

HOW PARENTS CAN ENCOURAGE HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Birth - Age 4

- Hold, cuddle, and comfort your children.
- Use correct names for all body parts, including penis, vagina, and vulva.
- Talk about the differences and similarities between bodies.
- Respect your children's bodies as their own and teach them that they have the right to say "no" to unwanted touch.
- Respect your children's right to explore their own bodies.
- Teach your children about boundaries. For example, when they want to touch their genitals, they should do so in private.
- Let your children know that it is okay to ask questions.



5 - 8 Years Old

- Encourage your children to make and keep friends.
- Continue to encourage your children to use correct names for the body parts and bodily functions.
- Tell your children that their bodies are beautiful.
- Feed your children healthy foods.
- Encourage regular bathing and washing.
- Explain to your children that people can be attracted to and love those of the same or another gender and that it's important to respect all sexual orientations.
- Talk with your children about their gender, and be supportive if they are struggling with the social and cultural expectations associated with their gender.
- Teach them to respect all gender expressions and identities.



9 - 12 Years Old

- Help your children understand how all bodies grow and differ during puberty.
- Provide your children with a clear understanding of the family values regarding dating and sexual relationships.
- Teach your children that sexual feelings are normal.
- Tell your children that sex is pleasurable and that it comes with responsibilities.
- Tell your children about pregnancy and reproduction.
- Model healthy conflict resolution skills.
- Teach your children how to care for their bodies, including how to protect against sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancy.
- If you hear your children using the word "gay" in a derogatory way, encourage them to use a different word. Explain what "gay" means.
- Take time to talk openly and honestly with your children about sexuality topics and ask them what they think or feel about these topics. Show your teens that you care about what they have to say and that you're willing to listen.
- Help your children understand how to take care of new hygiene needs, such as using deodorant, shaving, pad/tampon usage.



13 - 18 Years Old

- Continue to answer your children's questions about sexuality honestly and openly.
- Reassure your children that differences in size, shape, and development among teens of the same age are normal.
- Express clear expectations and boundaries.
- Discourage your children from dating people 2-3 years older, because unequal power dynamics may put them at higher risk of an unhealthy relationship.
- Encourage your children to talk about feelings of love, jealousy, anger, and other intense emotions.
- Support your children's desire to become independent and express their identity by encouraging them to make decisions, try new things, and mature.
- Show your children that you love them with continued affection.



19 - 24 Years Old

- Keep the lines of communication open and accept that the person is an adult, not a child.
- Continue to offer physical and emotional closeness, but respect their need for privacy and independence.
- Appreciate them for their strengths and qualities.
- Facilitate their access to sexual and reproductive health care.

