

Are You an Askable Parent?

As a parent or caregiver, it is very important for you to be *askable*. What does that mean? How do adults become *askable*?

To be *askable* means that young people see you as approachable and open to questions. Being *askable* about sexuality is something that most parents and caregivers want but that many find very difficult. Adults may have received little or no information about sex when they were children. Sex may not have been discussed in their childhood home, whether from fear or out of embarrassment. Or, adults may worry about:

- Not knowing the *right* words or the *right* answers;
- Being *out of it* in the eyes of their young people;
- Giving too much or too little information; or
- Giving information at the wrong time.

Being *askable* is important. Research shows that youth with the least accurate information about sexuality and sexual risk behaviors may experiment more and at earlier ages compared to youth who have more information.^{1,2,3,4,5} Research also shows that, when teens are able to talk with a parent or other significant adult about sex and about protection, they are less likely to engage in early and/or unprotected sexual intercourse than are teens who haven't talked with a trusted adult.^{6,7,8,9} Finally, youth often say that they want to discuss sex, relationships, and sexual health with their parents—parents are their preferred source of information on these subjects.^{10,11}

Because being *askable* is so important and because so many adults have difficulty initiating discussions about sex with their children, adults may need to learn new skills and become more confident about their ability to discuss sexuality. Here are some tips from experts in the field of sex education.

Talking with Young People about Sexuality

1. **Acquire a broad foundation of factual information from reliable sources.** Remember that sexuality is a much larger topic than sexual intercourse. It includes biology and gender, of course, but it also includes emotions, intimacy, caring, sharing, and loving, attitudes, flirtation, and sexual orientation as well as reproduction and sexual intercourse.
2. **Learn and use the correct terms for body parts and functions.** If you have difficulty saying some words without embarrassment, practice saying these words, in private and with a mirror, until you are as comfortable with them as with non-sexual words. For example, you want to be able to say “penis” as easily as you say “elbow.”
3. **Think through your own feelings and values about love and sex.** Include your childhood memories, your first infatuation, your values, and how you feel about current sex-related issues, such as contraceptives, reproductive rights, and equality with regard to sex, gender, and sexual orientation. You must be aware of how you feel before you can effectively talk with youth.
4. **Talk *with* your child.** Listen more than you speak. Make sure you and your child have open, *two-way* communication—as it forms the basis for a positive relationship between you and your child. Only by listening to each other can you understand one another, especially regarding love and sexuality, for adults and youth often perceive these things differently.
5. **Don't worry about—**
 - Being “with it.” Youth have that with their peers. From you, they want to know what you believe, who you are, and how you feel.
 - Being embarrassed. Your kids will feel embarrassed, too. That's okay, because love and many aspects of sexuality, including sexual intercourse, are highly personal. Young people understand this.

- Deciding which parent should have this talk. Any loving parent or caregiver can be an effective sex educator for his/her children.
- Missing some of the answers. It's fine to say that you don't know. Just follow up by offering to find the answer or to work with your child to find the answer. Then do so.

Talking with Young Children

1. **Remember that if someone is old enough to ask, she/he is old enough to hear the correct answer and to learn the correct word(s).**
2. **Be sure you understand what a young child is asking.** Check back. For example, you might say, "I'm not certain that I understand exactly what you are asking. Are you asking if it's okay to do this or why people do this?" What you don't want is to launch into a long explanation that doesn't answer the child's question.
3. **Answer the question when it is asked.** It is usually better to risk embarrassing a few adults (at the supermarket, for example) than to embarrass your child or to waste a teachable moment. Besides, your child would usually prefer it if you answer right then and softly. If you cannot answer at the time, assure the child that you are glad he/she asked and set a time when you will answer fully. "I'm glad you asked that. Let's talk about it on the way home."
4. **Answer slightly above the level you think your child will understand,** both because you may be underestimating him/her and because it will create an opening for future questions. But, don't forget that you are talking with a young child. For example, when asked about the differences between boys and girls, don't get out a textbook and show drawings of the reproductive organs. A young child wants to know what is on the *outside*. So, simply say, "A boy has a penis, and a girl has a vulva."
5. **Remember that, even with young children, you must set limits.** You can refuse to answer personal questions. "What happens between your father and me is personal, and I don't talk about it with anyone else." Also, make sure your child understands the difference between values and standards relating to his/her question. For example, if a child asks whether it is bad to masturbate, you could say, "Masturbation is not bad; however, we never masturbate in public. It is a *private* behavior." [values *versus* standards] You should also warn your child that other adults may have different *values* about this subject while they will hold to the same *standard*; that is, they may believe it is wrong and a private behavior.

Talking with Teens

1. **Recall how you felt when you were a teen.** Remember that adolescence is a difficult time. One moment, a teen is striving for separate identity and independence, and the next moment urgently needs an adult's support.
2. **Remember that teens want mutually respectful conversations.** Avoid dictating. Share your feelings, values, and attitudes *and* listen to and learn about theirs. Remember that you cannot dictate anyone else's feelings, attitudes, or values.
3. **Don't assume that a teen is sexually experienced or inexperienced, knowledgeable or naive.** Listen carefully to what your teen is saying and/or asking. Respond to the teen's actual or tacit question, not to your own fears or worries.
4. **Don't underestimate your teen's ability to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various options.** Teens have values, and they are capable of making mature, responsible decisions, especially when they have all the needed facts and the opportunity to discuss options with a supportive adult. If you give your teen misinformation she/he may lose trust in you, just as he/she will trust you if you are a consistent source of clear and accurate information. Of course, a teen's decisions may be different from ones you would make; but that goes with the territory.

Being *askable* is a lifelong component of relationships. It opens doors to closer relationships and to family connections. It's never too late to begin!

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Ten Tips for Parents to Help Their Children Avoid Teen Pregnancy

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has reviewed recent research about parental influences on children's sexual behavior and talked to many experts in the field, as well as to teens and parents themselves. From these sources, it is clear that there is much parents and adults can do to reduce the risk of kids becoming pregnant before they've grown up.

Presented here as "ten tips," many of these lessons will seem familiar because they articulate what parents already know from experience—like the importance of maintaining strong, close relationships with children and teens, setting clear expectations for them, and communicating honestly and often with them about important matters. Research supports these common sense lessons: not only are they good ideas generally, but they can also help teens delay becoming sexually active, as well as encourage those who are having sex to use contraception carefully.

Finally, although these tips are for parents, they can be used by adults more generally in their relationships with teenagers. Parents—especially those who are single or working long hours—often turn to other adults for help in raising their children and teens. If all these caring adults are on the same "wavelength" about the issues covered here, young people are given more consistent messages. So, What to Do?

1. Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes.

Communicating with your children about sex, love, and relationships is often more successful when you are certain in your own mind about these issues. To help clarify your attitudes and values, think about the following kinds of questions:

- What do you really think about school-aged teenagers being sexually active, perhaps even becoming parents?
- Who is responsible for setting sexual limits in a relationship and how is that done, realistically?
- Were you sexually active as a teenager and how do you feel about that now? Were you sexually active before you were married? What do such reflections lead you to say to your own children about these issues?
- What do you think about encouraging teenagers to abstain from sex?
- What do you think about teenagers using contraception?

2. Talk with your children early and often about sex, and be specific.

Kids have lots of questions about sex, and they often say that the source they'd most like to go to for answers is their parents. Start the conversation, and make sure that it is honest, open, and respectful. If you can't think of how to start the discussion, consider using situations shown on television or in movies as conversation starters. Tell them candidly and confidently what you think and *why* you take

these positions; if you're not sure about some issues, tell them that, too. Be sure to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture. Ask them what *they* think and what they know so you can correct misconceptions. Ask what, if anything, worries them.

