

Emotional
Physical
Relational
Health

14 years of
healthy sexuality
conversations
to have
with your child

How to Use this Booklet

This booklet grows with you and your child, and is separated into sections based on the age of your child. We have provided four conversations for each year of your child's life, listed as January, April, July, and October. Every three months, return to this booklet to have a brief conversation with your child, based on the content listed for that age. By spacing out the conversations, your child will become accustomed to speaking with you about their sexual health, and will be more likely to retain what you teach come to you when they need help.

Most parents want to be the primary sexual health educator for their children, but many fail to have more than one conversation about sexuality with their child, and often at later ages. Studies have shown that parents feel that they have talked with their children about sexuality, but their children do not remember the conversation, because it was only one conversation, and the parent was so uncomfortable that they spoke in vague terms that their child did not understand.

The best way to ensure your child is safe, healthy, and develops appropriately, is to create safe spaces for them to talk openly and appropriately about sexual health throughout their whole lives.

Before Age 4

A parent who is comfortable with their own body and their child's body, models for their child that the body is good.

Teaching a child the **appropriate, accurate words** for their private parts—vulva, vagina, penis, testicles—helps protect them against a sexual abuser who would want to make them feel that their body is 'dirty' or sexualized.

A parent who models **boundaries**— for example, maintaining appropriate privacy, that adults respect children's bodies and do not touch them in private areas, that adults and children should not ask to see each other's private parts, that the child can refuse a kiss or hug if they don't want one— teaches their child more about safety and health than one who only talks about it.

Ages 16+

We realize the conversation doesn't stop at 15, it only continues! If you put in the intentional effort to have the conversations in this booklet (and more!) during the early years, the conversation should continue easily. Pick topics to circle back to, to find out how they are experiencing the topic now. Keep listening non-judgmentally, and offer support as needed. Help them think through safety (for themselves and others) as they prepare for college and/or independence.

What is Human Sexuality?

*We are sexual from the day we are born until the day we die.
Our sexuality affects who we are and how we express ourselves as human beings.*

Our sexuality includes:

- our **bodies**, including our sexual and reproductive anatomy
- our **emotional** / psychological / spiritual self and relationships with others
- our **biological sex** — male, female, or intersex
- our **gender** — cultural attributions of being a girl, boy, woman, man, non-binary, or transgender
- our **gender identities** — our comfort with and feelings about our gender
- our **sexual orientation** — straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, or pansexual
- our **sexual identity** — the way we feel about our sex and sexual orientation
- our sexual **desires and feelings**

The ways we experience and express our sexuality include:

- our **body image** — how we feel about our bodies
- our **desires**, thoughts, fantasies, sexual pleasure, sexual preferences, and sexual dysfunction
- our **values**, attitudes, beliefs, and ideals about life, love, sexual relationships, and reproduction
- our sexual **activities** — the ways we have sex including masturbation and sexual intercourse

The conversations included in this booklet are intended to be had by parents of any gender, with children of any gender. It is important for children to have conversations with mothers and fathers, and to experience safety and appropriateness when talking about these important topics with a caring adult.

Our sexuality and the ways we experience and express it are influenced by...

- our biology
- our emotional lives
- our family/community lives
- our culture and our status in our culture
- how our community talks about sexuality, the language they use, and the behaviors they accept
- our ethical, religious, and spiritual upbringing and experience
- our prior experiences (empowerment, abuse, miscarriage, etc.)

Understanding our sexuality is a lifelong process. We can help our children gain this understanding by giving them age-appropriate information.

More resources about appropriate sexual behavior can be found at ncsby.org

This booklet was created by SARA Prevention Educators, Counselors, and Advocates to help parents have consistent, on-going, accessible conversations with their children. We have designed it to be used **every three months** over the course of over 14 years. **Keep it somewhere safe where you will refer to it, and feel free to backtrack sections you forgot!**

AGE 4

January

Topic: LOVE!

“Love should make people feel good, safe, and wanted.”

We get to start with an easier conversation than most! Still, we need to say it intentionally: Love is a good thing, and if it makes you feel bad, it's not love.

Tips:

- ◆ “Do you know I love you? How do you know?” (I help you tie your shoes, I hug you, I respect your feelings, I give you privacy...)”
- ◆ “Who else loves you?” (Grandma, babysitter...)

April

Topic: BODIES!

“People's bodies are different sizes, shapes, and colors.”

