

How to Talk About the Birds and the Bees

Expert
Reviewed

Three Parts: [Preparing for Discussions](#) [Having a Discussion](#) [Keeping Communication Open](#)

Discussing sex and reproduction with a child for the first time can be an uncomfortable subject. However, it's best your child learns about these topics from you first rather than being exposed to inaccurate information on the playground. Prepare the discussion ahead of time, lean on outside sources when necessary, and leave room for questions. Carefully planning and discussing the birds and the bees with your child will make them more confident and informed about sex, reproduction, and sexuality.

Part 1

Preparing for Discussions

1 Decide what you want to discuss. Over time, you should have a variety of discussions with your child about sex, sexuality, and reproduction. You should be prepared ahead of time in regards to what you feel most subject you feel most comfortable discussing with your child.

- What are you the most comfortable talking about? Some parents feel fine discussing the technical aspects of reproduction, but others balk at the idea as they fear they don't know enough to explain it well. Some parents are okay discussing relationships, consent, and readiness for sex, but others are uncomfortable with being so casual with their kids. Know what you feel you can cover yourself, without outside material.^[1]
- You should strive to frankly discuss the topics you're most comfortable with upfront and lean on outside material for areas you're less confident.^[2]
- Take your child's age into consideration. You should always answer a child's question about their body, but depending on your personal parenting style you might prefer to hold off on discussing sex and reproduction itself until around 10 or 12. Some subjects too might not be an issue until your child is a teenager. It's fine to talk to your 10 year-old daughter about menstruation and what it means, but she might not understand safe sex and STDs until she's a few years older.^[3]

2 Gather external resources. As stated, you might have to rely on certain outside sources for some areas of the sex talk.

- *What Makes A Baby* by Cory Silverberg is a great children's book for parents looking to explain how babies are conceived and born to young children. If you're unsure how to word the discussion in a kid-friendly manner, this can be an excellent resource.^[4]
- The website BishUK provides a range of topics for parents and teens that covers not only the physical aspects of sex but its emotional impact. You could direct your child to these web pages as he reaches his teenage years.^[5]
- MTV, as part of their well known *Teen Mom* series, has a website known as mysexlife.org that helps teenagers understand sex and sexuality and how to make safe decisions regarding their bodies.^[6]
- Speakeasy, a Family Planning Association, has online guides to help parents talk to kids about sex and reproduction at a variety of ages.^[7]

3 Understand your child probably knows more than you think. Many parents underestimate how much information children absorb, even at a young age, about sex and reproduction. Try to maintain a calm demeanor each time you have a discussion with your child and do not react with anger, shock, or surprise if your child reveals they already know some aspects of the topic.

- If your child takes a sex ed course at school, try and figure out what is covered. You can look over the material your child brings home, but it might be better to speak to the teacher directly and ask him for a syllabus or lesson plan.^[8]
- Even young children have some understanding of sex and sexuality. Children pick up on things in television and other sources of media and talk amongst themselves. Older children might fill younger children in on

certain topics, and a child might ask you for further information or verification about something they heard on the playground. Handle such lines of questions calmly.^[9]

- If your child claims they already know something you're trying to explain, remain calm. You want your child to leave the conversation feeling positive so he feels he can come back to you with questions. You do not want to react in a way that could provoke feelings of fear or shame in your child.

Part 2

Having a Discussion

1 Have occasional big discussions. While you should be prepared to answer questions about sex throughout your child's life, now and then you might need to have a sit down talk. This can be once your child reaches a certain age, before or after he begins sex ed at school, or at any point where changes have occurred that would result in him having a lot of questions about sex, sexuality, and reproduction.

- Let your child know ahead of time you want to talk to them about sex and reproduction, but phrase it in a positive way. Say something like, "As you're getting older, I feel like you're responsible enough to learn some things about the adult world you might be curious about."^[10]
- It's best for your child to hear about sex from you for the first time, so aim to have the first sex talk young. As previously stated, you can use discretion in what topics you do and do not cover, but try to talk to your child about sex by the time he's 10.^[11]

2 'Discuss menstruation with girls. As girls can start menstruating as young as 10, you should make sure your daughter feels comfortable coming to you with any questions about periods.

