



What, When, and How to Talk to Your 4 to 9 Year Old Child

A **Healthy Chat** about the **Birds & the Bees**
for **Parents of young Children.**

By **Dr. Chrystal de Freitas, M.D., FAAP**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Dr. de Freitas is happily married to Dr. Jeff Bonadio for 30 years. Their children, Cecily, Jocelyn, and Andrew, are now grown and are healthy young adults. It was Jocelyn who suggested the title of this book.

Learn more about Dr. de Freitas and her mission to education parents and children at www.healthychats.com.

Caution: Your child might have special needs for information and guidance not adequately covered here. Professional counsel could be helpful, even necessary.

INTRODUCTION

Talking to young children about "the birds and the bees" can cause anxiety even in the most confident parent. I know this well—I have been there. We all procrastinate, making up excuses to delay the conversation. We think: "They are too young." "I'll do it later." "Children will get that information at school." "Why spoil their innocence?"

The reality is that if we parents don't initiate the conversation, it will be done for us. In fact, the process of your child's sexual education has already begun. It began at birth. Parents, friends, caretakers, the media, and everyone else who interacts with your child will play a role in educating your child about sexuality.



Unfortunately your child will be exposed to information or events that meet the standards of your values and beliefs. Consider many of the television programs that children see—the sexual messages and innuendoes are rampant.

It is therefore of utmost importance that we parents take an active role in teaching our children about healthy sexuality, you must be your child's primary educator.



Sexuality is a sensitive topic because of its private nature. Yet, if the subject is approached in small steps and at different times, the barriers will not seem so high.

Learning about the facts of life can be not much different than learning about mathematics. We begin with very simple

arithmetic and we advance gradually. This booklet will emphasize the "little by little" approach that will make your job easier and more effective.

You have probably been doing an excellent job in caring for your children, nurturing them, providing them love and affection. This is a vital part of teaching sexuality.

Nonetheless, reproduction and male-female relationships are a bit complicated. We can all use a little help as to what knowledge is appropriate for the age of our children. How much do they need to know and when do they need to know it? What are the best opportunities to talk? How can you recognize a "teachable moment"? This booklet offers help along these lines.

Providing this information is not "spoiling their innocence" it is more like "repairing their ignorance". When my children were preteens, I examined the "health education" curriculum they were going to receive at school, and I volunteered my services as a way to get involved.

The school welcomed me with open arms and asked me to teach young girls about the changes of puberty and related issues. The classes I taught were eye openers. The girls lacked basic information about conception—information one would think they would have received at home.

The girls were not comfortable asking their mothers about the topic or about changes in their bodies. "I am too embarrassed to speak to my mom about this," they would say. Yet they would question me, almost a stranger.

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This booklet can help you bridge that chasm or hopefully keep it from developing in the first place. Ideally, the educative process should begin very early so that the lines of communication are working well by the time the child becomes a preteen.

There are many right ways of approaching this topic, so don't hesitate to modify my suggestions. Use my words as a springboard to start conversations and as an opening for teaching your own values and beliefs.

SEXUALITY

What is Sexuality?

Human sexuality is much more than the mechanics of sex. It is more than "The Talk" about the birds and the bees. It involves many aspects of our lives, such as:

- The way we relate to the opposite sex in everyday contact.
- The way we give and receive affection.
- The way we approach situations and problems.
- The values that give foundation and purpose to our lives.

We need to be prepared to talk about respect, both for others and for ourselves, and about understanding differences between the sexes that are more than physical.

Our children need to understand that the relationship of marriage is one of love, caring, trust, commitment, and responsibility, all of which are only enhanced by physical sexual relations, not

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defined by them. They need to know that intimacy which is primarily physical is not true intimacy.

Much of this you have already been teaching your child by example, by the everyday, loving environment of the home. This kind of teaching can be expanded by purposeful words when the time is right.

When should you begin to talk? Many parents believe that conversations about sex are only for preteens and teenagers. They give the preteen "The Talk" just before he or she enters puberty. It's usually an awkward conversation.

The fact that it's coming late is evidenced by the common response, "I already know that." Other parents adopt a hands-off approach, hoping that the schools will do the teaching for them. Delaying or omitting conversations about sex is likely to make giving guidance for sexual behavior during the teenage years more difficult.

We need to get started earlier. By age four or five, children have a natural and healthy curiosity about their bodies and those of the opposite sex. The point is not to tell all at an early age, but to tell what "age appropriate" is for your child.

The next few pages will help you feel confident that what you are saying is right for the age of your child. Having appropriate conversations in the early years will make the later preteen conversations much easier and more fruitful.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Here are some guidelines that apply to most conversations. Many parents feel anxious about talking to young children about reproduction. They think, "What if I say too much?" or, "I don't want to overwhelm my child," or "It is so embarrassing."