Age-appropriate conversations about relationships and intimacy should begin early in a child's life and continue through adolescence. Resist the idea that there should be just one conversation about all this—you know, “the talk.” The truth is that parents and kids should be talking about sex and love all along. This applies to *both* sons and daughters and to *both* mothers and fathers, incidentally. All kids need a lot of communication, guidance, and information about these issues, even if they sometimes don't appear to be interested in what you have to say. And if you have regular conversations, you won't worry so much about making a mistake or saying something not quite right, because you'll always be able to talk again.

Many inexpensive books and videos are available to help with any detailed information you might need, but don't let your lack of technical information make you shy. Kids need as much help in understanding the *meaning* of sex as they do in understanding how all the body parts work. Tell them about love and sex, and what the difference is. And remember to talk about the reasons that kids find sex interesting and enticing; discussing only the “downside” of unplanned pregnancy and disease misses many of the issues on teenagers' minds.

Here are the kinds of questions kids say they want to discuss:

- How do I know if I'm in love? Will sex bring me closer to my girlfriend/boyfriend?
- How will I know when I'm ready to have sex? Should I wait until marriage?
- Will having sex make me popular? Will it make me more grown-up and open up more adult activities to me?
- How do I tell my boyfriend that I don't want to have sex without losing him or hurting his feelings?
- How do I manage pressure from my girlfriend to have sex?
- How does contraception work? Are some methods better than others? Are they safe?
- Can you get pregnant the first time?

In addition to being an “askable parent,” be a parent with a point of view. Tell your children what you think. Don't be reluctant to say, for example:

- I think kids in high school are too young to have sex, especially given today's risks.
- Whenever you do have sex, always use protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases until you are ready to have a child.
- Our family's religion says that sex should be an expression of love within marriage.
- Finding yourself in a sexually charged situation is not unusual; you need to think about how you'll handle it *in advance*. Have a plan. Will you say “no”? Will you use contraception? How will you negotiate all this?

- It's okay to think about sex and to feel sexual desire. Everybody does! But it's not okay to get pregnant/get somebody pregnant as a teenager.
- One of the many reasons I'm concerned about teens drinking is that it often leads to unprotected sex.
- (For boys) Having a baby doesn't make you a man. Being able to wait and acting responsibly does.
- (For girls) You don't have to have sex to keep a boyfriend. If sex is the price of a close relationship, find someone else.

By the way, research clearly shows that talking with your children about sex does *not* encourage them to become sexually active. And remember, too, that your own behavior should match your words. The “do as I say, not as I do” approach is bound to lose with children and teenagers, who are careful and constant observers of the adults in their lives.

3. Supervise and monitor your children and adolescents.

Establish rules, curfews, and standards of expected behavior, preferably through an open process of family discussion and respectful communication. If your children get out of school at 3 pm and you don't get home from work until 6 pm, who is responsible for making certain that your children are not only safe during those hours, but also are engaged in useful activities? Where are they when they go out with friends? Are there adults around who are in charge? Supervising and monitoring your kids' whereabouts doesn't make you a nag; it makes you a parent.

4. Know your children's friends and their families.

Friends have a strong influence on each other, so help your children and teenagers become friends with kids whose families share your values. Some parents of teens even arrange to meet with the parents of their children's friends to establish common rules and expectations. It is easier to enforce a curfew that all your child's friends share rather than one that makes him or her different—but even if your views don't match those of other parents, hold fast to your convictions. Welcome your children's friends into your home and talk to them openly.

5. Discourage early, frequent, and steady dating.

Group activities among young people are fine and often fun, but allowing teens to begin steady, one-on-one dating much before age 16 can lead to trouble. Let your child know about your strong feelings about this throughout childhood—don't wait until your young teen proposes a plan that differs from your preferences in this area; otherwise, he or she will think you just don't like the particular person or invitation.

6. Take a strong stand against your daughter dating a boy significantly older than she is. And don't allow your son to develop an intense relationship with a girl much younger than he is.

Older guys can seem glamorous to a young girl—sometimes they even have money and a car to boot! But the risk of matters getting out of hand increases when the guy is much older than the girl. Try setting a limit of no more than a two (or at most three) year age difference. The power differences between younger girls and older boys or men can lead girls into risky situations, including unwanted sex and sex with no protection.

7. Help your teenagers to have options for the future that are more attractive than early pregnancy and parenthood.

The chances that your children will delay sex, pregnancy, and parenthood are significantly increased if their futures appear bright. This means helping them set meaningful goals for the future, talking to them about what it takes to make future plans come true, and helping them reach their goals. Tell them, for example, that if they want to be a teacher, they will need to stay in school in order to earn various degrees and pass certain exams. It also means teaching them to use free time in a constructive way, such as setting aside certain times to complete homework assignments. Explain how becoming pregnant—or causing pregnancy—can derail the best of plans; for example, child care expenses can make it almost impossible to afford college. Community service, in particular, not only teaches job skills, but can also put teens in touch with a wide variety of committed and caring adults.

8. Let your kids know that you value education highly.

Encourage your children to take school seriously and set high expectations about their school performance. School failure is often the first sign of trouble that can end in teenage parenthood. Be very attentive to your children's progress in school and intervene early if things aren't going well. Keep track of your children's grades and discuss them together. Meet with teachers and principals, guidance counselors, and coaches. Limit the number of hours your teenager gives to part-time jobs (20 hours per week should be the maximum) so that there is enough time and energy left to focus on school. Know about homework assignments and support your child in getting them done. Volunteer at the school, if possible. Schools want more parental involvement and will often try to accommodate your work schedule, if asked.

9. Know what your kids are watching, reading, and listening to.

The media (television, radio, movies, music videos, magazines, the Internet) are chock full of material sending the wrong messages. Sex rarely has meaning, unplanned pregnancy seldom happens, and few people having sex ever seem to be married or even especially committed to anyone. Is this consistent with your expectations and values? If not, it is important to talk with your children about what the media portray and what you think about it. If certain programs or movies offend you, say so, and explain why. Be "media literate"—think about what you and your family are watching and reading. Encourage your kids to think critically: ask them what they think about the programs they watch and the music they listen to. You can always turn the TV off, cancel subscriptions, and place certain movies off limits. You will probably not be able to fully control what your children see and hear, but you can certainly make your views known and control your own home environment.

10. These first nine tips for helping your children avoid teen pregnancy work best when they occur as part of strong, close relationships with your children that are built from an early age.

Strive for a relationship that is warm in tone, firm in discipline, and rich in communication, and one that emphasizes mutual trust and respect. There is no single way to create such relationships, but the following habits of the heart can help:

- Express love and affection clearly and often. Hug your children, and tell them how much they mean to you. Praise specific accomplishments, but remember that expressions of affection should be offered freely, not just for a particular achievement.
- Listen carefully to what your children say and pay thoughtful attention to what they do.

- Spend time with your children engaged in activities that suit their ages and interests, not just yours. Shared experiences build a “bank account” of affection and trust that forms the basis for future communication with them about specific topics, including sexual behavior.
- Be supportive and be interested in what interests them. Attend their sports events; learn about their hobbies; be enthusiastic about their achievements, even the little ones; ask them questions that show you care and want to know what is going on in their lives.
- Be courteous and respectful to your children and avoid hurtful teasing or ridicule. Don’t compare your teenager with other family members (i.e., why can’t you be like your older sister?). Show that you expect courtesy and respect from them in return.
- Help them to build self-esteem by mastering skills; remember, self-esteem is earned, not given, and one of the best ways to earn it is by *doing* something well.
- Try to have meals together as a family as often as possible, and use the time for conversation, not confrontation.

A final note: it’s never too late to improve a relationship with a child or teenager. Don’t underestimate the great need that children feel—at all ages—for a close relationship with their parents and for their parents’ guidance, approval, and support.

