

Tips for preparing to talk with your child about their sexual health

Prepare and practice

It isn't always easy to talk about sexual health with your kids. In fact, it can be extremely difficult for some parents. Don't be afraid to practice. You can practice in front of a mirror, with your spouse or partner, or with friends. Your ability to speak comfortably about sexual health will make your child more comfortable asking questions and discussing sensitive issues. Included in your chat pack are facts about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to help you increase your knowledge. Take some time to look over the information in your packet and, if possible, visit a few of the suggested websites.

Communicate your values

In addition to talking to your children about the physical facts pertaining to sex, it's important that they also understand sexual relationships involving feelings of caring and issues of responsibility. Parents need to make their children aware of their values about sex. Although your child may not adopt these values as their own, it's important that children are aware of them as they develop their own set of values about sexuality. Knowing your values will help guide them in making theirs. Sometimes it helps to take a few minutes to write down your feelings and values about sex, unplanned pregnancy and STDs/HIV.

It's OK to say "I don't know"

You do not need to be a sexual health expert. It's OK if you don't know all of the answers to all of your child's questions and to say "I don't know." If you don't know the answer to your child's questions, you can make the search for the answer together. Make it into an opportunity to grow and learn together.

Create an open and safe environment

It's important that when you are ready to have a talk about sexual health with your child that you create an environment that feels safe. Children who have a sense of connection to parents are more likely than other children to wait to have sex. Children who have previous discussions of sexuality with parents are more likely to feel able to communicate with a partner about STDs/HIV/AIDS. Not only do open relationships and environments have positive effects on the sexual risk-taking behaviors of children, they also give your child a safe place for asking questions. Be available, honest, and attentive. This will show your child that you are always available for them and it is safe to come and talk to you anytime. Preplan a safe and private place for you and your child to talk. Make sure to set aside a good amount of time for your talk.

Talk with your child

It is important to talk with your child. Make sure you listen to your child the way you want your child to listen to you. Try to ask questions that will encourage him or her to share specific information about feelings, decisions, and actions. It is important for you to understand exactly what your kids are saying, that your children feel they have been heard, and that their opinions are valued, even when they differ from your own. This talk should feel more like an open and safe conversation to your child, not a lecture.

For more information and guides for parents about youth, sex, and their bodies visit:
www.plannedparenthood.com/parents