But think about what it is that you want your children to know about sexuality? What messages do you want to provide them?

The following suggestions will help you overcome your fears and focus your conversations.

- Include values and morality. If you have religious beliefs that bear on sexuality, be sure to include them. Your main role as a parent is to have a mission statement about sex.
- Sex should be emphasized as health and well being. Give them a positive message. Your personal example is your strongest message. At this age you can leave out disease and pleasure associated with sex. That will come later.
- Pace yourself. You need not tell "the whole story" at one time. This is an incremental process.
- Learn what is age-appropriate. Become familiar with the guidelines. Use the correct body names from the very beginning in addition to "private body parts".
- Rehearse. Review the topic ahead of time with your spouse and with other parents of similar age children.

- Admit your uneasiness. Admit to your child that the subject is sensitive because of its private nature and that you may be uneasy in talking about it. A little humility and candor on your part helps your relationship, helps your bond with your child.
- Include some humor. This is okay as long as it doesn't belittle the topic. Humor can ease the atmosphere and open the door to future conversations.
- Tell your own story. Speak of your experience as a child learning about sexuality. A story from your own background might begin, "When I was your age...." Of course, no intimacy details are necessary.
- Be cool. Treat questions in a calm, matter-of-fact way.
- Postpone the difficult. Don't try to answer a question you don't feel prepared to answer. Make sure that you check into it and get back soon with the answer.
- Watch for teachable moments. These are times when it's easiest to introduce a topic. Learn more about teachable moments later in this e-book.

SECRET VS. PRIVATE

Many children giggle, act embarrassed or withdraw when we talk to them about sexuality. This may be because they feel that sexuality is a secret topic. We need to say that everyone knows

about sexuality— it's no secret—and it's important for them to know about it too. This knowledge allows them to understand the way their bodies work and to keep them safe and healthy.

On the other hand, sexual matters about an individual person are not public—they are private, to be shared only with certain people.

Here are a few suggestions you might use to clarify this when talking with your child:

- Define secret. A secret is something we don't share, unless keeping a secret makes us feel uncomfortable.
- Not all secrets should be kept secret. If someone asks you to keep a secret, don't promise to do so until you know more about it. If the secret makes you feel hurt or uncomfortable, it's okay to tell a parent.
- Define private. Private information can be shared but only with people we trust.
- Talking about the "facts of life" is private. This is helpful, personal information, not a secret.
- Our genitals are private body parts. We keep them private by covering them with clothing.
- Going to the bathroom is private. We close the door so we can have privacy.

What about friends? Point out that information about sexuality is

not to be shared with friends and acquaintances. Use the "what if" technique. "What if Michael asked you about your private body parts? What would you say?" Suggest these possible answers: "My body is private." "You should ask your parents about that."

Knowledge is power. Tell your child you want him or her to have that kind of power and that you are available to help provide it. Knowledge should not be embarrassing.

NEED TO KNOW: AGE 5



What does the 5 Year Old Need to Know?

Many 5 year olds have a healthy and natural curiosity about the different between boys and girls. They will try to find out about these differences during everyday play. Some will "play doctor" or try to explore another child's body. Some will practice male and female roles by "playing house."

The following suggestions apply to most 5 year olds but not all. Your own family style and the child's temperament may lead you to make exceptions. You need to feel confident about the timing.

Most 5 year olds should:

- Be aware of the difference between boys and girls. They should know the correct names for their body parts including their genitals, which can also be called "private body parts."
- For boys, this means penis, foreskin, testicles, scrotum,

and anus.

- For girls, the parts are breast, vulva, clitoris, vagina, and anus.
- Understand that some touching is not okay. No one should touch their bodies in any way that makes them feel uncomfortable. If touched in that way, they need to know that they should push the hand away and say "No!"
- They should also report this to a parent or another trusted adult. Touching by a doctor or nurse should be noted as an exception.
- Respect the privacy of others. They should be told to knock first when parents' doors are closed and that bathroom activities are often private.
- Expect privacy for themselves. They should know they are entitled to privacy for themselves, such as when bathing, dressing, or using the bathroom.
- Enjoy being a boy or a girl. Seeing healthy relationships in the family will help. So will your affirmation, "I'm glad you are a boy/girl," or similar words. Do not tell a child or imply that the opposite sex was desired.
- Begin to understand where babies come from. If you think your child is ready for this topic, review later pages for examples of age appropriate information.

NEED TO KNOW: AGES 6 - 9



What does the 6 to 9 year old need to know?