Source: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Talking Back: Ten Things Teens Want Parents to Know About Teen Pregnancy

Introduction

Teens hear advice on all kinds of issues from their parents, teachers, and other adults in their lives. But they don't often get asked to offer it. Over the past year, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy has been asking teens from all over the country a fairly simple question: If you could give your parents and other important adults' advice about how to help you and your friends avoid pregnancy, what would it be? The following ten tips represent the major themes we heard from teens.

You may be surprised to learn that young people do want to hear from parents and other adults about sex, love, and relationships. They say they appreciate—even crave—advice, direction, and support from adults who care about them. But sometimes, they suggest, adults need to change *how* they offer their guidance. Simply put, they want real communication, not lectures and not threats.

The National Campaign would like to acknowledge the contributions of the many young people who have offered their suggestions for this publication, including the National Campaign's *Youth Leadership Team*, the readers of *Teen People*, and the teens who participated in our focus groups, answered our polling questions, visited our website, or told us their stories in communities we've visited around the country. We would also like to thank our informal group of adult advisors who reviewed drafts of the brochure.

We hope that *Talking Back: Ten Things Teens Want Parents to Know About Teen Pregnancy* offers parents and other adults comfort that their efforts to help teens do make a difference—as well as gives the kind of practical advice that will make the job a little easier.

Sarah Brown
Director
National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy
April 1999

Source: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Ten Things Teens Want Parents to Know About Teen Pregnancy

1. **Show us why teen pregnancy is such a bad idea.** For instance, let us hear directly from teen mothers and fathers about how hard it has been for them. Even though most of us don't want to get pregnant, sometimes we need real-life examples to help motivate us.
2. **Talk to us honestly about love, sex, and relationships.** Just because we're young doesn't mean that we can't fall in love or be deeply interested in sex. These feelings are very real and powerful to us. Help us to handle the feelings in a safe way—without getting hurt or hurting others.
3. **Telling us not to have sex is not enough.** Explain why you feel that way, and ask us what we think. Tell us how you felt as a teen. Listen to us and take our opinions seriously. And no lectures, please.
4. **Whether we're having sex or not, we need to be prepared.** We need to know how to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.
5. **If we ask you about sex or birth control, don't assume we are already having sex.** We may just be curious, or we may just want to talk with someone we trust. And don't think giving us information about sex and birth control will encourage us to have sex.
6. **Pay attention to us before we get into trouble.** Programs for teen moms and teen fathers are great, but we all need encouragement, attention, and support. Reward us for doing the right thing - even when it seems like no big thing. Don't shower us with attention only when there is a baby involved.
7. **Sometimes, all it takes not to have sex is not to have the opportunity.** If you can't be home with us after school, make sure we have something to do that we really like, where there are other kids and some adults who are comfortable with kids our age. Often we have sex because there's not much else to do. Don't leave us alone so much.
8. **We really care what you think, even if we don't always act like it.** When we don't end up doing exactly what you tell us to, don't think that you've failed to reach us.
9. **Show us what good, responsible relationships look like.** We're as influenced by what you do as by what you say. If you demonstrate sharing, communication, and responsibility in your own relationships, we will be more likely to follow your example.
10. **We hate "The Talk" as much as you do.** Instead, start talking with us about sex and responsibility when we're young, and keep the conversation going as we grow older.

Source: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

Ten Tips for Parents* of a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender Child

1. **Engage with your child.** Your gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) child requires and deserves the same level of care, respect, information, and support as non-GLBT children. Ask questions, listen, empathize, share, and just be there for your child.
2. **Go back to school.** Get the facts about sexual orientation and gender identity. Learn new language and the correct terminology to communicate effectively about sexual orientation and gender identity. Challenge yourself to learn and go beyond stereotyped images of GLBT people.

Here's a quick lesson on two frequently misunderstood terms:

Sexual orientation—Describe to whom a person feels attraction: people of the opposite gender, the same gender, or both genders.

Gender identity—A person's inner sense of gender—male, female, some of each, neither. Transgender people have a gender identity that is different from the gender to which they were born or assigned at birth.

Some people ask, "Isn't transgender just like being gay?" No. Transgender describes a person's internal sense of gender identity. Sexual orientation describes a person's feeling of attraction toward other people. Transgender people have some issues in common with gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, but gender identity is *not* the same as sexual orientation.

3. **Get to know the community.** What resources are available? Find out if there is a Gay/Straight Alliance at school, a community group for GLBT and questioning teens, a bookstore with a selection of books on GLBT issues, or a GLBT community center nearby.
4. **Explore the Internet.** There is a growing amount of excellent information on the World Wide Web that connects people with support and materials on these important topics. Two excellent web sites are Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (www.pflg.org), and Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/about/index.html).
5. **Find out where your local Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gay (PFLAG) meets.** Many parents say that their connections with other parents of GLBT kids made a world of difference in their progress toward understanding their young people. Finding another person you can trust to share your experience with is invaluable. Many people have gone through similar things and their support, lessons learned, and empathy can be very valuable.

6. **Don't make it ALL there is...**just because your child has come out as GLBT does not mean that young person's whole world revolves around sexual orientation or gender identity. It will be a big part of who the youth is, especially during the process of figuring it all out, including what it means to be GLBT. Still, being GLBT isn't the sum of life for your child, and it is vital to encourage your child in other aspects of life, such as school, sports, hobbies, friends, and part-time jobs.
7. **ASK your child before you "come out" to others on the child's behalf.** Friends and family members might have questions or want to know what's up; but it is most important to be respectful of what your child wants. Don't betray your child's trust!
8. **Praise your GLBT child for coming to you to discuss this issue.** Encourage the youth to continue to keep you "in the know." If your child turns to you to share personal information, you must be doing something right! You are askable. You're sending out consistent verbal and non-verbal cues that say, "Yes, I'll listen. Please talk to me!" Give yourself some credit—your GLBT child chose to come to you. Congratulations!
9. **Find out what kind of support, services, and education are in place at your child's school.** Does the school and/or school district have a non-discrimination policy? Is there a GLBT/straight support group? Do you know any "out" people, or their friends and loved ones, to whom you can turn for information? (Before doing so, again refer to tip number 7, above. *Ask* your child if it's okay for you to "come out" about the child.)
10. **Educate yourself on local, state, and national laws and policies regarding GLBT people.** On the national level, GLBT people are still second-class citizens in regard to some national policies and their rights are not guaranteed by law. Consider educating yourself about this and finding out what you can do to work toward extending equal rights to GLBT people in the United States.

***Note:** These tips can also be useful for other trusted adults in the GLBT young person's life, explaining how a caring adult can be there for GLBT youth.

Source: Lisa Mauer, MS, CFLE, ACSE, Coordinator, The Center for LGBT Education, Outreach and Services, Ithaca College.



Our Sons and Daughters

Questions & Answers for
Parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Youth

"I think the turning point for me was when I read more about it, and read that most kids who can accept their sexuality say they feel calmer, happier and more confident. And of course, that's what I wanted for my child and I sure didn't want to be what was standing in the way of that." — Father of a gay son

As parents, every day we work to ensure that our children are safe, happy and successful. When they are young, we dream about their future. We encourage them to finish school, find love, get married, and have our grandchildren. When we have a child who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) it's common to feel that those dreams are ruined. Some are taught that being gay is different, wrong, or sinful.

What is the first thing you can do when you learn that your child is gay? Seek support from others. Families all across the country and in your community have lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people in their immediate or extended families. **You are not alone.** Talking about it to someone can really help. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) chapters have provided support and education opportunities for families just like yours for over 35 years. Find a chapter near you at www.pflag.org.

It's important for you to understand that coming out can be a difficult process. Regardless of how nurturing you are with your children, your son or daughter felt a real risk of losing your love and support by coming out to you. Every day, young people are kicked out of their home for disclosing their sexuality. In a study conducted by The Gay and Lesbian Task Force, nearly 40% of all homeless youth identify as LGBT and cited "experiencing negative reactions by their parents when they came out." By the time your child has built up the courage to come out to you, he or she has gone through the process of self-acceptance. Telling you is a sign of love, and desire for an open and honest relationship.

