

How to Talk to Your Kids about Sexuality and Healthy Sexual Choices

Youth need to hear about sexual health issues in different ways—by talking with parents and other trusted adults, through books, and in class discussions. Books and resources like SEX?—A Healthy Sexuality Resource can provide information, but family discussion provides young people with the values that will guide their choices.

As a parent, you are your children's first and best teacher. You have the opportunity to ensure that your children know about sexual health and healthy sexual choices. Young people have told us that they want to make the right choices and that they need information that will allow them to do so. You are their best source of information, guidance and support. We hope this information will give you some ideas for talking with your children about sexual health.

Be available and easy to talk to.

Start conversations about sexual issues. Ask what your children are learning in health class, what they hear from their friends, what they see and hear in the media—movies, TV, videos, magazines, etc. Your children will be more willing to come to you for information if they know you're willing to give it.

Let them know you're willing to talk about difficult issues. You may feel uncomfortable discussing topics like abuse, assault, dating violence, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual orientation, but it's likely that your children or someone close to them will face one of these issues at some point.

Listen to your children without judging them.

Accept that your teens may see things differently. Share your own opinions, values, and views in a non-threatening way. You can disagree without condemning or belittling your child. Your children won't open up to you if they're afraid of being put down.

Look for accurate, up-to-date information to share with your children.

The more you know, the more you will be able to help your children and the more comfortable you'll be with the whole topic of sexuality.

There are many up-to-date resources that are accurate and respect young people's intelligence and ability to make decisions. These include books, videos, magazine articles, television, and the internet. And don't overlook local professionals like public health nurses, your family doctor, or community agencies.

Leave resources and reading material where your children can find them when they need information. Keep in mind that before your children come to you with a question, they've probably already looked for information about it. Do your best to be sure that what you tell them is honest and straightforward and that the resources you give them are accurate, respectful, and up-to-date.

Help your children learn to make decisions and accept responsibility.

Children who have experience in making decisions and accepting responsibility for the results of their choices will be better prepared to make responsible sexual choices.

Don't forget about boys.

Often sexual health information focuses on young women. This can give young men the message that they don't need information and don't have to accept responsibility for their actions. Young men need to hear about male sexuality and sexual responsibility too.

It's never too late.

Talking about sexuality and sexual issues with your teenagers will seem more natural and comfortable if you've been answering their questions since they were small. But it's never too late to share your values, beliefs, and experiences with your children. It's never too late to let them know you care about them and the choices they make. Fathers and adult males offer important perspectives and can contribute a great deal to these discussions.

If you don't feel comfortable talking about sex and sexuality with your children, help them find other adults or professionals they CAN talk to. Questions and curiosity are a normal part of growth and development. If you're uncomfortable with the topic, let your children know it's okay with you if they ask for information from other accurate, reliable sources.

For more information, check the Department of Health and Wellness website: novascotia.ca/dhw

Adapted from:

Just Loosen Up and Start Talking. Planned Parenthood Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Department of Health, 1996, revised 2002.

Just Loosen Up and Keep Talking. Nova Scotia Round Table on Youth Sexual Health, 2nd Edition, March 1999.

