TALKING WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY

.

(**E**



Communication is the ability to express what we think and feel with others. It is an important part of good relationships.

When we communicate well with our children they become more able to learn, develop their feelings and ideas and solve problems. If we have good communication and relationships with our children it can be easier to shape their behaviour.

Communicating well takes work and practice. It means giving all of our attention to the other person. [1, 2]



Some useful ideas for good communication with our children are [3]....

Being interested and not judging

Show your child that you want to listen to them. If you seem busy with other things or your child feels what they are saying is silly or wrong they will not keep talking.

Encourage talking

Ask questions that need longer answers than a 'yes' or 'no'. If you ask "What do you think about that story?" they will talk more than if you ask "Did you like that story?"

Talk about your own thoughts and feelings

When you say what you think and how you feel your child learns how to express their own thoughts and feelings and about how adults behave.

Try to understand your child's feelings and ideas

Sometimes children need help to understand and express what they think and feel. Once you have listened to your child you might say "You seem very excited about that". Your child may agree that they are excited but also a bit worried. You can then help them to understand having these Talking with our children about sex and sexuality is very important.....



One aim of sexuality education is to **help children have healthy attitudes to their bodies and their sexuality.** It can prepare children for their future sexual life and to make good decisions about their sexual health.

Research shows that teaching children about

sexuality might **help prevent some problems.** Young people who have accurate information about sex are more likely to be older when they start to be sexually

active and to use safer sex practices[4].

Other research shows that if we do not talk to children about sexuality they will find out in other ways like talking to their friends. Children also have a lot of access to media like the internet, television, magazines etc. These other ways of finding out about sexuality often **don't provide children with accurate information**[5,6].



understand their development and have a healthy future sexual life where they are protected from risky sexual behaviours[8].

> hen teaching your children about sexuality parents who have talked with their children, researchers and sexuality educators agree....

- A. You'll need to have many conversations over time instead of 'just one big talk'
- B. Start the talks early in your child's life
- C. Give only the information they need for their age and stage of life

Doing things this way helps your child to understand and accept what they have heard and to think of any questions they might have. When they need answers or more information they are more likely to come to you than to find out in other ways[7,9].

It can be hard to decide what information to give your child at each age. Here are some suggestions provided by child development researchers....

Up to 2 years old children are learning the names for all their different body parts and so you can also teach them the correct names for their genitals. At this age children are not shy or embarrassed about these parts of their bodies[10].





At 3-5 years

children are

curious and may ask questions about bodies. They need to have honest and simple

answers to their questions. This is also the age to tell

children which body parts are private; the difference

between 'good touching' and 'bad touching' and who they should allow to touch those body parts. (Remember to tell your child that the doctor or nurse might touch these private parts only for medical reasons and only after you and your child have been asked for permission.)[10,11]



By 6-9 years children's curiosity about sex and sexuality increases. Some will ask questions and some will not, but
 most will be wondering about babies and how they arrive. They need very basic information about puberty and what they might expect to happen to their body when they get there. Children may also ask about sex. You might want to give a short,

basic answer and let them know that sex is only for adults, not children[11].

At 9-12 years children might know quite a lot about sex and sexuality. Some of their information will be accurate and some will not. Many children already have noticed the effects of puberty on their body. When you talk to your children about puberty name



the changes, let them know these are normal changes and that every young person has them at different times. It is also important to talk about the emotional changes your child may feel.

At this age, some parents want to talk with their children about the physical and emotional risks of starting sex too early in life. They may give simple information on the risk of pregnancy, STI's and how they can affect people's future lives. Some

parents want to leave this talk for later in their child's life[12].

Whatever the age of your child you should try to.....

Use the correct names for body parts, signs of puberty and when talking about sex and

🖌 sexuality

 \star

Speak with confidence or your child may think talking with you about sex and sexuality is not ok_[13]

Many parents want to be the first person to talk about sex and sexuality with their children. This means being prepared as your child may ask questions at any



time. Even if your child has not asked any questions you should still talk with them. If you have not already started talking – don't worry! It's never too late to start.

ow to get ready.....

⇒ Think about your own sexuality
 education and how it prepared you.
 What would you do the same and what
 would you do differently?

Learn about normal sexual development and the correct names for all the sexual body parts if you are unsure.

If your child's primary school runs a sexuality

education program your child may learn about body parts, functions and hygiene; physical and emotional changes in puberty; sex and reproduction; relationships and personal safety.

You may want to check with the school which topics they will cover.

Try to become comfortable with talking about sex and sexuality. If you show your child you are shy or embarrassed they may feel that their bodies and sexuality are something to be ashamed of instead of being a normal part of life_[4].

