

Talking to Your Child

About Sexuality

Ages 9-12



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Public Health

This Booklet For Parents Explains:

- The meaning of sexuality.
- The parent's role in providing knowledge and guidance about sexual health.
- How to discuss sexuality with children.
- The Four Point Plan. This plan is designed to help guide parents when their child has questions about sexuality.
- The stages of sexual development and what to expect.
- Where to find more information.

This information is meant to serve as a guideline only. Each child develops and asks questions at their own pace.

Choose the information that best fits you and the values of your family.



What is Sexuality?

The term sexuality does not only refer to sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Sexuality involves the mind and body as a whole, not just the genitals. Sexuality is shaped by a person's values, attitudes, behaviours, physical appearance, beliefs, emotions, personality and spirituality, as well as all the ways in which one has been socialized.

Sexuality is an important part of a person's overall health and well-being. Sexual health education is key to providing children with the knowledge and skills they need to ensure their healthy development.

What is Your Role?

Parents want to provide the knowledge and guidance their child needs to become a responsible and secure adult. However, some parents may be uncomfortable talking about sexuality with their child because:

- Parents may be hesitant to talk about reproductive body parts and functions, especially if the topic was not discussed when they were growing up.
- Parents may wonder if talking about sexuality and reproduction will encourage their child to experiment. In fact, young people whose parents discuss all aspects of sexuality with them tend to delay becoming sexually active, when compared with children whose parents do not discuss the issue.
- Parents may not be sure what their child already knows or needs to know.

These factors may cause some parents to remain silent on the subject of sexuality. However, by doing so, you may actually be sending an unspoken message to your child. Not speaking openly about sexuality may be sending the message that it is a forbidden topic.

The reality is that you are continually teaching your child many things about sexuality and have been since the day your child was born.

Children learn from the way they are touched by others, the way they feel about their own bodies, and what their family believes is okay and not okay to do. Children quickly pick up on the words that family members use (and don't use) to refer to body parts, gender and other terminology used when referring to sexual health.

Children also learn a great deal from sources outside the family, such as the media, the Internet, other relationships, friends, and their own life experiences.



Ways to Help Your Child Grow Up Sexually Healthy

Parents hope their children will make positive choices, based on the values that their family shares. You can help your child make these decisions, since you are an extremely important influence in your child's life. To do so, it's important to talk about your family values and beliefs when discussing sexuality.

You should start by asking yourself:

- Does my child actually know what I believe?
- Have I honestly discussed our family's values about sexuality?



You may want to have a family discussion to talk about some of these issues. A few suggestions include:

- Choose a quiet time when no one is feeling rushed.
- Treat each other with respect.
- Really listen to each family member.
- Be honest.
- Share the reasons for your beliefs and personal values.

More tips to help your child grow up sexually healthy

- Encourage your child to feel good about themselves and their bodies.
- Help your child express their feelings.
- Be patient and prepared to hear the information your child is willing to share.
- Discuss the components of a healthy relationship.
- Help your child build communication and assertiveness skills to resist peer pressure.
- Help your child learn how to make decisions about relationships and sex. Emphasize that their decisions may have consequences.
- Communicate your family values on sexuality.
- Help your child develop a personal value system, but recognize that it may be different from your own.
- Counteract the distorted view about sexual relationships that are sometimes shown in the media.
- Respect your child's need for privacy. Show that you are interested without demanding intimate details. Children need to know that you trust and respect them.



Tips for Discussing Sexuality with Your Child

- Accept the role of sex educator. Most young people want their parents to provide them with information about sex and sexuality but aren't sure how to start the conversation.
- Become knowledgeable about sex and sexuality, but don't think you have to be an expert! Often you and your child can find the answers together.
- Accept that it may be awkward and embarrassing to talk to your child about sex and sexuality – and then do it anyway.
- Along with facts, talk about feelings, relationships, and how other people can be affected.
- Ensure there are resources in your home where your child can get accurate information. If children have access to age appropriate books, they will probably read them even if they won't talk to you. If you recommend books, videos or websites to your child, make sure you preview them first to ensure they are appropriate.
- Answer questions directly, honestly, and without judgement. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and tell them you'll find out and get back to them. Then do it!
- Take advantage of those moments that arise when you can share your views. For example, you can do this when watching TV, reading the newspaper or a magazine, or while listening to the radio.
- Communicate your values honestly and expect them to be challenged. Children want to be independent and have their own identities.
- Accept that you can't control all of your child's actions. Promote their ability to take responsibility for their actions.
- Recognize that you may not understand what your child is experiencing. Talk with other parents, teachers or call Peel Public Health to speak with a Public Health Nurse.
- Make sure your child knows where they can access credible information and/or medical help if needed. See the **Resources** section at the end of this booklet.

The Four Point Plan

This plan can help you respond to questions your child might have about sexuality. When answering questions, try to use the following four points:

1. Facts



2. Your Family Values

3. Responsibilities



1. Facts:

- Give truthful information.
- Find out the facts together if you need more information.

