful of—or could be more respectful of—people of differing sexual orientations.

### Patrick's Story

“Before I told my parents I was gay, the fear they wouldn’t accept me was overwhelming. Now, knowing that my parents are there for me is incredible. It makes everything better. I see so many stories on the news, and hear from other kids who are gay, that their families don’t accept them. My parents totally trust me, I know they support me. Parents need to know that a child they love may be gay. Unless your child tells you, you won’t know. There are ways to bring up the subject. For example, when parents see things about the gay community on TV, they need to be aware of comments they make. If they are supportive, children who are gay will feel they can trust their parents to accept them. There are probably hard times ahead for me. I am fully prepared for discrimination. There are people who are against homosexuals. I’ve dealt with them before, and I’ll probably have to deal with them again. But the love from my parents helps me cope with cruel comments. I know my parents love me. It makes me love myself more.”

(from *Words Can Work: When Talking with Kids About Sexual Health*, by Jeanne Blake, [www.wordscanwork.com](http://www.wordscanwork.com).)

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*Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature*

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*Student Signature*

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Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

Here are some helpful resources you can refer to in your talks with your child about sex and sexuality. They include call centers, websites and book lists. Try exploring some of the websites with your child to help you start talking and find some more activities to do together!

## Phone Resources

### Planned Parenthood Sexual Health Counseling and Referral Hotline

English/Spanish: 617-616-1616, Toll-Free: 1-800-258-4448, Option #3

*Mon., Tues., Thurs., 9 a.m.–8 p.m.; Wed., Fri., 9 a.m.–6 p.m.; Sat., 9 a.m.–3 p.m. (EST)*

Trained health center staff and volunteers are available to discuss a wide range of issues related to birth control, pregnancy options, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, and other aspects of reproductive health.

### AIDSinfo

1-800-HIV-0440 (1-800-448-0440), TTY: 1-888-480-3739

*Mon.–Fri. 1 p.m.–4 p.m. (EST)*

*Chat room available in English and Spanish: Mon.–Fri. 12 p.m.–4 p.m. (EST)*

Offers information on HIV treatment and research, customized clinical trial searches, and referrals to a host of other useful government-approved resources. Health information specialists can confidentially answer questions in both English and Spanish.

### Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

English/Spanish: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)

*24 hours a day, 7 days a week*

National Sexual Assault Hotline offers access to a range of free services including:

- Confidential, judgment-free support from a trained staff member
- Help with finding a local health facility trained to care for survivors of sexual assault that offers services such as sexual assault forensic exams
- Someone to help you talk through what happened
- Local resources that can assist with your next steps toward healing and recovery
- Referrals for long-term support in your area
- Information about the laws in your area
- Basic information about medical concerns

*(See reverse side for more resources)*

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**Websites**

**Planned Parenthood:** [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

This website contains information on contraception, pregnancy testing, emergency contraception, pregnancy options, STI and HIV testing and treatments, as well as a pro-choice action network and sex education programs.

**SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States):**

[www.siecus.org](http://www.siecus.org)

SIECUS provides medically accurate information about sex and sexually transmitted diseases. They also provide many guides for talking with children about these topics.

**Advocates for Youth:** [www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents)

This organization creates programs and advocates for policies that help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health.

**Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG):** [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

PFLAG's mission is to promote the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons and their families and friends. PFLAG provides support in coping with a hostile society, and offers education and advocacy.

**Books for Parents**

Debra Haffner, *Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens*.

Debra Haffner, *From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children*.

Justin Richardson and Mark Schuster, *Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex*.

Deborah Roffman, *Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense About Sex*.

Ellen Rosenberg, *Get a Clue: A Parent's Guide to Understanding and Communicating with Your Preteen*.

**Books for Adolescents (14–18)**

Carol Weston, *Girltalk*.

Columbia University Health Education Program, *The Go Ask Alice Book of Answers: A Guide to Good Physical, Sexual and Emotional Health*.

Ruth Bell, *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships*.