There is, of course, considerable difference between a 6 year old and a 9 year old. Fourth graders have matured a lot since the first grade.

Yet knowledge about sexuality is important throughout this period. The main difference between early in the period and late is the increasing need for: more detail and reinforcement.

Also, the way you communicate may need to change, a 6 year old may be helped by a picture book, but an 8 year old may think it's childish. By age 8 or 9, some girls may be entering puberty and will need specific information about that.

If your child (boy or girl) has reached 7 or 8 without conversations about sexuality, it is not too late. Review these guidelines and begin.

The 6 to 9 year old needs to know:

- Correct names for body parts. Start discussions by reviewing what the child already should know. Gradually add other names. Discourage the use of slang terms, but talk about them with the older child who has heard them.
- The basic facts of birth. Where do babies come from and how do they get out? The 6 year old may not need to know about sperm, eggs, and intercourse, but your 8 year old probably will. Refer to the section on "How are babies made?"

- Responsibility for personal hygiene. Keeping a clean body is part of healthy sexuality. So is brushing teeth.
- Basic information about family dynamics. What is the parents' ongoing responsibility for and relationship to the child? What happens in divorce and remarriage?
- Guidelines for friendships. Learning to make, keep, and end friendships has a lifelong benefit. Parents help by providing for interaction with same age children, and they can teach principles when conflicts arise. Trust, communication, and other tools for living are learned in early friendships.
- Basics about HIV/AIDS. Again, age 6 may be too early, but young children will hear about it. Refer to the section on that topic.

WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?

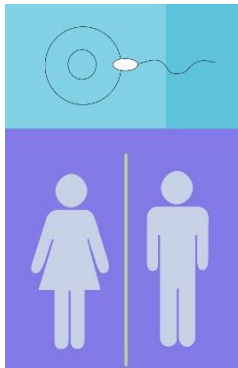
Young children often ask (when you are least expecting it), ask the question... "Where do babies come from?" This first attempt to understand their origins is often met with a response that gives the impression the subject is off limits, taboo. The parent says: "Ask your mother," or "Ask your father." "You're too young to understand," or "I'll explain when you get older."

Some children never ask the question, but that does not mean they are not interested. They just take in all the misconceptions coming from their playmates or dreamed up in their imagination.

Whether asked openly or not, the question usually makes parents uneasy. This may be because parents tend to think about it from the adult point of view. They think in terms of love, sexual intercourse, unwanted pregnancy, disease, etc., but such subjects are beyond the answer needed by the very young child.

Another reason for unease may be the concern that children will use information on sexuality for experimentation. This applies especially as more details are given with increasing age.

Perhaps you may think that children will interpret willingness to talk about sexual matters as a sign that you approve of early and inappropriate sexual behavior. Research has shown that this is not true. Children who know at an early age how their bodies work and understand issues of sexuality are more likely to postpone sexual intercourse to an adult age. Children are healthier and safer when they hear correct information from their parents.



Your child's level of understanding is something only you can judge. You probably know what your child can take in. Answer accordingly.

When very young children ask about where babies come from, your response should be simple and brief. No more than two or three sentences may be all that is needed to satisfy a preschooler's curiosity. Many children between the ages of 3 to 7 believe that babies have always

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existed, and it is just a matter of going to the hospital, store, or elsewhere to pick them up. Keeping this in mind will help you answer in a simple and straightforward manner.

Here is a sample conversation of how to deal with the subject:

Madeline, age five, comes home after kindergarten.

Madeline: "Mom, where do babies come from?"

Mother: "Well, let's see. Have you noticed that Mrs. Wilson is having a baby? Where do you think her baby comes from?"

Madeline: "I'm not sure, but she sure is fat."

Mother: "A baby grows in a special place inside a mother's body that is there just for growing babies—a special room."

Madeline: "In your tummy, right?"

Mother: "No, the special place is called the uterus or womb, and it's right here below your belly button."

This explanation will satisfy most preschoolers, but not all. Other children may continue to ask questions and will carry on an engaging conversation. The basic rule in this case is to do more listening than talking, adding just enough information to satisfy curiosity. Don't be surprised if misunderstanding shows up days later.

That's your opportunity for repetition. Remember that learning about the facts of life is a gradual process, and information may

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need repeating many times before a child understands. Here are more suggestions for responding to early age questions:

"A mother's womb is like a balloon that can stretch and get bigger and bigger. Her womb gets very big as the baby is growing inside of her. It goes back down to size once the baby comes out."

"The woman's body is special because it can carry a baby while it grows from a tiny baby to the size of a newborn."

"When the baby is ready to come out, a mother goes to a hospital so that a doctor, nurse, or midwife can help her bring the baby out."

