

# Talk soon. Talk often.

A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex.



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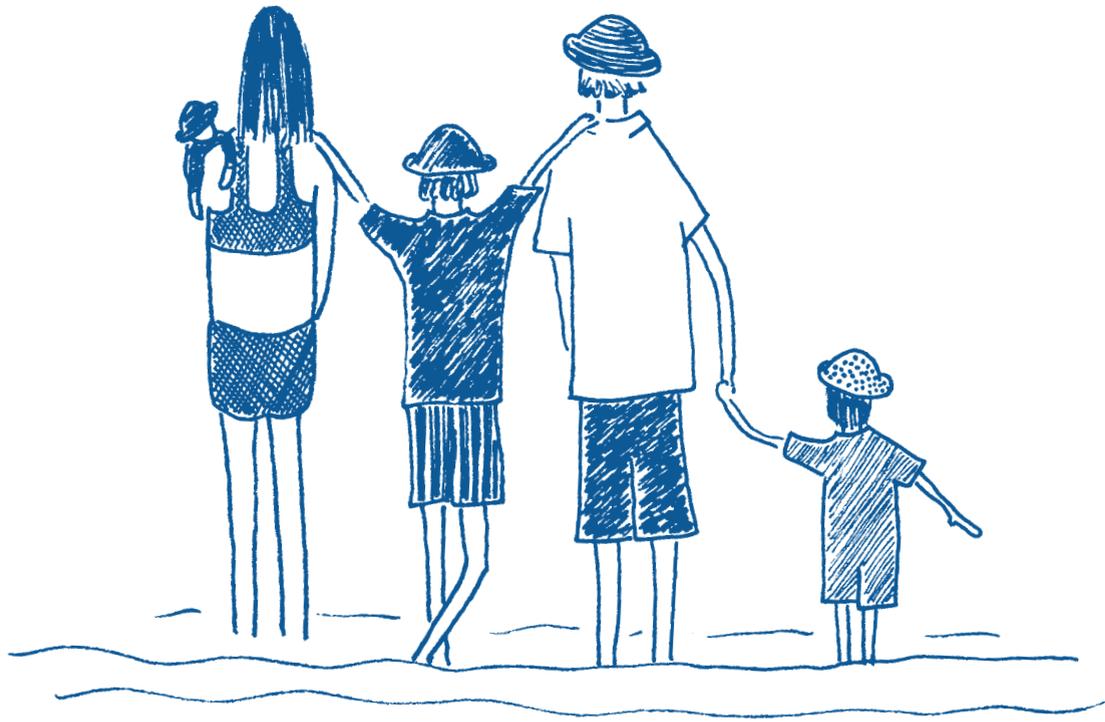
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# Talk soon. Talk often.

A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex.



*Talk soon. Talk often.* was commissioned by the Western Australian Department of Health following research with young people that found there is a need for resources to support parents and families as sexuality educators of their children.

It was written by Jenny Walsh of the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society at La Trobe University, Victoria.

Maryrose Baker, of the Western Australian Department of Health, provided the project coordination and an expert reference group guided its development.

In 2008, consultations were held with the parents of primary and secondary aged school children in city and country WA. Parents were asked about the ways they currently approach educating their children about sex, reproduction, sexuality and relationships, and the kind of support needed to assist them to more effectively communicate with their children about these topics. Parents were also asked about school sexual health education programs, the role of schools and teachers in the provision of these programs, and parent engagement with the school regarding this particular type of health education program.

The sidebar quotes in this booklet came from those interviews.

The reports of these interviews and the review of international literature can be accessed at:  
[www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/1276/2/parentcaregiver/pm](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/2/1276/2/parentcaregiver/pm)

The original cartoons in *Talk soon. Talk often.* are by Georgia Richter.



**Government of Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

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# Introduction

# I. Introduction

... with our generation, our parents – it was just a taboo subject. Whereas this generation, we're more open about it. Back when I went to school some people had sex education, and a lot of people didn't ... It makes it easier if you had something.

Most parents and carers know that, just like learning how to play or talk, sexual development is a part of human development. We know that it will happen whether we talk with our children about sexual matters or not.

*We can be so worried  
about getting it right,  
perfectly right,  
that we end up saying  
nothing at all.*

Despite living through a couple of sexual revolutions, many parents are still nervous about the topic. Many of us grew up when talking about sex (within the family) wasn't done. So we feel we don't have a model to copy, or at least one that we would be happy to repeat.

This is especially true for men. At least girls got some information about periods and babies (from Mum) but boys (now men) often missed out on any sort of parent talk about their bodies, sex and relationships. One thing we did get from the sexual revolution (or from watching daytime talk shows) is a fear about what we adults might do to a child's sexuality. And that's what worries us. We can be so worried about getting it right, perfectly right, that we end up saying nothing at all.

You might be relieved to know that helping your child towards a happy, healthy sexuality does not come from any one big talk that you have to get perfectly scripted. You might also be glad to know that talking with your children about sexuality will not make them go out and do it. In fact, talking about sex with young people has the opposite effect.<sup>1</sup>

It's not one big talk, but lots of little conversations. Repeated.

Life presents lots of opportunities to chat, make a comment, ask a question about the kids at school, so you can always go back to what you were trying to say the first time. By the time you've done that a few times, your child will have learnt the most important message: **They can talk about this subject with you.**

### **Ahem ... what is sexuality?**

It's not just sex. 'Sexuality' covers bodies, babies, growing up, being a boy, being a girl, love and closeness, sexual feelings, sexual expression, personal values and relationships.

Fundamentally it's about caring for (and enjoying) yourself, your body, and others.

The purpose of this booklet – what parents said they want to know

We want kids to learn to care for and enjoy themselves and their bodies, and to care for others. We also want to prevent unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and forced sex.

*Talking a little and often  
makes a positive difference  
to your child's sexual health.*

Talking a little and often, and going over the same topics, makes a positive difference to your child's sexual health and relationships.

I've probably never sat down and discussed the birds and the bees. It's not been like that. They're boys, and you go, we'll have a bit of a chat about that now. It's not even if they ask, it's if something goes ping in my head, and I can connect bits of information. It's been little bits of information as they are ready to absorb it, really.

*–Parent of boys aged 11, 13, and 16*



Not surprisingly, parents talk more often, and in a more natural and open way, when they feel confident. As well as looking at what the research advises, we asked parents what they want to know in order to feel more confident. Parents said:

### 1. We want knowledge

- *I just want to know what's normal, what to expect with my kids.*
- *How much is 'too much' information for my children?*

### 2. We want to know how to share our values with our children

- *Do you ostracise your child, who has come home with his girlfriend and has always been very open and all the rest of it? ... You want to keep that relationship right with everyone. But when it's suddenly thrust upon you and you haven't got a book or a website to go to ...*
- *How do I encourage talking about sex, without encouraging them to have sex?!*

### 3. We want to know how to keep communication going

- *What age do we start talking? What do I say? What is the right thing to say?*
- *I want to talk but she doesn't!*

### 4. How do we deal with all the sexual information (on TV, Internet, billboards, schoolyards, etc?)

- *Kids have access to so much more information than ... we ever did, and ... do now. Because, as a general rule, we don't sit down and google sex ...*

*Talk soon. Talk often.* provides some information on some of these issues, as well as a chance to decide your own position on a range of issues to do with sex and relationships.





**When do we start talking?**

## 2. When do we start talking?

### Soon. Now.

No matter how young your child, they are already learning some important messages that will lay the foundations for their sexual development.

### Home schooling – the first lesson

Home is the first place for a child to learn about loving themselves, their body and loving others. Even simple domestic routines such as bathing, rules about nudity and privacy, or responding to an infant's curiosity about going to the toilet are situations where messages are sent and education about the body begins. As children get older, reactions to developing bodies, questions about sex, or the arrival of boyfriends or girlfriends will continue the 'home schooling'.

Ideally children learn early that they can talk to their parents and trusted carers and ask questions.

### School life – the second lesson

A surprisingly large part of a child's school life communicates what we want them to know about sexuality. Beyond stories heard in the playground, the way schools manage everyday events has a lot to teach kids too. When girls get their periods do they know what to do and who to talk to? If young children are found playing doctor is there panic, or are children taught that curiosity about bodies is OK but playing doctors at school isn't?



There are plenty of parents who haven't talked with their kids about sex and values, or going on the pill, or anything like that. So, we really need to be able to say to our kids, well, we haven't talked about this so far, but we think it is really important, and here's what we want you to know ...

*–Parent of 15 year old girl*

Secondary school corridors and change rooms are the sites for excitement and despair about friendships, bodies, belonging, and being loveable. By the end of Year 12 about half of all young people will have had sexual intercourse.<sup>2</sup> Some schools run programs that give young people a chance to make informed choices and think about values around this part of their lives. Finding out what your school is teaching is a good way to get the conversation going at home.

*... excitement and  
despair about friendships,  
bodies, belonging, and  
being loveable.*

#### Screen time – the third lesson

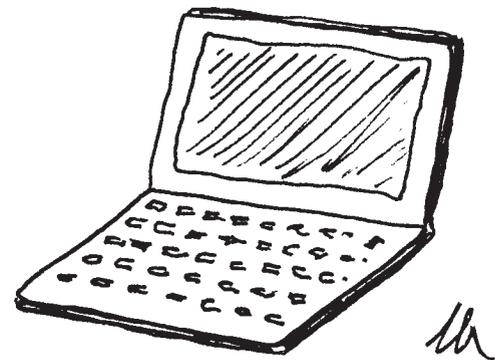
It's hard to trace the effects of TV and movie talk on children's understanding of sex and themselves. It's even harder to assess its effect on parents and how we react to sexual matters. We can try to make sure kids know the difference between TV beauty and real beauty, TV love and real love, but it's just as hard for parents to know what's true about TV-presented dangers for our kids. In fact we can use TV and other media to start conversations and share opinions and values. We can use it to talk about whether the stories are like real life, or a beat-up.

Most concerns expressed about children and media seem to be about pornography. There is little doubt: pornography does have a negative effect on young people's sense of what is 'real' and acceptable in sex and relationships.<sup>3</sup>

#### Online relationships – the fourth lesson

Mobile phones, Internet chat and social networking sites like Facebook mean kids are more likely to get closer, sooner, with someone they are just getting to know. They can also share photographs. The technology helps us feel connected and supported and it's fun. But young kids need to know that any photos or video taken with phones or webcams could become public the moment they are sent (for more on this, see **Parenting in the digital age: Texts, tweets and Facebook**, page 49).

**The question is not whether children will learn about sexuality, rather, what and how do we want them to learn?**



Look at some TV shows: girls get out of bed with their boyfriends and they put on their school uniforms and go to school. I mean, how much pole dancing can a schoolgirl do? And how many are pregnant and not sure who the father is? I mean, you can't blame kids for thinking this behaviour is normal!

*—Parent of 7 year old boy and 10 year old girl*



## 8 reasons for talking about sexuality (soon)

### 1. Many children want to know

Many younger children are curious about how babies grow, and how they 'started'. It is better that responsible adults answer children's questions than other children in the playground.

### 2. Breaking the ice/Setting the stage

Give children and yourselves practice being comfortable talking about sexual matters before they are older and reluctant to discuss the topic.

### 3. It helps children cope with puberty

Kids worry: 'Am I normal?' and 'When will it happen?' They want to know how to manage periods, or wet dreams. Learning what to expect and how to manage these changes helps children to become independent and confident. Having your support helps take any potential worry away.

### 4. Children may be starting puberty earlier

Puberty can start at the age of 8 for some children, particularly girls.<sup>4</sup>

### 5. It helps young people make healthier choices

Research shows that children whose parents talk with them about sexuality, and who receive good sexuality education at school, are more likely to start sex later and are less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy or to get a sexually transmitted infection.<sup>5</sup>

### 6. Boys need to know too

Boys sometimes miss out on sexuality education within the family. Mothers tend to provide more discussion on this topic, but may know less than dads about boys' development. Boys are often left to learn about sex and sexuality on their own.<sup>6</sup> Be aware that some boys might seek out pornography on the web as an alternative source of information.