**Books for Preteens (10–14)**

Robie Harris, illustrated by Michael Emberly, *It's Perfectly Normal* (also en Español).

Lynda Madaras with Area Madaras, *"What's Happening to My Body?" Book for Girls: A Growing-Up Guide for Parents and Daughters* (recommended for ages 8 to 15).

Lynda Madaras with Area Madaras, *"What's Happening to My Body?" Book for Boys: A Growing-Up Guide for Parents and Sons* (recommended for ages 8 to 15).

## A Safe Place

**Instructions:** According to the CDC and the National School Climate Survey, students who describe themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) experience a significant amount of bullying and harassment. The worst experiences were reported in middle school. Working together, circle the answers you think are correct.

1. What percentage of LGBT students reported being verbally harassed at school in the past year?  
a. 30%    b. 50%    c. 80%
2. When compared to peers, this group...
  - a. was more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide in the past year than their heterosexual peers.
  - b. had the same likelihood of attempting suicide as their peer group.
  - c. was less likely to attempt suicide than their peer group.
3. What percentage of LGBT students skipped a day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable?  
a. 10%    b. 20%    c. 30%

### *Tips for Parents*

The goal of this activity is to promote conversations between *Get Real* students and caring adults in their lives. It provides a great chance to review material covered in class, research resources for additional information, and share your feelings and values.

*Note:* If it's embarrassing to discuss these issues with one another, you can decide to:

- Say so—and do the exercise anyway.
- Skip parts of it.
- Write down your answers and then read each other's answers.
- Laugh, giggle, blush, and go right on talking.

Discuss with each other:

- Has there ever been a time you felt unsafe at school, either physically or emotionally? What can you do to help create a safe school environment for everyone?
- How often do you hear anti-gay or anti-lesbian name-calling? (For example, "That's so gay.")
- How do anti-gay name-calling and bullying affect people who are or may be gay? How might it affect someone who is not gay?
- What are three ways people who are or think they might be gay or lesbian can find support? What are three ways people can be allies and support their gay and lesbian classmates?

(Quiz answers: 1. c, 2. a, 3. c)

Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature

Student Signature

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Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

In addition to being human beings, we are all sexual beings. Sexuality is a normal, healthy, natural part of being human at every stage of life. People's sexuality is made up of many aspects of their lives—sex is just one part.

Sexuality includes gender, the body and how it works, values, attitudes, beliefs and feelings about life, love and other people, as well as a person's sexual behaviors. Young people learn about their sexuality from the day they are born, and home is the first place they begin to learn about it. When kids feel good about their sexuality, it's easier for them to ask questions about sex later in life.

Parents and other caring adults can start to talk with kids about sexuality using many different themes, including relationships, communication, respect and body image, as well as intimacy and sexual behavior. These talks are a way to share values and facts that will help young people take charge of their lives, have loving relationships, and make healthier, safer and better-informed choices related to sexuality.

**Here are some ways to define key terms:**

*Sex* can refer to sex assigned at birth or sexual behaviors.

- ▣ *Sex assigned at birth* refers to how a person is most often assigned a sex at birth (male, female, intersex) based on their external genitalia.
- ▣ *Sexual behavior* usually involves touching oneself or another person in ways that cause sexual feelings and pleasure. Sexual behavior includes many different ways of touching. It can range from holding hands or massage to masturbation or intercourse (vaginal/oral/anal).

*Sexuality* changes and grows throughout a person's life. It includes sexual behaviors, sexual relationships and intimacy; but also includes:

- ▣ How we choose to express our gender (including the way we talk, dress, and relate to others)
- ▣ Sexual orientation (straight, gay, bisexual, and other orientations)
- ▣ Values, beliefs and attitudes as they relate to gender and sexual identity
- ▣ Changes bodies go through during life stages such as puberty, pregnancy and menopause
- ▣ Whether and how people choose to have children
- ▣ Relationships with romantic partners, friends and others
- ▣ The way people feel about how they look, who they are as a person, and how they treat others.

