

SEXUALITY EDUCATION TIPS FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

Research shows that children who have been able to talk about sex with their parents are less likely to engage in early or irresponsible sexual activity. Parents are best suited to be their children's sexuality educators because they care the most, and can share core family values while providing essential information.

- 1. Get together with your spouse/partner or other adults to discuss and clarify your values** and sexuality education strategies. Rehearse sexual words and situations so you will be prepared to respond to questions your child has.
- 2. Purchase or borrow good sexuality education resources.** If you give your child a book, read it with them. Planned Parenthood Mid and South Michigan has a list of excellent books that can help you in this process. Our book list is located under the Education and Training portion of the website, under "For Parents." Y
- 3. Answer questions as they come up one at a time.** Children whose guardians put off answering their questions with statements like "later" may never ask again.
- 4. Don't wait to be asked.** Many parents often wait for their children to approach them with questions about puberty, relationships, and sexuality. But children may not always feel comfortable making the first move. Don't assume that if your child hasn't asked you about sexuality she or he isn't interested in talking about it. Sometimes they're shy or uncomfortable and are just waiting for you to broach the subject.
- 5. Find out what knowledge the child has before answering the question.** When a child asks a question try using "What do you think?" and let their answer lead the discussion.
- 6. Consider age.** Don't over- or under-answer questions. For ideas on age appropriate information go to www.plannedparenthood.org click on "Health Info" and then "Pregnancy and Parenting". Look for the links under "Guides for Parents".
- 7. Never tease** a child about their sexuality, or laugh at their questions about sex.
- 8. It's okay to ask for time to think about an answer:** "Let me get back to you on that when I've had time to think about it." It's also okay to say you don't know. This would give you an opportunity to look up the answer and get back to your child, or look up the information together.
- 9. Compliment the child for their question.** This will encourage ongoing communication.
- 10. Be a positive sexual role model for your child.** When you demonstrate warmth, affection, and support for your family and spouse you are showing your child how to behave in interpersonal relationships. Talk about love and affection as well as providing children with facts about anatomy and sexual functioning.

PPMSM HEALTH CENTERS

Ann Arbor 3100 Professional Drive **734.973.0710**
Ann Arbor West 2370 W. Stadium Blvd. **734.929.9480**
Benton Harbor 1161 E. Napier Ave. **269.926.2042**
Brighton 7900 Grand River Rd. **810.220.4513**
Detroit 4229 Cass Ave. **313.831.7776**
East Lansing 515 E. Grand River, Ste G **517.333.6744**
Flint G-3371 Beecher Road **810.238.3631**

Jackson 2009 W. Michigan Ave. **517.784.1700**
Lansing 300 N. Clippert, Ste. 6 **517.351.0550**
Livonia 37625 Ann Arbor Rd. #107 **734.591.6544**
Owosso 205 N. Hintz Rd. **989.723.6420**
Saginaw 2650 N. McLeod Dr. **989.249.7736**
Warren 25932 Dequindre **586.758.2100**
Ypsilanti 840 Maus Ave. **734.485.0144**

- 11. Be receptive to your child's questions.** You don't need to be an expert to be an effective sexuality educator for your children. In fact, not knowing all the answers can be the perfect opportunity to spark discussion about sexuality by looking for the answers together.
- 12. Take advantage of "teachable moments."** Look for natural opportunities to talk to the child. Teachable moments arise with T.V. programs that broach sexuality issues, pregnant relatives, slang words, name-calling situations, songs on the radio, etc.
- 13. Keep the conversation going.** One big talk won't convey all the information and your values about sexuality. Kids need information as they develop, and they need to feel comfortable asking you as they grow. Start early and let talking about sexuality be an ongoing part of your evolving relationship with your entire family.
- 14. Keep in mind that you are talking to your children because you care about their happiness and well-being and tell them so.**
- 15. Know what is taught about sexuality in your schools, faith communities, and youth groups.** If you know what is being taught in your community you can decide what you want to discuss further and what additional information you may want to teach your child.
- 16. Remember the facts are not enough.** Children need, and want to learn about the spiritual, moral, and emotional aspects of sexuality, not just 'the basics'.
- 17. Remind yourself that it is okay to feel uncomfortable.** This is a normal reaction. You are not the only one; many parents report feeling nervous.
- 18. Encourage your children to express their ideas openly.** Everyone makes judgments- especially when we disagree with someone. But when you disagree with your child, let them know that you respect them and their ideas, you just don't agree with them. Don't be afraid to ask your child to explain why they feel a certain way. Young people who feel they are being judged or talked down to will be less likely to talk in the future.
- 19. Don't assume that questions or interest in the subject indicates the child is engaging in any specific behaviors.** Listen and be sure to keep the lines of communication open.
- 20. Always use correct terms.** Often families use alternative names for sexual body parts. By using the correct terms you give your child a vocabulary for future discussions. This can begin early. During potty training is a great time to teach your child correct terms for his or her body parts. Using other names can give your child the idea that these body parts are 'dirty'. If any of the correct words embarrass you, practice saying them alone or in front of a mirror.

Source: *Planned Parenthood of Illinois*

PPMSM HEALTH CENTERS

Ann Arbor 3100 Professional Drive **734.973.0710**
Ann Arbor West 2370 W. Stadium Blvd. **734.929.9480**
Benton Harbor 1161 E. Napier Ave. **269.926.2042**
Brighton 7900 Grand River Rd. **810.220.4513**
Detroit 4229 Cass Ave. **313.831.7776**
East Lansing 515 E. Grand River, Ste G **517.333.6744**
Flint G-3371 Beecher Road **810.238.3631**

Jackson 2009 W. Michigan Ave. **517.784.1700**
Lansing 300 N. Clippert, Ste. 6 **517.351.0550**
Livonia 37625 Ann Arbor Rd. #107 **734.591.6544**
Owosso 205 N. Hintz Rd. **989.723.6420**
Saginaw 2650 N. McLeod Dr. **989.249.7736**
Warren 25932 Dequindre **586.758.2100**
Ypsilanti 840 Maus Ave. **734.485.0144**