## 7. It can make life easier for kids who are not traditional 'boy' types or 'girl' types

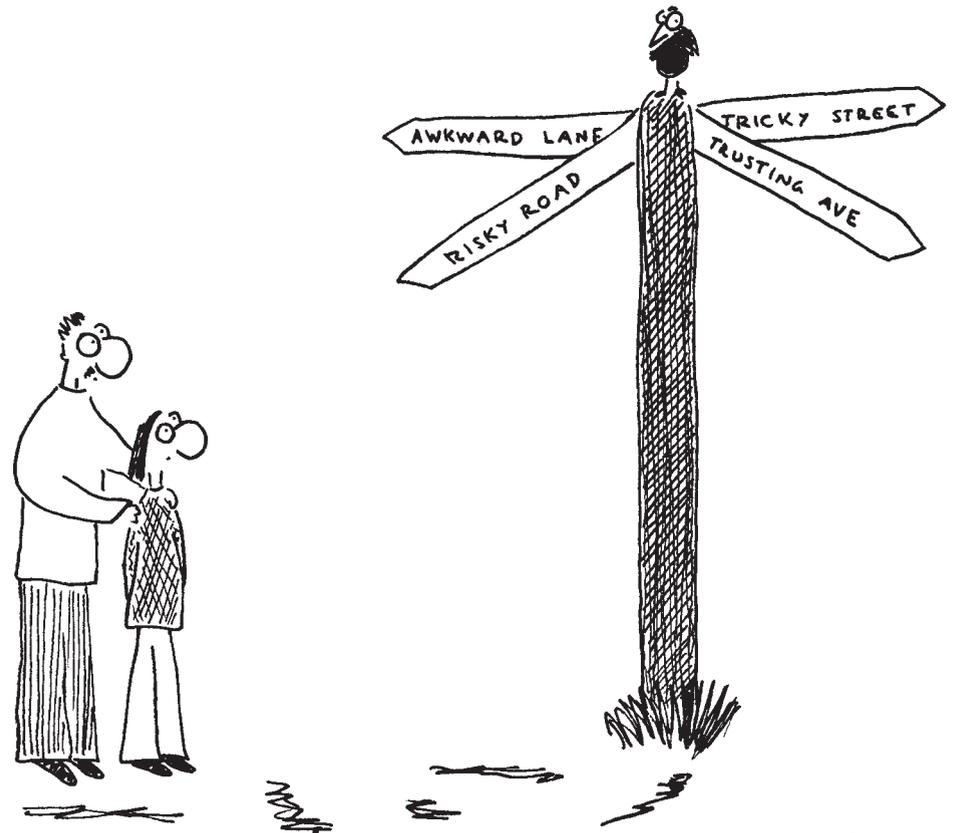
There is more than one kind of boy and one kind of girl, but kids suffer if they don't follow the 'endorsed model'. If we start early to question kids' beliefs about what boys and girls are 'supposed' to do, we could prevent a lot of misery and help to broaden everyone's options, ultimately contributing to kids' wellbeing and sense of belonging.

## 8. It can help protect them from sexual abuse

Keeping sex and bodies a secret can help sexual abusers keep their crimes secret. Open discussion at home gives children permission to talk with you about sex and sexual body parts and to ask questions.

... the younger they are, the less embarrassing it is for them. If I try to start now with my 10 year old, it would be just really unusual for me to be speaking to her like that. Because they've always known and it's not been a big secret – she can just come and talk to me. And my 8 year old. And if they hear things in the playground they can come and talk to me and they know that what I'm going to say is going to be honest.

*–Parent of 10 year old girl and 8 year old boy*



## Sex – telling it like it is: a survey of 1000 Australian teenagers and their parents<sup>7</sup>

Key findings in a recent survey of 1000 teenagers and their parents include:

- Teenagers who have talked with their parents about sexual matters become sexually active later than those who haven't.
- Most parents (90%) rate themselves as approachable on the topic of sex, but only 74% of teens agree.
- One in five parents think that their teen is sexually active, but in reality about one-third of teenagers claim to be. At the same time, 13% of parents admit that they wouldn't know whether their teen was sexually active or not.
- In general more parents think they've had 'the talk' about sexual health than teens do (80% vs 73%), with 20% of parents admitting that they have never had the conversation with their teenager.
- 66% of teens and 75% of parents support sex education in schools.





**Milestones – What to expect at different ages and stages**

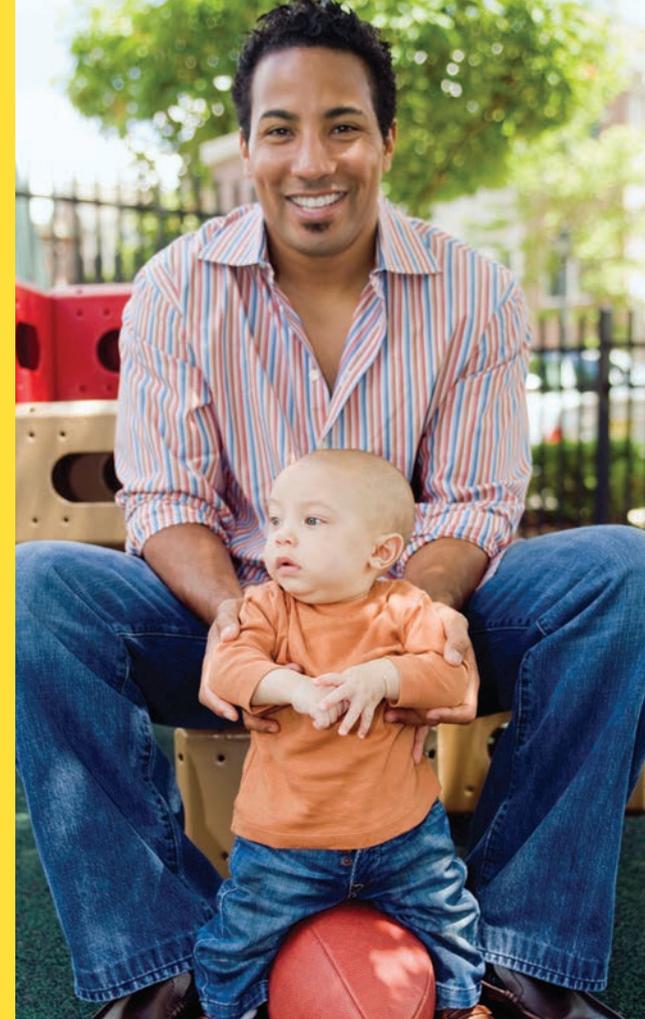
### 3. Milestones – What to expect at different ages and stages

It is more common to hear parents swapping stories about children's first teeth and first steps than it is to hear them discussing a child's sexual development.

Be prepared: What are the values I want to share with my child?

If you are a parent or carer it can be useful to spend some time thinking about what is important to you and how you might want to respond if these values are challenged. Use the following questions to start a discussion with your partner or other important adults in your child's life to get a sense of the degree to which your ideas are the same and what you might do. If you have sole care of your child it is useful to think about some of these situations in advance.

1. Your 5 year old sees two people having sex on television and asks you what they are doing. How much do you want to tell them?
2. Your 14 year old has a new boyfriend who is 16. You are concerned that it might be getting a bit 'hot and heavy'. Should you interfere?
3. You have been brought up very strictly and have taught your children a strong moral framework about sex, which you believe should be kept for after marriage. You find a packet of condoms in your 17 year old son's jeans pocket. How do you deal with this?



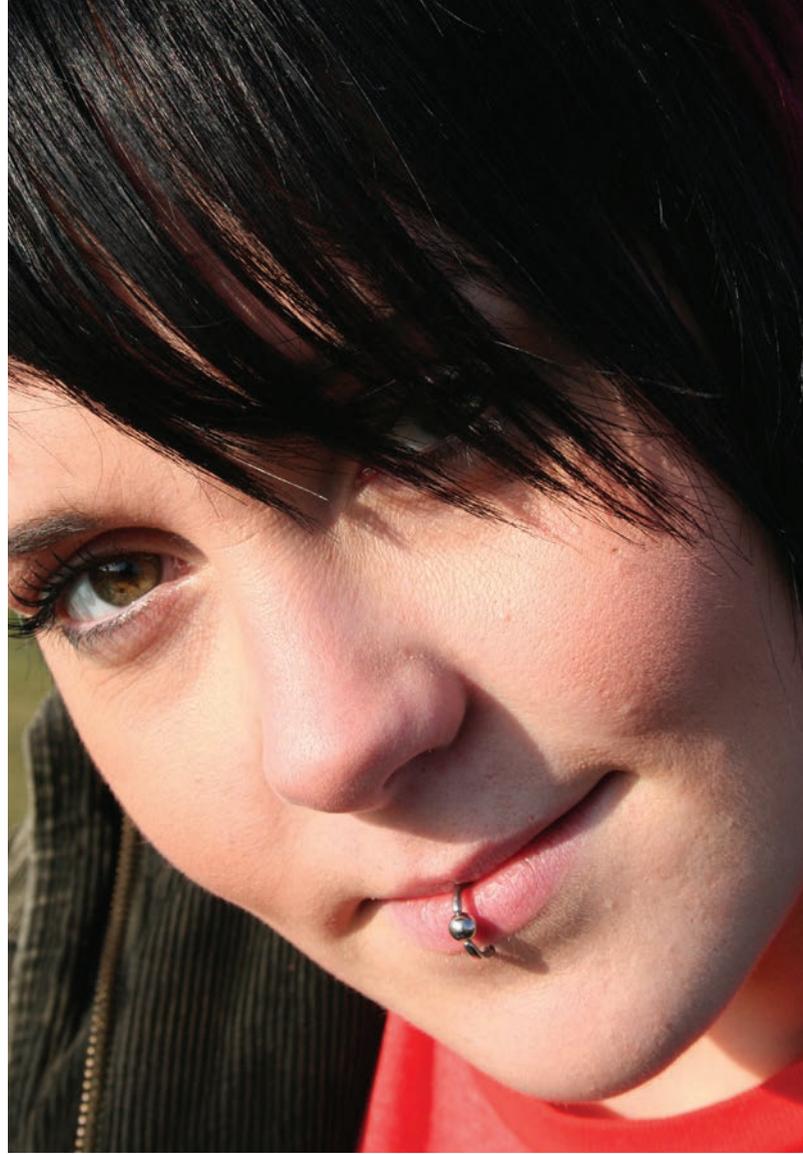
And when you have kids you assume that you're immediately going to know what your values are. But it becomes a lot greyer as you go along. And also, because we're so time-poor, I don't think you sit and really assess what your values are.

And then it all creeps up on you.

*–Parent of 14 and 16 year old daughters*

4. Your 16 year old daughter tells you she is having sex with her boyfriend of the same age and would like to have him sleep over sometimes instead of having to find a quiet spot elsewhere. You have a 12 year old daughter at home as well. Until now you have discouraged both girls from early sexual activity. What do you say?
5. You notice some information about gay support groups in your 17 year old son's room. Do you say anything?
6. Looking at the history on the home computer you discover that 'someone' – possibly the 13 year old boy having a sleep over with your son – has been viewing pornography. Should you say anything?

*Children are not devoid of sexuality. They have their own brand of sexuality that corresponds to their age and stage of life.*

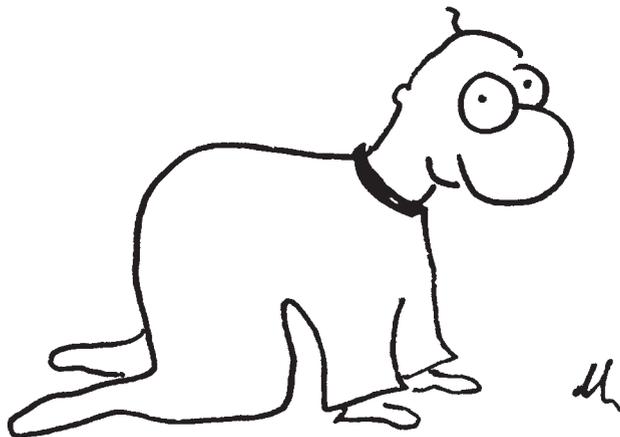


7. Your 15 year old has become uncommunicative and sullen. You are concerned that she is meeting with a group of friends who you believe are into alcohol, and maybe even drugs, mixed with risky sex. Can you do anything to help her be safer?
8. Your 17 year old tells you he is going to have sex with his girlfriend when they go off to the city for the weekend. You think they are both too young for this and you are worried about protecting them against unwanted pregnancy or STIs. What could you do?
9. Your daughter confides in you that her boyfriend forced her, when she was drunk, to have sex. How do you handle this including the fact that there are legal issues?

Some of these dilemmas are very complicated and you might need to make a list of your thoughts to help you decide on the path to take. There are no correct answers so finding what is right for you and your family is the aim. And of course you can (and probably will) change your mind as circumstances change.

Children are not devoid of sexuality. They have their own brand of sexuality that corresponds to their age and stage of life. They will also have an adolescent sexuality that is normal and good and healthy. Going through these stages will help them enjoy their adult sexuality.

A person's sexuality, much like their personality, is assembled over the years from different components: the brain and body's natural growth and development; the experiences of the child; and the way the child 'reads' the world.<sup>8</sup> While there are differences among children, there are general ages and stages that children and young people go through.



## Birth to 2

Sexuality for a baby is not like adult sexuality. Getting love and affection is the start of learning to expect and have loving relationships. They learn about the world through touch. Just as babies enjoy playing with their fingers and toes, they will play with their genitals too, because it feels nice.

