



When is the best time to talk to your teenager about sexuality? When you least expect it.

By Robyn Hubbard, M.D.

Experts say that kids should know the basic facts about sex and where babies come from by age nine. I find that this conversation is one you should be prepared for at unexpected opportunities that come your way, rather than planning a time for “the talk.” If you’re ready with simple questions that may come up during a grocery store run, car ride or dinner conversation, it may be the easiest and most natural way to talk to your kids about sex.

Movies often make fun of mom or dad sitting their kid down for “the talk,” usually an awkward, comical portrayal of a pretty unsuccessful conversation. While I know many adults who are intimidated at the notion of talking about sensitive issues with their kids, it’s important that your kids get accurate information and that you’re in touch with what they’re thinking, wondering or exposed to at school. It’s much better to get accurate information from you than from myths and rumors.

Public health officials talk about how important it is for us as parents to be in continuous conversation with our kids about smoking, drinking alcohol, drugs and sex. I see it as part of our job as a parent to make sure that our kids are making good and informed choices about their health.

Good health is more than yearly physicals and drinking your milk! Many preteens are exposed to risky behavior in middle school. As the mother of twin sixth graders, I find that horrifying and hard to believe. But as confident as we may feel about our own children’s innocence, statistics don’t lie, so we need to arm them with good information.

Sexuality is a broad concept including awareness of yourself as a sexual being, flirting, experimenting with dressing differently or using makeup in a more provocative way, all the way to kissing, petting and sex. Sex, by the way, includes a lot of things, from traditional intercourse to oral and anal sex, which many kids think is safer because they can still be a “virgin” and can avoid pregnancy. The important thing is to make sure they understand what it all means in case they are asked to engage in this behavior. It’s also important they know that abstinence is the only healthy choice for the prevention of pregnancy and STDs.

Knowing the risks – not only the physical but the emotional – can help teens understand and hopefully make right choices about sex. Feeling confident and informed is a huge plus for teens when peer pressure kicks in.

This broader concept of sexuality may make it easier to talk to kids. Talking about who is cute, what a crush is, and what friends are doing may open the door for more information sharing about deeper and more important things. As your children get older, there are plenty of resources to help you share accurate information on safe sex practices, pregnancy prevention and good health. Some of them are great for your kids to use too.

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The anonymous nature of the Internet may be good in this case, where you give permission for them to explore their questions on sites that give accurate information. Helping your

kids to understand the risks and consequences early on can help to ensure that they have good health and happy lives.

- kidshealth.org
- girlshealth.gov
- *American Girl books: The Care and Keeping of You*

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