Have You Had "The Talk" Yet?
Innovative Ways to Address Parents/Guardians and Providers about Adolescent Sexual Health (Roundtable)

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OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this workshop is to

A. Identify factors that influence adolescent sexual practices

B. Identify the role of parents

C. Provide resources and innovative strategies on how to talk to adolescents about sexual reproductive health
FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE ADOLESCENT SEXUAL PRACTICES

Parents
Peers
Media
Access to education and services
Mental Health
Religious institutions
Factors Contributing to Problematic Adolescent Sexual Practices

- Child Vulnerabilities:
  - Developmental & verbal delays; impulse control problems

- Family Adversity:
  - Lack of guidance & supervision; stress/trauma; parental depression & substance use

- Modeling of Coercion:
  - Physical abuse; domestic violence; peer violence; community violence

- Modeling of Sexuality:
  - Sexual Abuse
  - Penetration
  - Multiple Perpetrators
  - Sexualized Environment

Adapted from Friedrich, Davis, et al. 2003
Ways Parents Can Have “The Talk”
Tips about “The Talk”

How Can I Start Talking to My Kids About Sexuality?

• Everyday life provides lots of opportunities for talking about sexuality. When watching a TV show that shows a young person going through puberty or going out on a date, seeing an ad that prompts thoughts about body acceptance, or running into a pregnant neighbor, we can use that to initiate conversations with our children. These teachable moments occur every day, and can help make the conversation easier and more natural.

When Should I Start Talking to My Kids About Sexuality?

• Some of us plan “the talk” for months, expecting to say everything important all at once. Then, when “the talk” doesn’t go as planned, we get frustrated. But talking with children about sexuality is a lifelong conversation. Doing a little bit at a time helps set realistic goals when we talk with our children. It also helps keep children from feeling overwhelmed.

• It’s best to start talking with children about sexuality early. Children are curious about their bodies, being a boy or girl, and different kinds of relationships from a very early age. Their curiosity creates a natural opportunity to begin the conversation and start building a respectful and trusting relationship. For young children, you can start by teaching them the names of their body parts or asking if they know why girls and boys look different.

• When we talk to our children about sex, it’s important to keep our conversation age appropriate. If a five-year-old asks, “what is birth?” we might respond, “when a baby comes out of a mother’s body.” If a 10-year-old asks the same question, our answer would have more detail and might begin with, “After nine months of growing inside its mother’s uterus, a baby comes out through her vagina…”

• Providing young people with information that is age-appropriate makes it easier for them to understand that sex is a natural part of human and emotional development. It also makes it easier to talk with them about the more complicated aspects of sexual intimacy as they get older.

• Don’t worry if you haven’t started talking with your children about sexuality yet. It’s never too late. Just don’t try to “catch up” all at once. The most important thing is to be open and available whenever a child wants to talk.
Tips about “The Talk”

What Kinds of Things Should I Tell my Kids?

• It’s important to give our kids truthful, useful, and accurate information that conveys our own values about sex and sexuality. It’s also important to prepare them to make responsible choices whenever they become sexually active. By the time they turn 19 years old, 70 percent of teens have had intercourse. So in addition to conveying our own values about sexual relationships, it’s important to talk with teens about preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

• It helps to think ahead of time about what messages we want to express. For example, a common topic that comes up with children is the difference between boys and girls or men and women. Some parents might want to convey the feeling that boys and girls are mostly the same except for some body parts, and boys and girls can do the same things. Other parents may want to express the belief that boys and girls are quite different from one another in many ways.

• Talking about sexuality may be uncomfortable at first, but it will get easier in time. Being open to discussing sexuality can be challenging. It’s common for parents and kids to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable when talking to one another about sex. Owning up to that can help relieve the tension. We might try saying, “It’s totally normal that this feels awkward, but I love you and care about you so we need to talk about important things like this.” In time and with practice, it will get easier. The key is to keep the conversation open and ongoing.

• Listening to children shows them that we’re interested in and respect what they have to say. We don’t always have to agree with what we hear, but it is important to pay attention to what they say.

• It can be tempting to jump in and give our point of view, but if we spend some time just listening and asking questions, we help our kids learn how to explain their ideas clearly. We get to know each other even better, and we build trust by showing we really care about our kids’ thoughts and feelings. We can show we understand their point of view by saying things like, “I think I see where you are coming from...” or “I understand what you are feeling and I often felt that way when I was your age, too.”
Tips about “The Talk”

How Do I Answer My Kid’s Questions About Sex and Sexuality?

• Our kids have various reasons for asking us questions about sex and sexuality. They might ask out of curiosity. They may need help making a decision or making sense of the world. Or they may need to be reassured that they are “normal.” Kids may also disguise their real questions with other questions. So, no matter how surprising their questions may be, kids always need honest, factual answers.

