

Hey, What Do I Say?

A Parent to Parent Guide on How to
Talk to Children about Sexuality



Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the Adult Role Models—past, present, and future—for their commitment to help parents and other caring adults throughout New York City improve their communication about sexuality and build strong relationships with their children.

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Introduction

Talking to the children in your life about sexuality is a lifelong process, and this guide can help you start or continue that process.

As parents, we know we have all received different messages about sexuality. Some of us may or may not have received education about sexuality from our own parents. Regardless of what we were taught when we were young, it's important to give our children accurate information, along with our family values, in order to help them make healthy decisions about sexuality.

With high rates of sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and unintended pregnancy among teens in the United States, we know that children need information about sexual and reproductive health from trusted sources. And with too many potentially untrustworthy sources on TV,

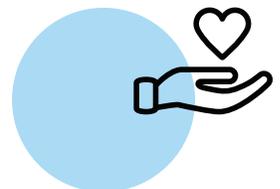
in movies, on social media, and on the Internet, parents are needed more than ever to be the primary and most trusted sexuality educators of their children. We realize that for some parents, figuring out how to do this can be tricky. That's where the Adult Role Models program comes in.

In 1998, Planned Parenthood of New York City (PPNYC) created the Adult Role Models (ARM) program to help parents learn skills and techniques to keep the lines of communication open with their children about sexuality. As Adult Role Models, we've undergone extensive training that showed us how to speak openly and honestly with our children about sexuality

and use techniques to improve communication with our children.

We hope the information, skills, and techniques in this guide will make it easier for other parents and caring adults to share accurate information and their family values with the children in their lives. Talking to the children in your life about sexuality is a lifelong process, and this guide can help you to start or continue that process. Good luck!

PPNYC Adult Role Models



Talking to Children about Sexuality...



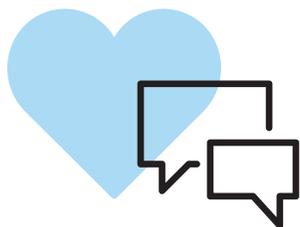
Based on our own experience and what we hear from other parents, the main barriers that prevent us from openly talking to our kids about sexuality are:

- **fear**
- **lack of information**
- **myths**

Whatever the reason that holds us back, the bottom line is that our children need to have us talk to them about sexuality. We want to be the ones they come to for advice and guidance. Let's be real: it can be difficult to talk about sexuality in general. Talking to our children about sexuality just takes it up a notch!

So, if you are a parent who is uncomfortable talking about sexuality or a parent who is comfortable but can use some more tips, we are here to share information and techniques to help you get your message across to your children.

This guide answers questions that we've been asked by parents of children who range from infants to adults. You may find that you have some of the same questions or that you can learn something new that will open up the lines of communication even more.



True or False?

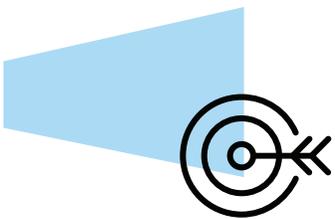


Before we answer some of the most common questions we hear from parents, we have to clear up some of the myths that can get in the way of open communication with children about sexuality.

TRUE OR FALSE: Parents have to know a lot about sexuality before they can begin to talk with their children about it.

FALSE! Although it is great to learn as much as you can about sexuality, you do not need all the answers to begin talking with your children. Just letting your children know they can come to you with their questions and concerns will help them to feel more comfortable talking with you about sexuality, which is a huge step in the right direction.

It is always okay to admit you do not know or are not sure of the answer to a question. After being honest about what you do and do not know, you can look it up and get back to them with an answer. Or better yet, look it up together!



TRUE OR FALSE: Talking to children about sexuality will encourage them to have sex earlier.

FALSE! We often hear this and we can definitely understand parents' concerns about this issue because none of us want to encourage our children to engage in sexual activity before they are ready. The good news is that studies have shown that when parents talk with their children about sexuality—providing accurate information and sharing their values—their children are more likely to delay sexual intercourse and use protection when they do have sex.