What if your child is silent on this subject? What if there are no questions? By the time your child is 5 or 6, consider starting the conversation. See "Teachable Moments".

HOW DO BABIES GET OUT?

"How do babies get out?" If babies come from inside the mother, then how do they get outside of the mother? Children's ideas include being born through the mother's mouth, her belly button, or her bottom.

Straightforward answers are called for, but the younger the child the less detail is needed. Although the miracle of birth is truly amazing, a simple description will do. This can also be a time to review basic information that has already been given.

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The following are suggestions about what to say.

"The mother's body has a special place for growing babies. It's like a balloon that expands to make room for a baby to grow. The name of the place is the uterus or womb."

"When the baby is ready to come out, the mother's body helps her push her baby out."

"The baby comes out through a special opening between the mother's legs. This is called the vagina or birth canal. It is like a tunnel through which the baby travels to the outside world."

"Sometimes, for any of several reasons, a baby cannot come out through the vagina. Then it needs extra help. The doctor must make a cut on the mother's lower abdomen into the uterus so that the baby can come out through that opening. This is called a Cesarean Section. The mother is given some medicine so she 'doesn't feel the cut.'"

"Having a baby is lots of work for the mother and the baby. That is why it is called 'being in labor.'"

Many children enjoy hearing stories about their own birth. You can use this opportunity to talk about the birth process. Invariably the child's concern about whether it hurts to have a baby will come up. You can answer:

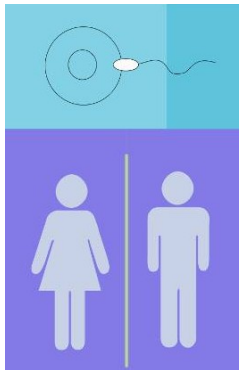
"Yes, it does hurt! But mothers are so happy to see their babies that they soon forget about the pain. Also, there are ways to ease the mother's pain."

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Be aware of your body language as you talk about these things. Show calm acceptance of questions. Avoid grimacing. A warm attitude now sets the stage for good future communication.

HOW ARE BABIES MADE?



The question about how babies get started seems to be the one that causes the most distress for parents. Nonetheless, let me assure you, speaking to children about the mechanics of sexual intercourse is a lot simpler than speaking to them about the values and morals that accompany it. The plumbing is just a matter of fact, not much different from the way a puzzle fits together.

Don't be surprised if you get a negative reaction to the plumbing facts. Many children will say "Yuck," "No way," or something similar. They may show a look of disgust and will prefer to bury the subject. Others may want to talk further. Keep in mind, in any event, that the "facts of life" is not a onetime talk, and you will have the opportunity to come back to it. Good understanding of this topic comes from many conversations.

Young children (typically ages 6 to 8) can be ready for the basics. They can understand that it takes a mommy and a daddy to make a baby.

Your conversation might go something like this:

Child: "How do mommies make babies?"

Parent: "That's a wonderful question. Sounds like you have been wondering where babies come from. How do you think mommies make babies?"

This kind of active listening allows you to gather your composure at the same time that you continue in conversation and correct any misconceptions the child may have. Another response might be:

Parent: "Wonderful question. The answer is complicated, so let's talk about it tonight at home. "

Make sure you follow through. In the meantime, review your response with your spouse or a friend. Consider using the following explanation as a general guide.

"It takes a mommy and a daddy to make a baby. Each one has half of the puzzle. The mother's half is called an egg and the daddy's half is called a sperm. When mommies and daddies decide they want to have a baby, they lie very close together and have warm and loving feelings toward each other."

"The mommy's and the daddy's bodies were made to fit together, so the penis fits into the mother's vagina. This is how our bodies were designed. The sperm comes out of the daddy's penis and joins the egg (the other half of the puzzle) inside the mommy's body. When these two pieces come together, a new

baby will start to grow in the mommy's body."

Take a break after such an explanation. Ask your child to repeat what you have said to see if they truly understood. There is another advantage to this—the child will become more at ease with the subject by using their own words in a two-way conversation.

Many children lose interest. Others will change the subject, showing that they are uncomfortable with the conversation. Still others will quiz you further. Whatever the response, remember that with young children, less is best. Keep your answers short—just two or three sentences if that will do the job.

This is an opportunity to communicate your religious beliefs about the beauty and origin of life and possibly about other topics.

Depending on your child's response, you can proceed with more details or just let the subject rest. The following list may be helpful for use either at this time or later. You can, of course, select those you wish to use, modify others, and add your own "pearls." Remind your child that this information is private, something to be shared only with a trusted adult.

"Our bodies were designed to work this way"

"The making of a baby by a mother and a father is called 'sexual intercourse,' 'reproduction,' or 'making love.'"