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A great resource is *The Parent Buzz*, a bimonthly newsletter that contains helpful strategies for talking with kids about sex and sexuality. It gives parents and other caring adults tips for talking with their children, current information about sex and sexuality issues and trends, links to useful websites, and descriptions of the stages of adolescent development. To receive *The Parent Buzz*, please visit [www.pplm.org/parenteducation](http://www.pplm.org/parenteducation) to sign up. If you decide *The Parent Buzz* isn't for you after reading one issue, simply click on the opt-out box in the newsletter.

## What to Do on a Date

**Instructions:** Student and parent or other caring adult should set aside some time to discuss this activity together. Pick 5 of the possible dating behaviors listed and brainstorm the pros and cons of each one.

### Dating behaviors:

- Chatting, emailing or texting
- Going out on a date in a group
- Dancing
- Touching a partner under clothes
- Hugging
- Going to an unsupervised party
- Watching a movie with a romantic or dating partner
- Talking
- Having sex
- Kissing

### *Tips for Parents*

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Say so—and do the exercise anyway.

Skip parts of it.

Write down your answers and then read each other's answers.

Laugh, giggle, blush, and go right on talking.

After brainstorming the pros and cons of these 5 activities, agree on a few boundaries around the issue of dating. Make sure that both the adult and the student are comfortable with the boundaries. (Examples: only going out with groups of friends, having a 9 p.m. curfew.)

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Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature

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Student Signature

# GET | REAL

Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

This week in *Get Real* class, your child has been learning about the concept of abstinence and how it relates to sexual activity. *Get Real* defines abstinence as choosing not to engage in certain sexual behaviors, including any sexual behavior that could result in pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection (STI), including HIV.

People may have different ideas about what abstinence is. For some it means no sexual contact of any kind, including kissing. For others it can include everything but sexual intercourse. Still others fall somewhere in between. Some people choose to abstain from sex until marriage. Some decide to put off or postpone having sex until they are older.

The Family Activity gives you a chance to share your personal and family values around sex and abstinence. Values are deeply held beliefs about what is right and appropriate for us and what is wrong. Some people think of values as morals. Values guide our decisions in life and can help us stay healthy. They help us model healthy behavior and respect ourselves and others.

As your child's primary sexuality educator, it is your right and responsibility to talk about your values around relationships, communication, respect for self and others, and other topics related to sex and sexuality. Even if you and your child disagree about some values, these discussions give you a chance to understand each other's point of view and explain why you feel the way you do.

**There are different kinds of values:**

- ▣ **Personal values** come from our own experiences and are not necessarily agreed on by everyone. For example someone might tidy his or her room every day because of a value for cleanliness. Or different families may have different beliefs about when it's appropriate for people to begin engaging in sexual activity.
- ▣ **Cultural values** are influenced by groups, societies or cultures and are largely shaped by their members. For example, a person growing up in the United States might value democracy because that is the accepted political ideal of this country.
- ▣ **Universal values** can be looked at as values important to the majority of humans. For example, across most cultures, people value safety, personal health and self-respect.

## An Article About Abstinence

**Instructions:** The student will be a reporter writing a column on abstinence who will interview the parent or other caring adult using the following questions.

*"I'm doing research for an article on abstinence for the local newspaper to find out what it means to different people and why it can be confusing. I have some questions for you."*

1. Please define the word *abstinence* for me. What is your idea of what this word means?
2. Do you think it might mean something different to someone else? Why might a common word have different meanings for different people?

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3. What if two people in a relationship had different ideas about what abstinence means? What could happen? How could they talk about it?
4. Do you think the word or concept of abstinence is confusing for young people?
5. What can parents, caregivers and teachers do to make it less confusing?

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*Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature*

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*Student Signature*

# GET | REAL

Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

When it comes to sex and sexuality, many parents wait for their kids to ask a question instead of bringing up the topic. But many children won't ask a parent questions about sexual topics, and some parents may avoid the subject because they feel uncomfortable. The Family Activity for this *Get Real* lesson will help you talk about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and share the facts with your teen.

