



CanaVox Tips for Talking to Your Child about Sex



Teaching a child about the basics of sex begins from an early age. As the parent, you are in the best position to talk to them. We recommend a layered approach, giving age appropriate information at each stage of their life.

One to One. Mom and Dad

Each parent brings something unique to the conversation about sexuality. It's good for mom and dad to speak to their sons and daughters separately. Moms can empathize with daughters about the experience of being female first hand (starting her period, for example); dads can explain to daughters some of the psychology behind young male behavior; and mothers can explain to their sons some of the mystery behind female behavior. Your child should come to see you as the experts on this subject, that you are authorities who know, who care, who are calm, and don't get angry or dramatic. This doesn't mean that it might not feel uncomfortable or awkward sometimes to talk about this, but as the parent you must remain serene and welcoming.

Aim to speak to your children first, before schoolteachers or peers start talking to them. Sadly, sex talk today is often mixed up with appeals to participate in unethical behavior or even violence. It is better for mom and dad to be the first to introduce this subject, so as to explain the great beauty and place for bodily love. "Better a year too early than five minutes too late."

Ages 2 to 4

From a very young age, your child is aware of mom and dad's signs of affection—like loving words, handholding, dancing, kisses, and acts of service. The physical and emotional displays of affection between mom and dad are powerful influences on a child's later understanding of love. As they grow up, they will find it easier to understand that there are many ways to show love and that sex is the culminating way in which a married couple shows their love for one another.

Ages 4 to 5

Early on, you can explain to children that they have special private parts. Girls have girl parts and boys have boy parts. Other people should not touch these private parts (except a parent or doctor), and we should cover up in front of siblings or others. It's also good to help them get into the habit of refraining from potty language or making jokes about private parts. These small messages help them to begin to understand that our private parts are not mundane and laughable but beautiful and to be protected.

If your child asks: "Where do babies come from?" You can say, "A mommy and daddy make the baby, and mommy carries the baby in her tummy. Isn't that neat?" This is usually enough information. If they ask more questions, you can appeal to their imagination: "Mommy and daddy's love puts the baby in there." Or "God puts the baby in mommy's tummy." A good approach is to answer what they ask with simple, honest replies. If they need more information, you can respond to them based upon what is appropriate for their maturity.

Ages 6 to 8

As your child enters elementary school, they are ready to grasp basic plant reproduction, which can serve as an analogy for how a baby grows from seed. Look for a teachable moment, like the pregnancy of a friend, to raise the issue. "You know what? Babies grow from a small seed in mommy's tummy, kind of like the way the bean grows in the plastic cup at school!" For some kids, this is enough new fascinating information. Others may ask more questions. Keep it simple: "Mom and dad's love makes the seed for the baby. Daddy has a seed and mommy has an egg, and when the two come together, the egg develops into a baby inside of mommy's tummy."

Some inquisitive children may ask about the mechanics—"How does daddy's seed and mommy's egg come together?" You can continue to use metaphor: "Mom and dad have a special hug that puts the seed into mommy's tummy." Or you can be more direct: "Boys and girls have different body parts, remember . . . ? Well, mom and dad's different body

parts fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. The mommy part and daddy part come together to join the seed and egg.”

— Ages 8 to 11 —

During this stage, children are ready for longer explanations. Conversations should take place in natural ways, when speaking about how a girl’s body is changing; or about how to dress appropriately; or the ways in which boys and girls can touch each other. Kids hugging kids, or watching wrestling, and other sports events can give parents and children opportunities to reflect on these matters together. Other times, you will want to raise an issue so as to help your child to be on their guard.

Again, a good strategy is to raise the topic with a question. “Do you remember about the special hug to make babies? Do you remember what that is called?” Leading with questions helps you to start a conversation intelligently, figuring out what they already know or don’t know, so you can build from there. “Have you heard of the word pornography or “porn” before . . . ?” “Well I want you to be aware that some people take pictures of themselves naked and share those pictures with others. The pictures are called pornography.” “What have we learned about nakedness in front of other people? Why do we cover up in front of others?” “. . . Right! So if you ever see someone looking at pictures of a naked person, walk away and find mom or dad.”

If your child has not initiated the conversation about how babies are made by age 10, it is a good idea for you to initiate it. Don’t wait around for them to come to you. This is too important a topic to let slip through the cracks. Remember that your child’s social environment can be a factor when deciding how early you should discuss these matters. If your child spends a considerable amount of time away from adult supervision, chances are they will be exposed to the topic of sexuality earlier. Research polls have found that the average age at which boys are accidentally exposed to pornography is at around age 12, and often younger, so it’s important to address sex, its purpose and beauty, as well as the dangers of pornography before then—to help protect them from harm.