Our conversations about sexuality should go beyond how to take care of one's body, how to abstain from sex, and how to use protection. They should also include:

- **The importance of feeling good about oneself.**
- **How to have healthy, respectful relationships.**
- **Clear messages from you about your values and expectations about sexual decisions.**

With this information, our children are better prepared to resist peer pressure and other influences and to make healthy decisions.

TRUE OR FALSE: Children want to talk to their parents about sexuality.

TRUE! Young people do want to talk to their parents about sexuality; many just fear their parents' reaction. (Think for a moment about when you were in their shoes.)

As a parent, you can help your children to feel comfortable talking to you about sexuality by answering their questions openly and honestly. It is important for you to use a calm, encouraging tone of voice, to be patient, and to be willing to listen, even if you are shocked by what they say.

Still don't believe us? In a survey by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unintended Pregnancy, teens said that parents (not friends or the media) most influence their decisions about sex! That's great news.

TRUE OR FALSE: Teens who ask their parents questions about sex are probably sexually active.

FALSE! Many teens ask questions about sex because they want to know their parents' views and values.

We know that messages about sex are everywhere: television, movies, social media, the Internet, and music. Often the messages that teens receive from the media and other sources are unrealistic, unhealthy, or confusing. So, when your child asks you a question about sex, try to remain calm (take a deep breath if you have to) and resist making assumptions or jumping to conclusions.

Many teens say that the biggest barrier to talking to their parents about sex is that they think their parents will assume that they are sexually active. Don't make that mistake.

Questions and Answers

Here are the 12 most common questions that parents ask about how to talk to kids about sexuality.



1 When should I start talking to my child about sexuality?

You may not realize it, but you have probably already given your child a lot of information about sexuality. Giving a child information about their body is talking about sexuality!

Sexuality is related to much more than you may think, including:

Reproductive Health and

Anatomy—Includes sex, puberty, birth control, safer sex, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause, hygiene, and general health care.

Gender—The cultural and social expectations about what it means to be masculine or feminine. How people should act or look, activities and jobs they can do based on their sex (these expectations are sometimes called gender roles).

Relationships—Connections between people. Includes behaviors, expectations, satisfaction, and abuse.

Love and Affection—How we express love, affection, and other emotions to friends, family, and romantic partners.

Body Image—How we feel about our bodies, how we treat our bodies, and how attractive we feel.

Sexual Orientation—Physical and/or emotional attraction to a person of the same or another gender.

Sensuality and Pleasure—Accepting and enjoying our own bodies and accepting and enjoying the bodies of our sexual partner(s).

Sexual Activity—Acts of intimacy such as hugging, kissing, touching, and sexual intercourse.



Values

Our values are personal beliefs that affect how we think, feel, and act. Values can change over time with new knowledge and life experiences.

Some values that we want to teach our kids may come easily to us because we feel strongly about them, while others may need more thought.

One way that you can start to think about your values is to look at the definition of sexuality in Question 1 and come up with a value that you would like to teach your children for each component of sexuality.

You may have already started speaking with your children about at least a few of these components of sexuality. It's important to remember that sexuality is more than just sex and that each component is equally important.

As your child becomes older, you will continue to teach them about sexuality, through role-modeling and verbal communication as well as body language.

For example, if your child starts playing with their genitals while sitting on the toilet, how you respond sends a message that may affect how they feel about their body. If you get upset or show anger, your child may get the idea that the genitals are a bad or dirty part of the body.

After considering all that makes up sexuality, it is easy to see how talking and teaching about sexuality is a lifelong process. Talking with your children about sexuality should not be limited to a one-time event. Keep reading and you'll find more tips and techniques to help you to effectively communicate the information and values that you want your child to learn.

2 How do I answer my child's questions about sexuality?

One of the great things about teaching our children about sexuality is that they often keep us on our toes by asking questions. When your child asks you a question, try to remain calm and answer the question. By remaining calm and not avoiding the question, you are sending your child the message that you are open to talking about sexuality. This will enable your child to become comfortable talking with you about sexuality and to continue to come to you for answers.

