



The Talk Show

Using TV to Talk with Your Children about Sex

Nearly all (97%) U.S. homes own at least one television. TV is part of most of our daily lives, and most people have a favorite show...or three or four. TV shows are filled with story lines related to sexuality, relationships, and reproductive health – everything from sex and pregnancy to unhealthy relationships and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues. Watching TV with your children can help you have honest conversations about these topics.

You can use storylines to spark conversations and find out what your child thinks and how they might behave if they were faced with the same situation. You can also share your values, expectations, and hopes for them.

STEP 1

Find out which shows your kids are watching and figure out a time to watch with them when you won't be distracted. Ask open-ended questions about what they're watching instead of yes/no questions to get a conversation going. Here are some general questions you can start with:

- What is this show about? What do you like about it?
- What do you think about what's happening in the show right now?
- How realistic are the situations in the show? Do you know anyone in a similar situation? If so, how are they handling it? What do you think about how they are handling it? What would you do?
- Which relationships in the show are healthy and which are unhealthy, and why?

STEP 2

Get more specific about what's happening on the show, and listen carefully to what your children say. This is an important opportunity to talk about your thoughts and values. Share your expectations and hopes for them if they were in a situation similar to what's happening on screen or use the show as a jumping-off point to talk about related issues.

When You See Romantic Relationships



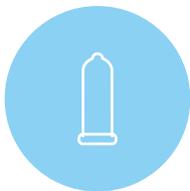
ASK:

- How do they treat each other? Why are they together? How do they communicate?
- What do you think about how they treat each other and how they settle disagreements?
- Overall, what makes the relationship healthy or unhealthy?

TALK ABOUT:

- What you hope for them in their romantic relationships.
- The relationships you've had or have. Children and teens are often fascinated to hear more about their parents' dating history.
- Warning signs of unhealthy relationships, and the fact that one in ten high school students has been physically hurt by a dating partner. What to do if you ever feel scared, threatened, or are hurt by your romantic partner.

When You See Sex or Sexual Activity



ASK:

- Do you think the sex on this show is realistic? Why or why not?
- How did the characters know they were ready to have sex? What factors did they consider in making that decision? What factors would you consider? How would you know if you were ready? Who would you talk to about it?
- What do the characters expect from each other? What are the disadvantages and advantages of having sex?

TALK ABOUT:

- Your values about when sex is appropriate. Be specific—do you believe sex is only for marriage? Is only for adults? Is OK for older teens as long as the relationship is a strong and loving one? Many parents aren't specific enough—your teen won't know what you expect from them unless you're direct and specific.

- The complex emotions that can go along with having sex.
- What the advantages and disadvantages are of having sex. Talk with them about these things and help them think through what the right decision is for them right now.
- What real sex looks like versus sex on TV, including how in real life people don't look perfect all the time and they don't automatically know what the other person wants. In real life, couples don't go from kissing to sex in one minute. There has to be communication between partners. And in real life, most teens aren't having sex—the average age of first sex in the U.S. is 18.
- Preventing unintended pregnancy with birth control—the different methods and where they can get birth control.
- Using condoms with birth control to avoid STDs.
- Getting tested for STDs.

When You See a Pregnancy



ASK:

- How does this character feel about being pregnant? Who did she tell about the pregnancy?
- What are her options and what is she considering doing? How does reality compare with what they're showing on this show?
- How would getting pregnant affect your life right now? What would you do?

TALK ABOUT:

- Ways to prevent pregnancy with birth control.
- When you think the right time for your child to become a parent is.
- What your child needs (good job, education, home, partner, etc.) before becoming a parent.
- Your beliefs about what he/she should do if he got someone pregnant or she got pregnant right now.

When You See Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) Issues



ASK:

- How realistic do you think this character's experience is? What are different experiences someone might have in real life as an LGBT person?
- What are the challenges that this character faces because of his/her sexual orientation or gender identity? How is he/she being treated? What do you think about that?
- What gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender people do you know? What are their lives like? How supportive is your school for LGBT students? What can you do to be supportive?