Is my child different now? We think we know and understand our children from the day they are born. So when a child announces "I'm gay," and we hadn't a clue – or we knew all along but denied it to ourselves – the reactions are often shock and disorientation.

You have a dream, a vision of what your child will be, should be, can be. It's a dream that is born of your own history, of what you wanted for yourself growing up, and especially of the culture around you. Despite the fact that a significant portion of the population is gay, American society still prepares us only with heterosexual dreams for our children. The shock and disorientation you may feel is a natural part of a type of grieving process. You have lost something – your dream for your child. Of course, when you stop to think about it, this is true for all children, straight or gay. They're always surprising us. They don't marry who we might pick for them; they don't take the job we would have chosen; they don't live where we'd like them to live.

Keep reminding yourself that your child hasn't changed. Your child is the same person that he or she was before you learned about his or her sexuality. It is your dream, your expectations, and your vision that may have to change if you are to really know and understand your gay loved one.

"I have to tell you, there are so many pluses now. You begin to recognize what an incredible child you have to share this with you and to want you to be part of their lives... [Look at] the trust that has been placed in your hands and how much guts it took to do that." — Father of lesbian daughter

To learn more about common questions and answers that parents and family members of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people often have check out the full length Our Daughters and Sons resource at www.pflag.org or find a chapter in your area.

Ten Tips for Talking About Sexuality With Your Child Who Has Developmental Disabilities

Conversations about sexuality can yield many benefits when you talk with your child who has developmental disabilities. The positive effects for your child include, not only an understanding of sexuality, but also opportunities to learn, grow, and build skills for life. Talking about sexuality sets the stage for talking, without guilt or embarrassment, about body parts and their functions. It sets the stage for your child to articulate life goals. It equips young people to understand behaviors that are inappropriate in public or that are destructive to relationships, trust, and self-esteem. It enables young people to recognize and prevent abuse and exploitation. Many parents also observe their children increasing in self-esteem and self-empowerment as they master key concepts related to sexuality.

Young people who have developmental disabilities deserve accurate, age and developmentally appropriate sexual health information. This can sometimes be challenging for parents and young people if some learning channels are blocked or if commonly used teaching tools (such as diagrams and charts) are less than useful for children who learn in non-traditional ways. Nevertheless, the numerous benefits are worth the effort. Here are some tips and ideas for beginning your conversation:

1. **Use pictures as often as you can.** Photos of family or friends can be a springboard for talking about relationships and social interactions. These give important and immediate context to your discussions, which is key for these children who have success with concrete ideas.
2. **Use repetition in providing small amounts of information over time.** Check that your child understands by asking questions that put the information in a practical context. (What could Cousin Laverna have said?) Use opportunities to repeat key ideas in other settings—for instance, while watching television programs that deal with relationships or sexuality issues.
3. **Draw, copy, or buy a full body drawing or chart.** This is a concrete way to show where body parts are and what they do.
4. **For more involved tasks (such as personal hygiene related to menstruation), try to break down the activity into several steps.** Frequently review the steps with your child and always provide feedback and praise. If you are unsure if your steps are concrete and understandable, write them down and try following them yourself. Did you leave *anything* out? Using a pad or tampon during menstruation or cleaning beneath the foreskin of the penis may seem straightforward, but these activities require several separate steps in a particular order.
5. **Repeat information often, and offer feedback and praise.** Reinforce important concepts frequently.
6. **Practice!** Make sure your child has plenty of opportunities to try out his/her skills.
7. **Use existing resources.** Visit the library and check out books and videos about talking with your kids about sexuality. Also use the World Wide Web.

8. Network with other parents. Share your insights and listen to theirs. Involve others by communicating with teachers, coaches, and caseworkers about the topics you are discussing. Share ways they can reinforce these lessons at school, work, or on the playing field.
9. Recognize and validate your child's feelings. This is a unique opportunity to get to know your child better.
10. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know the answer to that question." But, be sure to follow up with, "Let's find out together!" Then do so.

There is no single approach that is always best. As a parent, you have the opportunity to investigate and experiment, to be creative and to learn from your successes as well as your missteps!

Recommended Resources

Positive Approaches: A Sexuality Guide for Teaching Developmentally Disabled Persons (1991)

Talking Sex! Practical Approaches and Strategies for Working with People Who Have Developmental Disabilities When the Topic Is Sex (1999)

To purchase these publications, contact Planned Parenthood of Tompkins County's Education Department at 607-273-1526.

Source: Lisa Maurer, MS, CFLE, ACSE, Consultant and Trainer, Planned Parenthood of Tompkins County's Education Department

Parents as Advocates for Comprehensive Sex Education in Schools

Parental support for school-based sex education is overwhelmingly positive. Over the past 20 years, in survey after survey, local, state or national, 80 to 85 percent of parents indicate they want their children to receive comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education. Parents see such courses and content as supplementing, not supplanting, their discussions at home. They say that their children need both to be taught about delaying the onset of intimate sexual relationships until they are mature and responsible and also given the information and skills they need to use condoms and contraception when they do choose to become sexually active. It's not either/or, but both.

Parents' involvement in school health education committees, as members of school boards, or as advocates during community controversy is vital to making sure that young people receive accurate information and that answers to their questions are not censored. Many curricula and classroom materials exist to meet children's needs and help them grow up sexually healthy. But there are also "education" materials that are discriminatory, inaccurate, biased, and judgmental, and that use shame, fear, and guilt to scare young people about sexual intimacy.

Sexuality education curricula and programs should be reviewed carefully for the following important components:

- Acknowledging that sexuality is a component of each person's personality, character, and life
- Containing age appropriate information, based on physical, emotional, and social developmental stages
- Containing information that is honest, medically accurate, and based upon verifiable scientific and behavioral theories
- Respecting of differences in family, religious, and social values
- Being nonjudgmental and open to all questions and concerns related to sexuality
- Reflecting cultural, social, and ethnic diversity
- Encouraging children/youth to discuss sexuality issues with their parents and to ask them questions
- Providing parental review of all materials used in the classroom
- Avoiding shame, fear, or guilt
- Promoting gender equality
- Including skills for decision making and resisting pressure
- Acknowledging that sexuality and sexual decisions are influenced by family, media, peers, religion, and personal experiences
- Acknowledging both responsibility and pleasure in intimate sexual relationships
- Giving young people opportunities to role play and to practice effective communication
- Acknowledging the diversity of sexual orientation
- Acknowledging that sexual abuse, coercion, and incest occur and offering referrals for counseling and support for survivors

- Promoting responsibility, respect, and honesty in relationships
- Containing materials evaluated by respected researchers and published in credible sources
- Offering reference lists from scientific, professional, peer-reviewed sources rather than personal opinions, newspaper articles, sermons, speeches, or magazine articles.

Finally, the chosen curriculum should be taught by knowledgeable, comfortable, and well trained sexuality educators.

As a Parent You Can Become an Advocate by:

- Learning what your school offers in sex education
- Acknowledging that sex education is a life long process and that parents are only one of the primary sex educators of young people
- Supporting honest, balanced sex education that is comprehensive and that includes education about abstinence and contraception
- Knowing what training your child's teachers have had in sex education
- Knowing the official school system policies on sex education.



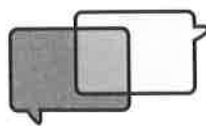
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Compiled by Barbara Huberman, RN, MEd, Director of Education and Outreach

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A GUIDE TO RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

PARENTS AS SEXUALITY EDUCATORS RECOMMENDED READING LIST

"Sexual knowledge, like all knowledge, is powerful. Used carefully and deliberately, it is the cornerstone of safe, healthy, moral conduct."