While most of us have observed baby boys with erections, people are often surprised to learn that baby girls' vaginas can lubricate. The jury is out on what causes these reactions – it could be just a reflex.<sup>9</sup>

**Many children will touch  
their genitals for  
comfort or pleasure.**

### What parents can do

Start using the right names for body parts now: vulva, vagina, breasts, nipples, penis, scrotum, testes. Babies hardly need a biology lesson but it helps you, the parent, get used to saying these words before they are older. Using the right words helps avoid confusion. A table of the correct words and commonly used words has been included on the following page.

Start now: Using the right names for body parts

Correct name	Other names
breasts	boobs, boobies, norks, knockers, melons
clitoris	clit, button
nipples	cherries
vagina	fanny, front bottom, fru fru, hoo ha, minnie, tuppy
vulva	lips, petals, tuppy
penis	doodle, JT (John Thomas), member, willy
scrotum	ball bag, ball sack
testes	balls, eggs, nuts

## 2 to 5

If you have had a 2 to 3 year old in your life you might have noticed that they like being naked. And, they are also very interested in other people's naked bodies. Because genitals are usually covered they are especially interesting. They will also notice that boys' and girls' bodies are different, and ask 'why' or 'what's that?' Body functions, especially going to the toilet, are also of great interest. Parents are allowed to have their privacy and close the door on their curious children if they wish.

As part of their fascination in the body, children may start to play 'you show me yours and I'll show you mine'. This sex play might more accurately be called 'naked' play, spurred by curiosity in each others' bodies.

Many children will touch their genitals for comfort or pleasure.

They may also ask lots of questions about bodies, and where babies come from. A simple accurate explanation like 'babies grow in a special place inside the mother called the uterus' is usually enough.

### What parents can do

- Read the books written for children about these topics before reading together with your child, for example, *Everyone's Got a Bottom* (see page 65 for recommendations).
- Teach kids that every part of the body has a name and its own 'job' to do. Answer their questions. Point out that girls and boys have lots of parts that are the same and some that are different. Boys have a penis, and girls have a vulva ('vulva' is the name for the female external sexual parts/genitals). For older children tell them that boys have a scrotum and testicles, and girls also have a clitoris and vagina.
- If children are touching their genitals in public places you can tell them that it is something to do at home, in private.

- If your 3 year old asks you 'where do I come from?' you could ask them, 'what do you think?' This serves a few roles – it clarifies what they are asking, it gives you some time to think and gauge answers accordingly, and it shows that you are happy to have the conversation. Usually, telling a very young child that the baby starts as a tiny egg inside the mother's body is enough.
- Four and 5 year olds can understand that a baby grows in the mother's uterus, and that you need a sperm (like a seed) from a man and an ovum (like a tiny egg) from a woman to make a baby.

### What do I do when ... I find them playing doctors?

If they are quite young you might ignore it, or you might just insist they keep their clothes on. For 4 and 5 year olds you might want to teach that it's natural to be curious but you'd prefer they keep their clothes on. If you have a good book handy (see **Some good books and other written resources** on page 65 for recommendations) try telling them that it looks like they are very interested in girls' and boys' bodies and, while they get dressed, you'll get a picture book that explains the body. You will need to tell the other child's parents. They may do things differently in their family, but they will want to know.



## 5 to 9

By the age of 6, most children will show an interest in how babies are made and may ask how the egg and sperm get together, which will involve a simple explanation of sexual intercourse (see **Explaining intercourse, conception, pregnancy and birth to children** on page 35).

They are also likely to hear stories about sex in the playground, and pick up that sex is a 'rude' topic.

At this age children may continue sex play (such as looking under toilet doors, or 'you show me yours') but have usually become better at stopping when adults pass by. They need to know that some parts of the body are private, and that masturbation is a private thing.

Make sure all children know that they can say 'No' to touching that they do not want.

Around age 8, children may begin to form new social groups based on common interests, so children who are 'different' may have more trouble fitting in. **Some of the things we teach children about 'acting like a man' or 'being ladylike' can affect children's wellbeing by creating a 'right' or 'wrong' way to be. Many girls**

**and boys do not fit current feminine and masculine stereotypes.** Children might start to be critical of boys who like 'girl' things, and girls who like 'boy' things. Your children might need to learn that it is wrong to pick on kids who are different, and that it is unfair to have rules about who can like what.

### What parents can do

- Use books and start the conversation now about how babies are made (see **Some good books and other written resources** on page 65). If the children haven't asked, start with 'have you ever wondered how you were born?'
- Some children at this age may well feel modest and so might want privacy in the bathroom.
- Make sure all children know that they can say 'No' to touching that they do not want.
- Some girls will begin breast development and periods at age 8. By age 9, start a conversation with boys and girls about 'growing up' and changing bodies.
- If your son or daughter feels they do not fit in because they are developing at a different rate or do not share common 'boy' interests or 'girl' stereotypes, you can support them by reminding them that the way of being a boy or girl in your town/country/school is only one way and there are lots of ways of being a boy or girl. Focusing on the qualities of being a good person, and seeing examples of different types of women and men, can also be of help.

My friend had never heard the word vagina out loud. And she did this presentation when she was learning to be a teacher; and ... she spent the whole time [pronouncing] vagina ... vageena. [H]er lecturer had to just leave the room because she was trying not to laugh ... but she had never used that word. Whereas I think our kids know the words – vagina, penis, testicles.

–Parent of 12 year old twin girls



I feel like one of the really important things is to be totally honest ... because I don't want her to grow up and think, 'Gee, my mum led me to believe that babies were born through people's navels.'

–Parent of 9 year old girl

### What should I do when ... my child plays with herself?

Masturbation (touching your own sexual parts for pleasure) is normal and healthy for children and can start long before puberty begins. Children (and adults) can find it comforting and enjoyable. Children just need to know that it is something to do in private.

Parents and teachers should only be concerned if a child is masturbating very frequently, in public and private places. In that case it should be investigated, as children who have been sexually abused can become preoccupied with masturbation.

### Do we need to say 'vulva'?

Yes – children need to know there is a name for those parts on the outside and 'vagina' is incorrect.

Having polite 'science' words helps children to talk with adults so that they can ask questions and seek help. (See **Start now: using the right names for body parts**, page 15.)

*At age 9 or 10, children may begin to feel attracted to other people.*

## 9 to 12

Puberty can start as early as 8, often at 10 or 11, and continues until 18. Girls usually start puberty earlier than boys. At around age 9 or 10, children might notice their friends' and classmates' bodies, or their own, beginning to change. A little information about puberty before it happens can help children understand what is happening.

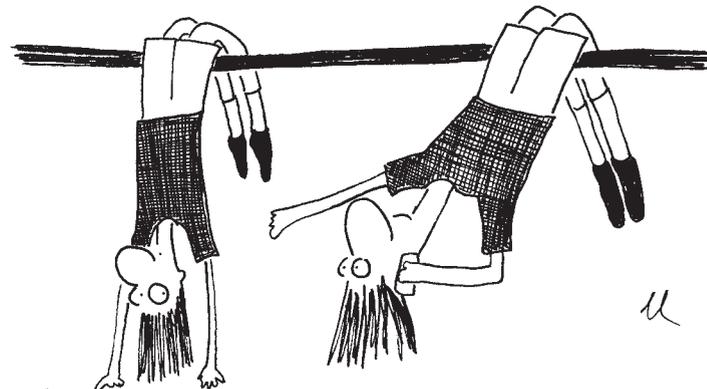
At age 9 or 10, children may begin to feel attracted to other people. This might be played out in 'who loves who' games, and some children will be very interested in having boyfriends and girlfriends. Of course many children will have no interest of this kind.

Friendships will be the most important concern in playgrounds at lunchtime, and children often enjoy learning skills for how to get on with each other.

As children turn 10 and 11 they often worry with thoughts such as, 'Am I normal?' Girls worry about breast development and periods, as well as getting on with friends and family. Boys often ask about penis size, wet dreams ('How will I manage it?'), erections and getting on with friends and family. Nearly one in two boys experiences temporary swelling of the breasts during puberty. Both boys and girls will often wonder if it is normal to masturbate (the answer is yes). These are very embarrassing questions to ask, so do not necessarily expect that children will. Raise the topic, leave books around, and tell stories about your own puberty.

One of the strongest feelings will be the desire to blend in.

One of the strongest feelings will be the desire to blend in. The changes that they are experiencing, or they are watching their peers go through, are enough to make



Hang on a sec. I'm just talking to my broker.

any child feel self-conscious. In addition to this is their new ability to critically compare themselves (and their family) with the rest of the world.

Children may become aware of new, first sexual feelings for children of the same sex. When a child senses disapproval of homosexuality from family and society they may feel forced to hide crushes for people of the same sex.

Some children will have an interest in expressing their sexuality in dress and need guidance on dressing to suit their age.

### What parents can do

- Start talking about puberty-type issues at age 9. It can be reassuring for children to learn when their family members started noticing changes in themselves. Telling your children when you went through puberty can give them a clue about when it will start for them. Talk about how you felt, and how you managed periods or wet dreams. Tell your children any funny stories you can remember about this time in your life.

- It's good for boys and girls to know what's happening for each other. Acknowledge that it can be tricky when people are at different stages, e.g. that boys and girls may start having crushes which can change friendships, but that this is a natural part of growing up.
- Don't assume that the talks you have already had have stuck. You will need to go over topics (in fact it's the best way to create open communication).
- School programs can help to normalise this growing and changing, so that kids who have started to develop are not singled out and made to feel embarrassed or abnormal.
- Normalise same-sex couples and same-sex attractions.

### What do I do when ... my 11 year old has been looking at porn?

Don't panic. A one-off look at porn is not uncommon. While you may prefer it didn't happen, children are curious, and it can be exciting. So, we don't need to make them feel ashamed or really bad about doing this. After you have calmed down, try to turn it into a 'teaching moment'. Tell them you don't like it because this is one kind of sexuality that is best left for adults. And it gives kids a wrong idea about what sex is, too. If it's violent porn then you need to tell them that violence is wrong.

## ANSWERING TRICKY QUESTIONS: 9 TO 12

### How do I explain sex beyond 'making babies'?<sup>10</sup>

*When people are older their sexual feelings can get even stronger and sometimes they want to share those feelings with someone else. People have sex to show love and affection. Sometimes a man and a woman have sex to make babies. People also have sex because it feels nice and exciting.*

*Some people call having sex 'making love' because it is a way you can share very strong important private moments and feelings with another person. It is something for older people to do, not children. When a man and a woman have sex, it does not always make a baby – that only happens if the man's sperm and the woman's egg are in the right place at the right time.*

### And contraception?

*Sometimes a man and a woman want to have sex, but they do not want to make a baby. There are special medications (not just any medicine does it) they can get from the doctor that will stop the sperm and egg joining up.*



### Can two women (or two men) have sex?

Yes. People have sex to show love and affection. They have sex because it feels nice and exciting. When two adults feel very loving towards one another they can really enjoy touching each other's bodies.

### Talking about erections and 'wet dreams'

An erection is when the penis gets stiff and sticks out from the body. Boys get erections from the time they are babies. As boys get older, especially during puberty, they can get erections because they are nervous or excited, but sometimes it just happens by itself! This can be a bit embarrassing, but other people don't usually notice it as much as the boy does.

During puberty boys may have 'nocturnal emissions' or wet dreams. For some boys it happens once or twice, for others, more often. It's normal. During puberty the testicles start to make sperm and semen and sometimes, while the boy is sleeping, it leaks out (about a teaspoonful).

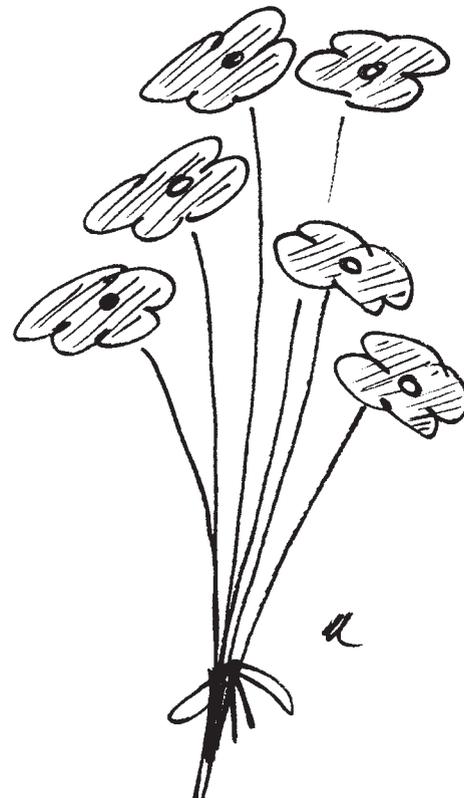
### Periods (menstruation)

A girl will usually begin her periods about two years after her breasts have started to swell. When she reaches puberty, her ovaries start to release one egg (called an ovum) about once a month. The egg travels from the ovary along a tube towards the uterus. Every month the uterus gets ready for the egg to arrive by building a thick, soft lining. If the egg does not connect with a sperm (i.e. get fertilised), the egg and the lining of the uterus will pass out through the vagina. It looks like thick blood and is called a period.