Open-ended questions can be used to start these conversations and keep the door open for a comfortable dialogue about sex and sexuality. Inviting teens to share their observations and ideas can be a good way to ease into discussions. ("The character in that TV show was pretty angry at her boyfriend. Do you think she was right?" or "Have you ever thought about when you might be ready to have sex? What do you think makes a person ready?")

It's important to validate teens' questions about sex and sexuality. It's also key to really listen without judging when they share their thoughts and feelings. You can be an "askable" parent by rewarding questions with, "I'm glad you came to me." This will reassure your children that you are open to talking with them about these issues, and teach them to come to you when they have questions. Remember that the unspoken question, "Am I normal?" is often hiding behind many of kids' questions and concerns about sexual development, sexual thoughts and sexual feelings.

## Door Openers

- What do you think?
- That's a good question.
- Tell me what that means to you.
- I'm glad you told me about that.
- I think you're saying that you *[fill in the blank]*—is that right?
- Tell me more.

## Door Slammers

- You're too young!
- Where on earth did you hear that?
- Do you want to know about it because you're doing it?
- That's none of your business!
- I don't care what your friends are doing.
- We'll talk about that when you need to know.

*(See reverse side for more ideas)*

Continued

**For Kids Who Don't Bring Up the Subject**

- "I can't believe how tall you've grown already. Have you noticed other changes in your body? What do you like (or what don't you like) about the changes you're going through?"
- "When do you think a person is ready to be a parent?"

**Answering Those Tough Questions You Don't Feel Ready for**

- "That's a really good question. It's normal to be curious about *[fill in the topic]*. I'd really like to talk about it with you but I need some time to think about it first."
- "What have you heard or learned already about *[fill in the subject]*, and where did you hear it?"

**Questions Parents Can Ask That Open the Door to Discussing Values**

- "How do you think people know for sure whether they're ready to have sex?"
- "What do you think about how the couple on *[fill in a favorite TV show]* deal with each other when they get angry?"

**Ways to Give the Facts and Clear Up Slang While Responding to the Question**

**Q.** Why do we need to talk about this stuff? I'm not having sex.

**A.** I know it can be embarrassing to talk about, and I get embarrassed, too. But there are so many things you need to know about as you grow and mature. Your body is going to change, and some of those changes can seem scary or strange. I want you to have all the right information so you can stay safe and healthy.

**Q.** Where do girls pee from?

**A.** Another word to describe peeing is "urinating." People urinate through the urethra, a small tube in the body that connects to the bladder.

**Q.** Everyone is talking about "hooking up." What does that mean?

**A.** That's a great question. I think it means different things to different people. Some people might use it to describe going out or dating, but others might use it to describe sexual contact in a casual way (not in a serious relationship with a partner). Here's what concerns me about that: *[insert your personal and family values here.]* What do you think "hooking up" means?

## Understanding STIs

**Instructions:** Draw a line to connect the first half of each sentence on the left to the corresponding second half on the right.

HPV...

...often have no symptoms and can be cured with antibiotics.

The HPV vaccine...

...can cause blisters and be transmitted through oral sex.

Genital herpes...

...often has no symptoms and has a vaccine that can reduce risk.

Chlamydia and gonorrhea...

...protects people from the types of HPV that cause the most cases of genital warts and cervical cancer.

Then discuss the following questions with your parent or other caring adult:

- Sometimes people don't know they have an STI because there are no symptoms. How could a person who didn't know tell a partner?
- Where in our community can people get STI health services if they need them?
- What are some things every person can do to prevent STIs from being spread?

### *Tips for Parents*

The goal of this activity is to promote conversations between *Get Real* students and caring adults in their lives. It provides a great chance to review material covered in class, research resources for additional information, and share your feelings and values.

*Note:* If it's embarrassing to discuss these issues with one another, you can decide to:

Say so—and do the exercise anyway.

Skip parts of it.

Write down your answers and then read each other's answers.