—from *But How'd I Get in There in the First Place?* by Deborah Roffman

for families

All About Sex: A Family Resource on Sex and Sexuality

Ronald Filiberti Moglia, Ed.D. and Jon Knowles, Editors. Three Rivers Press, 1997.

This book, published by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, provides important information about sex and sexuality in straightforward language that families can understand and use. It is intended to facilitate family communication, establish sexual values, and encourage responsible sexual behaviors.

The Family Guide to Sex and Relationships

Richard Walker, Ph.D. Macmillan Publishing USA, 1996.

Complete with over 300 color photos, illustrations, and diagrams, this book presents comprehensive information on the entire life cycle. Chapters include: "The Reproductive Body," "Baby to Child," "Adolescence," and "The Family and Sexuality."

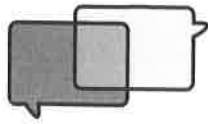
Five Hundred Questions Kids Ask About Sex and Some of the Answers

Francis Younger, M.A. Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Ltd., 1992.

This book is intended for parents, teachers and young people. Written in question-and-answer format, it provides clear, comprehensive answers to questions young people ask. Chapters include: "Bodily Development and Sexual Maturation," "Conception, Pregnancy, and Childbirth," "Relationships," "Birth Control," "Sexually Transmitted Diseases," and "Heredity."

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A GUIDE TO RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

for parents and other caregivers

Always My Child: A Parent's Guide to Understanding Your Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning Son or Daughter

Pat Shapiro and Kevin Jennings, Fireside Publishing, 2002.

Using real-life stories, scientific research and practical advice, this book helps others understand the many obstacles GLBTQ youth face and what a family can do to create a safe environment for these teens.

Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens

Debra W. Haffner, Newmarket Press, 2001.

A guide for adults about adolescent sexual development, values, influences, parent involvement, and what to say and do.

But How'd I Get in There in the First Place? Talking to Your Young Child about Sex

Deborah Roffman, Perseus Press, 2002.

This book shares thoughtful, thorough guidance for parents' continuous sexuality education of children up to about age six, written by an experienced certified sexuality and family life educator, covering how children assimilate information, what they need to know, and how to recognize and work with one's own inhibitions.

But I Love Him: Protecting Your Teen Daughter from Controlling, Abusive Dating Relationships

Jill Murray, Harper Publishing, 2001.

This book focuses on the different types of relationship abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional), how to spot signs of abuse, and help teens experiencing it break free and heal.

Conversaciones: Relatos Por Padres y Madres de Hijas Lesbianas y Hijos Gay

Mariana Romo-Carmona, Cleis Press, 2001.

Written in Spanish, this book contains a collection of interviews from parents of gay and lesbian teens in Latin America. They share first-hand experiences of everything from discrimination to isolation and ways of coping with these issues.

Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid They'd Ask)

Justin Richardson and Mark Schuster, Three Rivers Press, 2004.

Written by an assistant psychiatry professor at Columbia and Cornell and a UCLA associate professor of pediatrics and public health, Richardson and Schuster team up to provide a positive, straightforward guide for parents on teenage sexuality from the earliest signs of puberty to young adulthood.

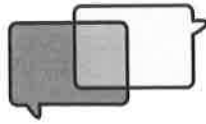
Field Guide to the American Teenager: A Parent's Companion

Michael Riera and Joseph Di Prisco, Perseus Publishing, 2000.

Addressing the isolation, fear, and silence parents endure during their child's adolescence, these authors go beyond the stereotypes to expertly guide parents to a better appreciation of their teenager's frustrating if not completely troubling behavior.

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From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Youth (2nd. Edition)

Debra Haffner. Newmarket Press, 2008.

This book is filled with practical advice and guidelines to help parents feel more comfortable talking to children and early adolescents about sexuality issues. Incorporating values exercise, it encourages parents to examine their own sexual values so that they can share these messages.

How to Talk to Teens About Really Important Things: Specific Questions and Answers and Useful Things to Say

Charles E. Schaefer and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

Schafer and DiGeronimo stress the importance of communication between teens and caregivers in this book. It offers examples of discussions and answers to common questions and issues that adolescents may bring up, such as tattoos, sex, and depression. It also offers further resources for parents needing more specific information.

Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense about Sex

Deborah Roffman. Perseus Press, 2001.

This book for parents is intended to inspire honest communication about sexuality between them and their children. Chapters include "Age Appropriateness: Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right?," "Values: Becoming Your Child's Cultural Interpreter," "Sexuality: More Who We Are than What We Do," and "Sexual Orientation: Why and How It's Everyone's Business."

Ten Talks Parents Must Have With Their Children About Sex and Character

Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D. and Dominic Cappello. Time Warner Trade Publishing, 2000.

This book is intended for parents of children in grades 4 through 12. Developed to help parents and children talk about sexuality and building character it offers advice to parents on how to begin and what to say. Topics include safety, character, peer pressure, ethics, the Internet, and the media. Each chapter provides ways for parents to clarify their values and family rules about specific sexuality issues, anecdotes to share with children to foster communication, questions to ask your child, opportunity to reflect on responses and identify potential problems, and sample talks.

The Real Truth About Teens and Sex

Sabrina Weill. Perigee Trade, 2005.

This book presents a realistic picture of what today's teens are thinking, feeling, talking about and doing regarding dating and sex. The book contains exclusive results from a nationwide survey conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

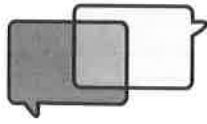
The Rollercoaster Years

Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, Broadway, 1997.

A how-to manual for those raising 10-15 year olds, this book addresses issues that are likely to come up in this age-group, how to properly respond to them, and when to seek professional help. With plenty of statistics and humor, this book is clear and effective in helping parents navigate their child's adolescence.

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What Every 21st-Century Parent Needs to Know: Facing Today's Challenges with Wisdom and Heart

Debra W. Haffner. Newmarket, 2008.

This book presents parents with facts and statistics about the toughest issues teens face in today's world, including drugs, sex, and drinking, but Haffner interprets them in an optimistic way and focuses on helping parents make realistic and positive parenting choices that will bring out the best in their child.

When Sex is the Subject: Attitudes and Answers for Young Children

Pamela M. Wilson. ETR Associates, 1991.

This insightful handbook was written for teachers and parents, it addresses questions from children 10 years of age and younger. The psychosocial development and learning processes of children are discussed and guidelines are provided for accurate and comfortable responses.

Why Do They Act That Way? A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen.

David Walsh. Free Press, 2004.

Although this book is not primarily about sexuality, it does cover hormones, impulsivity, sex drive, abuse, sexual activity and education in helpful ways other books omit.

for older children, preteens and teens: GIRLS

American Medical Association Girl's Guide to Becoming a Teen

Kate Gruenwald, Jossey-Bass, 2006.

With information from the American Medical Association, this book teaches girls 9-12 about both the physical (nutrition, exercise, and menstruation) and emotional (feelings and relationships) changes and issues that need to be addressed with the arrival of puberty. This guide does not spend great detail on sex or contraception, encouraging readers to wait.

Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret

Judy Blum, Yearling, 1986.

Written from a preteen girl's point of view, this novel explores all aspects of female puberty in a relatable way.

Cycle Savvy: The Smart Teen's Guide to the Mysteries of Her Body

Toni Weschler, Harper Publishing, 2006.

Written by a national best-selling women's health author, *Cycle Savvy*; enlighten girls on various phases of their menstrual cycles and gives them the tools to stay physically and emotionally healthy in this area of their lives.

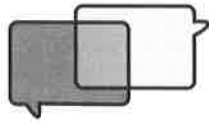
Deal with It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain, and Life as a GURL

Esther Drill, Heather McDonald, and Rebecca Odes. Simon and Schuster, 1999.

