



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Helpful tips for grandparents and caregivers

Talking with young people about sex

MU Center on Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Parenting

Talking with young people about sex can be uncomfortable and difficult at times. But it is important that you establish yourself as a trusted source of reliable information for the child in your care. Here are some valuable tips for talking about sexuality with your young person.

Relax.

Don't worry about having all the right answers for your young person's questions regarding sex. The most important thing is to begin a dialogue. If you are able to relax while you talk, your responses to his or her questions can encourage the child to open up.

Be clear about your own sexual values and attitudes.

It's okay to let your child know your attitudes and values about sex and sexuality. It can serve as a good point of reference as they develop their own values.

Children learn by observation.

It's nearly impossible to keep children from viewing sexual situations on television shows or movies, and from hearing sexually suggestive lyrics in some music. But you can help them

Tips



keep these observations in perspective by showing how your life is enhanced by your own values. And remember — your actions speak louder than words.

Set an open tone and answer directly.

It's important to set an open tone for your conversations. Make sure you answer each question directly — don't tiptoe around the subject by using vague generalities.

Words send important messages.

Use the correct names for genitals and for sexual acts and behaviors. If you are uncomfortable using correct terminology, practice saying the names of sexual body parts out loud or in front of a mirror.

Reassure your child that it's normal to have questions about sex.

Your child may feel that he or she is the only one that age who doesn't know all about sex. Help your child feel comfortable about asking you questions by telling him or her it's normal to be curious about sex.

Use teachable moments.

Take advantage of a television show dialogue that mentions sex or implies sexual issues to help start a conversation. Or, use the example of a pregnant neighbor to introduce the subject of sex.

Ask questions.

Don't let your discussions be one-sided. Ask your child or teen what he or she thinks and feels about a situation or issue.

Answer questions honestly and accurately.

Remember, you are a trusted source of information for your child. Your honesty and reliability is key to keeping your child's trust.

It's okay to say that you need time to think about a question or issue, and that you will be ready to talk about it in an hour, after dinner or the next day. Then be sure to have that conversation.

Listen carefully to all parts of a question.

Often, a young person's question will include a fact that he or she has heard or read. Use this opportunity to find out what he or she knows about the topic before you answer the question.

Be available.

Let your children and teens know that you're available for them whenever they have questions.

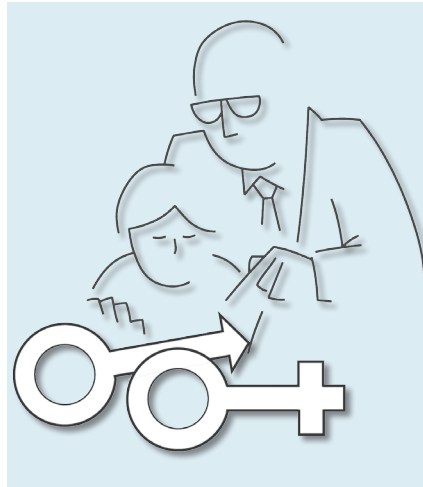
Be honest but sensitive.

Express your thoughts and feelings, and give them opportunities to do the same.

Be clear and truthful about your own feelings but be sensitive to your child's feelings. Although you may not agree with what a child says, it is important to show that you value his or her feelings, and that you are glad for the chance to talk openly.

Be gentle.

Mistakes are opportunities for learning. If your child has made a mistake in judgement, turn this into a learning



opportunity. Show your child an alternative behavior or action that he or she can use when faced with the problem again.

Keep the lines of communication open.

If you are upset or worried, say so and ask if the conversation can continue later. Don't shut down. Take time to form your thoughts or to look for resources on a topic that you're unsure of or uncomfortable talking about.

Learn about your child's world.

Learn more about the activities your child participates in. You can use these opportunities to get to know your child's friends better. Try to understand the pressures your child may be facing.

Be patient.

Children hear and learn about sex from many different sources: peers, television, music, videos and school. Often some of this information may conflict with what you have told your

child. You may have to repeat information and give more details as he or she grows older.

Keep your sense of humor.

Your ability to see humor in some situations will show your child that you are comfortable in talking with them about sex. This comfort and openness can help keep the lines of communication open for future talks.

Online resources

10 Tips for Talking about the Facts of Life (2007). Advocates for Youth. advocatesforyouth.org/parents/tips.htm.

Grandparents and Other Caregivers as Sex Educators (2007). Advocates for Youth, Barbara Huberman, RN, BSN, Med, Director of Education and Outreach. advocatesforyouth.org/parents/experts/huberman.htm.

How to talk to your children about sex (updated 2006), Ruth A. Peters, PhD. msnbc.msn.com/id/5818650.

Sex education: Talking to your teen about sex (2007). Mayo Clinic Staff. mayoclinic.com/health/sex-education/CC00032.

Talking to Your Kids About Sex (2005). American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. aacap.org/cs/root/facts_for_families/talking_to_your_kids_about_sex.

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