As early teens, kids take a greater interest in romance. Discussions should be more focused on relationships. You can explain that true love is about self-gift (not self-love). False love seeks another person for the sake of more selfish ends, like popularity, or for pleasure, to have the experience of sex, or the emotional high that comes with being with someone. True love is about caring for the other person, helping to build them up, to bring the best out of them. It is helpful to have conversations in reference to something that has happened at school, or to a popular song or movie. This makes discussions more interesting and real. It also lets your tween know that you are not naïve to what is going on. You are an expert. Give them examples of true love and courtship from movies, books, and real life to think of as role models. A couple of messages that you can communicate at this age include:

- 1) How we speak with our bodies: that the body has a language of love and that sex says "I give myself entirely to you forever." However, sex outside of marriage is like telling a lie. The body says "I give myself to you forever," but the persons have not voiced this kind of promise to each other.
- 2) How unfair that sex can produce a baby without the father or mother committed to the new baby. You can ask your young teen: "Would you like to have had only a mother and not a father, or to have been abandoned? Marriage is what best ensures that a baby has both parents for the long haul" ". . . When two people marry, they announce to each other and to all their family and friends in the audience that they will be faithful and stay together, ready to raise any children that come to them." They don't just make these promises to each other in private. They make them in a beautiful place in front of a large audience. This thing called "marriage" is the best way we have of making sure that men and women stay by each other and to help raise any children they create.

Conversations about subjects like these will help your teen understand why the rules and boundaries make sense. You don't just want to lay down rules but be a mentor and loving guide.

— Ages 15 to 18 —

At this stage, many teens start dating. It's good for parents to talk about dating guidelines as well as revisit the subject of sex. A couple of rules that our families have found useful are: *The 4 Hour Rule*: That a teen should be able to accomplish all the socializing s/he needs in four hours. Instead of these endless "drop me off at 4 and pick me up at 11" hangouts, your teen should figure out how they will use their time wisely. *No Bedroom Hangouts*: Your teen should plan the date in a more public or group setting. Going over to a home with responsible adults present is fine but *no bedrooms*.

At this age, talking about sex can be more awkward. Talk to them while doing another activity, like driving or going on a walk, so that you are not forced into continuous eye contact. You can start the discussion by saying, "Hey, I know that you already know a lot about this stuff, but this is important. And now that you are older, I want you to be better informed."

At this age especially, fear has its place. Teens should be aware of the dangers—and avoidability—of sexually transmitted infections. Identify the diseases by name—not just HIV—but HPV, chlamydia, herpes, and the range of STIs. Let them know that there is an overblown confidence in the safety of condoms. Medical information can be a strong deterrent for teens. In the heat of the moment, fear of catching a disease can hold them back. Fear tactics are used successfully in other educational campaigns, like the drunk driving, the smoking and the no-texting-while-driving campaigns. You can help them to have a healthy fear of sexual disease as part of your "waiting for sex" campaign at home.

Speak to them also about the powerful role that the sex drive can have in decision-making. Hormones can push us to act, sometimes against our better judgment. "It can be like getting drunk on alcohol. If you put yourself into a situation where your hormones are aroused, it is very difficult to

act in a level-headed way . . .” “And if you both drink alcohol and allow yourselves to get sexually aroused, you virtually guarantee that you will make a decision you will regret later, when you are sober and calm.” Girls this age should know that at fertile times of the month they are more susceptible to the force of sexual desire than at non-fertile times, whereas sexual desire for boys is more steadily the same all month.

Finally, let teens know that no matter what happens, you will always be there for them. Even if they go too far, they can always come to you for help; that you will always love them and help them get through it, make amends and start again. We all make mistakes. For every mistake there is a solution!

Waiting Becomes Beautiful

By instilling good habits from an early age and having honest conversations with them as they grow, you will help your child appreciate the beauty of sex and willingly wait for a once-in-a-lifetime partner to marry. The important thing is to talk to your kids! It doesn't matter if you don't feel knowledgeable or tactful enough. The parent-child relationship is a safe haven of love where these discussions are meant to happen, so don't wait until they hear about it from someone else. Take a deep breath and collect your thoughts. You can do this!

For the full-length version of this Tips Sheet, and for other free readings on how to have conversations about delicate subjects related to marriage visit www.CanaVox.com.



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