The creators of the gurl.com website offer frank, funny, and factual information about girls' sexuality.

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A GUIDE TO RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

Girl Stuff: A Survival Guide to Growing Up

Margaret Blackstone and Elissa Haden Guest, Harcourt Paperbacks, 2006.

This book gives girls going through puberty helpful tips and lots of straightforward information on everything from stress to menstruation. It also touches on peer pressure and sex and encourages girls to make smart, healthy decisions in all aspects of their lives.

Girltalk: All the Stuff Your Sister Never Told You

Carol Weston, Harper Paperbacks, 2004.

A mixture of advice, facts, and answers to questions from adolescent girls, this book addresses puberty and everything that comes with it in an easily applicable and honest way.

It's A Girl Thing: How to Stay Healthy, Safe, and in Charge

Mavis Jukes. Random House, Inc., 1996.

This book for young women presents general information about puberty, crushes, kissing, intercourse, pregnancy, STDs, birth control, boys and puberty, and health. A list of resources is included.

My Body, My Self for Girls: for Preteens and Teens

Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras, Newmarket Press, 2000.

This journal/activity book for girls eight to 15 years of age is a companion to *What's Happening to my Body? Book for Girls*. It includes exercises, quizzes, and personal stories to help girls learn about body changes.

Period

LoAnn Loulan and Bonnie Worthen. Book Peddlers, 2001

Illustrated with drawings, this book addresses the changes that girls experience as they mature. Emphasizing that we are all unique and special, it explains physical changes during puberty. Includes a parents' guide. Intended for children ages 8 and older.

Ready, Set, Grow!: A What's Happening to My Body?

Lynda Madaras, Newmarket Press, 2003.

This book focuses on informing and supporting girls 9-12 about the changes they are beginning or about to experience both physically and emotionally and gives tips on staying healthy and positive.

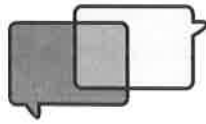
The Period Book: Everything You Don't Want to Ask (But Need to Know)

Karen Gravelle and Jennifer Gravelle with illustrations by Debbie Palen. Walker and Company, 1996.

This is a positive, down-to-earth book illustrated with funny and sympathetic cartoons. It answers the many questions that young women may have about their "period." It will also help guide young women through physical, emotional, and social changes.

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What's Happening to My Body? Book for Girls: A Growing Up Guide for Parents and Daughters

Lynda Madaras with Area Madaras, Newmarket Press, 2000.

Filled with anecdotes, illustrations, diagrams, and honest, sensitive, nonjudgmental information for the young girl, this revised edition also addresses the new scientific facts about when a girl actually begins puberty, advice on “female athletic syndrome,” eating disorders, unwanted attention because of early development, and information on eating right, exercise, AIDS, STDs, birth control, and more.

What's with My Body? The Girls' Book of Answers to Growing Up, Looking Good, and Feeling Great

Selene Yeager, Prima Publishing, 2002.

This book contains reassuring, accurate advice for preteen and young teen girls and their parents. Presented in a question-and-answer format, topics include body changes, skin and hair care, menstruation, eating disorders, moods, and sexuality.

Your Body: The Girls' Guide

Janis Brody, Ph.D., St. Martin's Press, 2000.

This book for teens discusses puberty, menstruation, female and male anatomy, sexual intercourse, STDs, birth control, sexual orientation, dating, and crushes as well as eating well, sports, and growing up healthy.

for older children, preteens and teens: BOYS

American Medical Association Boy's Guide to Becoming a Teen

Kate Gruenwald Pfeifer, Jossey-Bass, 2006.

With information from the American Medical Association, this book teaches boys 9-12 about both the physical (nutrition, exercise, and growing bodies) and emotional (feelings and relationships) changes and issues that need to be addressed with the arrival of puberty. This guide does not spend great detail on sex or contraception, encouraging readers to wait.

Changes in You & Me: A Book about Puberty Mostly for Boys

Paulette Bourgeois and Martin Wolfish, M.D., Andrews and McMeel Publishers, 1994.

This is a reference book for boys about the physical changes and feelings that go along with growing up. Topics include anatomy, puberty, birth control, pregnancy, masturbation, what happens to girls, decision making, STDs, sexual abuse, sexual orientation, and where to go for help. The book includes transparent overlays, a glossary, and an index.

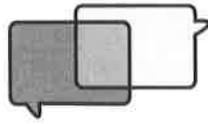
Growing up Gay in America: Informative and Practical Advice for Teen Guys Questioning Their Sexuality and Growing Up Gay

Jason Rich, Dimension Publishing, 2002.

Thoughtful, thorough, and expansive exploration of many relevant topics important to male teens who are gay or questioning if they are gay and need information about self-acceptance and fitting in.

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The Guy Book: An Owner's Manual for Teens

Mavis Jukes, Crown Publishing, 2002.

A clever, retro automotive style guide with information for boys on changes that occur in their bodies during puberty and offering advice on sexual topics, nutrition, drugs, girls, and more.

My Body, My Self for Boys: for Preteens and Teens

Lynda Madaras and Area Madaras, Newmarket Press, 2000.

This journal/activity book for boys eight to 15 years of age is a companion to *What's Happening to my Body? Book for Boys*. It includes exercises, quizzes, and personal stories to help boys learn about the changes that take place in their bodies during puberty.

Our Boys Speak: Adolescent Boys Write about Their Inner Lives

John Nikkah, St. Martin's Griffin, 2000.

This collection of writings by adolescent boys addresses sex and dating, sports, religion, depression, sexual orientation, and family. The author provides commentary and perspective on the question: "What do boys think?"

The Teenage Guy's Survival Guide: The Real Deal on Girls, Growing Up, and Other Guy Stuff

Jeremy Daldry, Little, Brown and Company Children's Books, 1999.

This book for young men discusses basic information about sexuality. Topics include love, dating, sexual orientation, relationships, intimacy, puberty, emotions, confidence, and peer pressure.

What's Going on Down There? Answers to Questions Boys Find Hard to Ask

Karen Graville with Nick and Chava Castro and illustrated by Robert Leighton, Walker and Company, 1998.

Straightforward and entertainingly presented, this book helps boys understand the changes that occur during puberty, what causes these changes, and what to expect. The book addresses sexual orientation, masturbation, intercourse, contraception, STDs and pregnancy.

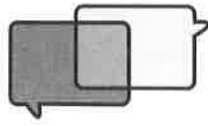
The What's Happening to My Body? Book For Boys: A Growing Up Guide for Parents and Sons

Lynda Madaras with Area Madaras, Newmarket Press, 2000.

This book discusses the changes that take place in a boy's body during puberty, including information on the body's changing size and shape, the growth spurt, reproductive organs, pubic hair, beards, pimples, voice changes, wet dreams, and puberty in girls.

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for older children, preteens and teens: GIRLS AND BOYS

Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: Expanded Third Edition: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships

Ruth Bell, Three Rivers Press, 1998.

Written to address all areas of teenage sexuality, this book includes illustrations, quotes from teenagers themselves, and lots of straight-forward information about sexual health for both boys and girls from eighth grade and older.

GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens

Kelly Huegel, Free Spirit Publishing, 2003.

This book is designed to offer practical information on all aspects of life for a teen questioning hihe/her sexuality. It addresses everything from coming out to religion as well as listing other resources for additional information.

The "Go Ask Alice" Book of Answers: A Guide to Good Physical, Sexual, and Emotional Health

Columbia University's Health Education Program, Owl Books, 1998.

This book provides young people with information and advice on a variety of frequently asked questions from the "Go Ask Alice!" web site at Columbia University. Topics include relationships; sexuality; sexual health; emotional health; fitness and nutrition; alcohol, nicotine, and other drugs; and general health.

Healthy Sexuality

Kristen Kemp, Scholastic, Inc., 2004.