A lot of parents worry more about exactly what they will say when asked a sexuality question, instead of how to say it. Your tone is just as important, if not more so, than what you say. A child will more vividly remember your warm, welcoming tone than the content of what you said.

When answering your child's question, be sure to give your child accurate information while also letting them know your views and values. When you think about it, who could be better to teach your child values about sexuality than you!

Keep your answers brief and uncomplicated. Start with a simple answer and give your child more information if they continue to ask more questions. If you happen to ramble (as we tend to do when caught off guard) or give your child incorrect information, you can always go back and clarify. And remember, if you don't know the answer, it's okay to admit you don't know, then look it up, and get back to your child. Teaching your child about sexuality is an ongoing process.



Here are four steps for answering your child's questions about sexuality that we suggest and have regularly used ourselves.

These steps will help you to give your child the right amount of information and share your views and values.

In addition, these steps "buy you some time," so that you can communicate effectively.

1

Normalize and validate the question. For example, you can say: "That's a really good question." Use a warm tone of voice.

This step is helpful for reassuring your child that their question is normal and okay to ask you.

2

Ask "What makes you ask this question today?" or "What do you think?"

This step helps you find out how much information your child already has and gives you a sense of their understanding and language around the topic, so that you can better answer their question.

3

Answer the question by sharing accurate information and your values.

This step allows you to share the information and expectations your child needs to guide them in developing sexually healthy attitudes. Parents play a really important role in sharing that information and instilling values in their children.

4

Check if they understand your answer. For example, you can say: "What do you think about my answer?" or "Does that answer your question?"

This step helps you to make sure that your child got the information they needed and that your answer addressed what your child was really asking.

I was walking through my house and out of nowhere my daughter says to me, "Mom, do you get horny?" I wanted to keep walking, but I stopped and did the four steps with her. The first question broke the ice: "Why are you asking that question today?" She began to explain that her friends are always saying they are horny and that she didn't feel that way. She wondered if there was something wrong with her. After I knew where she was coming from, we were able to have a great talk and I was able to reassure her and share my values with her. The four steps really work!

– Crystal

We suggest that you also use "Teachable Moments" to educate your child about sexuality. Teachable Moments are everyday opportunities that can be used to talk to our children about sexuality and other tough topics without seeming obvious. During Teachable Moments, you may come across issues related to sexuality and then engage your child in conversation while:



Watching television and movies



Listening to music



Looking at an Internet site or social media



Talking about personal experiences and other people's experiences (family members, friends, etc.)



Reading the newspaper or magazines

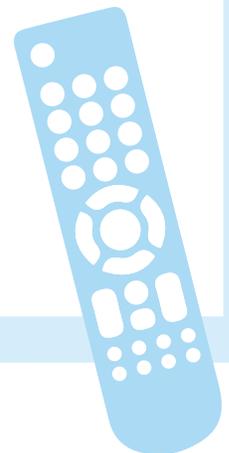
The most important part of Teachable Moments is asking your child what they think about a sexuality issue and then being ready to listen! That way, you can share your thoughts and values with your child after hearing what they think.

Here's an example of how you can use a Teachable Moment.

You and your pre-teen child are watching a television show. In one scene the characters are passionately kissing and, bam, they end up having sex. During a commercial or after the show is over, you can start a conversation with your child by asking what they think about the couple having sex. Then you can follow up with one or two more specific questions such as:

- How realistic was that scene?
- How do you think having sex might affect their relationship?
- What are some of the consequences that they may have to deal with?
- How did they protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and/or sexually transmitted infections?
- How well did they know each other before having sex?
- What did they say or do to show whether they wanted to have sex or not?
- How did they talk about consent?
- Do you think they were ready to have sex?

For more on Teachable Moments, see #6 in Questions and Answers.



They just might ask...

If your child hasn't asked you a sexuality question, chances are they will. In addition to using the four steps to answer your child's questions, you may want to think in advance about your answers to some of the common "kid" questions. For example: Where do babies come from? What's sex? Do you have sex? Why do boys and girls look different? Why is my body different from yours? If these questions make you anxious, there are a lot of resources available for parents that can help you to simplify information for your child according to their age or stage of development.