Resources:

- ◆ Your Body is Awesome by Sigrun Danielsdottir
- ◆ The Skin You Live In by Michael Tyler
- ◆ www.healthychildren.org has a section on race

Does it feel like you're repeating yourself?

That's okay! That's actually good—repetition is the key to learning, especially for young children. They NEED to hear it again! They grew so much over the past three months, so it will have different meaning to them this time.

July

Topic: BODIES!

Now is the time to make sure you've taught your child the correct names for all body parts, including their private parts!

Model for your child that you can talk about private body parts without feeling "naughty". A vagina is just a body part, like an arm. That doesn't mean it's not private, or that it should be touched by people who can touch your arm, but all of our body parts are good, and we don't need to feel any shame about them.

Resources:

- ◆ Amazing You! by Gail Saltz
- ◆ This Is My Body & These Are My Parts, Talia Newman
- ◆ God Made All of Me by Justin Holcomb (rel.)

October

Topic: PRIVACY and self-touch

Some children may begin masturbating to self-soothe. Let them know it's okay to touch your own sexual organs for pleasure, but it is important to do it privately because that is a moment just for yourself. Remind them that, "No one should ever touch your private parts. If someone ever did, that is called "abuse" and you can tell me, no matter what, and I will help you be safe. It would not be your fault if someone did that to you."

Resources:

- ◆ Your Body Belongs to You, Cornelia Spelman

AGE 5

January

Topic: Your Right to say No

“You don’t have to hug or kiss anyone you don’t want to. You can say “no” to unwanted touch.”

“Remember that no one is allowed to touch your private parts. No one should ever take a picture of you without your clothing on, or show you pictures of others without clothing on.”

Don’t forget to also emphasize that your child needs to respect others’ limits, too!

Tip: Help your child practice saying “no” firmly, and be sure that you model respecting physical limits your child sets—including not wanting to see other people naked.

April

Topic: FAMILIES!

There are many different types of families!

Some families have one parent, some have two.

Some families have one mom and dad, some have two moms or two dads. Some have grandparents who live with them. Some families don’t have any children, some families are people who are not connected by marriage, some people live in communities.

“What kind of family are we?”

“What kind of family do you think you’ll want to have?” (Remember to listen non-judgmentally!)

Resources:

- ◆ The Great Big Book of Families by Mary Hoffman
- ◆ My Rainbow Family by K Vance

Topic: REPRODUCTION

“All living things reproduce.”

Tip: Look at books about how plants and animals grow and reproduce, what they need, and how we care for them.

Resources:

- ◆ Planting the Wild Garden by Kathryn Galbraith
- ◆ In the Womb: Animals by Michael Sims

Topic: BOUNDARIES!

“Let's talk about how to respect the physical and emotional boundaries of others!”

Boundaries are limits on what you can do or say to another person. We listen when others tell us what ways of speaking, acting, or touching are not acceptable for them, because each person has their own special limits in addition to the ones we all have. We respect these limits/boundaries because we don't want to hurt anyone.

Using hula hoops to demonstrate “personal space” is helpful with this age.

What types of boundaries / limits do you have?

(I'm not okay with people calling me mean names, I will only hug people I want to hug)

LiveStrong.com has great resources on boundaries

July

October

AGE 6

January

Topic: Sexuality is OK (Asexuality is also OK)

Conversation Starters:

- ♦ **What does it feel like when you like another person?**

(it's not always sexual, of course!)

“All people are sexual, and it is a positive and beautiful part of life. Most people have sexual thoughts sometimes, and that is okay; it's also okay if you don't.”

Sexuality includes all of the bodily and emotional and intellectual feelings we have, including attraction and “crushes”, as well as physical and emotional development and reproduction. Love and intimacy can be part of sexuality. Sexuality is a part of who we are as humans, and is with us our whole lives.

April

Topic: EQUALITY

Now is the time to start breaking apart any myths about gender that your child has picked up from living in a fairly gender-separated society.

Engage them in thinking about how women can be good leaders, and men can be good at taking care of children, or other myths that may be important for them to challenge.

Visit SARAcville.org for more tools about gender.

GoodNet.com has a list of books that help redefine gender roles.

July

Topic: FRIENDSHIP

A friend is someone we enjoy being with, someone who shares, listens, encourages, and helps us think through our problems. Discuss how to develop, maintain, and end friendships.