Contributing editor at Girls' Life magazine, Kristen Kemp offers facts, advice, and straight talk about different aspects of sexuality, including gender characteristics, changing emotions during puberty, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases.

It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Sex and Sexual Health

Robie H. Harris and illustrated by Michael Emberly, Candlewick Press, 2004.

In this book accurate information about sexuality is presented in a reader-friendly style that includes age-appropriate illustrations and humor. From conception and puberty to contraception and HIV/AIDS, it covers both the biological and psychological aspects of sexuality.

Love & Sex: Ten Stories of Truth

Edited by Michael Cart, Simon & Schuster, 2001.

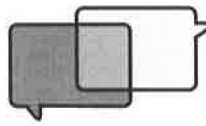
This anthology, featuring popular writers for adults and teens, contains stories about love and sexuality in the lives of adolescents.

Puberty's Wild Ride: The Ups and Downs, Ins and Outs, Zigs and Zags of Growing Up

Marta McCave, 2001

This book is intended for young teens and their parents. It is a useful resource for teens to find information. Parents and teen can use it together as a conversation starter or as a reference tool. This book is sure to help teens get through the ups and downs, ins and outs, zigs and zags of growing up.

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STD's: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

Diane Yancey, Lerner Publishing Group, 2002.

This book explains different types of sexually transmitted diseases, how they are contracted, their symptoms, and treatment.

The Underground Guide to Teenage Sexuality

Michael Basso, Fairview Press, 2003.

This book for teens on human sexuality covers such subjects as anatomy, sexual intercourse, STDs, contraception, and homosexuality. The author wrote the book to give teens the information they need to protect themselves and accept responsibility for their actions.

Too Old for This, Too Young for That! Your Survival Guide for the Middle-School Years

Harriet S. Mosatche and Karen Unger, Free Spirit Publishing, 2005.

Geared toward preteens ages 9-12, this illustrated book uses humor and examples of situations that may arise to inform about physical and emotional changes, peer pressure, and family life. Survival tips and further resources are listed to give kids more information and confidence as they enter adolescence.

What If Someone I Know Is Gay? Answers to Questions about Gay and Lesbian People

Eric Marcus, Penguin Putnam Incorporated, 2000.

This book for teens provides questions and answers about homosexuality and bisexuality. Topics include coming out, friends and family, religion, sexual behavior, school, activism, and discrimination. The book includes a resource section.

for younger children

Amazing You! Getting Smart About Your Private Parts

Gail Saltz, M.D. and illustrated by Lynne Cravath, Dutton Publishing, 2005.

This book is mostly pictures with anatomically correct illustrations and proper terms for body parts. It's meant for parents and their children, ages 3 to 7, to read together.

A Very Touching Book...for Little People and for Big People

Jan Hindman, Alexandria Assoc, 1983.

This book is designed to teach young children about respecting their bodies and how others should treat them in terms they can understand and includes illustrations to teach proper anatomy.

Bellybuttons Are Navels

Mark Schoen and illustrated by M.J. Quay, Prometheus Books, 1990.

This children's book is intended to create a relaxed environment for the discussion of sexuality. It will help parents initiate and guide matter-of-fact, accurate discussions with their young children about sexual anatomy.

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Did the Sun Shine Before You Were Born?

Sol and Judith Gordon, Prometheus Books, 1992.

Targeted to children three to seven years old, this book focuses on the family and how it grows. It explains everything from conception to birth. Illustrated with charcoal drawings of multicultural images, this book fosters communication between parents and children by the sharing of values and ideas.

Do I Have A Daddy? A Story About A Single- Parent Child

Jeanne Warren Lindsay, Morning Glory Press, 1999.

This book introduces children to single-parent families by following Erik as his Mother explains why he doesn't have a conventional family, but the love she feels for him and the importance of his Uncle and Grandfather in his life.

Emma and Meesha My Boy: A Two Mom Story

Kaitlyn Considine, TWOMOMBOOKS.com, 2005.

This book focuses on the story of Emma learning proper pet care while simultaneously introducing the fact that she has two Moms. While not directly addressing same-sex parenting in-depth, this book allows children to see how different types of families share the same every-day activities.

Happy Birth Day!

Robie H. Harris, Candlewick, 2002.

Designed for children from babies to age 7, this book illustrates a mother describing the first day after birth to her daughter in an affectionate and joyful way.

How Babies and Families Are Made: There Is More Than One Way!

Patricia Schaffer, Tabor Sarah Books, 1988.

This picture book seeks to show children ages 5-9 the journey from conception to birth and alternative circumstances, such as in vitro fertilization, adoption, and premature birth.

How Was I Born?: A Child's Journey Through the Miracle of Birth

Lennart Nilsson and Lena Katarina Swanberg, Dell, 1996.

For children 4-8, this book is told from the point-of-view of Mary, a 5-year-old with a pregnant mother. It includes real photographs of a developing fetus and describes the progression from conception to infancy.

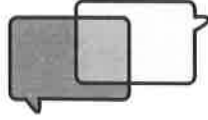
How You Were Born

Joanna Cole, Harper Collins Publishers, 1993.

This book is designed to tell children about birth in simple terms. Using colorful photographs, it can be read to children or pictures can be discussed.

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*When the question
is tough, the answer
is ... apparent!*



it's that easy!™

A GUIDE TO RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

It's My Body

Lory Freeman, Parenting Press, 1982. Also available in Spanish, *Mi Cuerpo es Mio*

Simply illustrated, but containing a powerful message, this book aims to explain to young children the difference between "good" and "bad" touch and how to respond appropriately.

It's NOT the Stork! A Book About Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families, and Friends

Robie Harris and illustrated by Michael Emberley, Candlewick Press, 2005.

This book is for ages four and up to help answer those endless and perfectly normal questions that preschool, kindergarten and early elementary school children ask about how they began and what makes a girl a girl and a boy a boy.

It's So Amazing! : A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies, and Families

Robie Harris and illustrated by Michael Emberley, Candlewick Press, 2002.

Also available in Spanish, *¡Es Alucinante!*

This book provides a solid combination of appealing cartoon humor and intelligently presented, straightforward information, presented at the middle elementary age level, about many topics kids wonder about: bodily changes, abuse, intercourse, birth control, pregnancy and birth, genetics, love, masturbation, homosexuality, HIV and AIDS.

Molly's Family

Nancy Garden, Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishing, 2004.

This book depicts to children aged four to eight a story about Molly and her two mothers. While Molly has trouble finding peer acceptance at first, support and understanding grow as all different types of families are explored.

The Family Book

Todd Parr, Little Brown Young Readers, 2003.

Written for children four to eight, this colorful picture book illustrates different types of families, including single, step, and same-sex parents, while highlighting the similarities all families share such as the love to hug and support each other.

What's the Big Secret? Talking About Sex with Girls and Boys

Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown, Little Brown Publishing, 1997.

This inviting children's picture book for children presents information and answers about sexuality. It addresses how boys and girls differ, anatomy, reproduction, pregnancy, and birth. It also discusses feelings, touching, and privacy.

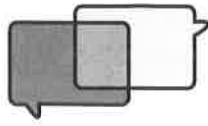
When You Were Inside Mommy

Joanna Cole, HaperCollins, 2001.

Using easily understood language and inviting illustrations, this book describes the fetus growing in the womb through birth to young children.

continued >

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A GUIDE TO RAISING SEXUALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN

Where Did I Come From?

Peter Mayle with illustrations by Arthur Robins, 1997.

Celebrating its twentieth anniversary, this book uses humor and bright illustrations to explain anatomy, intercourse, orgasm, fertilization, pregnancy and birth to children.

Your Body Belongs to You

Cornelia Maude Spelman, Albert Whitman Publishing, 1997.

This book shares positive encouragement for children to use their own judgment to be in charge of who touches their body and how.