In my culture, we never used the word "vagina." However, after my ARM training, I realized how important it was to use the proper terms and to teach my daughter to do the same. After I became an ARM, my mom participated in one of my workshops and now she knows why proper terms are important and she uses them with my daughter too!

– Luz

After you have listened to your child's thoughts and feelings, you can then share your thoughts concerning the situation, including your values about sexual activity and dating. Many times during a Teachable Moment parents will realize they have a lot in common with their children, and often a parent will simply need to affirm their child's thoughts and feelings because their values are already in agreement.

3 Aren't words like "penis" and "vulva" too complicated for pre-schoolers to understand?

No, the words "penis" [PEE-niss] and "vulva" [VUL-vah]* really aren't that complicated for children to understand. The fact is, we teach our children even more complicated words such as "stomach" and "shoulders." We tend to feel less comfortable talking about the genitals compared to other parts of the body because we relate genitals to sex. Really, genitals are just another part of the body.

Teaching your children the correct names for their genitals gives them a couple of advantages. First, it encourages a healthy and positive attitude toward their bodies. Secondly, because nicknames for genitals

tend to be specific to the family ("pee-pee," "wee-wee," and "down there" to name a few), teaching your children the correct names for their genitals will give them language they can use to express themselves clearly. This becomes particularly important in a medical situation and in reports of abuse.

4 Should I talk to my girls and boys differently about sexuality?

All children need the same important information to become healthy adults. It is important for all children to understand their own body's development as well as the development of bodies that are different from theirs.

All children also need to know that sexual feelings are normal, how to take care of their bodies, how to protect themselves from infection and unintended pregnancy, and how to have healthy, respectful relationships. Anyone can become infected with a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV, and can also experience the stresses and consequences of an unintended pregnancy. The more information your children have, the more choices are available to them to stay safe.

*"Vulva" is the name for the external genital area, which includes the inner and outer labia, clitoris, and urethral and vaginal openings. Although the vulva is commonly called the "vagina," the vagina is actually the stretchable passage that connects the vaginal opening with the cervix and uterus.



One parent in a workshop thought that her young son was watching “sex movies” on TV because he was waking up with an erection every morning. I was able to explain to her that it was just a normal part of development that her son was experiencing. She was relieved, and I felt good that I could help her and know that she would be able to support her son through his sexual development.

– Bernice

5 What’s the harm in telling children myths about where they come from? Don’t we tell them “myths” about Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy?

Myths are false or half-accurate information that can create confusion or fantasies. As your child’s most important and first sexuality educator, you want to provide your child with actual facts so that they will see you as a reliable source of information.

Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy are fairy tales that can be fun for both parents and children. These myths cannot lead to health consequences such as unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections; but lack of information about sexuality can.

6 My child avoids conversations about sexuality. How can I make my child comfortable talking to me about sexuality?

Some children feel uncomfortable talking about sexuality, and that’s okay. In order to create a comfortable environment without seeming pushy, you may want to talk with your child about something that interests them and relate that topic to sexuality.

We also recommend that parents take advantage of the Teachable Moments mentioned previously, such as listening to music, watching television, looking at Internet sites, social media, etc., to start a conversation about sexuality and to keep the lines of communication open. To use a Teachable Moment, find issues that are relevant to your child. Then ask your child to share their feeling about the issue by asking, “What do you think about that?” Teachable Moments can help you to find out your child’s views and will give you the opportunity to share your own thoughts and values in a more subtle way. Most importantly, you want your child to know that you are approachable and open to discussions about sexuality.

Other important tips for a successful Teachable Moment

- Show interest in what the child has to say.
- Focus on the child.
- Stay calm and avoid reacting with anger or by making assumptions.
- Answer any questions openly and honestly.
- Remember the “music of your message”—use a warm and welcoming tone of voice.
- Keep the conversation private if you’re asked to, as long as the person does not indicate that they are at immediate risk for abuse or suicide.
- Keep trying. If a conversation doesn’t go as well as you hoped, don’t be afraid to revisit and try again. The more you practice, the more naturally it will come.