"The word 'sex' can be used to mean whether the baby is

a boy or a girl."

"It takes a mother and a father to make a baby."

"Sexual intercourse is when a man and a woman share their private body parts."

"Starting a baby is like fitting together two halves of a puzzle. The mother has one piece of the puzzle, and the father has the other piece of the puzzle."

"When the father's half of the puzzle joins the mother's half inside her body, a baby starts to grow."

"The father's half of the puzzle is called sperm."

"The mother's half of the puzzle is called an egg, although it is not the same as the ones we buy in the grocery store."

"It takes nine months for a baby to grow from a very tiny speck to the size of a newborn."

"When a baby is growing inside a mother, we say she is pregnant."

"Sexual intercourse is for married adults. It is not for children."

"When two people love each other, there are many different ways of being sexual besides sexual intercourse. There is hugging, kissing, and intimate touching."

"It takes maturity and responsibility on the part of both adults to share their bodies in this special way."

It is important to realize the power of that first impression when children learn about sex. As parents we have the power to set a good foundation. They will always remember what they heard first, be it from us or from someone else. Let it be from us.

By the time your child reaches puberty, other pieces of information will need to be incorporated in to their understanding of reproduction, sexuality, and relationships. Indeed, we continue to learn about this topic for our entire lives.

"When two adults have sexual intercourse, it involves big feelings, big actions, and big responsibilities.

"Sexual intercourse is a beautiful part of adult, married life." Always include your family values and beliefs surrounding this topic.

TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Teachable moments are everyday instances which give you the opportunity to talk to your child about the facts of life. Here are some examples. You may be able to add to the list.

- A trip to the zoo. Seeing animals nurturing their babies is a good opportunity to talk about where babies come from.
- Pet giving birth. This situation is even more direct.

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- Pregnant relative or friend. Curiosity is natural.
- Visit to doctor. This can be a good chance to review basic health issues and body privacy.
- People showing affection in public. A show of affection illustrates that sexuality is more than the act of sexual intercourse.
- Television show with family values. Television viewing plays a role in your child's outlook on the world. Talk about how your values compare to those shown in a television program.
- Sanitary products in the store. Your child's taking notice of sanitary products suggests a time to talk.
- Change of diaper. This may be a great opportunity to review the physical differences between a boy and a girl.
- Bathing Bath time illustrates body privacy, something even a very young child can understand. It's also a time when you can talk about responsibility for personal care. And you can review the names for private body parts.
- Birth of a Sibling. The times both before and after birth offer good possibilities for conversation with your child from a broad front. Reproduction, love, family, and life are topics found in this wondrous event.

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OTHER ISSUES

Sexual Curiosity

Many parents have had an encounter something like the following: Your five year old son is with a playmate in your home. You notice they are quiet. You go to see what they are up to and walk in on them. There they are—naked from the waist down. You might panic, or be angry or confused.

The best approach is to be calm and to say something like:

"I want you both to put your clothes back on. Our bodies are private, and we do not take our clothes off at other people's homes. Let's find something else to do."

Children this age often get into natural sexual play, trying to find out more about their bodies. These situations can become teachable moments. Take note, however, whether there is aggression between the children, such as an older child or bigger child dominating a younger or smaller child.

In such cases, you will, of course, show strong disapproval. In any event, you will want to discuss appropriate behavior and principles of body privacy.

Curiosity itself can be acknowledged in an accepting way, such as: "I can see you are curious about your body. Let's look at a book together."

Talking about a "curiosity" incident may embarrass your child, but

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it will do no harm. Also you may need to tell the other parents about the incident so that they can talk to their child about it.

Modesty

Here is another common situation:

You are taking a shower with your preschooler in tow. It is a quick and efficient way to get the job done. You notice that your child is staring at your genitals and reaches to touch them. You feel uncomfortable and finish in a hurry.

Although there is no "right" age at which a parent should not shower with their child, use your instincts. Seeing the parent naked may excite or confuse a child.

Show bathroom modesty by covering yourself or closing the door when bathing. Children need their own bathroom privacy and by age 7 or 8 are likely to request it.

Touching or Exploring Genitals

Parents of children from preschool age through preteens have walked in on them while they are "playing with themselves." This is common after a preschool boy has been potty trained and now finds his genitals loosely covered. Little girls are often found playing with their genitals during bath time.

Young children enjoy discovering their bodies and do so by

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looking, probing, and touching. Such touching at a very early age is not masturbation, which is defined as manipulation of genitals for sexual gratification or to reach orgasm.

Physicians and psychologists regard masturbation as doing no physical or mental harm.