- Your child should know the basic physical properties that lead to menstruation. It is helpful to have a medical drawing of the female reproductive system on hand when having this discussion. As stated, if you do not feel comfortable in your own medical knowledge feel free to use outside sources while discussing the process.^[12]
- Your daughter should also know she can and should come to you the first time her period starts. You will be able to find her the proper sanitary napkins or tampons and help her through the emotional impact menstruation might have.^[13]
- Your daughter might already know what her period is, or at least know the word. You can start off by asking her, "Do you know if any of the girls in your class have had their period yet?" and see how she responds. Allow her to ask questions throughout the discussion.^[14]

3 Discuss wet dreams, ejaculation, and erections with boys. While a 10 year-old might not need to know about the logistics of safe sex, boys do start experiencing arousal and erections as young as age 9. Discuss these topics with your son early so he understands these things are a normal part of growing up.

- Many boys have some idea of what erections are as they've noticed other boys experiencing them or heard crude "boner" jokes on the playground. Start by asking your child if he understands what an erection is and then fill him on the physical processes that drive arousal, erections, and ejaculation.^[15]
- Boys need to understand an erection is a hormonal response and a normal part of puberty and growing up. You should start this discussion sooner rather than later as boys may experience their first ejaculation during a wet dream and become confused and even scared about what is happening.^[16]

4 Do not shy away from hot button topics. Many parents feel controversial subjects are off the table when discussing sex and reproduction with their children. However, it's better your child learns about such topics from you than getting faulty information from an uninformed teenager.

- Most of the more hot button topics about sexuality should be reserved for a later sex talk, when your child is starting high school. Around this time, many of his friends and classmates may begin experimenting with sex.^[17]
- The average age at which teenagers lose their virginity is 15, so make sure your teen feels he can talk to you about sex and sexuality. Subjects like safe sex, contraception, STDs, and oral sex should be things you talk to your child about when shortly after he begins high school.^[18]
- Make sure you talk about the emotional aspects of sex and sexuality as well. Your child should understand sex has an emotional impact, especially when he is young, and he should not make decisions about his body

without making sure he's emotionally ready.^[19]

**Part
3****Keeping Communication Open**

1 Let your child know he can come to you with questions. Ongoing communication is important as it's impossible to fit all the basic questions into a few conversations. Make sure your child knows he's welcome to come to you with any questions that arise about sex, sexuality, and reproduction.

- Staying calm during any sit down discussions can be helpful. Handling any questions in a calm, non-judgmental manner at the time makes your child more likely to feel comfortable if he has questions later on.
- Make it clear that the sex talk is never a one time opportunity. Leave the conversation by saying, "If you have any questions in the future, do not hesitate to ask."
- Give your child with some age-appropriate reading material. He can consult a booklet, pamphlet, or website if he's confused and come to you with other questions.

2 Look for learning opportunities. Do not limit discussions of sex and reproduction to those moments when your child specifically asks or when you decide it's time to have a talk. Look for opportunities to teach your child about sex throughout your day-to-day life.

- Highlight positive or negative examples of sex and relationships you see in movies or television shows or news stories. You can also learn about reproduction through nature documentaries.^[20]
- Things like marriage, divorce, pregnancy, and childbirth can trigger questions from a child. Always answer these questions honestly and frankly. Remind your child families come in a variety of forms and that this is a normal part of life.^[21]
- If you notice stains on sheets, possibly from wet dreams, masturbation, or periods, take this as an opportunity to discuss certain subjects with your child. Make sure you go into the conversation in non-judgmental way, however. You don't want your child to think he's being scolded.^[22]

3 Model a healthy attitude about sex and relationships for your child. One of the best things you can do to make your child comfortable and informed about sex, sexuality, and reproduction is to model a healthy attitude for them.

- If you're co-parenting with a spouse or partner, make sure you and your significant other treat each other with respect, kindness, and affection in front of your children. Minimize fighting and, when it happens, try to let your children see how you make up. Make sure they understand small fights are a normal, healthy part of a romantic relationship.^[23]
- Some children's first introduction to sexuality is accidentally discovering a parent's pornography. While pornography can be a healthy aspect of a relationship for some couples, it is not appropriate for children. Try to keep adult material out a child's reach to avoid confusion.^[24]
- If you're a single parent, talk to your child about relationships and dating. Introduce them to partners only when you feel they are ready, and make sure your partner knows how to behave appropriately in a child's presence.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/10291383/Sex-education-How-to-talk-about-the-birds-and-bees-with-your-child-in-the-21st-century.html>
2. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/10291383/Sex-education-How-to-talk-about-the-birds-and-bees-with-your-child-in-the-21st-century.html>
3. <http://www schooldays.ie/articles/Talk-about-sex-6---12-yrs>

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