For pre-teens, body image is so important. So many of my daughter’s classmates have begun to menstruate and develop breasts that my daughter began to worry that there was something wrong with her. Although we would like our children to appreciate their uniqueness, I could understand her concern. I used magazines and books to illustrate how bodies develop differently and encouraged her to appreciate the beauty of her body going through its changes.

– Sandra

7 My child is starting to develop. How do I help my child deal with puberty and body changes?

Preparing children for puberty before they begin to develop makes it easier for them to make the transition. It also helps you to get in touch with the fact that one day your “baby” will start to look more like an adult.

But, if your child has already started to develop, we recommend that you let them know that the process is normal and healthy, and that each person develops at their own pace. You may have to repeat this a few times because kids’ self-esteem can be very fragile at this age. You want to make sure that you give your child information about the changes they are going through and what to expect at each stage of development. If you don’t feel confident guiding your child through puberty on your own, there is a lot of information available through libraries and the Internet.

Another way that you can help your child deal with the changes of puberty is to avoid teasing or publicly commenting about your child’s body changes (and also instruct other family members to do the same). Teasing and public comments

can cause embarrassment, shut down future communication with your child, and affect your child’s self-esteem.

Try to remember how you felt during puberty. We encourage parents to take off their “adult glasses” when communicating with their children about puberty and other sensitive sexuality topics. Try to see their questions and experiences through their eyes and in the context of their age and stage of development. If we don’t take off the “adult glasses,” we may forget that their worries about puberty and body changes are perfectly normal and appropriate for their age.

Lastly, be prepared for your child to experience a range of emotions and interact with you differently during puberty and adolescence. Some kids withdraw a bit, some express very intense emotions, and others go back and forth. You may feel that you do not even recognize your own child! This is a time when your child will be adjusting to physical changes as well as developing their own identity and testing limits (although this can be a pain in the you-know-what, it is totally normal).

When my oldest daughter had her first kiss, at fourteen years old, she talked to me about it. I was really glad to see that she felt comfortable enough to confide in me. She shared with me how she felt both physically and emotionally. I took advantage of that moment to talk with her about kissing and relationships. Looking back, I realize how important it is to have open communication with your children about sexuality.

– Wanda

On one occasion I walked into my bedroom to find my nine-year-old masturbating on my bed. We were both surprised; she because I found her and I because I didn't think she was masturbating yet. Later, I explained that masturbation is normal, but needs to be done in the privacy of her room.

– Luz

Continue to talk to your child about their feelings and experiences, because it is important that you remain connected to what's happening in their life. And, remember, even if your child is trying to pull away, it's not personal.

8 **My child has had a "first kiss." How do I talk to my child about relationships and setting boundaries?**

Although it may set off an alarm in parents, it is perfectly normal for young people to begin experimenting with kissing and touching. As parents, we can help our children to deal with the emotions involved in receiving and giving affection and setting boundaries.

We recommend that you begin by having a conversation with your child about the feelings that go along with kissing. Ask your child, with an open mind, how the kiss made them feel. This is a good time to introduce your values concerning kissing, touching, and relationships. You may want to help your child practice what they can do and say in different situations to set limits. For example, ask your child, "If your partner wants to do more than kissing, how would you handle that?" Again, an open mind makes for an open conversation.



9 **How do I encourage my children to abstain from sex when there is so much pressure around them to have sex?**

As parents, this can be an intimidating issue for us, but we don't have to feel defeated. Parents are powerful. Sometimes we just have to remind ourselves that we do influence our children. So, even though there is pressure out there to have sex, your message can sink in. Recent studies have shown that when parents give clear messages about delaying sex, their children are more likely to postpone sexual intercourse.

Here are some steps that you can take to encourage your children to abstain from sex:

Here are a few suggestions for how you can get to know your child's friends and their families.