As to privacy, you may wish to say:

"I know it feels good to touch your private parts, but this is not an okay place to do that." or

"Please do that in the privacy of your bedroom or the bathroom."

If you object to masturbation for religious or other reasons, carefully explain this to your child. Since most masturbation will occur in private without your knowledge, convictions you have about it are best brought up during one of your conversations about sexuality.

What is Gay?

If you are asked this question, first make sure your child is asking for the meaning in terms of sexuality. Gay also means to be happy.

The following brief sentences are suggested:

"A person who is gay is also known as a homosexual."

"This can mean a male or female with romantic feelings for another person of the same sex."

"A woman with romantic and sexual feelings toward another woman is also called a lesbian."

You may also want to say that there are many kinds of love. Those for family members, friends, and pets, are different from the special romantic love that adults can have for a special person. That's the love found in marriage.

Many preteens and teens go through a stage in which they feel especially attracted to a friend or teacher of the same sex. This is normal and not indicative of sexual orientation.

Foul Language

The very young preschooler may go through a stage of experimenting with "potty words." There is no need to scold the child, but simple correction should prevent a habit from forming. In elementary school, your child will have more exposure to foul language.

They will also hear these words in songs and on television. When you first hear your child use a vulgar word, ask them what they think it means. Mention different meanings, if the particular word has them. Then instruct your child according to your values.

"F—k is the vulgar word for sexual intercourse. It degrades and belittles the love that a man and a woman share in this very special way."

"I do not want you to use that word." "We do not use that language in our home." This is appropriate to say to visiting children as well.

What is AIDS/HIV

AIDS and HIV AIDS is the name for a disease called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. HIV means Human Immunodeficient Virus refers to the microorganism causing AIDS.

At some point, you might need to say:

"AIDS is a serious disease that adults and children can get. It does not allow the body to fight off germs."

"A child born to a mother with HIV can sometimes catch the virus from the mother."

"Adults can get the disease during sexual intercourse with someone who has it or by sharing drug needles."

"You cannot catch the virus easily. Playing, hugging, or being close to someone with HIV is not risky. It would be risky to mix your body fluids (saliva, blood, semen, vaginal secretions) with those of someone who has AIDS."

"You and your parents do not have AIDS/HIV."

Suspicion of Molestation

If you suspect that your child has been molested, you should report this promptly to the state agency that investigates such cases. The usual name is "Children's Protective Services" or something similar.

PUBERTY IS COMING

Puberty is the time when a child's body begins to change and develops the ability to reproduce. Today many girls start puberty changes as early as age 8 and 9. Boys usually don't start their changes until age 11 or 12.

Many of the changes of puberty are the same for both girls and boys. These include rapid growth, body hair, oily hair and skin, and mood swings. The hallmark for girls is their first menstruation and for boys it is their first ejaculation. This ejaculation may occur during sleep (called "nocturnal emission" or "wet dream").

Because menarche (first menstrual period) can occur anytime between the ages of 10 and 15, it is best to prepare your daughter with good information before she needs it. The same attention should be given to a son's need to know about wet dreams even though they usually come later and are less conspicuous. For both sexes advance knowledge can be empowering. It builds self-confidence.

As to menstruation, you might say:

"Menstruation (also known as having a period) happens to all young girls at puberty. It is natural and a normal part of growing up. It is the way the body begins to practice for later on, if and when a woman decides to have a baby."

The older the daughter, the more detail will be needed, including the source and nature of the menstrual flow. However, many

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young girls will be eager to learn about puberty sooner rather than later.

For mothers, this is a wonderful opportunity to form a new alliance with their daughters. You can attend a class together, shop for bras, communicate more, and take time to discuss family values.

As to first ejaculation, you might say:

"When a boy's body starts to change, he will start to produce sperm, which is his contribution for making a baby. He also makes semen, which is the fluid that contains the sperm. The body may from time to time get rid of its build up of sperm and semen by sending them out through the penis. This may happen during sleep while dreaming. It is a healthy and natural part of growing up."

The boy's father or other respected male should be taking an active role in communicating during the early years of puberty.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The family is the most powerful influence in the development of a child's sexuality. It is within the family that children begin to get a sense of identity. Here they form their value system and find their models for future relationships. Here, too, children learn to relate to others, give and receive affection, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts. All of these skills contribute to your child's healthy sexuality and help ensure satisfying, adult relationships.

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Basic to this learning process is a healthy parent-child relationship, which is both an exercise for the present and a model for the future. At the heart of a healthy parent-child relationship is good communication, and at the heart of good communication is good listening.

As a parent, you need to practice the art of listening. Look for your child's perspective on everyday events instead of using the tinted glasses of your own adult experiences. Be involved in your child's activities. School, sports, and hobbies are door openers for conversations.