Additional Tips

• Try to find out what is really being asked. What seems like a straightforward question might not be. To find out the true nature of the question, we might ask, “What have you heard about that?” “What do you think about that?” or “Can you tell me what you already know about that?”

• Don’t answer with too much information. We can keep answers short and simple and explain new words that our children might not have heard before. After giving an answer, we might encourage our kids to ask us follow-up questions by asking, “Is there anything else you would like to know?”

• Check their understanding. After answering a question, we can ask, “Does that answer your question?”

• Some parents worry that they won’t know the answers to their children’s questions. It’s perfectly fine not to know something, or not to have an immediate answer. One of the best ways we can teach our kids about sexuality is to find the answers together and then talk about what we’ve learned. Seeking out information together in books, online, or by asking others can help build a respectful and trusting relationship, as well as model how our kids can seek answers on their own.
Resources for Helping Parents Give “The Talk”


**Articles on How to Talk to Kids About Sex**

- If you need to start with a few pointers, check out these articles that can help you express the key points of the birds and bees, and address questions children may have.

1. **Parenting – Talking to Kids About Sex**: How and when to talk to kids about sex, including the age range where certain topics are appropriate.
2. **4 Parents**: This is a great website for parents and discusses giving your kids a healthy attitude towards sex, while preparing them with what they need to know.
3. **Family Education – Talking About Sex**: Talking to kids about sex means choosing your words wisely. Here’s an article that teaches you how to phrase things when having the talk.
4. **Medicine Net - Sex Education for Kids**: This article talks about why you should always make sex a neutral topic, allowing your child to feel comfortable and ask questions.
5. **About Our Kids – Towards a Better Understanding of Children's Sexual Behavior**: This article talks about misconceptions and appropriate ages to talk to your kids about the various aspects of sex.
6. **LA Times - Franco Talk With Kids About Sex**: See how this playful, approachable museum exhibit was used to explain the birds and the bees to kids.
7. **Modern Mom - When to Give the Sex Talk**: This concise article talks about misconceptions and appropriate ages to talk to your kids about the various aspects of sex.
8. **About Our Kids - Towards a Better Understanding of Children’s Sexual Behavior**: This is an article that can talk about any subject in a frank manner that will make both parents and children comfortable, creating an open forum for questions and answers.
9. **WellSphere – Talk About Sex With Kids**: This article links to various sources for talking to kids about tough issues, including HIV/AIDS and the media.
10. **Island Sexual Health – Talking to Kids About S-E-X**: A rundown of what age is right for what level of sex talk can be found here.
11. **eHow – How to Talk to Kids About Safe Sex**: When giving your kids the talk, it’s imperative you talk about safe sex practices.
12. **CBC – How You Talk to Your Kids About Sex**: CBC interviews three professionals about how they handle the sex talk with their own children.
13. **Dads Today – Straight Talk About Sex**: Starting early and telling kids like it is proves to be the most effective way for parents to talk to their children about sex.
14. **Time Out New York – How to Talk to Kids 12 and Under About Sex**: This article links to further reading on how to handle various sexuality topics with your children. Subjects include gender identity and an interview with a sex educator.
15. **Dr. Phil – Talk to Your Teen About Sex and Oral Sex**: Parents should know the facts about sex and oral sex before sitting down with their child. Here are a few pointers that parents can use for the talk.
16. **LA Times - Franco Talk With Kids About Sex**: See how this playful, approachable museum exhibit was used to explain the birds and the bees to kids.
17. **Modern Mom - When to Give the Sex Talk**: This concise article talks about misconceptions and appropriate ages to talk to your kids about the various aspects of sex.
18. **About Our Kids - Towards a Better Understanding of Children’s Sexual Behavior**: This is an article that can talk about any subject in a frank manner that will make both parents and children comfortable, creating an open forum for questions and answers.
19. **NY Times – Another Awkward Sex Talk: Respect and Violence**: Talking to your children about sex has to encompass the good, the bad and the ugly. This article touches on the topics of respect and violence when teens are learning about sex.
20. **Time – Parents’ Sex Talk Too Late**: Tim Magazine examines a study that says parents are waiting far too long to have the sex talk with children and tweens.
21. **Self Help Magazine – What is Considered “Normal” Sexual Health and Behavior**: Here’s a list from the pros that explains what a child’s curiosities are at particular ages when it comes to sex.
22. **Planning Parenthood – How to Talk to Your Children About Sex**: At this sect of the Planned Parenthood site, you’ll find links to helpful articles on talking to your kids about sex.
23. **The Well Project – Talking to Your Children About HIV**: Safe sex must be stressed as kids become young adults (and may be sexually active). Here’s how to have the talk on HIV/AIDS to ensure your child knows the facts.
24. **Kids Growth – Talking to Kids About Puberty**: Puberty comes before sex, so help your kids know what’s happening to their bodies before delving further into the birds and the bees.
25. **Parent Central – Talking to Kids About Sex is Often Mom’s Job**: This article discusses how it’s usually a mother that explains sex to kids and why other dad or older siblings should also be a trustworthy source for kids to ask questions.
Resources for Helping Parents Give “The Talk”