- **Make sure that you are around when your children's friends are visiting, and get to know them by talking with them.**
- **Invite your children's friends to family gatherings.**
- **Invite the parents of your children's friends to your children's parties.**
- **Drop your children off and/or pick them up when they visit their friends so that you can get to know their friends' parents. As your children get older, they may beg you not to drop them off because they feel embarrassed. If this is the case, consider allowing them to call you when they get to where they are going and when they are leaving.**
- **Before your child visits a new friend, call the friend's home to introduce yourself to the parents or guardians. During your conversation, you can talk about what you're comfortable or uncomfortable with when your child visits their home or goes out with their child.**

For example, you can mention what time you would like your child to return home, you can ask whether a parent or adult will be around during the visit, and you can exchange phone numbers. Most parents will appreciate your call because they probably want to get to know the parents of their children's friends as well.

Be open-minded. Ask your child their opinion, and then be prepared to listen. Try to resist the urge to lecture. Instead, have ongoing two-way discussions with your children about your values, expectations, and how to have healthy, respectful relationships. Your children may be facing the pressure to have sex to keep their partners or to make them feel mature or accepted among their peers. Ask questions and create Teachable Moments in order to talk to them about these issues.

It is also important to understand and accept that many children will choose to

have sex during their teen years. For this reason, it is essential to discuss safer sex* methods like condoms to protect against sexually transmitted infections and birth control methods to protect against unintended pregnancy.

Be aware of your child's whereabouts and activities. Now, that doesn't mean strap an electronic monitoring device on your kids (although secretly some of us would like to if we could get away with it). It means know where your children are and whom they are with when they go out. Make sure that there is responsible adult supervision if they are visiting a

friend. It's a good idea to have their friends' home and cell phone numbers.

Monitor them when they are on the Internet and ask them to tell you about whom they communicate with and what sites they visit. Keep in mind that even if you block sites at home, kids can access the Internet at a friend's house or at the library. It's important to let your child know your expectations concerning Internet use.

Become familiar with your child's friends and their families, particularly if there is a "love interest." Since children can

*"Safer sex" refers to using condoms and dental dams (a rectangular sheet of latex) to protect from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections that can be contracted during sexual activity such as oral, anal, or vaginal sex. It can also refer to using birth control methods to avoid unintended pregnancy.

have a strong influence on each other, you want to make sure that your children's friends and their parents share your values or at least respect your values and expectations for your children.

Encourage your child to avoid dating someone much older. Try to set a limit of no more than two years difference. Dating an older teen or adult can seem very "cool." There is often glamour associated with attracting someone significantly older, and an older person will tend to have more money and material possessions such as a car or apartment.

However, research shows that when a pre-teen or teenager is dating someone at least two years older, the older person has more power in the relationship and it is much harder for the younger person to stand firm on a decision to abstain from sex or to practice safer sex.

Help your child to develop self-confidence and goals. Studies have shown that children are more likely to abstain if they have high self-esteem and goals for the future. Acknowledge the ways in which your children are special and wonderful, help them to develop their talents and skills, emphasize

the importance of education, encourage them to take healthy risks like trying out for a sports team or running for student government, and work with them on a plan to achieve their goals.

Be a role model. Children learn not only from the information we give them, but also from our example. Our children observe our actions on a regular basis; it's like having a surveillance camera on you at all times! So, be mindful that your actions reflect the values that you want your children to have.

10 **How can I tell my teen to wait to have sex until they are older, when I was sexually active as a teen?**

Regardless of what we did when we were young, we have to help our children get the information

they need to make their own decisions about sexual activity. Some parents feel comfortable sharing their experiences when they were teens to highlight a particular message and communicate a family value.

For example, one parent may say, "When I was your age, I waited until I was in a loving and trusting relationship to have sex and we used condoms and birth control every time. If you decide to have sex, I hope you will talk to your partner about how you will both protect yourselves from pregnancy and STIs." Another parent with a different value may say, "I regret having sex in high school. If I could do it again, I would wait until I was in college and felt more secure about myself. I would like you to wait until after you graduate from high school to have sex."