TALK ABOUT:

- How LGBT people can be just as diverse as everyone else—they're not all the same.
- How discrimination affects LGBT people, including bullying, self-esteem, and legal obstacles in adulthood like not being able to get married, get a job, or find housing.
- How to support people who are LGBT by joining a Gay-Straight Alliance at school, standing up for LGBT people at school who are bullied, or just being a good friend.

When You See Peer Pressure



ASK:

- What made the character do that? What do you think about what they did? What would have happened if they didn't do that?
- What would you do if faced with a similar situation? How would you say no to someone pressuring you to do something sexual that you were not comfortable with?
- What do you think about people who pressure others to do things they're not comfortable with?
- What are some ways to tell that someone might be uncomfortable about what you are suggesting?

TALK ABOUT:

- What peer pressure looks like as a child, teen, and adult.
- Ways your child can say no to sex or something else they're not comfortable with.
- Ways they can get out of a peer pressure situation safely.
- Recognizing when someone is uncomfortable.
- The importance of accepting when someone does not want to do something.

When You See Texting or Social Media



ASK:

- Have you or a friend ever sent a text or posted something on a social media site that you've regretted? What happened? What could have happened?
- What kinds of things do you think are OK to text or share and what kinds of things aren't?

TALK ABOUT:

- Protecting your privacy and how little control you have of photos, videos, and posts once they are shared.
- That sending nude or semi-nude photos – even of yourself – is illegal for minors in many places. Even when it isn't illegal, these kinds of pictures often end up getting shared with people who were not meant to see them and can lead to a lot of problems.
- The fact that only 1 out of 5 teens have ever sexted, so most teens aren't sexting.

When You See Issues of Body Image or Unrealistic Beauty Standards



ASK:

- Why do you think this character feels the way they do about their body? What causes someone to feel good or bad about their body?
- What do you notice about most of the people on TV – are their bodies typical of most people? What do you think actors and actresses do to look like they do?
- Do your friends talk about their bodies in negative or positive ways? How does that make you feel?

TALK ABOUT:

- The fact that bodies come in many different shapes and sizes, and that's normal. The average size in the U.S. is 5'4" tall and 166 lbs. for women, and 5'9" tall and 196 lbs. for men.

- The messages we receive about the way men and women “should” look from media and peers are often unrealistic and tend to make us feel inadequate.
 - How models’ and actors’ body types usually do not look like the average person’s. People on TV need to look a certain way as part of their jobs and they often have to make a great effort to stay in shape. In addition, their bodies are sometimes cosmetically or surgically enhanced, and their images are often changed.
 - Maintaining a healthy body image – including keeping a list of their positive qualities that don’t have to do with appearance, how to treat their body with respect and kindness, and surrounding themselves with supportive, respectful people.
-

STEP 3

Keep going! Talking about sexuality is a lifelong process. It’s not something that happens once. You should keep talking as your children grow and their lives change.

- For more information and resources, visit plannedparenthood.org/parents.
- For games and quizzes for your teen to help them wait to have sex until they’re ready, and use birth control/condoms once they do have sex, visit plannedparenthood.org/apps.

REFERENCES

Finer, Lawrence B., and Jesse M. Philbin. (2014). “Trends in Ages at Key Reproductive Transitions in the United States, 1951–2010.” *Women’s Health Issues*, 24 (3), e271–e279. [Online]. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1049386714000085>, accessed July 30, 2014.

Fryar, Cheryl D., et al. (2012). “Anthropometric reference data for children and adults: United States, 2007–2010.” *National Center for Health Statistics. Vital and Health Statistics*, 11(252). [Online]. http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_11/sr11_252.pdf, accessed September 29, 2014.

Kann, Laura, et al. (2014). “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2013.” *MMWR*, 63 (No. SS-4). [Online]. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/ss/ss6304.pdf>, accessed September 29, 2014.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. (2008). *Sex and Tech: Results from a Survey of Teens and Young Adults*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. [Online]. http://thenationalcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/sex_and_tech_summary.pdf, accessed September 29, 2014.