

Spring 2014 Lecture Series

Surviving and Thriving in Adolescence

Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Communicating about Sexuality from Childhood to Adolescence

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The best time to *start* talking about sex and sexuality with children is as *soon* as they ask. While some of these suggestions may need to be modified based on the age of the child, the general issues apply. Below are some pointers to help make the conversations easier:

- Try to avoid laughing or a lecturing tone. If you are overly serious, flippant, condescending or appear embarrassed, children will sense this and might avoid asking in the future.
- Even if the question is “cute” avoid repeating it to others when the child is around.
- Answer their questions briefly and honestly. Use age appropriate language. When you have answered, don’t feel the need to go into other details.
- Share information via “teachable moments”- these vary across developmental stages.
- Learn to follow your child’s cues and see if they need or want to know more. Ask, “do you understand?” or “Is that what you wanted to know?”
- Repeat the same message at other times when warranted.
- Listen to your child’s responses and reactions and also try to respond when other’s share information.
- Find ways to better understand your own views and values and how they may influence your communication with your child.
- While it’s important to share information on risk, try to avoid using fear to teach or moralizing in that context. Save those messages for a more values-based on-going dialog.
- Spend time with your child and teen and learn more about what they are watching/hearing/reading.

Parent Characteristics of Sexually Healthy Children

- Demonstrate value, respect, acceptance and trust in their children
- Model healthy attitudes in their own relationships
- Maintain a non-punitive stance towards sexuality
- Are knowledgeable about sexuality
- Discuss frequently
- Provide information
- Seek appropriate guidance and information as needed
- Try to understand their child’s point of view
- Help gain an understanding of values
- Set and maintain limits
- Stay actively involved in their children’s lives
- Asks questions about friends, romantic partners and others
- Offer to help adolescents in accessing health care services
- Help their son or daughter plan for their future

From Facing Facts: Sexual Health for America’s Adolescents, SIECUS

Recommended Resources

Books for younger children:

Where Did I Come From: The facts of life without any nonsense and with illustrations
By Peter Mayle; Illustrated by Arthur Robins; (Kensington Publishing Corp 1977)
(Also illustrated in an African-American version)

It's so amazing! A book about eggs, sperm, birth, babies and families
By Robie H. Harris (Candlewick 2004)

Books for pre-teens:

What's Happening to Me?
The Answers to some of the World's Most Embarrassing Questions
By Peter Mayle; Illustrated by Arthur Robins (Kensington Publishing Corp 2004)

Our bodies, ourselves: a new edition for a new era
By Judy Norsigian (Touchstone 2005)

Books for older teens:

Sex: A Book for Teens: An Uncensored Guide to your Body, Sex and Safety
By Nikol Hasler Zest Books (2010)

Being a Teen: Everything Teen Girls & Boys Should Know about Relationships, Sex, Love,
Health, Identity & More
By Jane Fonda (yes, that Jane Fonda) (Random House 2014)

For parents:

Talking to your kids about sex: Turning the talk into a conversation for life
By Dr. Laura Berman (DK Publishing 2009)

From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's guide to raising Sexually Healthy Children
By Jim Burns (Bethany House 2008)

What every 21st Century Parent needs to know: Facing today's challenges with wisdom and
heart
By Debra W. Haffner (Newmarket 2008)

Everything you never wanted your kids to know about sex, but were afraid they'd ask: The
secrets to surviving your child's sexual development from birth to the teens
By Justin Richardson and Mark A. Schuster (Three Rivers Press 2004)

Organizations and Websites:

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org> (Advocates for Youth)

www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

www.guttmacher.org (Guttmacher Institute)

www.plannedparenthood.org (Planned Parenthood)

www.siecus.org (Sex Information Education Council of the United States)