To soak up the period as it passes out through the vagina, girls and women use either a pad, which goes on underwear, or a tampon, which is put into the vagina. During her life, a woman will release four or five hundred eggs! Periods will happen every month until the woman is about 50. When a girl starts her periods, it means that she is now able to get pregnant.

### Girls often want to know:

- What will happen if I get my period at school/a sleepover/school camp?
- How do I dispose of pads in the school toilets?
- How often do I change them?
- Do I have to use tampons?



### Top tips for managing periods

- Give her a special pencil case or wallet to keep a pad or a tampon in, just in case.
- Help her find out which toilet cubicle/s at school have a pad disposal bin.
- Talk about who to go to at school if she needed clean underwear, or a pad or tampon.
- Show her how to make an 'emergency' pad out of toilet paper.
- Show her how and where to soak blood-stained undies (in cold water) at home before putting them in the washing machine.
- Tell her she needs to change her pad/tampon about every 4 hours.

## 12 to 14

As children reach puberty and their bodies change, they can be extremely self-conscious.

They want to know 'Am I normal?' and 'How do I look to everyone else?' The opinions of friends and classmates become more important. Along with this comes a new awareness of their own thoughts and feelings. It can feel like a door opening to a new inner life, which is fascinating but perplexing too. They might start clamming up, and want more space to work things out in their own way. They may have trouble explaining what they are thinking and feeling, which can be extremely frustrating for them and the people around them.

*They might start clamming up, and want more space to work things out in their own way.*

The way the world sees and responds to teenagers changes too. A girl developing breasts may find herself getting sexual attention she's not ready for. Tall boys are able to access the adult world more readily.

The 'cute' crushes that children have had in the past may begin to turn into something more like sexual attraction. Many will begin to wonder (if they haven't already) about when they can have a girlfriend or boyfriend, some more seriously than others. This is a normal, healthy and exciting part of growing up. Sexually, they may (re)discover masturbation.

Some young people become sexually active (deep kissing, close touching) by age 14 and a small number will start having sexual intercourse.



## What parents can do

Fathers often talk about losing their little girls as they begin to grow up – if you can find a common interest this can help keep the connection alive. Don't stop offering physical affection to sons and daughters if this has been a part of your relationship. They need you now more than ever. Respect it if they turn you down, but keep offering.

Your kids may want to know what you think a 'good' age for beginning relationships is. Start conversations about the pros and cons of having a boyfriend/girlfriend. Don't assume they will want a relationship with the opposite sex. Listen to what they think and tell them what you believe too.

Revisit the how-to-make-a-baby conversation. Make sure they know that a girl can get pregnant if they do it standing up, during a period, the very first time they have sex, even if they pull out 'in time'.

Make sure they know who they can talk to about embarrassing personal 'stuff'. Discuss with them who they would talk to if they needed an adult's ear but were reluctant to come to you.

Young people of this age also need practical information and skills related to sexual decision making, and how alcohol affects those choices.

Take a deep breath and start to think about talking about sex, not in a 'when you grow up and get married and make babies' kind of way, but about your child's first experience of sex. By the end of Year 12 about 50% of young people have had sexual intercourse, and a greater number are sexually active (meaning having close sexual touching, and/or oral sex).

The average age for first sexual intercourse is 16 and many 14 year olds are beginning some kind of up-close sexual contact.

**Don't stop offering physical affection to sons and daughters. They need you now more than ever.**

What do you hope for your child? Many parents hope that they are: older, sober, that it is their choice rather than feeling forced into it, in love, have a respectful relationship, use contraception. The list goes on, but if you think in terms of what you want for them, rather than closing your eyes and hoping they just don't do it, your conversations will be more likely to contain the real guts of what kids want from their parents, which is guidance about values and feelings (and as a side effect they will be more likely to put off having sex!).



### What do I do when ... my child calls everything 'gay'?

'That's so gay' has come to mean that something is bad, or stupid. There is a good chance that your child has been using this term for some years now. It has become so common that it's not unusual to hear kindergarten children use it.

Tell them that you don't like hearing this expression because it is hurtful. 'Imagine if a gay person heard it or someone who thought they might be gay. When you say that, you are saying that it is bad to be gay, but it's not; it's just less common.' Ask them to find another word to use.

Changes at puberty	Boys	Girls
Grow taller and gain weight	✓	✓
Hair grows in armpits and around genitals	✓	✓
Hair grows on upper lip and chin*	✓	
Sweat more	✓	✓
Get spots and acne on face, neck, chest and back	✓	✓
Feel emotional or moody or very 'giggly' and excited	✓	✓
Voice deepens	✓	
Testicles start to make sperm	✓	
Experience erections and 'wet dreams'	✓	
Ovaries start to release eggs (ova)		✓
Hips widen and breasts grow**		✓
Menstruation begins		✓
Have feelings of attraction towards others	✓	✓

\* Some girls may also experience this.

\*\* Some boys may experience breast growth.

## 14 to 17

A young person in this age group has two important jobs:

- to become an independent person who is separate from their parents; and
- to come to know 'who am I?'

Part of the task of discovering 'who am I?' for a young person is to get their head around sexuality. Not necessarily the act of sex, but about feeling attractive, loved, popular, good enough, and one of the gang.

Friendships at this age mean more than they ever have. Friends also determine among themselves what's acceptable sexual behaviour. Despite all the challenges facing them, young people in this age group most often report that their close boy/girlfriend relationships are positive and satisfying.

While this generation of young people is possibly better educated and more confident than those before them, their sexuality knowledge is lagging. Research shows that young people highly value the sexuality education they get from school, although they say it is too biological and they want more opportunities to talk about feelings and relationships. They value and want to know their parents' beliefs about sex-related issues.<sup>2</sup>



## Some facts

- By the end of Year 12, 50% of boys and girls have had sexual intercourse, and the average age of first sexual intercourse is 16.<sup>2</sup>
- The majority of young people in Years 10 and 12 are sexually active in some way and this proportion has increased over the last decade.<sup>2</sup>
- The types of sexual activity among Year 10 and 12 students include deep kissing (80%); genital touching or being touched (67%); and giving or receiving oral sex (46%).<sup>2</sup>
- Of teens who are sexually active, a third had their first experience at age 14 or younger, yet almost one in ten say they have not been taught sex education at school.<sup>7</sup>
- Young people often delay seeking prescription contraception for a year after initiating sexual activity. Most unwanted pregnancies occur in this period.

## What parents can do

- Sexuality is only one part of the whole person. Help young people keep it in balance by taking an interest in their sports, schooling, relationships, TV shows, computer games, as well as their growing interest in looking good and going out.

- Staying connected to and feeling loved by their family remains extremely important to teenagers. Having a sense of a future, with goals and a life to look forward to, makes looking after themselves worthwhile.
- Parents can help by reducing the chances of young people getting into situations they can't handle – like parties with an excess of alcohol or other drugs. (Contact the Drug Education Network. See page 62 for details.)

*Having a sense of a future, with goals and a life to look forward to, makes looking after themselves worthwhile.*

- To start a conversation, find old photos of your teenage years. Show off the hairstyles, the clothes, but most of all use it as a conversation starter to talk about how you felt about your appearance, your relationships, your parents, and sex. Tell them what it was like being a girl or boy in those days. Ask your teenager if they think things are different for young people now.

Right from the word go we tried to develop bedtime rituals that will last into high school years. So, Josh loves his back scratched. That's got a direct link to his jaw. So you just – you know, you scratch his back. And it's a great time for sharing and catching up on the day and all of those other sorts of things.

*–Parent of two boys (13 and 16 years) and a daughter (10 years)*



- Tell your child about using contraception and using condoms. It might go against the grain but telling your kids about the importance of looking after themselves does not indicate approval of, or encourage them to have, sex. Your teenage children are old enough to understand when you express an apparent contradiction: 'I care about you, and even though I don't want you to do this, I do want to make sure you look after yourself and others.' It's much more effective than telling them to 'just say "no"'.

## Kids and teens with a disability

Parents of kids and teens with a disability may face added worry when considering talking to their kids about sex. But according to Family Planning Tasmania (FPT), the issues and concerns people with disabilities have around sex and sexuality are no different.

FPT provides specialist and relationship advice across Tasmania for people with a disability and their carers. FPT provides education in menstrual management; reproductive and sexual health; healthy and safe relationships; and protective social and sexual behaviours.

FPT works with parents, carers and professionals to support people with disabilities to make informed choices. FPT educators are available for consultation over the phone, one to one and group education sessions. FPT also works with agencies to tailor relationships and sexuality workshops to address particular concerns or needs.

FPT doctors and nurses are also available for appointments for advice and management of medical concerns in sexual and reproductive health.

It is not always easy to know where to start when talking to your kids about sex and answering their questions but FPT staff reinforce there are plenty of ways parents can help their kids. FPT can recommend a comprehensive list of resources dealing with the wide array of issues around relationships and sexuality for people with disabilities. There is a resource list on its website (see page 64).

## Sexuality education: instilling self-worth, self-value and self-esteem.

Although there can be some added barriers for kids with a disability in learning about healthy relationships and sex – such as communication – these can be overcome. There are a lot of great resources around and highly trained professionals available to consult with. They have much success in dealing with these issues. Having a group specifically dealing with relationships and sexuality for disabled people in the community is critical.

And in answer to that tricky question many parents ask: Is there a right or wrong time or age to start talking? FPT staff agree we look at the bigger picture.



‘Sexuality education is more than the mechanics of sex. It includes the development of self-worth, self-value and self-esteem and the ability to make informed choices. These messages can be given from birth.’

See page 62 for information on how to contact FPT.

FPT's SoSAFE! Program is a set of visual and conceptual tools designed to promote social safety to clients with an Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder. SoSAFE! tools promote social safety through the provision of a simplified and rule-governed model of social reality that teaches the type and degree of verbal and physical intimacy appropriate with different categories of people.

The SoSAFE! tools (together with SoSAFE! Certified Training) provide teachers, teacher assistants, disability support workers, parents and carers with skills and simple visual tools to enhance the social, social-sexual and social safety training of people with moderate to severe intellectual disability.

SoSAFE! uses a standardised framework of symbols, visual teaching tools and concepts to teach strategies for moving into intimate relationships in a safe and measured manner, and provides visual communication tools for reporting physical or sexual abuse.

The SoSAFE! Program is presented as a five hour interactive workshop which provides participants with knowledge and skills to use the teaching resources. See page 62 for information about how to contact FPT.



## Tasmanian Programs: A snapshot

FPT's Growing Up Program is a relationship, sexuality and protective behaviours program that is delivered in Tasmanian Primary Schools from Kindergarten to Grade 6. Students learn about their bodies and keeping healthy and safe in a positive and empowering manner. The program promotes respect for oneself and others, personal responsibility and interpersonal communication.

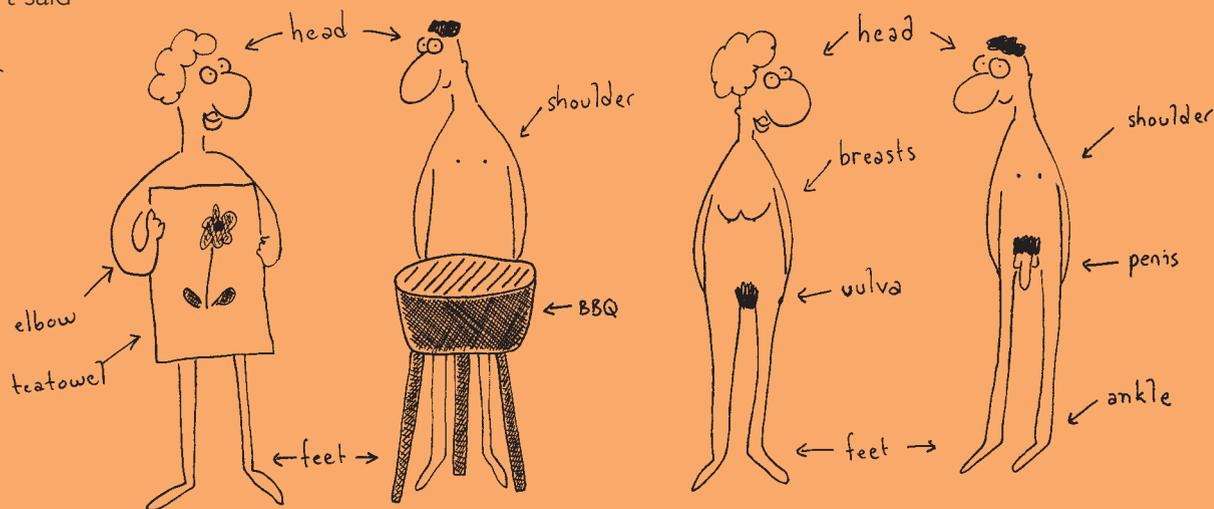
Run by Centacare, Family Life Education is a service offered to schools and families around the state. It involves the delivery of an educational program within schools, sometimes during normal school hours while at other times as an extracurricular component with parental involvement. The types of issues which are discussed within the Primary School programs include; the importance of families, how babies begin, grow and develop and how babies are born. Programs developed for the Upper Primary students will generally include other components as well such as, issues relating to puberty. Secondary programs look at a range of topics such as where does life begin, healthy/happy relationships, myths about sex, teen pregnancy, contraception, fertility, STIs, sex and the law and other current topics.



