

Help for having tough talk on sex with your children

By JENNIFER DREYER

Someone I know is struggling to talk with her 12-year-old son about sex.

Someone I know has a hard time using the word “penis” with his 5- and 7-year-old sons.

And someone I know panicked and stuttered when her 6-year-old daughter asked how babies get inside a woman’s tummy.

I imagine we all know someone who struggles with talking to their children about sexuality.

For many years, Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest has offered classes for parents who want to be more “askable” about issues related to sexuality.

We’ve helped thousands

of parents start — or deepen — a healthy dialogue with their teens about sex.

As we continue to serve San Diego, Riverside and Imperial counties, Planned Parenthood is introducing Positive Action, a new, evidence-based curriculum with a proven track record of improving communication between parents and their children.

What is most exciting about the seven-class Positive Action program is its holistic approach to communication. The program works to foster healthy dialogue about sexuality by laying the groundwork and helping parents develop essential communication skills. The classes help parents become more involved with their children’s schoolwork,

nutrition, hygiene, and self-development.

The emphasis is not on sexuality education, but on laying the foundation for better overall family communication.

An example of the holistic nature of the program is the section on family dinners. One of the simplest and most effective ways for parents to be engaged in their teens’ lives is by sharing meals as a family.

Besides bonding, families that dine together tend to eat more vegetables and fruits — and fewer fried foods, soda and foods with trans fats. Positive Action helps families understand these benefits and devise strategies to implement change.

The results of Positive Action have been

impressive. After completing the program, more than half of the parents report that their children’s reading scores improved.

Seventy-three percent say their kids’ math scores increased.

Parents also saw reductions in family conflict, suspensions, dropout rates, violence, gang activity, bullying, and the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

I have long believed that education is one of the few “equalizers” in our world, so I am delighted that Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest is now offering Positive Action. We know that parents are the primary source of education for their children, especially about sensitive issues like sexuality. And,

I know offering this evidence-based program will give parents more tools, confidence and comfort in talking with their children about sexuality.

I also believe that this dialogue will help shape a new generation of community leaders who might just find it easier and completely normal to talk with their children about sex.

If you would like to learn more about our Positive Action program, contact Education Outreach Project Manager Chrissy Cmorik at ccmorik@planned.org. Visit www.planned.org.

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