Other parents do not feel comfortable sharing a personal story, and that is okay as well. In fact, it is perfectly fine to tell children “That’s a personal question” if they ask you directly about your sexual experiences. Whether or not you feel comfortable telling your child when you became sexually active, sharing your hopes and expectations about sexual activity for them will still send an important message. Always remember to encourage your children to come to you with concerns about the sexual decisions they face.

You can also help your children brainstorm ways to talk with their partners about delaying sex or about safer sexual activity.

It is important that you provide your children with support to avoid unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Talking to our children about safer sexual activity does NOT encourage them to have sex. It keeps them safe from STIs and protected against unintended pregnancy whenever they choose to have sex.

11 I know my child is sexually active. How do I bring up safer sex and pregnancy prevention without putting my child on the defensive?

Regardless of whether your children are sexually active or not, it’s important to speak with them about safer sex. Be subtle: try bringing up the conversation without asking about their current behavior. You can do this by using a Teachable Moment to find out how much your child knows about using protection. Once you know how much information your child has, you can fill in the gaps.

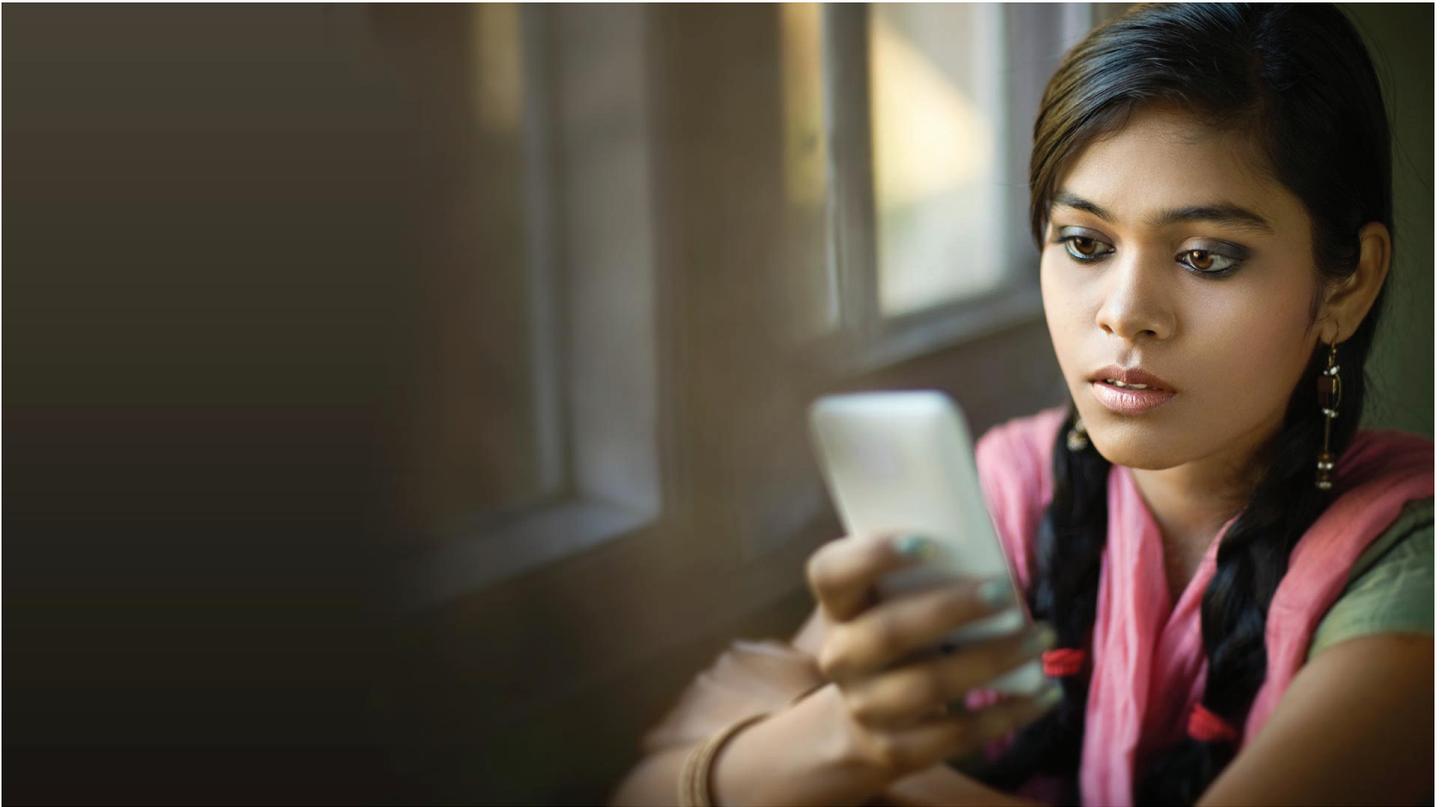
Make sure they know where to get condoms and other latex barriers, birth control, and sexual and reproductive health services. Offer to go with your child to a sexual and reproductive health center.