# Let's talk: Tips for talking about sex

## 4. Let's talk: Tips for talking about sex

1. Start early. Practise talking about sexual matters before the children reach an age when they are reluctant to discuss the topic.
2. Talk often. Cover the same subject lots of times. A general pattern of openly 'chatting' about sexual issues will stick and create a feeling of closeness and comfort talking about sex.
3. Answer questions honestly and simply. Just a little bit of information is OK because you can always come back to it (and you should).
4. Do not wait for your child to ask questions. They might never ask, but they still need to know. If they haven't said anything to you by the time they are 10 then shyness or embarrassment is likely to stop them from this point on. Create conversations – use books, characters in TV shows, stories from your own life.
5. Good communication needs two-way talk, not one-way lectures.
6. It's never too late to start. If the kids and you are feeling self-conscious, avoid eye contact and start a conversation when you're in the car, washing the dishes or going for a walk.
7. Practise saying these words out loud: vulva, vagina, clitoris, penis, testes, scrotum, breasts, nipples. Get used to using the proper names for sexual body parts right from the start. That doesn't mean you can't use the words 'winkie' or 'willy', but it helps you and your child to be more matter of fact about these issues.



Anatomy 101 at 7 Smith Street

Anatomy 101 at 9 Smith Street

8. If you don't know how to respond to a question it is OK to say so. Keep the communication open with something like, 'That's a good question. I don't know how to answer it. I'll find out and get back to you,' or 'We can find out together.'
9. Leave books around that have accurate information, and make sure you talk to your children around age 9 or 10 about puberty. Have a look at websites (see page 64 for recommendations).
10. Take advantage of opportunistic 'teachable moments'.

### Dads too

In the old days, dads did not often talk to their kids about sex. That was understood to be Mum's job. It's quite likely that, as more men are involved in the day-to-day care of children, talking to their kids about sex and relationships will evolve. While no-one should have to talk about something that makes them feel deeply uncomfortable, we do want to encourage and support men in taking the job on.

Outdated ideas of men as sexually irresponsible have left many men feeling vulnerable when it comes to talking to their kids about this subject. This unfortunately runs the risk of maintaining the myth that boys and men cannot reliably talk about sex, bodies, contraception, and relationships. Or, more damaging: that men should not talk about these subjects with children. Boys and girls benefit from women and men taking part in this aspect of their education.

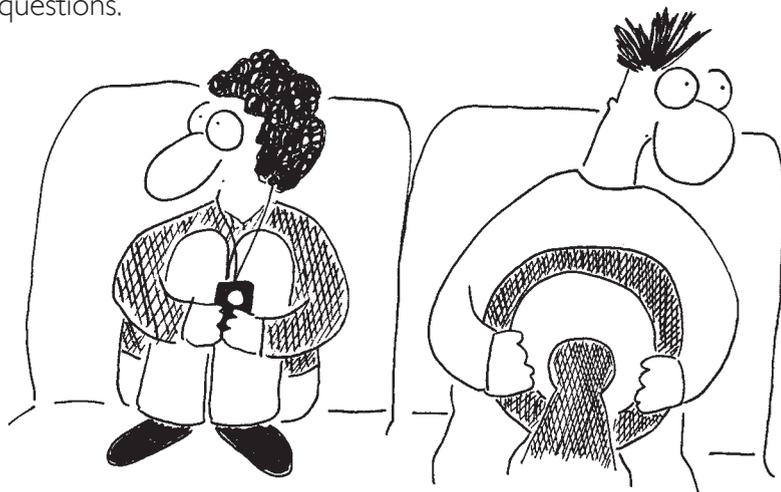


Of course discomfort can be felt by the kids as much as by the adults, especially when fathers try to talk to their daughters. If a father can see that his daughter is uncomfortable talking with him about bras and periods then he doesn't have to push on regardless. But it might not hurt to acknowledge your discomfort too. 'I'm not sure what to say, but I think it is really important that we can talk about it. When I was a boy the only thing I knew about girls was ...'

## Boys and girls benefit from women and men taking part in this aspect of their education.

So here are some strategies that other fathers have used:

- Start when the kids are really young so that you get used to it.
- Pick the bits that you do feel comfortable talking about and find books for the bits that you don't.
- If you are a single parent of a daughter who feels uncomfortable talking with you, together you might decide on a female adult to go to with questions.



We haven't made it an issue. So it's just information, and it's there to be asked, and [my attitude is] I'll tell you, to the best of my knowledge. If not, I'll find out for you and then we can work through it.

—Parent of 6 and 8 year olds  
(girl and boy)

I feel really honoured that she is able to come to me with this.

—Parent of 17 year old girl

My son is 10 and he doesn't ask questions, but my husband won't even go there. His parents were never open. They were very shy about their bodies, and everything else. My family was very open; I could talk to my Dad about anything at any time. So I'm the one having to deal with it, and I'm thinking, 'What do I say to my son? How do I teach my son?' I don't know where to start. He might be hearing things out there from his mates and thinking, 'Oh, I can't really tell Mum that.'

—Parent of 10 year old boy

Explaining intercourse, conception, pregnancy and birth to children<sup>10</sup>

### **Making babies**

*To make a baby you need sperm (seed) from a man's body to join with a tiny ovum (egg) from a woman's body. This is how it happens. When two adults feel loving towards each other they can really enjoy touching each other's bodies. Sometimes they decide to have sex.*

*When a man and a woman have sex the man's penis goes into the woman's vagina.*

**When a man and a woman have sex the man's penis goes into the woman's vagina.**

*The sperm gets from the man's body into the woman's, and sometimes (not all the time) an egg from the woman connects with one sperm from the man, and that might develop into a baby.*

*The egg that has joined with the sperm travels into a place in the woman's body (called the uterus) where it settles in to grow. It will go on growing for about nine months – this is called pregnancy. When the baby is ready to be born, the muscles in the uterus stretch and push the baby out through the vagina, which also stretches so that the baby can get through, and the baby is born.*

### **What if a child has same-sex parents?**

*We are all different but every human baby starts the same way – with a tiny egg from a woman and a small seed, called a sperm, from a man.*

### **Explaining assisted conception**

These are the ways a sperm and egg can join:

- Sex between a man and a woman
- With the help of a doctor, sometimes the egg and the sperm can be 'mixed up' together and put inside the mother's uterus.

What to do if they just won't talk (or letting go of the big talk concept)

For those of us worrying about how to answer kids' questions, there are as many frustrated parents and carers wishing they had that problem. You are looking forward to being supportive and open, and helping your child through puberty, relationships and sexuality, and their communication stops! First, know that this is part of adolescence. Young people often need to work things out in their own way. Communication about values or providing information can still happen, just not as directly as you might have liked.

There are some good websites (see page 64 for recommendations), TV shows and CD-ROMs that might help too. Perhaps one of the most important things you can do as a parent is to support school sex education programs.



Young people often need  
to work things out in  
their own way.

#### What parents can do

- **Make opportunities for their independent learning by leaving brochures and books around the house.**
- **Suggest somewhere or someone to whom they might go for advice when they need it.** Having trustworthy adults other than parents and carers can be very supportive and sustaining for young people.

- **Ask what 'most' kids in school do.** Or, ask your child what their friends think about the health education curriculum, e.g. 'Do you and your friends think health ed is relevant to you?'
- **Use TV shows or other media as a springboard.** For example, make a comment on someone's treatment of another person in a relationship, or refer to an article in the paper and express your opinion on a homophobic community leader. It might create a discussion, or it might not, but perhaps you've achieved communicating your values, which children do take into consideration.
- **Visit the [Get The Facts youth website](#)** (see page 65) for a list of young people's frequently asked questions and answers on sex and relationships, and consider sharing the website with your child.

#### Some conversation starters for you and your teen – questions you can ask<sup>11</sup>

- How have you changed in the last two years? What do you like and what do you not like about the changes?
- How do you think you'll be different in five more years? Do you think you'll like these changes?
- At what age do you think a person is ready to have sex? How do you decide?
- At what age do you think a person is ready to be a parent?
- What do you think are the qualities that a parent should have?



## Preparing young people for healthy sexually active lives

Would our approach to sexuality education for our children be different if we assumed it was our job to prepare them for happy, safe sexual lives? Rather than trying to stop them having sex at all costs, what if we asked ourselves:

- What do they need to know to have happy sexual lives?
- What are the choices that lead to them having more fulfilling sexual lives?

If you don't know the answers to these questions (and many of us don't) then probably neither do they. And it's the absence of this conversation with young people that leads them to take sexual risks.

### What's love got to do with it?

Part of growing up and becoming an adult is forming your first strong attachment to somebody else – somebody who is not the parent! A young person's

first fall into love can force a whole set of new questions for the family about how much freedom they are allowed and how they manage their intense new feelings.

Your child needs to know they do not have to have sex even if they are truly-madly-deeply in love. It is their right and choice to take their time, and in fact sex is better when you wait until you feel ready (really! the research says that the younger you are the more likely it is uncomfortable, and the more likely it is regretted). And they need to know that not everyone is doing it, although some are.

### What's good about sex?

If we acknowledge that sex can be a happy experience we will be better able to 'sell' that it's worth waiting for, rather than something to rush into. If parents only talk about the downsides of sex, like sexually transmitted infections (STIs), then young people will switch off. If responsible adults acknowledge what's good about love and sex and relationships then we can teach young people what to aim for. It's important that they are told somewhere along the line that a sexual relationship can be a good and happy thing, and worth waiting for the right conditions for. The research tells us that young people can have happy experiences of sex, without negative consequences, if the conditions are right (see page 48, **A checklist for young people: How do you know you are ready for sex?**).

## Getting it over and done with

Unfortunately a lot of young people begin to see not having had sex as a burden. Pressure for young people to have sex is real. The talk in schools among friends often sets the standards for what is good and bad sexual behaviour. This is why school programs can be so powerful, as they can get young people thinking and talking about the conflicting sets of rules about sex.

Sex is better when you wait until you feel ready.

## I was so off my face I didn't know what I was doing

Among sexually active Australian secondary students, being drunk was the most common reason given for having unwanted sex.<sup>12</sup> Being pressured by a sexual partner was the second most common reason, which is why being drunk or affected by drugs can confuse issues even further.

Lots of people combine sex and alcohol because it frees them to admit to wanting sex and to seek sex. It is also a handy tool for relieving yourself of personal responsibility for what happens. Kids need opportunities to think about the consequences of mixing alcohol and sex so they can reduce the chances of getting into situations they can't handle. A frank discussion about first sexual experiences – the disappointments and the highlights – might start them thinking how they might like to engineer their own sexual lives.

## A word from FPT

The thought of starting 'the talk' about sex, sexual health and sexuality with kids might send some parents running for the hills. It can be awkward and difficult and, more likely than not, teenagers would rather do their algebra homework than talk to Mum, Dad or an aunt about sex.

But it doesn't have to be this way. According to relationship and sexuality educators at FPT, it is more effective to have regular, open chats with kids as things come up, rather than saving it up for 'the talk'. Talk to your child while you're doing something together – driving the car, sharing a meal, exercising or watching TV. This can help you both feel more comfortable and relaxed. Avoid interrogating your child about what they know or have done. Instead, ask open questions that allow you both to share your knowledge, beliefs and values.

So, instead of saying, 'Have you had sex?' try asking open questions such as: 'What do you and your friends think about 15 year old girls having sex?' or 'What do you think about Britney being photographed getting out of the car with no knickers?' This way, teenagers are more likely to talk freely and come to you when they have questions or problems.

And although lots of the issues surrounding sex and sexual health are very serious, FPT staff say it's OK to have a giggle and to keep things lighthearted.

“Humour is a natural way to make difficult conversations easier. Plus, it also reinforces the positive side of sex and everyone’s right to enjoy their sexuality.”

