



Teaching Sex Education by Age

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Toddlers:

- Give them proper words for body parts – penis, vagina, vulva, testicles, urine, stool, menstruation, etc.
- Acknowledge that although touching themselves in their genitals (penis, and vagina area) feels good, it should be done when they are in a private area.
- Teach public behavior and private behavior. Butt-scratching, masturbation, nose-picking and swearing are all private behavior and best done in the bathroom or alone in the bedroom.

Preschoolers:

- Begin teaching your values about sex and sexuality. For example, you might say, "I believe that marriage is only for a man and a woman." Or, you might say, "I believe that marriage is for two people that love each other and two men that love each other, have the right to marry." As your child enters teenage hood, they will develop their own values, but as a parent, you have a heavy influence, beginning when they can understand language.

- Answer any questions children have with simple, accurate language. For example, a child might ask, "How does a baby get made?" Your answer might be, "A baby begins as a tiny cluster of cells when a man and a woman love each other. The man and woman lie close together on a bed and the man puts his penis into a woman's vagina. Sperm comes out of his penis and swims up the woman's vagina and finds an egg. When the sperm goes into the egg, a baby begins to grow." This explanation may even spur more questions such as "How long does it take?" "Does it hurt?" "Do you have to do that to get a baby?" "Do you have to have a man and a woman?" Again, give accurate, simple answers.
- Don't worry about getting too detailed or giving too much information. Children will only take as much information as they can understand. It's better to give too much information than too little.
- We often give too little information and not enough. Children are always taking in information about sex from friends, TV, Internet, movies and even children's media. They need your values and accurate information most.
- The most important benefit of answering questions is that you give your child the message that you are approachable and willing to talk about his questions. He knows that he can ask you anything.
- Teach your child that it's "Her body, Her rules!" Whenever she is uncomfortable with anything regarding her body and another person, she has the right to say, "No" and that must be respected. If she doesn't want to kiss Grandma good-bye, she is saying "No", and Grandma has to accept that. If she doesn't want to take her pants off for the doctor, she must be respected. Perhaps she needs more explanation and preparation for the next visit.
- This is a good age for children to begin asking questions as they often see their mothers or mother's friends breastfeeding children. They often follow you into the toilet and see first-hand how things work.
- Exploratory behavior is very normal at this age. Continue to talk about "private" versus "public" behavior in terms of masturbation, nose-picking, farting, and other behaviors.
- Children should be taught to not touch other children. Looking and touching sibling or friend's privates are common. It becomes a problem and possibly criminal behavior when a child is over age 12 and/or if there is 5 years age difference between the children.
- This is a good time to begin discussions about consent. Talk about what family, friends, doctors and others can do with the child's body. Basically, if the child says "No," their wishes must be respected and it is up to you as the parent to enforce that. Say, "Whoever says "No!", rules!

School-agers:

- Continue putting comments out there such as, “When you begin menstruating, we will purchase some pads for you.” This invites your child to ask questions as they know you are willing to talk.
- Recognise that there will not be one talk; there will be many little talks.
- Give information on puberty changes, the mechanics of sexual intercourse, how babies are born, sexual transmitted infections, birth control and anything else they want to know.
- If they don’t ask questions, respect that.
- Use media as a talking point; Say, “What do you know about abortion? Would you like me to explain it to you?” after watching a movie such as “Dirty Dancing.”
- Do more listening to your child rather than lecturing.
- Most children around this age become very modest. Respect their choice by covering up yourself and closing the bathroom door.
- Don’t use your child as a confidant. They are embarrassed easily. Let them set the pace for questions, but you can throw comments out there to let them know it is okay to ask you.
- If your child agrees, celebrate first occasions by going for lunch when your daughter gets her period, or going for coffee when your son learns how to shave.
- Be sure to share your values when listening to their music, movies and videos.
- Children at this age are developing their gender identity as a male or female.

Teenagers:

- Attend your city’s gay pride parade with or without them. Show your support and let your child know that he will be supported if he comes out as a person who is LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered, Queer.)
- Provide information and websites about contraception and body changes.
- Leave books in the bathroom so they can pick them up and read them.
- Discuss healthy dating, intimacy, relationships and consent from talking points such as movies etc.
- Have conversations and practice refusal skills and well as initiation skills. How to ask for a date and how to refuse unwanted attention.
- Discuss what is appropriate to put online. Photos of body parts, drinking and drugs, and relationship status, as well as personal information is a no-no on social media.

Excerpted from *Attachment Parenting Tips for Raising Toddlers to Teens*, by Judy Arnall, Copyright 2019

Parenting/Childcare

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