

SEX EDUCATION

Talking to young people about sex

Speaking to young people about sex is embarrassing, but a necessity. If you spent your child's early years avoiding the subject of sex then it is tempting to leave it up to your teen's peers and teachers to give them the facts.



Parental avoidance is not a recommended method of sex education. A teenager's perception of sex and sexuality can be skewed by incorrect or misleading information that comes from many sources, including: magazines, television and other teenagers. Parents need to provide young people with accurate information so they can act safely and responsibly.

Parents who have been successful communicators in their children's early years are generally good sexuality educators. Talking to a teenager about sex is certainly easier if you have talked about sex already and the communication lines are open.

Talking about sexuality covers a wide range of topics extending beyond the issue of biology that we so often get stuck on. It includes issues such as; emotions and feelings, relationships, gender roles, sexuality, contraception, safer sex and values.

Perhaps the most important part of the process is to help young people develop their own views and values that will determine their sexual and relationship behaviour. It is helpful then

for young people to know your values and understand the reasons behind your beliefs. Young people may at first reject their parents' values but they often return to them in later adolescence or early adulthood.

Young people usually love to have discussions about sexuality, relationships and sexual behaviour as long as the talk doesn't focus on them. Discussing issues such as abortion, homosexuality and safe sex helps parents stay in the game with young people at a time when they are often cut out.

Talking about sexuality with young people is not a one-off event where you discuss the topic once and only revisit it if trouble arises. It is an ongoing activity that relies on honesty and open communication from both parents and young people.

WHAT TO TALK ABOUT

Numerous studies have shown that the most influential role models for young people are parents. Parents need to talk about more than biology when they discuss sex with young people.

1. RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS: Placing sex in a context of relationships is important when talking about sexuality. The notion of values, gender roles, and sexual feelings are part of the broad spectrum known as sexuality education.

2. SEX OPTIONS: Safe and unsafe sex, different practices and pregnancy are covered in this area.

3. YOU CAN SAY NO: The options including the ability to say no to sex need to be discussed with students.

DECISION-MAKING

Help your young person make informed decisions about their sexual experiences in the following ways:

- Encourage them to discuss sex with you. Be non-judgemental in your views. Help them see the consequences of different decisions.
- Discuss ways they can resist the pressure to have sex. Keep in mind that a great deal of pressure for girls to have intercourse comes from their female peers.

KEEP IN MIND

1. Teenagers need accurate information about sex so they can make informed decisions and act safely and responsibly.
2. Sex education needs to cover a range of topics and not just focus on biology.
3. Talk with young people about sex rather than to them.



Parenting ideas
MICHAEL GROSE

Parenting Ideas Tip Sheet