And remember that educating our children about sex goes beyond giving them information about safer sex and birth control. It also includes teaching them how to talk with their partners about these topics and how to talk about consent. Consent means that all partners involved in sexual activities verbally agree to participate in each interaction, free from coercion, pressure, or violence.

12 I talk to my child about using protection and being safe. Yet, I know that my child is not using protection. What can I do?

First, find out why your child is not using protection. There are so many reasons why teens, or people in general for that matter, don’t use birth control or practice safer sex.

Some of the more common reasons: they don’t feel at risk, they are misinformed, they cannot easily get methods of protection, and they are not able to talk to their partners about using protection. Also, some people will say that they get “caught in the heat of the moment” or that they “don’t like condoms.” Depending on the reason why your child is not using protection, you may want to use one of these strategies:



- Share factual information with your child, such as the rates of unintended pregnancy and STI and HIV infections.
- Share the experiences of young people who have experienced consequences from having unprotected sex.
- Make sure your child is familiar with safer sex methods, birth control, and emergency contraception* and can get them easily.

You may want to keep a supply of condoms in a place in your home where your child will not have to ask for them.

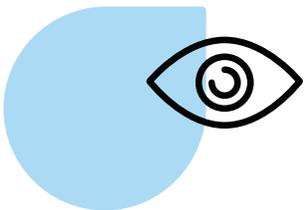
- Talk to your child about what gets in the way of discussing protection with their partner. Don't hesitate to get help from a professional if you get stuck. For instance, Planned Parenthood of New York City provides counseling on safer sex and birth control options that includes suggestions about how to talk to one's partner about using protection.

Finally, you may also need to call on the support of other family members and people who are important to your child. Sometimes receiving the same message from a different messenger can make a big difference!

*Emergency contraception is a pill taken after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy. It is commonly known as the "morning-after pill," but it can be taken up to five days after unprotected sex, though the sooner it is taken, the better.

A Few Last Words

Don't beat yourself up if you don't feel comfortable talking to your children about sexuality right away. It doesn't happen over night—it's an ongoing process.



Always remember that talking to your children about sexuality is an opportunity to share your views and values with them, to stay involved with what's going on in their lives, and to help them to grow up healthy. Children want to know about sexuality, and they want to learn about it from you!

We have found the information and techniques that we have included in this guide to be helpful to our families, and we hope that you will also find them helpful in conversations with the children in your life.

But don't let this be the end of your search for information on how to talk to your children about sexuality. You can explore more resources and you can also turn to a trusted friend or family member who has been successful in talking with their children about sexuality. We can all learn from each other. Good luck!

About Planned Parenthood of New York City

At Planned Parenthood of New York City, we have more than 100 years of experience providing high-quality sexual and reproductive health services and education in a safe, supportive environment. We provide services regardless of age, gender, immigration status, or ability to pay. For confidential appointments at our health centers located in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx, make an appointment online at www.ppnyc.org or call **212-965-7000**.

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Adult Role Models Program at PPNYC

PPNYC's Adult Role Models are local parents and caring adults trained to facilitate a four-part workshop series in schools and community organizations throughout the city to help other parents and caring adults talk with their kids about sexuality and strengthen parent-child relationships. For more information, call **212-274-7362**.

For More Information

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