Parents who have begun talking with their children about sex and sexuality are a great source of

wisdom. Here are some of their

ideas....

- ★ Talk with your children, not to them
- ★ Pay attention to them when they ask a question
- ★ If you can't answer a question tell them you will find out and go back to them
- Listen to what they are trying to say as well as what they say
- ★ Behave like you are not surprised when your child asks questions
- Talk with other parents about what they said, what their children said, how it went and what they would do differently
- ★ Use books and activities to help you give your child information
- Use things in daily life as reasons to talk such as the pregnancy of someone they know, changes they see in older children they know, a movie with a romantic scene, un-wanted 'pop-ups' when using the internet, sanitary

- ★ Tell your child you, too, are learning how to talk with them about sex and sexuality
- ★ If you cannot overcome shyness as a last resort ask someone else to talk with your child
- ★ If your child is shy or embarrassed try talking in the car or while lying on your/their bed with so. lighting
- Have another activity planned that will distract a younger child if you decide it is best to stop talking with them
- Tell your child your family values about sex and sexuality because if they don't learn expected behaviour from you who will they learn it from?
- Talk about good relationships because sex is about relationship with another person
- ★ Talk to your child about feelings and sex
- ★ Teach your child how to be kind to their boyfriend or girlfriend and how to end a relationship in a considerate way
- If your child accidently sees pornography online or elsewhere tell them porn is like a story – it's not real and some of it is against the law. Don't get angry that they have seen it

Where to get more information and support...

Talk with someone -

- ★ Your family and friends
- ★ The Student Wellbeing Officer at your child's school
- ★ Your family doctor or GP
- ★ Your Maternal Child and Health Centre
- ★ Espod Geelong Inc (Education and Parenting Support) Ph: 03 52232425
- ★ Parentline Victoria Ph: 132289
- ★ Family Planning Victoria Ph: 1800 013952
- ★ Your Maternal Child and Health Centre
- ★ Barwon Health Sexual Health Information and Screening Ph: 03 42151489

Online resources –

- Espod Geelong Inc. www.espodgeelong.org.au
- Better Health Channel Sex education tips for parents www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Family Planning Victoria Parent portal <u>www.fpv.org.au</u>
- Department of Education and Training Victoria 'Catching On Early'
 Program <u>www.vic.gov.au</u>
- The Hormone Factory <u>www.thehormonefactory.com</u>
- Geelong Regional Library <u>www.grlc.vic.gov.au</u>

Parenting Programs

Barwon Child Youth and Family – <u>www.bcyf.org.au</u>

Bethany – <u>www.bethany.org.au</u>

City of Greater Geelong Service Directory – <u>www.geelongaustralia.com.au</u>

References

- Paltin, D., (2011). 'Bridging the Communication Gap Between Parents and Children.' (https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/parenting/parentchild.communication)
- Paull, T., (1986). 'Parenting Skills Program : a resource for parent educators'.
 Dandenong Valley Family Care, Dandenong.
- Faber, A., Mazlish, E., (1999). 'How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk'. Avon Books, New York.
- Eastman, K., Corona R., Schuster, M., (2006). 'Talking Parents, Healthy Teens : A Worksite-based Program for Parents to Promote Adolescent Sexual Health'. Preventing Chronic Disease Public Health Research, Practice, And Policy., 3(4). (www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2006/oct/06_0012.htm)
- Busse, P., Fishbein, M., Bleakley, A., Hennessy, M., (2010). 'The Role of Communication With Friends in Sexual Initiation'.

(www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2897170)

6. Walker, L., (2012). 'Sex Talk With Teens Must Address Pornography'.

(http://www.thekidsareallright.com.au/2012/parenting/sex-talk-with-teensmust- address-pornography/)

- Center for Parenting Education. 'Talking to Children About Sex—Transmitting Your Values And Attitudes About Sexuality'. (centerforparentingeducation.org)
- Dilorio, C., et al., (2006). 'Keepin' It R.E.A.L.!: Results of a Mother-Adolescent HIV Prevention Program'. Nursing Research, 55(1), pp.43-51
- Martino, S.C., (2008). 'Beyond the "Big Talk"; The Roles of Breadth and Repetition in Parent-Adolescent Communication About Sexual Topics'. Pediatrics, 121(3)
- Mayo Clinic. 'Sex education: Talking to toddlers and preschoolers about sex' (www.mayoclinic.org)



This booklet was compiled by Espod Geelong Inc



Our grateful thanks to the Percy Baxter Charitable Trust for funding this project

THE

PERCY BAXTER

TRUST

through Impact Philanthropy with Perpetual as Trustee