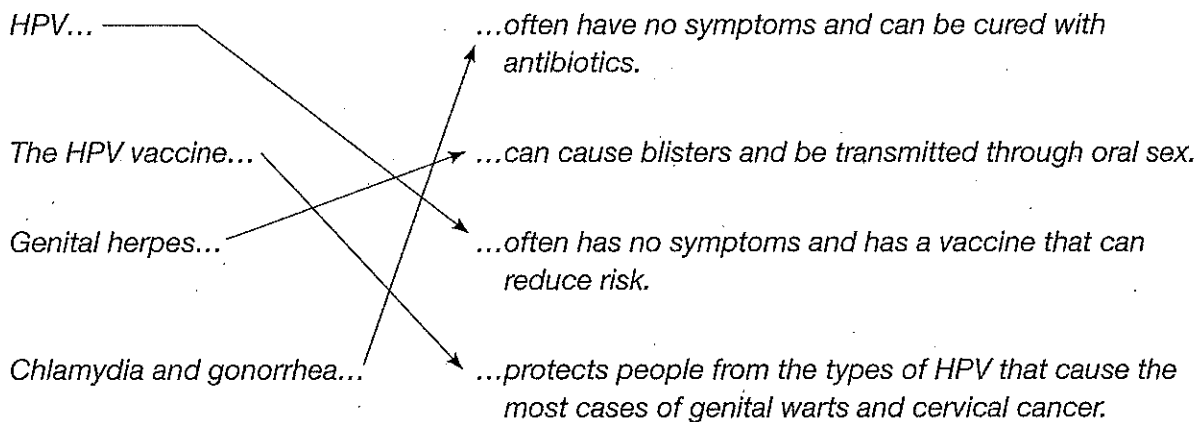
Laugh, giggle, blush, and go right on talking.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Student Signature*

## Understanding STIs

**Instructions:** Draw a line to connect the first half of each sentence on the left to the corresponding second half on the right.



Then discuss the following questions with your parent or other caring adult:

- Sometimes people don't know they have an STI because there are no symptoms. How could a person who didn't know tell a partner?

*People who are sexually active can protect themselves and their partners by getting tested for STIs regularly (every 3–6 months), and before engaging in sexual activity with a new partner. People can also use condoms every time they have sex to reduce the risk of getting or transmitting an STI to a partner.*

- Where in our community can people get STI health services if they need them?

*Answers will vary.*

- What are some things every person can do to prevent STIs from being spread?

*Be abstinent; communicate openly and honestly with a partner; use condoms if sexually active; get tested for STIs regularly if sexually active; don't have concurrent sexual partners.*

### Tips for Parents

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Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature

Student Signature

# GET | REAL

Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

Today in *Get Real* class, students learned about the protection methods available to help prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for people who choose to be sexually active. Children are naturally curious about their bodies and how they work. During puberty, they want and need the facts about menstruation, wet dreams, other body changes, sex and reproduction. They want to know about sexual and social relationships. They need to know about STIs, birth control methods, and the potential risks of sexual activity.

At this age many kids worry a lot about whether they are “normal.” Concerns about body shapes, such as penis or breast size, may begin to arise. It’s important to reassure them that no two people are the same, and it’s very normal to be different. Preteens often want to “fit in” with their peers, yet, at the same time adults want to help them to think for themselves and not get carried away by the crowd.

Below are some real questions middle school students asked through the Anonymous Questions Box used in the *Get Real* classes. You can visit websites listed on the Parent Resources list sent home earlier, or use a book, such as *It’s Perfectly Normal*, by Robie Harris, to help you answer these and other questions. Practice how you might answer, sharing both the facts and your values, if your child asks you any of these questions.

## Anatomy and Physiology

- What is the average size of a penis?
- When does someone first start having their periods? Why do they have a period?

## Contraceptives

- When you have sex, do you have to use more than one condom?
- Do condoms always protect people from getting a disease?

## Pregnancy

- How old was the youngest person to get pregnant?
- If you smoke when you’re pregnant, what will happen to the baby?