- **24. TVO Parents - Talking to Kids About HIV/AIDS**: An in-depth look at talking to children about HIV/AIDS, including what age to bring up the topic and when to add more information so your child ends with a solid education on the subject.
- **25. Primary System - For Parents**: This is a great resource because it’s available in both English and Spanish, giving parents helpful tips on how to have the sex talk and address everything from respect for one’s body to safe sex practices.
- **26. L5 Online - Talk to Your Kid About Sex Often**: An article on why it’s best to mention sex often to make it less awkward and more normal to your child versus keeping it a hush-hush topic.
- **27. Time Out New York Kids - Sex Ed Resources**: This article gives you a synopsis of some of the best sex-ed books out there if you want to give the talk and then hand over a book to your teen.
- **28. Go Ask Alice! - How do I Begin Talking to My Children About Sex?**: A breakdown of how having the talk has evolved over the years and what to say when you encounter a “teachable moment.”
- **29. A Better Child - Talking to Your Kids About Sex**: This article talks about how to tell your child about your own values and views on sex without clouding theirs.
- **30. BC Council for Families - Beyond the Birds and the Bees**: Along with talking to kids about the technicalities of sex, be sure to bring up relationship talk as advised in this article.
- **31. MenStuff - Talk to Your Kids**: A great read for dads, these short articles discuss talking to kids about the birds and the bees, as well as HIV and sex protection.
- **Parent Forums**: If you feel like you’re the only one giving the sex talk, know that you aren’t alone. Check out these forums where parents can share tips and get advice from experts on giving the birds and the bee talk.
- **32. Today’s Parent**: Stop by this chatty message board and see how other parents are handling talking to their kids about the birds and the bees.
- **33. eHealth Forum - Parenting**: This forum has a generous section devoted to dealing with kids and teens when it comes to talking about sex and how to express your opinion on the subject, while sticking to the faces.
- **34. ParentTalk Forums**: Parents here are talking about how they handle explaining a child’s sexuality and body parts at various ages throughout childhood.
- **35. Chadz Boyz**: This forum is for male gay teens, as well as parents and teachers who want to lend support and learn more about the male gay teen community.
- **Resources Parents of Teens and Teens on Sex**: Once a child knows the basics, they are likely to have more questions as they become teens. Luckily, the Internet has a bevy of resources for teens to learn on their own, after having the proper talk from a parent or counselor on the basics of sex and safe sex practices.
- **36. Teen Source**: This is a fantastic resource for teens to learn about their sexuality and topics such as lube and birth control.
- **37. I Wanna Know**: This is a stellar site that is devoted to educating teens on what’s what when it comes to sex. It debunks myths and shares the facts so teens know what they’re dealing with.
- **38. Stories of Sex Education**: If answering a few questions for your teen makes you squirm, check out these stories on how teens are getting their sex education. It will make you want to be your child’s #1 source on the topic.
- **39. Kaiser Family Foundation - The Entertainment Media as “Sex Educators?”**: Many teens learn about sex through the media. Read the study on this and realize why you should be the go-to source for your teen.
- **40. Kids Health - Contraception**: This article gives teens the facts on birth control and links to further reading on specific types so they can decide what works for them.
- **41. Advocates for Youth**: This program is aimed at empowering teens so they make smart decisions when it comes to their body and sexual relationships.
- **42. Scarleteen**: This is a great site for teens to check out because it touches on everything from rape to homosexuality, as well as the standard teen sex curiosities.
- **43. Like It Is**: This site is aimed at teens from the UK and Australia, but can be utilized by anyone with questions on sex. We love it because it indeed tells it “like it is,” never scaring teenagers into one decision or direction, but simply giving them the facts so they can make informed choices.
- **44. The Cool Page for Queer Teens**: This site provides great information for gay teens to learn about sex, becoming comfortable with their sexuality and listening to their bodies.
- **45. The Entertain Media**: Along with talking to kids about the technicalities of sex, be sure to bring up relationship talk as advised in this article.
- **46. TVO Parents - Talking to Kids About HIV/AIDS**: Developed by MTV, this site stresses the importance of safe sex, getting tested regularly for STDs if you’re sexually active and how to have conversations on both topics with your partner.
- **47. It’s Your Sex Life**: Teenagers will have questions. Here’s how to approach a conversation with an adult who cares.
- **48. Sex, Bitch - Want to Learn About Sex?**: The pros now tell us that having several small conversations with your child over the course of their life is the most effective way to teach them about their body, sexuality and sexual relationships. Kids know more at an early age than previous generations, so it’s imperative they’re armed with the facts from someone they can trust, allowing them to make decisions that are comfortable.