2. Values:

- Share what you believe in and what is important to you.
- Practise what you believe in and be a positive role model.

3. Responsibility:

- Let children know what you expect of them.
- Allow your child to think and talk about how they feel.
- Help your child understand and accept the consequences of their decisions and actions.

4. Self-Esteem:

- Help your child feel good about themselves.
- Treat your child with respect, and they will learn to respect themselves and others.
- Encourage your child to follow through with their own decisions even when their friends disagree.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Language is a powerful tool to help build healthy self-esteem.

Adapted from Lipton, Matthew, Weber, Susan J., (1990) SEXUALITY EDUCATION AT HOME: THE CARING PARENTS GUIDE, The Pacific Coast Centre of Sexology, British Columbia

Sexual Development – What to Expect...

Preteens, age 9 to 12:

- May begin to experience the changes associated with puberty.
- May become more modest and want privacy.
- May experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies.
- May develop crushes on friends, teens, teachers and celebrities among others.
- Romantic feelings may be directed towards people of the opposite gender.
- Romantic feelings may be directed towards people of the same gender.
- May take part in sexual exploration with peers.
- May masturbate to orgasm.
- May have to make decisions about sex and drug use.

Teens, age 13 to 18:

- Complete the changes associated with puberty. On average, boys develop about two years later than girls.
- Place great value on independence.
- Become more aware of physical appearance.
- Experience increased sexual feelings.
- May be more influenced by peer groups. Peer acceptance continues to be very important.
- May become interested in or develop romantic relationships.
- May desire physical closeness with a partner.
- May face peer pressure to be sexually active whether or not they feel ready.
- May favour romantic relationships over close friendships.
- May make choices which could lead to pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.

Resources

Peel Public Health Resources:

Healthy Sexuality Clinics

Clinics provide counselling and confidential services related to birth control and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C. The emphasis is on education, prevention and counselling. For more information, please call 905-799-7700 or visit www.peelsexualhealth.ca

Region of Peel Sexual Health Information

This is a confidential telephone service that provides counselling and education. Public Health Nurses answer questions related to birth control, STIs, pregnancy, puberty, abortion, sexual orientation and other sexual health issues. For more information call 905-799-7700.

Region of Peel websites

Children and parents may also want to explore the resources available on the following websites. Please visit www.changesinme.ca, www.talktomepeel.ca and www.peelsexualhealth.ca

Website Resources for Parents:

These resources are provided for information only and do not imply an endorsement of views, products or services.

Teaching Sexual Health Website (Canadian)

www.teachingsexualhealth.ca

A sexual health website with sections for parents and students at all grade levels.

Sexuality and U (Canadian)

www.sexualityandu.ca

Information about puberty, talking about sex with your child, STIs and contraception.

Canadian Federation for Sexual Health (formerly known as *Planned Parenthood*)

www.cfsh.ca

A sexual health website with links for parents and youths.

Planned Parenthood – SPIDERBYTES (Canadian)

www.spiderbytes.ca

Sexual health information for youth.

PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) (Canadian Branch)

www.pflagcanada.ca

Information, resources and support for parents of lesbians and gays.

Kids Health (USA)

www.kidshealth.org/parent/growth

Articles on communication with your child, puberty and surviving adolescence.

I Wanna Know (USA)

www.iwannaknow.org/parents

Information on being an “askable” parent, links to youth sites about puberty, STIs, abstinence, decision-making and condom use.

Positive Space Coalition of Peel (Canadian)

www.positivespacepeel.org

Positive Space Coalition is a networking group of individuals and agencies dedicated to addressing the needs and increasing the visibility of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgendered, questioning and queer (LGBTQQ) community in Peel.

Books

Changes in You and Me: A Book About Puberty Mostly for Boys

By: Paulette Bourgeois and Kim Martyn

This book is written specifically for male youth. There are answers to children’s questions about growing up. It also features quizzes, exercises and detailed illustrations related to puberty and maturation.

Beyond the Big Talk

By: Debra Haffner

A parent’s guide to raising sexually healthy teens from middle school to high school and beyond.

It’s So Amazing: A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families

By: Robie H. Harris – Illustrated by Michael Emberley

This book provides accurate, unbiased answers to many sexual health and reproduction questions, while giving children a healthy understanding of their bodies.

Changes in You and Me: A Book About Puberty Mostly for Girls

By: Paulette Bourgeois and Kim Martyn

This book is written specifically for female youth. There are answers to children’s questions about growing up. It also features quizzes, exercises and detailed illustrations related to puberty and maturation.

Sex & Sensibility: The Thinking Parent’s Guide to Talking Sense About Sex

By: Deborah Roffman

This book is written by a sex educator and provides a down-to-earth, realistic view of sexuality issues. Topics discussed include age appropriate behaviours, values, cultural norms and differences, and sexual orientation. The author stresses the importance of empowering children with knowledge.

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Peel Public Health, Healthy Sexuality Program
905-799-7700 www.peelsexualhealth.ca

Adapted with permission from:
Calgary Health Region www.teachingsexualhealth.ca



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