FPT staff say to keep in mind that “teenagers are designed for taking risks, and sex is no exception. Risk taking is a way that we learn. Withholding information about sex won’t stop the risks and it can make the consequences worse.”

Last but not least, know that you are not alone in helping your kids navigate the tricky issues around sex and relationships. FPT Sexuality Education and Clinical Services provide information for parents and carers through FPT Clinics and FPT Education programs. The clinic is staffed by specially trained nurses and doctors. The services are available for a small annual fee – less than a trip to a GP. For that fee people can come whenever they need for tests, contraception, pap smears, etc.

FPT says there is a real benefit in having specialised sexual health clinics. “Our staff have access to a full range of contraceptive options. They also have the time to help you with even the most sensitive issues.”

## It's OK to have a giggle and to keep things lighthearted.

Here are some more helpful hints from FPT staff:

- Listen more and talk less – listen with interest and openness, not judgement.
- Be a loving parent or carer – show affection, tell them you love them, give them positive feedback and support them to solve their problems.

There are lots of great websites for parents, kids and teens that are interactive and real. Perhaps save the website as a favourite so your kids can look in their own time.

See page 62 for information on how to contact FPT.

I hope this doesn't offend, but there are lots of different 'normals'. And I personally think, you know, being gay and homosexual – I mean, I wouldn't have anything against my kids seeing that. That's a version of love and normality to me. So we talk about that. Normal is – it is such a different thing for so many different people.

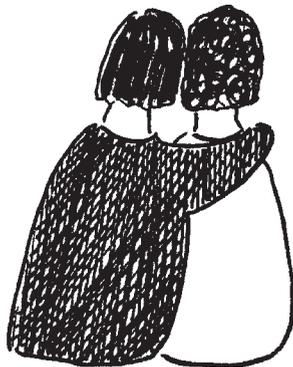
–Parent of teenage boys, 17 and 19



## I think my child is gay

For whatever reasons, you have begun to think that your child might be gay; that is, attracted to people of the same sex. Sometimes, worry and love for the child, and a history of hearing that 'gay = bad' causes parents to feel they need to do something. Even a behaviour as harmless as a boy playing with dolls can cause some parents to panic. It is very sad that our history of male and female stereotyping and fear of homosexuality causes so much worry about natural and normal behaviour in children. So here's what you can consider to continue being a loving and helpful parent:

- It is common and normal for kids to dress up in Mummy's or Daddy's clothes without it meaning they are gay or straight.
- It is common and normal for boys to play with dolls and girls to play rough without it meaning they are gay or straight.



*Handwritten signature or initials.*

**While it is less common to be gay, lesbian or bisexual (about one in ten people)<sup>2</sup>, it is normal.**

## How do I support my child?

- You can't control your child's sexual orientation. It is not caused by you and it can't be changed by you.
- A child may not 'know' they are gay until they are much older. Give them time to grow up and find out who they are for themselves.
- Aim to be a 'tellable' parent: give your children some positive messages that you are open to talking. For example, use something in the media to make a positive comment about gay people, or about parents who support their kids, or about women and men who follow their interests, careers and passions outside of narrow gender stereotypes. Your child may even ask you a question to 'test' you. If you don't know what to say, it's OK to be honest. Saying something like, 'When I grew up it was rarely talked about, so I feel like I've got a lot to learn' lets your child know that you haven't closed the door on the discussion.

My child is gay

You might have always had a bit of a feeling about it or it might come as a complete surprise.

Your child has just told you that he or she is gay.

*You can't control your  
child's sexual orientation.  
It is not caused by you  
and it can't be changed  
by you.*

You may feel shock, particularly if you have had no idea; feeling like the child you have had all along has gone and been replaced with someone else. You may feel guilt; that you did something wrong that caused your child to be gay. You may feel angry, as though this is someone's fault and you want to find them and sort it out. You may fear for your child's safety, or fear that their life will be more difficult because of being gay. You may not feel upset about it – you may be OK with your child being gay. Or you may come from a family where there is shame associated with same-sex relationships and you are fearful of others finding out. These feelings are common first reactions. Sadness about weddings and grandchildren and welcoming in-laws may (or may not) come later.

How can this have happened? There is no clear answer about why some people are gay, some bisexual and others heterosexual. Sexual orientation towards those of the same sex occurs naturally in all human, and some animal, societies. One thing is certain – it is not a choice children make. Almost all children are raised as though they are heterosexual and their feeling of 'difference' is likely to be a slowly growing revelation, not always welcome.

Telling parents and risking losing their love is the thing that nearly all same-sex attracted young people fear most. Research has shown that young people rejected by their families at this point have a much worse time than those who are not rejected. **The first thing to remember when you are told by your son or daughter that they think they are gay is that you have a very brave child who has chosen to take you into his/her confidence. They deserve a hug for that at the very least.**



Telling parents and risking losing their love is the thing ... young people fear most.

Some kids who are gay have had it tough for a long time – if they have been picked out as different from the other kids they may have been criticised or bullied at school or even in the street. Other kids, who nobody has identified as gay, may still be feeling the pressure of living a lie, hoping no-one will find out about them. To state the obvious, this is not good for their health, especially their emotional health.

They may have gone through all this alone rather than risking losing you by bringing you in as an ally. You knowing about it is a great step forward in helping them cope with whatever is going on in their lives. Now there are two of you on the team.

If it takes you some time to get used to the idea, don't worry – your child probably took some time to get used to the idea too. Eventually, most parents of young people who are gay are relieved to know, and pleased to see the improvement in their relationship with their child when it is out in the open. Later on, you may experience the joy of welcoming a same-sex partner into the family. And gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex (GLBTI) people often have children too.

It helps to know that other young people, other families, can survive and thrive. There is a group called Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) that is well worth contacting for a chat about the issues, and the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard Counselling Line is another important support for parents coming to terms with their GLBTI children (see pages 62 and 64 for contact details).



Some worthwhile things to know about human sexuality:

- Not all homosexual adolescents are sexually active
- Many homosexual adolescents are heterosexually active
- Many heterosexual adolescents are homosexually active
- Sexual identity may vary over time but cannot be 'cured' or changed forcibly.<sup>13</sup>

## Relationships and sexual health education in schools

Schools have an important part to play in helping to develop well informed and confident young people. The teacher can lead discussions that children may not be able to have with their parents and provide the environment for students to hear, sometimes shattering misconceptions on the way. School programs have been found to increase parent-child communication about this topic.

Peter: Parents [need to] know that certain things are going to be broached ... as the children go through [school]. Ready or not, these things will come up in conversation.

Marie: Yes. Letting you know what the children will be taught at certain levels so that you are aware of what's going to be going on, so that you can either complement that, or ...

Peter: What questions you're going to get asked.

Marie: Yeah, that's right. So that you can get some information for yourself to complement what's going on, so that you're ahead of the game a bit. Or, you know, if you have real issues with something that's going to be taught, you have an opportunity to say, 'Well, I'm really not comfortable with my child being taught this.' Because, I mean, we know our children the best, you want to have that option of saying whether it's religious beliefs or whatever, that you can say, that doesn't go with my family ...

*—Peter, parent of 8 year old boy; Marie, parent of 10 year old girl*

Most parents support the provision of sexual health education in schools, but on the proviso that they are informed about what will be covered in school programs, so they can be prepared. Many parents say that they would like written information about the program and what it will cover. Finding out what your child's school is doing is important. The combined efforts of parents and schools in getting kids accurate sexuality information result in children who are more likely to:

- delay having sex, and
- use condoms and other contraception if they choose to become sexually active.

### Relationships and sexuality education in Tasmanian schools

In 2012 the Tasmanian Department of Education developed a strategy for school relationships and sexuality education. It focuses on supporting and enabling school communities to provide relationships and sexuality education that considers developmental processes for students of every age, with appropriate information related to sexual development, physical development, reproduction, respectful relationships and gender.



Hello Petal. It's J.T.  
I hear there's been  
a hoo ha with  
your fru fru.

I feel such a doodle.  
I left my cherries  
and my melons in  
the old fella's mini.  
What a balls up! Should I  
call my local member?



!!!



**What do young people  
need to know to decide  
about having sex?**

## 5. What do young people need to know to decide about having sex?

Some young people have the skills and the expectation that they will form a connection with someone before they have sex. Those young people are more likely to have happier experiences of sex if and when it does happen. Many others' experiences of first-time sex were characterised by feelings of pressure, disappointment, regret, and even necessity.<sup>14</sup>

So, what are some messages about sex that young people may not be hearing anywhere else?

(These 'messages' are by way of background music that you might want to choose from and sing in the background – hey, it's your job to be annoying!)

There are lots of different ways to enjoy sexual feelings.

- There are a lot of messages that suggest that everyone is having sex. This is not true. By the end of Year 12, 50% of students will have had sexual intercourse. 50% have not.
- One reason that people enjoy sexual activity is because it feels nice, good, great. You can feel excited, beautiful, powerful. You can feel close, loved, and loving. Sex can also be uncomfortable, disappointing, boring, a chore. At its worst it can make you feel lonely, sad, unloved and unvalued.
- You have a right to choose not to have sex, or to wait until you feel really ready.
- People have sex for a range of reasons, including to become closer, to feel loved, to feel good, to get it over and done with, to be popular, to fit in, or to rebel. Not all these reasons are ideal.
- If getting someone to love you is your goal, then ask yourself whether you think that person likes you. If you don't think they like you, then they are not going to hang around to love you.
- There are lots of different ways to enjoy sexual feelings. Some people do nothing. Some masturbate (and have been, off and on, since they were babies). Some people decide to do some sexual behaviours and not others.

- Everyone has the right to decide what sexual behaviours they are happy to engage in, if any. They can also expect their friends and sexual partners to respect those decisions.
- Every young person has a right to information that will help them keep safe and healthy, which includes information about avoiding pregnancy and STIs.
- Everyone, females and males, gay and straight, married or not, can choose not to have sex at any time.
- Having sex once does not mean you have to do it again.
- Sex can lead to getting or giving an STI, or pregnancy. It's important to protect yourself. Oral sex won't cause pregnancy but it can spread STIs such as chlamydia. If a person has vaginal or anal sex, condoms will stop the spread of most STIs but not others such as genital warts and herpes.
- Making good sexual decisions can be nearly impossible if a person is drunk or high.



Kim: When my children start experimenting with sexual behaviour, I want them to really enjoy it, I want them to have positive experiences and I want them to feel empowered. And, you want to make sure that it's healthy, it's safe, they're not pressured into it, but at the same time you don't want it to happen too young.

Jo: So it's about more than just knowing the facts of life.

Kim: It's about being strong, assertive, respecting yourself and other people.

*—Parents of girls aged 14*

'[T]he age of first sexual experience continues to get lower; even as the range of sexual activities widens ... High levels of pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), forced or pressured sex and sexual assault among young people suggest that current approaches to preparing young people for sexually active lives are limited...'<sup>16</sup>

## A checklist for young people: How do you know you are ready for sex?<sup>15</sup>

Some parents would feel comfortable enough to show their kids the following checklist. Young people need to have their own personal list of indicators (everyone is different, after all). Some of the following statements make really good starting places when a young person is working out if they are ready to begin having sex. It's crucial that the young person decides whether they are ready before someone else decides for them.

- You know how to prevent a pregnancy from happening
- You know how to protect yourself and your partner from getting an STI: you have condoms and you know how to use them
- You will feel OK about having had sex in the cold light of day
- You want to have sex and have said so
- You think you might like to have a baby
- You are 17 or over
- It feels right
- You feel comfortable with the person you are going to have sex with
- You feel you could say no, and that would be OK, but you still want to do it
- You have anxieties but not fear
- Nobody is forcing, pressuring or coercing you
- You've agreed you both care for each other and want to take this next step
- You both want it for yourselves, not because the other person wants it or because you want to please them
- You're not doing it to keep your partner
- You're not doing it to make you popular or to gain acceptance.

The above statements may not fit your own value system, but they do give you something to go on. You might even like to use them as a discussion starter.