Conversation Starters:

- ◆ Who are friends you really enjoy?
- ◆ Who are friends who make you feel special?
- ◆ Who does nice things for you and makes you feel like you belong?
- ◆ How do you let them know they matter to you?
- ◆ When would a friendship need to end?

Topic: SAFETY

Begin conversations about how they can recognize and protect themselves and their friends from potential sexual abuse and its dangers. Discuss how we look out for each other to keep people safe.

Talk about manipulative behaviors of abusers. For example, sexual predators may seem kind, giving, and loving, but make you feel nervous or sad. They may be friends or family members. Help them figure out how to decide who is a trusted adult and how to talk to them if someone tries to sexually abuse them or one of their friends.

Let them know that you will always help them, and there is nothing they could ever do that would make it okay for someone to touch them inappropriately or hurt them in any way.

October

AGE 7-9

January (7)

Topic: CHANGING BODIES

Use books to show how female and male bodies grow, talk about puberty, how to be comfortable with their changing bodies, and not to compare with others their age because each person develops differently and at different times.

Resources:

- ◆ It's So Amazing! by Robbie Harris

January (8)

Topic: Hygiene and New Body Changes

Talk about personal hygiene, especially during menstruation or for uncircumcised boys.

Discuss what menstruation and wet dreams are with both genders.

This is a great topic to make sure parents of both genders, if available, talk about body with a child.

Be sure to check in with yourself (and get people to support you) before talking with your child. It is extremely important that you speak about bodily functions in a way that signals that these are **perfectly normal**, and not taboo and not disgusting.

As always, it's okay if your child has their own reaction, but we want them to know that their bodies are wonderful, and puberty, as odd as it can feel sometimes, is part of being alive and well.

- ◆ Girls' Life Head-to-Toe Guide To You
- ◆ The Boys' Body Book

Topic: EMOTIONS

Use an emotions chart or wheel (with words or facial expressions, google image search is useful!) **to talk about different types of emotion, that it's okay to have any emotion, and how to deal with different emotions. For instance, if you're happy, it can feel good to share it with a friend; if you're angry, it helps to find a good way to use the anger and let it fizzle out.**

Children will really learn about emotions when you **model** the appropriate processing of emotions, and are attentive over time when they have emotions that need your attention, love, and validation.

A video for parents on exploring feelings with kids:
<https://youtu.be/hAckcoesj4s>

July (8)

Topic: Pregnancy and Birth

For children of ALL genders!

For all families, of all value systems!

Use books to talk about the biology of the fertility cycle, how pregnancy happens, and basics about how a baby develops in the Mom's womb.

Make sure they know that birth control exists to prevent pregnancy until parents are ready, and that it is their choice, along with their partner, when they're older and want to have children.

If your family values mean that you don't use birth control, still talk about the fact that others do, and use this as an opportunity to share why you don't.

January (9)

AGE 10-12

January (10)

Topic: Dating, Relationships, and Delaying Sex

Talk about **how different people might feel differently about dating, how kindness, respect, and equality are important parts of dating just like with friendship**. There are many types of family and community.

- ◆ Do you think you may want to get married someday or have a life-long relationship?
- ◆ What is the purpose of marriage or a life-long relationship? How do you build a healthy one?

Delaying sexual activity is good for young people of all genders—early sexual activity can impact mental health, result in unplanned pregnancy, or the spread of disease. **Keep in mind your child may not have told you of sexual abuse s/he has already experienced**, so be careful about statements that imply early sexual activity is morally bad, or that the harm is irreparable.

Revisit conversations about masturbation. This is also the time to begin talking about the fact that pornography exists, how it can change a person's brain, and what to do if someone tries to show them sexual images.

July (10)

Topic: Body Image

“How's your body image?”

Encourage good body image by avoiding commenting on their appearance, even when complimenting. (Even compliments like "you are so pretty" or "you're such a big strong guy", when repeated over and over, have a harmful effect on body image.) Instead, listen to their feelings and thoughts about their selves and their body, and support them in their own goals. Remember body image issues can impact girls AND boys.

July (11)

Topic: CONSENT!

Talk about how **sexual activity is a choice** a person gets to make, and no one outside of themselves should ever pressure them to do something they do not choose freely. Sexuality is supposed to be a good and beautiful part of life, but when a person tries to convince another person to do something they don't want to do, it is extremely devastating. It causes trauma—a re-wiring of the brain that can result in awful fear and sadness for a long time.