When it comes to the topic of sexuality, have a clear set of values to share with your children. Review these values with your spouse.

- What are the main points that you want to teach your children about human relationships?
- How do you think a man and a woman should behave? How do they solve conflicts?
- What is a healthy balance of power in a relationship?

Of course, these issues come up over the years, not all at once. The closer the children get to their teen years, the more important it is to review these topics with them. You will also, year after year, be sending powerful, nonverbal messages to your children through your own everyday actions and life. You live out your values in front of them.

Some of what you live out will no doubt be conflicts. No relationship is free from them and from a certain amount of ups and downs. Children need to see this, to see that love and anger can coexist and that resolution takes time and effort.

You can also teach about conflict resolution by asking your child to imagine him/herself in a fictitious situation. For example, you might ask:

"What if you had a friend and she asked you to....," or "Remember that TV program where Brian and Lucy were angry at each other? What would you have done?"

TIME IN

One of the best ways to carry out the goals is to practice what is sometimes called Time In. I cannot emphasize this too much. I guarantee it will enhance parents' relationship with their children if it is practiced consistently throughout their growing up years.

You probably feel you already spend a lot of time with your children, caring for them in all sorts of ways. But *Time In* is different. It is:

Spending time with your child when you do what he or she wants, according to his or her own terms.

A parent can give a child the opportunity to pick an activity (within reason, of course), and the parent assumes the role of follower. The child should be the one in charge. This situation leads easily

to talking and sharing about many things, including topics bearing on sexuality. It can be a great one-on-one experience.

As children get older, a meal with an individual parent can be the Time In. Also, a certain special activity can be chosen as a regular occasion for a parent's participation. These occasions can be once a day, once a week, or, at the very least, once a month.

This is a parenting tool that can work year after year, right into adulthood. Here are some guidelines for Time In:

- **Regularity.** Time In should be provided on a regular basis regardless of the child's behavior before the appointed time.
- **Labeling.** Call it "Special Time," or "Andrew's Time."
- **Child's Role.** The child chooses the activity and leads.
- **Parent's Role.** The parent chooses the time and follows. Start with a short time. Ten to fifteen minutes may be enough. Use a timer.
- **No interruptions.** Be sure other family members understand. Let the answering machine take phone calls.
- **No misbehavior.** The usual consequences should follow and the special time should be shortened.

This technique is also available to grandparents, aunts,

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uncles, and other adults who can spend time with the child on a regular basis.

THE SINGLE PARENT

The single mother and her son

Ideally the boy's father should play a vital teaching role, but that might not be possible. Uneasy though she may be, the single mother may have to be the son's primary resource. This is not especially difficult in the early years, although a little rehearsing ahead of time with friends may be needed.

As the boy gets closer to puberty, however, the mother may need help. This can be found in mother-son classes, where a good male leader can break the ice and get conversations going, or in adopting a male mentor—a trusted family member or friend.

The single mother and her daughter

A divorce may add some difficulty to communications. Dissension in the family may make the child less open to sensitive conversations.

Your commitment to your child's sexual education, however, will probably overcome the problem. Just follow the suggestions in this booklet. If you are involved in any personal sexual turmoil, do not share this with your child. Some matters are better kept private.

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The single father and his son

The situation is similar to the single mother and daughter circumstance (see above). Above all, the father must be committed to his son's sexual education.

Part of that education will happen automatically as the son observes how his father behaves toward women, including his mother. But deliberate conversation is also the father's responsibility. Such conversation should be informed (aided by reading), sensitive to the boy's stage of development, and without coarse joking or making light of the matter.

The single father and his daughter

If there was a good father-daughter relationship before divorce, hopefully the relationship will continue, even with visitation constraints. The way a father treats his daughter teaches her what to expect of other men. A healthy assertiveness is often best learned from the father.

As a daughter approaches puberty, however, practical sexual education is best done by a female. If the mother is not available, the father should enlist a stepmother or other family member. When the time comes, the father can be helpful by keeping feminine supplies at his house.

GLOSSARY

The human body is a magnificent creation which invites curiosity. When you supply the correct names for body parts, you satisfy this natural curiosity. You also convey that knowledge is valuable. These terms are appropriate to teach at puberty.

BOTH SEXES

Term	Pronunciation	Explanation
Anus	AY-nus	The opening where bowel movements come out.
Bladder	BLAD-er	A saclike structure that holds urine.
Buttocks	BUT-toks	The two large muscles that we sit on.
Genitals	JEN-i-tulls	A person's sexual organs.
Hormones	HOR-moans	Circulating sub-stances with many functions
Puberty	PEW-bur-tee	The time of becoming capable of sexual reproduction, genitals mature and secondary sex characteristics develop.
Pubic area	PEW-bik	Area at the bottom of the abdomen
Urethra	yuh-REE-thra	Tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside and in the male, it also carries semen.
Virgin	VER-gin	A person who has not had sexual intercourse.