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Says: Parental Influence and Teen Pregnancy

★ *Despite what parents may think, they have an enormous influence on their children's decisions about sex. More than two decades of high quality research, supplemented by recent public opinion polls, point to the same conclusion: the quality of parents' relationships with their teenagers can make a real difference in the decisions that their children make about sex.¹ This Science Says brief makes the case that — even in a culture that bombards young people with conflicting and often-confusing messages about sex and pregnancy — parents remain powerful. This brief compiles much of what is known from research about parental influence and offers parents and others suggestions for how to help children delay sexual activity and avoid teen pregnancy.*

What Research Shows

Relationships matter most.

Overall closeness between parents and their children, shared activities, parental presence in the home, and parental caring, support, and concern are all associated with a reduced risk of early sex and teen pregnancy. Teens who feel closely connected to their parents are more likely to abstain from sex, wait until they are older to begin having sex, have fewer sexual partners, and use contraception more consistently.²

The importance of attitudes and values. Children whose parents are clear about the value of delaying sex are less likely to have intercourse at an early age. Parents who discuss contraception are also more likely to have children who use contraception when they become sexually active.³

The overall strength and closeness of parent/child relationships seems to be the best protection of all.

The importance of parental supervision. Teens whose parents supervise them and monitor their behavior are more likely to be older when they first have sex, to have fewer partners, to use contraception, and to be less at-risk for pregnancy. However, overly strict, authoritarian monitoring is actually associated with a *greater* risk of teen pregnancy,⁴ so parents need to strike a balance.

The influence of parents and peers. Teens say that parents influence their decisions about sex more strongly than do friends and other sources. When asked who most influences their sexual deci-

sions, 45 percent of teens say parents. Only 31 percent say friends are most influential, six percent cite teachers and sex educators, seven percent say religious leaders, and four percent say the media most influences their decisions about sex. Meanwhile, adults appear to overestimate the influence of peers and underestimate their own — only 32 percent of adults believe parents most influence teens' decisions about sex, while 48 percent believe friends are most influential.⁵

Family structure. Family structure, income, and where a family lives are also related to the risk of

Teens say parents most influence their decisions about sex. But adults think that teens are most influenced by friends.

teen pregnancy. Children in single-parent families and teens with older brothers and sisters who are sexually active or who have been pregnant or given birth are more likely to be sexually active at an early age. Those teens living in neighborhoods beset by poverty, unemployment, and high crime rates are more likely to start having sex early, fail to use contraception, and become pregnant or cause a pregnancy.⁶ Yet these are not the most significant reasons why teens begin having sex at an early age.⁷

Overall risky behavior. Close parent-child relationships not only help protect young people from early sex and pregnancy, they also help teens avoid other such risky behaviors as violence, substance and alcohol use, and school failure.⁸

Parents are often in the dark. Many parents are not aware that their adolescent children have had sex. Only about a third of parents of sexually experienced 14-year-olds believe that their child has had sex.⁹ Half of parents of sexually experienced 8th to 11th graders are aware that their sons and daughters have started having sex.¹⁰

Most parents of sexually experienced children are unaware that their teenage children have had sex.

Dating and age differences. Research supports what common sense suggests: Two of the most powerful risk factors for early sex and pregnancy are, 1) close romantic attachments, and 2) significant

age differences (three years or more) between partners. Young adolescents are particularly vulnerable. Romantic relationships between young teens, and one-on-one dating with an age difference of three years or more, significantly increase the risk of early sexual activity.¹¹

Among those aged 12–14:

- 13 percent of same-age relationships include sexual intercourse*
- 26 percent of relationships where the partner is two years older include sex*
- 33 percent of relationships where the partner is three or more years older include sex¹²*

Abuse and neglect. Young people who grow up in abusive families (physical, sexual, and emotional) are more likely to be sexually active and not to use contraception consistently,¹³ although there are limitations in the research on this topic.¹⁴ Evidence also suggests that a significant number of teen mothers are in violent, abusive, or coercive relationships just before, during, or after pregnancy.¹⁵

Abstinence and contraception. Public opinion shows support for both abstinence and contraception for young people. The overwhelming majority of adults and teens believe that young people should be given a very strong message to

abstain from sex until they are at least out of high school. At the same time, most adults and teens believe that teens should be given more information about abstinence *and* contraception rather than one or the other.¹⁶

Stressing abstinence to teens while also providing them with information about contraception is not viewed as a “mixed message.” Seven in ten adults and eight in ten teens view such a message as “clear and specific.”¹⁷

Boys and girls. Six out of ten teens (59 percent) believe that teen boys often receive the message that sex and pregnancy are no big deal.¹⁸

What it all means

The research presented here has clear implications for parents, policymakers, and those working with young people and parents.

Parent/Child relationships matter most of all. Parents who (1) clearly communicate their values and expectations to their children, (2) express their concerns and love for them early and often, and (3) exercise supervision — including their child’s selection of friends and role models — raise children who are more likely to avoid early sexual activity, pregnancy, and parenthood than those parents who do not. Research supports the conclusion that the overall strength and

closeness of parent/child relationships seems to be the best protection of all.¹⁹

Talking is not enough. It is important for parents to discuss sex, love, and relationships directly with their children. Teens make it clear that they want to hear from their parents on these topics, even if they don't always act like it. However, simply talking with their teens about the risks of early sex and pregnancy is not enough. Parents need to become heavily involved in their children's lives in order to delay first sex, increase contraceptive use, or decrease the risk of pregnancy.²⁰

Use the media. Many parents say that they want to have discussions with their children about sex, love, values, and relationships but find starting such conversations awkward at best. Parents should consider using television, radio, movies, music videos, and magazines as prompts. In the media, sex often has no meaning, abstinence and contraception are mentioned rarely if at all, unplanned pregnancy seldom happens, and few characters having sex seem to be married or even especially committed to each other. Tell your children what you think about these messages and ask what they think about them. If certain programs or movies offend you, say so, and explain why. Encourage your kids to think critically; ask them what they think about the programs they watch, the magazines they read, and the music they listen to.

Adults support an “abstinence-first” approach. Policymakers and program leaders developing or running programs for youth should note that the majority of American

adults support an abstinence-first approach. This approach stresses abstinence as the first — and best — option for teens but also strongly advocates giving young people contraceptive information and services.

Make boys and young men part of the equation. As noted above, a majority of teens believe that boys often receive the message that sex and pregnancy are not a big deal. This suggests that a “double standard” — one that encourages girls to abstain from sex while offering teen boys a wink and a nod — may be alive and well. Those concerned about adolescent pregnancy must expand their efforts to reach boys and young men and parents must be direct with their male children about respect for girls and women, responsibility, and expected standards of behavior.

Recognize the connection between adolescent pregnancy and abuse. Efforts currently underway to inform and educate practitioners and policymakers about the connection between physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and teen pregnancy should be extended and strengthened.

For more information. Much of the information in this research brief is adapted from the National Campaign publication, *Parent Power: What Adults Need to Know and Do to Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy* (available at www.teenpregnancy.org/parent). *Parent Power* is divided into three sections: (1) what research says about parental influence, (2) what teens want parents to know about preventing teen pregnancy, and (3) tips for parents.

About the Putting What Works to Work project

Putting What Works to Work (PWWTW) is a project of the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy funded, in part, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Through PWWTW, the Campaign translates research on teen pregnancy prevention and related issues into user-friendly materials for practitioners, policymakers, and advocates. As part of this initiative, the *Science Says* series summarizes recent research in short, user-friendly briefs

For more information, please visit www.teenpregnancy.org

About the National Campaign

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supported largely by private donations. The Campaign's mission is to improve the well-being of children, youth, and families by reducing teen pregnancy. Our goal is to reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by one-third between 1996 and 2005.

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Author information

This research brief was written by Bill Albert, Senior Director of Communications, Publications, and Technology at the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

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