## Sexual Behavior

- Is sex fun?
- Even if you think you are ready, how do you know you really like someone enough to have sex?
- Is oral sex healthy if there are no diseases involved?
- Can you have sex with people younger than you?

## Gender and Sexual Identity

- How do gay people have sex?
- Why are people transgender?
- If it’s OK for girls to wear pants, why can’t boys wear skirts?

## The Best Protection

*Over a lifetime, most people choose to be sexually active at some point. When a person does start having sex it's very important to be protected from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection (STI).*

*The best protection method is the one a person feels safe and comfortable using consistently and correctly every time. That method could be abstinence or postponement. It could be a barrier or hormonal method. There are many things to think about when choosing a protection method—people have to choose what will work most effectively for them.*

**Instructions:** First, the student and parent or other caring adult should brainstorm together the qualities of an “ideal” protection method and how it would work. List some of its advantages (e.g., is invisible, affordable, etc.). Use your imagination and work together to create the next great product on the market!

Next, list all the protection methods you both can think of that are currently available. Feel free to refer to the Protection Methods Chart. Compare and contrast how they measure up against the “ideal protection method” that you brainstormed.

Discuss:

1. What might stop someone from using a protection method?
2. How would you explain to someone why a protection method is important?
3. Name three resources in your community where someone can get protection methods.

### *Tips for Parents*

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- Laugh, giggle, blush, and go right on talking.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Other Caring Adult Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

# GET | REAL

## Comprehensive Sex Education That Works

Dear Parent or Other Caring Adult,

This was the final week of *Get Real* classes! The Family Activity will help you and your child talk about the experience together. We hope you have found the *Get Real* Family Activities and letters helpful in your ongoing conversations with your child.

**As the primary sexuality educator of your child, here are some general strategies to remember as you continue to talk about relationships, communication, decision making and values—the keys to sexual health!**

- **Remember, sexuality isn't just about sex.** Sexuality includes gender, reproduction and sexual activity, but it's also much more. Sexuality involves feelings, attitudes, intimacy, caring, messages about gender, body image and sexual orientation.
- **Know that children and teens want to hear from their parents.** Teens cite parents as the number-one influence on their sexual decision making. Remind them that you care and want to help them make safe, healthy choices.
- **Be connected with their world.** Be curious about young people's interests (music, TV, sports, etc.) and get to know their friends.
- **Affirm them.** Compliments and support build positive self-esteem and will help your child open up to you.
- **Talk less, listen more.** Ask questions that open the door for discussion (e.g., "When do you think a person is ready to be a parent?"). Validate your child's questions, and really listen to your child's thoughts and views without judging. Start on a positive note by giving a compliment.
- **Choose the right times.** Talk in the car or having a snack, etc., not when people are on the run or in the middle of an activity such as homework.
- **Be prepared.** Learn about the sexuality education being taught in the schools, faith communities and youth groups. Identify available resources, such as websites, books and professionals.
- **Remember that it's never too late.** Starting early and talking often is great. But it's never too late to begin. Conversations about sexuality should be ongoing.
- **Be honest.** Communicate your true feelings and values. If you believe your child should wait to become sexually active, say so in a positive, supportive way. Don't expect to have all the answers. Admit when you don't know. Be willing to seek answers together. It's OK to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, as long as you keep talking.
- **Understand why facts and knowledge are important.** Respect your child's right to accurate and honest information about sexuality. Giving them the information they need helps young people make good decisions.

## What Have We Learned?

**Instructions:** Work together to finish these sentences. Think about the things you've both learned and discussed over the 9 weeks of *Get Real* classes and Family Activities.

1. One fact I learned about sex and sexuality is...

2. One value about sex and sexuality I have is...

3. One thing I still wonder about the topic of sex and sexuality is...

4. One thing I want my parent or child to understand about my feelings on this topic is...

5. One thing that's working in our relationship and communication about this topic is...

6. One of the main messages I want to share with my parent or child about the topic of sex and sexuality is...

### *Tips for Parents*

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