Key: **You know you have someone else's consent when you ask them a clarifying question, and then receive a FREE HAPPY CLEAR "YES" and nothing less.**

July (12)

Topic: Sexual Harassment

Talk about **sexual harassment** - it is any unwanted sexual behavior that happens in school, in a public space (on the street, in the library), or at work. It is against the rules because it can make women and girls, trans people and some men, feel like they can't go to school, or can't walk around town safely.

- ◆ ihollaback.com has a lot of true stories of harassment, and is an online community where people get support.

Keep the conversations going regularly - these topics should come up at least a few times a year. Pick topics from earlier dates to circle back to, to build on, to find out how they are feeling about those topics now, and what it is looking like for them personally. Make sure to listen non-judgmentally, and offer support as needed. Encourage self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-worth, along with empathy and kindness and community.

AGE 13

Topic: Sexuality, Asexuality, Emotional Intimacy are all OK

Have an intentional conversation with them about the fact that sexuality is a good, positive part of life, and that you want them to have those experiences, **when they are old enough**, in ways that benefit them and do not harm them. Ask them if they've been thinking about it.

Let them know if they have experiences they can talk to you about it. Don't assume you know everything they've experienced so far in life. Let them know it is perfectly natural and good to have desires for physical and emotional intimacy, and help them think through how to tell the **difference between wanting emotional intimacy and wanting physical intimacy**. Let them know that the desire for emotional intimacy is meaningful even without sexual contact.

Questions they can ask themselves when making decisions about sexuality:

- Do I just want someone to hold, or do I want to have sex?
- Have I been honest with this person?
- Do I trust this person?
- Do I feel safe with this person?
- Does this person make me feel respected?
- Do I respect this person?

Topic: Decisions

Talk about how everyone has a right to decide what sexual experiences they do and don't want.

Make sure they understand that, **if they ever want to start / initiate sexual contact, they are responsible for waiting until they know for sure that the other person has decided they want to as well** (i.e. wait till they know the other person consents).

How will they know? They have to ask first. And they will only have consent once they receive a freely-given, happy, clear "yes", and nothing less. And consent is not even possible if one person threatens, manipulates, guilt-trips, nags, tricks, intimidates, or gives an ultimatum to the other.

(We teach about asking for consent first, because that's where it starts, and that's who is responsible. Next time, we'll talk about how they can decide whether they consent.)

Resources:

- ◆ What You Really Really Want by Friedman
- ◆ <http://answer.rutgers.edu/>
- ◆ goodmenproject.com

- Am I sure my partner wants to do this and is not feeling pressured?
- Do I know the physical risks of sexual activity for both my partner and me?
- Do I know the emotional risks of sexual activity for my partner and me?

Topic: Am I in Consent?

Have an intentional conversation about how no one has the right to coerce them into sexual activity, and **victims are not responsible** for sexual assault. Make sure to talk about why adults should never engage in sexual contact with people under the age of 18, and how even someone under age 18, but who is still 3+ years older than the other person, should not engage in sexual contact. Make sure they understand why, and help them by giving an example of "What if a 13-year-old wanted to sexually touch a 10-year-old?" They will naturally have a disgust response. **Explain it's the same if a 17-year-old wants to touch a 13-year old.**

Talk about risks related to various sexual behaviors. **Find out** what behaviors they know about, and what they think they might want to do, and **reflect back** to them to help them think about what might be more risky, and what might be more safe. Make sure they know they have every right to not have sex until they personally really want to, and even if they have sex, they can choose not to in the future. Have conversations and model how to be assertive, know what you want, or be bold when you aren't ready.

Discuss **virginity** with boys and girls. Virginity is an idea that was made up by people, and sometimes used to control females when they were seen as property of fathers and husbands. Scientists have found that the idea of virginity is not based in any physical reality. A hymen can break from riding a horse, or be unbroken after having sex many times.

Topic: The Range of Sexuality

Discuss how **biological sex** (the physical body you are born with), **gender identity** (identifying as masculine, feminine, something in between, non-conforming, or just simply human), and **sexual orientation** (who you are sexually attracted to) are part of one's sexual identity.

Complete the genderbread person worksheet together. Get vulnerable!