FEMALE

Term	Pronunciation	Explanation
Cervix	SER-viks	Outer end of the uterus. Connects uterus to the vagina.
Clitoris	CLIT-uh-riss	Small erectile organ at forward part of the vulva.
Estrogen	ES-troh-jen	One of the hormones causing signs of puberty in girls.
Hymen	Himen	Thin tissue that partly closes the opening of the vagina.
Labia	LAY-beea	Fatty folds that cover the vulva.
Menarche	meh-NAR-key	A girl's first menstrual period.
Ovum	OH-vum	Plural: ova. The female's egg cell.
Vagina	Vah-JIE-nah	The canal connecting uterus to the outer sex organs. Also called the birth canal.
Vulva	VUL-va	The external parts of the female's genital organs.

MALE

Term	Pronunciation	Explanation
Circumcision	sircomeSISHun	The cutting off of the foreskin (prepuce).
Ejaculation	ee-jack-you-LAY-shun	The sudden discharge of semen.
Erection	ee-RECK-shun	Change in the penis from limp to firm and erect.
Glans	GLANZ	The crown or end portion of the penis.
Penis	PEE-niss	The male organ which hangs between the legs.
Foreskin	FOR-skin	The loose skin that covers the glans of the penis. Also known as the prepuce (PREEpyoos).
Prostate Gland	PRAHS-tate	Contributes substances to the semen.
Scrotum	SKROH-tum	The external pouch that holds the testicles.
Semen	SEA-men	Thick, whitish fluid that contains sperm.
Sperm	SPIRM	or spermatozoon, The male's reproductive cell.
Testicles	TES-ti-kuls	Or testes: Two roundish structures which make sperm.
Testosterone	tes-TOSS-ter-own	Male hormone made by the testicles.
Vas deferens	vas-DEF-arenz	Two tubes that carry sperm from the testicles.

RESOURCES

Books for Parents:

From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children. Debra W. Haffner. Newmarket Press, 1999. Valuable. Helps parents develop good rapport.

Keys to Your Child's Healthy Sexuality. Chrystal de Freitas, M.D. New York: Barren's Parenting Series, 1998. Gives age-appropriate information about sexuality for parents of children ages 4-12. Emphasizes a family value system. May be purchased as an e-book.

How to Talk to Your Child about Sex. Linda and Richard Eyre. Golden Books, 1999. The authors have written many other books on parenting and teaching values.

Books for Children or Children and Parents:

Why Boys and Girls Are Different (ages 3-5); Where Do Babies Come From? (ages 6-8); How You Are Changing (ages 8-11) Concordia Publishing series under auspices of the Board for Parish Services of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. First published in 1982, these highly regarded books have a Christian perspective.

Did the Sun Shine Before You Were Born?; Girls Are Girls and Boys Are Boys, So What's the Difference?; A Better Safe Than Sorry Book—A Family Guide for Sexual Assault Prevention. Sol and Judith Gordon. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991 1992. Appropriate for ages 3-7. The third book helps prevent molestation.

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So That's How I was Born! Robert Brooks, PhD. Susan Perl, Illustrator. Aladin Paperbacks, Simon & Schuster, reprinted 1993. When Joey's friend Lisa tells him how babies are born, he asks his parents to tell him how he was really born. Ages 4-8

Mommy Laid an Egg. Babette Cole. Chronicle Books, 1993. Two children use their own drawings to explain babies to their parents.

It's So Amazing! A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families. Robie H. Harris. Michael Emberley, illustrator. Candlewick Press, 1999. Cartoon characters present straightforward explanations.

It's not the Stork! A book about Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families and Friends. H. Harris. Michael Emberley illustrator. Candlewick Press. 2006. Similar to their other books. For ages 4 and up.

Books for Preteens:

The Care and Keeping of You. Valerie Lee Schaefer. Pleasant Co. Publications, 1998. An excellent first book for young girls. Reviews changes in basic language. No SEX! They love it. Fun.

The What's Happening to My Body Book for Boys. A Growing Up Guide for Parents and Sons. Lynda Madaras and Dane Saavedra. Newmarket Press, 1987. For older boys, ages 12 and up.

For Pre-teen Girls & Parents:

My First Period Kit & DVD Chrystal de Freitas, M.D., Healthy Chats LLC; www.myfirstperiodkit.com

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