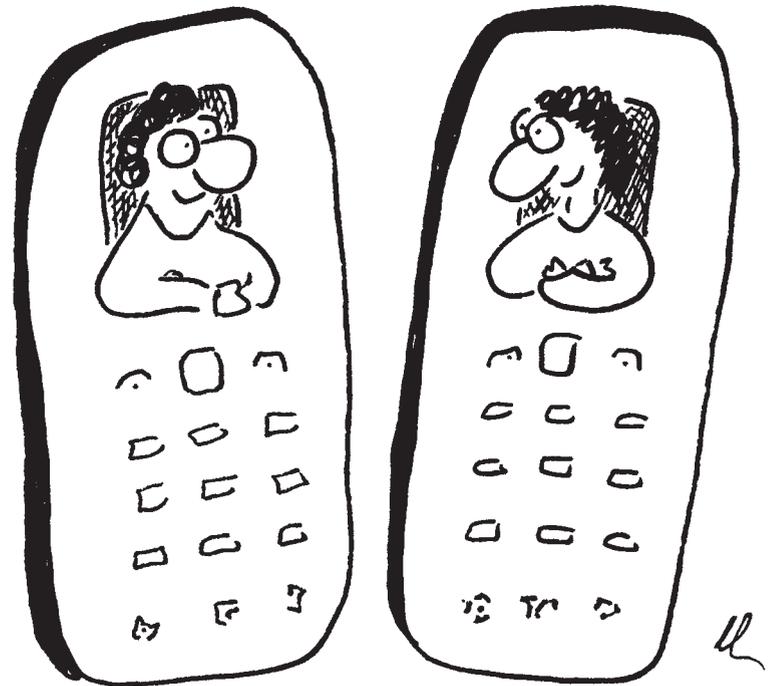
## Parenting in the digital age: Texts, tweets and Facebook

Many of us use the Internet and mobile phones to keep the bonds strong between friends and family. Kids do the same. A quick text or tweet lets someone know we are thinking of them. A bit of time on our Facebook page allows us to share jokes and photos and moments. Kids who have trouble fitting in at school might find safe ways to connect with others online. Time on the Internet can help us think through problems and get information. The Internet and mobile phones allow us informal, quick and alternative types of media to what's on TV and for all these reasons, many of us love them.

Our use changes as we get older. Eight to 11 year olds use the Internet for online games but as children hit high school they start to use social networking sites. Online life reflects offline life, so teenagers will flirt, and gossip, and talk about what happened last night. They will want to belong and connect with a group. They will look up information about growing up, sexual development, and/or sex. They may also have close calls with 'creeps' who try to make contact with them, but most of their contact will be with local friends. For kids, the point is to be in constant contact with friends.<sup>17</sup>

The key thing for kids to remember is that social networking sites and mobile phone technology creates a small town effect, where everybody knows your business, and knows it fast! Not only that, but if you put something out there, you can't take it back, because someone else will have it (whether it's a photo, a nasty comment, or a declaration of love) on their phone or computer.

The best way to help your kids navigate the online world is to stay involved. If you use the computer then it's easier for you to talk about the pros and cons than if you have never used it.



Here are some things to do:

- Keep your computer in a public place so that you can see at a glance what they are looking at.
- Get your own Facebook or Youtube account (or whatever happens to be popular at the time – ask your kids). Let your kids teach you how to set it up, so that you can appreciate what they are working with. (And remember, don't write embarrassing things about your own kids or your family.) You don't have to use it all the time, but it might alert you to any safety issues you need to know.

*The best way to help  
your kids navigate  
the online world is to  
stay involved.*

- To help kids understand the public nature of some of their postings, tell them that anything they put online could either end up on your fridge door, or on the noticeboard in the school assembly hall. That includes personal information like an address and phone number.
- Ensure your kids have privacy settings activated on their social networking sites (like Facebook).

- You do not want your child to be the one others are complaining about. Make sure they understand that cruel jokes about someone in their class become public comments.
- If they trip over something that troubles them on the web, like pornography, try to remain calm, if and when they tell you. If you explode and ban all access to the computer, they won't tell you next time.
- Make sure they understand that sending nude photos of themselves or of someone else is likely to be illegal.
- There are parent-friendly sources of information about how to safely socialise on the net. Go to [cybersmart.gov.au](http://cybersmart.gov.au)

There is also the Cybersafety Contact Centre offering callers information and advice about Internet safety issues and concerns. Telephone 1800 880 176.<sup>18</sup>

FPT provides information, advice and education sessions for parents and young people about online sexual and social safety.

## Managing mobile friendships

### 1. Control the pace

Mobile phones and the Internet enable young people to get closer, sooner, with someone they are getting to know. Young people need to know that they can take control if they are feeling hurried into a date, or sex. They can text back to say 'I'll let you know'. They don't have to reply straight away.



## 2. Make clear rules about sending pictures and messages

One in four Australian children aged 6 to 13 years now has a mobile phone.<sup>19</sup> A mature understanding of the effect of sending messages and photos usually comes when a child is much older, so children need clear rules about sending pictures and messages.

Make sure your kids know that any photos or video taken with their phones – or a photo taken of them by someone else – could become public the moment it is sent to someone (by being uploaded to the Internet). They should always ask their friend's permission before publishing/sending a photo of their friend.

While teenagers may think that sending these images to their friends is harmless, any image that portrays a minor in an indecent manner or engaging in sexual activity is regarded as child pornography. People who receive or pass on these images are risking criminal charges, whether they are a minor or an adult.

Some rules for mobile kids

- No unkind messages about friends or other kids at school
- No nude pictures
- No photos taken without a person's knowledge
- Don't use your phone in private spaces, for example, bathrooms, changing rooms.

## Contraception<sup>20</sup>

Condoms and the combined oral contraceptive pill ('the Pill') remain the methods most commonly used by Australian young people, although up to 10% report using no contraception in their last sexual encounter.

Condoms are an excellent contraceptive choice for young people as they provide protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and effective contraception (92–95% effective), and are relatively inexpensive.

If young people are going to have sexual intercourse, then 'double-dutching' – condom use in addition to another, usually hormonal contraceptive method – should be encouraged.

It's important that all young people who are considering having sexual intercourse know the following:

- A girl can get pregnant anytime, including the first time she has sex
- A girl can get pregnant even when she has her period, or has just finished it
- Sperm can stay alive in a girl's body for up to five days after sex
- 'Pulling out' is not a safe form of contraception; sperm can be present in the pre-cum
- Condoms are the only form of contraception that also reduce the risk of getting or passing on an STI
- Abstinence is the only 100% effective method.

*Condoms are an excellent  
contraceptive choice  
for young people.*

### Common methods of contraception

#### 'The Pill' (The combined pill)

The Pill is very effective. It prevents the release of an egg from the ovaries each month. If taken every day the Pill is over 99% effective at preventing pregnancy.

**Emergency contraception** (sometimes known as the 'morning after pill' or 'after sex pill')

Emergency contraception (EC) can be used to prevent pregnancy when intercourse has occurred without the use of contraception or when contraception may have failed (e.g. condom breakage). EC is most effective at preventing pregnancy when taken within 24 hours of having sex (the sooner it is taken the more effective it is). There is some effectiveness for up to 120 hours (five days) after intercourse, however, effectiveness decreases as time passes and is significantly reduced 72 hours (three days) after sex. EC is available over the counter at some pharmacies, so you don't need to see a doctor to get a prescription. Youth health services may help with the cost of EC.

#### Injectables and implants

Injectables and implants are respectively an injection or a plastic rod inserted under the girl's skin by a doctor, and work like the Pill to stop the release of an egg each month. Implants last for up to three years, while injections (Depo) last for 12 weeks.

#### Male condoms

Condoms fit closely over an erect penis. They collect semen and stop it from entering the vagina. Condoms are up to 98% effective at preventing pregnancy if used correctly – this means using a new condom every time you have sex (or when switching between vaginal and anal sex), putting it on and taking it off correctly and using water-based lubricants with condoms, e.g. Wet Stuff.

## Pregnant?

If a girl's period is late or much lighter than usual then she may be pregnant. Other signs of pregnancy are sore breasts, breasts getting larger, nipples getting darker, weight gain, nausea (feeling like vomiting), unusual tiredness and weeing more often. A girl should have a test if she thinks she might be pregnant and if her period is more than one week late. Urine pregnancy tests (often described as 'weeing on a stick') are quick and generally accurate. These are available from pharmacies and supermarkets, but results should be confirmed by a health professional.

## Meet chlamydia, Australia's no. 1 STI

High numbers of sexually active young men and women are becoming infected with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) called chlamydia. Chlamydia infections are extremely high and rising amongst 15-24 year olds in Tasmania.<sup>21</sup>

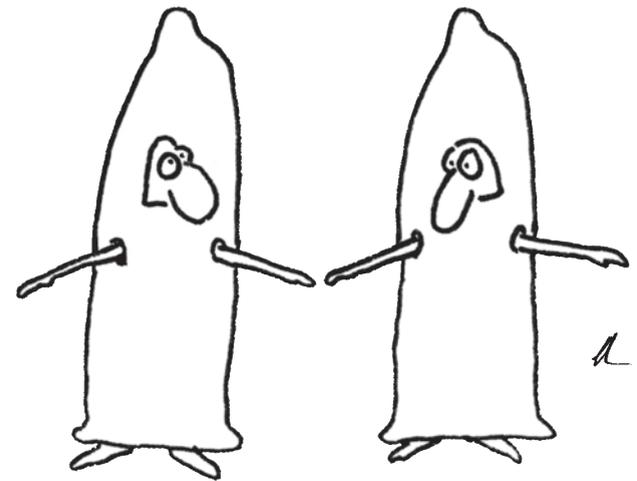
## Both women and men can become infertile from chlamydia.

One of the reasons it's so common is that often a person has no symptoms, and so doesn't seek treatment. A complication of chlamydia in women is that, if left untreated, it can develop into pelvic inflammatory disease, which can lead to chronic pain, internal scarring and infertility. Both women and men can become infertile from chlamydia.

The good news is that, despite high rates of infection with chlamydia, pelvic inflammatory disease in young women has halved in recent years because people are getting tested and treated earlier; new, easier tests have been developed; and treatment has improved to just a single-dose antibiotic.

It can be difficult for young people to access condoms – especially in rural or remote areas. They may not have the money or may not want to buy them from somebody they or their parents know.

Young people can text FPT's **Condoms free 4u** and they will receive condoms and lube through the post. If your child receives condoms from FPT's service, it does not necessarily mean he or she is having sex. Your child could be curious; seeing if it works. It is a chance for you to talk to your child about safer sex and your family's beliefs and values about sexual relationships.



## So, what do we want young people to know about chlamydia?

- People who are having sex should get tested for STIs at least once a year or when they get a new sexual partner. Testing usually involves a simple urine test.
- Chlamydia and other STIs can be passed on during oral, vaginal and anal sex with an infected partner.
- Choosing not to have vaginal, anal and oral sex will prevent the transmission of chlamydia.
- Up to 75% of women and 50% of men may have no symptoms.
- Both young women and young men can become infected with, and pass on chlamydia.
- Treatment is simple. It is usually just a single-dose antibiotic.
- Condoms will reduce the risk of contracting chlamydia (but not all STIs).

## Some things you should know about ALL sexually transmitted infections

- STIs can be passed on through vaginal, oral or anal sex. Most STIs are transmitted through an exchange of body fluids (semen, blood and vaginal fluids) but some, such as genital warts and herpes, can be passed on through skin-to-skin genital and oral–genital contact too.
- Condoms and dams stop body fluids from being exchanged (a dam is a thin latex square held over the vaginal or anal area during oral sex). As some STIs can be passed on through skin-to-skin contact, it's important to remember that condoms and dams only protect the area of skin they cover.
- STIs can cause a wide range of health problems, from mild irritation to serious ongoing illness. Some STIs are easily cured with antibiotics if detected early, but can have long-term consequences if left untreated. While other STIs can't be cured (such as herpes), treatments are available to ease symptoms.
- Most STIs have no symptoms, so it's possible to have one and not know it. If you've had unprotected sex in the past, get tested by a doctor or at FPT, a youth health service or a sexual health clinic (see pages 62 and 63 for details).



# Sex and the law

## 6. Sex and the law

Uh-oh. Pornography

### Of the potential causes of harm to our children, what role does pornography play?

Children and young people are often curious about pornography and may seek it out as part of their self-education.

The evidence is hard to find (after all it's a difficult subject to research!) but what seems clear is that boys who watch violent pornography a lot (weekly) have more aggressive sexual behaviour.<sup>22</sup> One study of 275 Canadian teenagers with an average age of 14 found a link between boys' frequent use of pornography and their agreement with the idea that it is OK to force a girl to have sex.<sup>23</sup> This is an important finding as it highlights that boys and girls who watch this regularly need to know that forced and violent sex is never acceptable, and is illegal.

When it comes to the effects on girls, more research attention has been paid to the effect on their self-esteem. It appears that pornography can affect both girls' and boys' self-esteem by presenting them as sexual types which they feel they have to live 'up' to.<sup>24</sup>

### Is a one-off exposure to pornography likely to do lasting harm?

It may be unpleasant and offensive for your kids, but of no more effect than that. It may certainly upset a child, offend a child, or make them feel anxious. Many children and young people may already be aware that some people produce this type of material and that it does not represent a happy, healthy kind of sex.

Their response can be lessened or heightened by the ways in which families interact and discuss what is seen. Tell your children what your beliefs are about porn and what your concerns are, and be sure to let them know that porn does not represent all sex or sexual relationships.



What I didn't know was that there was such a huge emotional gap between porn and reality.