Resources:

- ◆ Laci Green Sex-Positive YouTube Channel
- ◆ Genderbread Person personal worksheet
- ◆ GLSEN.org

More questions they can ask themselves when making decisions about sexuality:

- Is this the right thing to do for me?
- Is this the right thing to do for my partner?
- Do I communicate well enough with my partner that I will be able to tell her/him if something is painful or makes me feel uncomfortable?
- Do I communicate well enough with my partner that I will be able to tell if my partner finds something painful or feels uncomfortable?
- Am I sober? Is my partner sober?
- Will this contribute to my emotional well-being?
- Will this contribute to my partner's emotional well-being?
- Will I regret this tomorrow?
- Will my partner regret this tomorrow?
- Does engaging in sexual activity support my personal moral or religious values?

AGE 14

January

Topic: Independence and Responsibility

Have an intentional, proactive conversation about how to balance independence with responsibility. This is your chance to let them think through things with support. Make sure to ask questions, let them talk, and listen to what they are thinking and feeling. Explore how to make good decisions and solve problems.

Discussion questions:

- ◆ In what parts of your life are you starting to feel like you have some independence?
- ◆ How does it feel when you realize you are able to take care of something yourself, or make your own decisions? (explore both positive and challenging aspects)
- ◆ Does responsibility sometimes feel intimidating?

Topic: EMOTIONS!

Have a talk with them about their emotional changes and social needs - ask what they need from you, listen to what they're thinking about, reflect back to them what you hear and observe so they know you understand.

Resources:

- ◆ CommonSense.org (cutting-edge resources for parents in dealing with all types of media)
- ◆ FightTheNewDrug.org (teen-friendly, accurate information about pornography)
- ◆ Talk to a SARA Educator for help with conversations about sex

April

Topic: Relationships and Sex

Help them think through how to talk about their own experiences, attitudes, and feelings about relationships and sex. Find out, if you don't know, what words and behaviors your child's friends associate with romantic relationships (i.e. what are their 'norms' - what is dating and how do relationships look). Find out if your child is stressed or concerned or nervous about anything, or if he is feeling pressure in any way.

Discussion Questions:

- ◆ Do you think you'll feel comfortable talking to a partner when you are ready? What do you want that conversation to look like?

Topic: Media and Pornography

Talk with them about how to recognize how sexuality is **portrayed** in the media — and how much the media shapes what we think and how we feel about sex and sexuality. Talk about how **pornography** usually does not represent healthy sexuality, and that the porn industry makes a lot of money and involves a lot of sexual abuse of real people. Include conversations about child pornography (also called Child Sexual Abuse Images). Explain that **pedophilia** is a mental health disorder where a person feels attracted to children. It does not mean that the person has to abuse children, but in order to make sure they don't, they need to seek treatment and support. Let them know they **can come to you** to get a therapist if they are feeling attraction to children, or any mental health issues, like sex addiction or desires to harm others.

July

October

AGE 15

January

Topic: Long-Term Relationship Goals

Talk about realistic expectations about long-term relationships — emotional support, companionship, child rearing, etc. Aim to understand and help them work through what they want in a long-term relationship, what companionship would look like for them, and what kind of family they would or would not want. Help them think through what equality in a relationship looks like, and help them develop the idea that it is important, including equality when negotiating sexual experiences – for example, that oral sex should not only be performed by one partner for the other, and that both partners should experience pleasure in sexuality.

Resources:

- ◆ JoinOneLove.org

April

Topic: Communicating with Partners about Sex

Have an intentional conversation about how to communicate clearly about sexual desires with a partner or potential partner, and how to ask the other person if they want to do something first before initiating sexual contact.

Resources:

- ◆ What You Really Really Want by Friedman

Topic: Parenthood

Have conversations about parenthood. Include how having a child is a long-term responsibility — that every child deserves mature, responsible, loving parents; the stages of pregnancy and child development, the basics about how to take care of an infant; the basics of what a parent needs to do to meet a child's needs (physical and emotional).

Resources:

- ◆ Strengthening Families section of Center for the Study of Social Policy website CSSP.org

Topic:

Facts and Emotions related to Conception and Birth

For ALL genders!

Talk through the details about birth control methods, how to access them, and how to tell myth from fact. Make sure to also talk about miscarriage and that losing a child can be emotionally difficult. Discuss post-partum depression and talk about ways to cope with the emotional challenges related to reproduction.

Resources:

- ◆ ScarleTeen.com
- ◆ WhatToExpect.com

July

October

Sexual Assault Resource Agency

434-295-7273

24-hour hotline: 434-977-7273

SARAcville.org

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Some resources in this booklet were adapted from publications of Planned Parenthood and Peace Over Violence in Los Angeles.