—17 year old man, after a number of negative interactions with women<sup>25</sup>



### So what do we do?

In the first instance it would be good to stop young people's exposure to pornography, especially violent porn. While porn exists in many formats, Internet and mobile phone access to porn is difficult to control and as such is of special concern. Still, many of us have not sat down to figure out how to put filters on our home computers. The Australian Government recommends that we download 'Family Friendly Filters' listed by the Internet Industry Association (<http://iia.net.au>).

Some mobile phone companies provide access to content that is not suitable for children, i.e. content rated MA15+ or R18+. Before this content can be provided, customers must request access and provide proof that they are 18 years or older. If a child is given a phone by someone who no longer wants it, you should confirm with your phone company that access to content that is not suitable for children has not been enabled.

Boys and girls need to know that there is a difference between persuading someone to have sex, and forcing them.

### Forced sex

Almost 13% of the Australian population reports being frightened or forced into a sexual experience. Nearly 3% of men and 10% of women have been forced into some form of sexual activity aged 16 or younger.<sup>26</sup> Often the partners are known to each other and may already have a relationship.

Boys and girls need to know that there is a difference between persuading or charming someone to have sex, and forcing them. If the person feels he or she has no choice about having sex because they are frightened or threatened, or are blackmailed into a sexual act, then it's coercion. Sometimes a person may not want to have sex but 'gives in' rather than face the risk of being raped.

Forcing another person to have sex is sexual assault, and may result in a criminal charge.

Make sure your kids know that they cannot use force in this way, and that this kind of force is wrong. If there is any doubt about the other person wanting sex, then they must stop.

- No-one 'owes' anyone sex.
- 'Going outside' with someone at a party, for example, is not a contract for sex.
- They can change their mind at any time.

If a person has been sexually assaulted, they can contact a sexual assault service or the nearest hospital or health professional for assistance (see page 63 for contact details).

## Sex and the law

In Tasmania, the age of consent for sexual intercourse is 17. There are however some defences to this depending on the age of both young people. Laws can be complex and they are different in each state. In Tasmania, 15 year-olds and 16 year-olds can lawfully consent to sex with a person who is not more than five years older. For a young person who is 12, 13 or 14, the permissible age difference is three years.

If someone is not able to give consent to sex, regardless of their age, the law says it is a crime.



People who cannot give consent regardless of their age include:

- a person who is unconscious, asleep or intoxicated
- a person who is unable to understand the nature of the act.

For people with an intellectual disability to give consent, the law requires that they must understand what they are consenting to, and what the likely outcomes of that consent might be; and that there be no trickery, coercion or control influencing their decision.

### **Sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment includes any sexual actions which make a person feel uncomfortable, offended, humiliated or intimidated. This can include things like unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, sexual jokes, staring, leering and wolf-whistling, as well as actual physical contact (e.g. unwanted touching). Sexual harassment can happen at school or work, as well as in other places.

### **What is sexual assault?**

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual act or behaviour a person did not consent to or was not able to consent to.

Examples of sexual assault include:

- Unwanted sexual touching (e.g. kissing, hugging)
- Making you watch a sexual act, such as pornographic material
- Being forced to perform any sexual act.

Sexual assault goes on a lot in a subtle way where you've got your 16, 17 year olds, and they're dating, and they've all got drunk, and this kind of thing. It's not necessarily an unknown predator: It's like at the schoolies' week, and the girls are all disgustingly pissed – drunk, if you like. And they've got no idea. And there are older boys, not to mention the 16 and 17 year olds, all coming in ... it's ... an issue, especially for the girls.

*–Parent of 18 year old girl and 15 year old boy*

## Preventing child sexual abuse

A common concern of parents is raising the subject of sexual safety without leading children to believe that the world is full of predators. Sexual predators are not likely to be scary-looking people. In fact sexual predators often use tactics to make the child feel good and special. Teaching children straightforward rules about what's allowed and what's not is the best strategy that we have.

- Encourage children to know they can decide who touches them.
- Teach children they have a right to say no to unwanted touch.
- Teach about privacy and help them identify the private parts of the body.
- Talk about the difference between good and bad secrets.
- Encourage them to tell someone if they are confused or upset or if they have concerns or questions.
- Reinforce using the buddy system on outings.
- Try to always know where your children are and have them check in with you.
- Maintain an environment in which children feel safe talking about their feelings and problems.

### Safety rules for kids

- It is never OK for anyone to touch the private parts of my body and to ask me to keep it a secret, even if it is someone I know or like.
- It is never OK for anyone to ask me to keep a secret if it makes me uncomfortable, or I know it's wrong, even if it is someone I know or like.
- I can say 'No' to touching that is not OK. I can say 'No,' or 'Don't do that,' or 'I'm going to tell.'
- If I have a problem, it is important for me to tell an adult I trust about it.<sup>27</sup>

FPT's education programs provide young people with protective behaviours within age-appropriate sex education. This aims to combat child abuse by providing children with clear messages about inappropriate behaviours and the language to talk about their bodies and their experiences with a trusted adult.



**Services, websites,  
and good books**



## 7. Services, websites, and good books

Talk to someone

### **Centacare Tasmania – Family Life Education**

(03) 6278 1660

Family Life Education is a service offered to schools and families around the state to assist teachers and parents as the primary educators of their children in the area of sex and sexuality.

### **Child Protection Services**

1 300 737 639

To make a notification about abuse or neglect.

### **Drug Education Network**

1 300 369 319

[www.den.org.au](http://www.den.org.au)

Provides a range of health promotion, prevention, and early intervention programs to reduce the harm associated with alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) use across Tasmania.

### **Family Planning Tasmania (FPT)**

Glenorchy

(03) 6273 9117

Launceston

(03) 6343 4566

Burnie

(03) 6431 7692

[www.fpt.asn.au](http://www.fpt.asn.au)

Provides free counselling in sexual health and related issues; low cost counselling (relationship counselling, couples, family); and clinical services. Website hosts information, can also seek confidential answers to your questions by email.

### **Gay and Lesbian Switchboard**

Counselling line

1 800 184 527

An anonymous, free telephone counselling, information and referrals for gay, lesbian, transgender and intersex communities in Victoria and Tasmania.

### **headspace**

Hobart

(03) 6231 2927

Northern Tasmania

(03) 6335 3100

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

headspace can help young people who are going through a tough time with general health, sexual health, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and counselling.

### **Hobart Women's Health Centre**

(03) 6231 3212

[www.hwbc.com.au](http://www.hwbc.com.au)

Provides individual support, information / referral re health and wellbeing, support and exercise groups, and a health and parenting library. Clinic sexual health, pap tests, pregnancy counselling -options, birth and mothers support.

### **Kids Help Line**

1 800 551 800

Free, confidential 24-hour telephone and online counselling service for 5 to 18 year olds in Australia.

**Laurel house – Northern Sexual Assault Group Inc**  
North/North East (03) 6334 2740  
After Hours Crisis Service 0409 800 394

A confidential, free service that provides therapeutic services and support to women, men and children who have been affected by sexual assault, as well as support for their friends, family, support people, and professionals.

**The Link Youth Health Service** (03) 6231 2927  
A free, confidential service for young people aged 12-25 years in Southern Tasmania providing health help on issues such as sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, housing, nutrition and just about anything else!

**North West Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)**  
North West (03) 6431 9711  
Offers free and confidential services to women, men and children who have been affected by sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment and child sexual abuse. CASA provides a 24/7 crisis service and offers community education and professional training for organisations and the general community.

**Pulse Youth Health South** (03) 6233 8901  
Provides assessment, brief intervention, advocacy and referral for young people aged 12-24. Pulse also helps with the cost of health items including condoms and pregnancy testing and other support. Visiting services include Sexual Health GP clinic once a week by appointment and other counselling services.

**Relationships Australia Tasmania** 1300 364 277  
[www.tas.relationships.org.au](http://www.tas.relationships.org.au)

Provides of a wide range of services, including counselling, family dispute resolution, personal development and education, parenting skills training, men and family relationships programs, early intervention services and child-focused programs.

**Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS)**  
South (03) 6231 1811  
24 hour crisis support line (03) 6231 1817  
Provides information and support services to people who have been recently sexually assaulted, and counselling services for children and adults of all ages, who have experienced sexual abuse at any time during their lives. Counselling support is also available for family members and other support people.

**Sexual Health Services – Department of Health and Human Services**  
Freecall 1800 675 859  
Provides clinical services such as STI screening, counselling and education.

**TasCAHRD** (03) 6234 1242  
Information and support line 1800 005 900  
[www.tascahrd.org.au](http://www.tascahrd.org.au)  
Information and support on HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C.

**Working It Out Inc. (WIO)**  
South (03) 6231 1200  
North (03) 6334 4013  
North West (03) 6432 3643  
[www.workingitout.org.au](http://www.workingitout.org.au)

Tasmania's gender and sexuality support and education service.

Some good websites

**Child and Youth Health website** [www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)

Information on health, wellbeing and development of children, young people and families. Information for parents, kids and teens.

**The Donor Conception Network (UK)** [www.dcnetwork.org](http://www.dcnetwork.org)

The Donor Conception Network (UK) booklets are aimed at parents of children aged 0 to 7, 8 to 11, and 12 to 16. Books written for children on conception via donor.

**Drug Education Network** [www.den.org.au](http://www.den.org.au)

This website provides a range of resources and fact sheets that may be useful for parents and includes a directory of Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drug Services around Tasmania.

**Gay and Lesbian Switchboard** [www.switchboard.org.au](http://www.switchboard.org.au)

A website that provides information to Tasmanian communities about GLBTI services and events. Includes information for families.

**Growing & Developing Healthy Relationships (GDHR)** [www.gdhr.wa.gov.au](http://www.gdhr.wa.gov.au)

A website to support teachers delivering relationships and sexual health education for primary and secondary students. A WA resource that may be useful for Tasmanian teachers and parents.

**Families Are Talking** [www.familiesaretalking.org](http://www.familiesaretalking.org)

This website and newsletter aims to 'empower parents and caregivers to communicate with their children about sexuality-related issues'.

**Family Planning Tasmania (FPT)** [www.fpt.asn.au](http://www.fpt.asn.au)

This website contains information about services and programs offered by FPT. It also has a range of fact sheets and includes the Making Choices Booklets and resources for both young people and parents about sexuality, growing up and pregnancy.

**Freedom Centre** [www.freedom.org.au](http://www.freedom.org.au)

Website for young people who are gay, lesbian, queer, transgender and questioning. Also has information for parents and professionals.

**Kids Free 2B Kids** [www.kf2bk.com](http://www.kf2bk.com)

Information for parents and carers on the increasing sexualisation of kids in the media, advertising, and clothing industries, and how to limit kids' exposure to these sexualised images.

**Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)** [www.pflagaustralia.org.au](http://www.pflagaustralia.org.au)

Parents, families and friends of lesbians and gays. Support system to understand and accept loved ones who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex with love and pride.

**The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada** [www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

This website includes a focus on information and tools for guiding your child down the path to becoming a sexually healthy, well-rounded adult. Information for parents and teens.

**The Victorian Better Health Channel** [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

This excellent website offers a wide range of health and wellbeing related issues. Some of the topics include: masturbation; menstrual cycle; puberty; acne; female genital mutilation; and circumcision.

## Sexual health websites specifically for kids or teens

### Get clued up [www.getcluedup.com.au](http://www.getcluedup.com.au)

An excellent website with straightforward information, written for young people and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

### Get The Facts youth website

[www.GetTheFacts.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.GetTheFacts.health.wa.gov.au)

Developed by WA Health, this website provides reliable information and support on sexual health, blood-borne viruses and relationships for youth aged 14 to 17 years.

### The Hormone Factory [www.thehormonefactory.com](http://www.thehormonefactory.com)

Developed by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, this website offers specific sexual and reproductive development information for parents and children (10 to 12 years). Check it out yourself before showing your children.

## Some good books and other written resources

### For parents and carers

- *Everything You Never Wanted Your Kids to Know About Sex (But Were Afraid They'd Ask): The Secrets to Surviving Your Child's Sexual Development from Birth to the Teens*, Richardson & Schuster

Great expertise and an intelligent guide to coping with a child's sexual maturation.

### For children aged 5 to 8

- *It's Not the Stork: A Book about Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families and Friends*, Robie H. Harris & Michael Emberley

The text is straightforward, informative, and personable. Facts are presented step-by-step, with humour.

- *Everyone's Got A Bottom – A Storybook For Children Aged 3–8 Years*, Family Planning Queensland

This is a tool for parents and carers to gently start a conversation with children about self-protection.

### For children aged 8 to 12

- *Boys and Puberty: Almost Everything Boys Will Ever Need to Know About Body Changes and Other Stuff!*, WA Department of Health

Easy to read and informative book for boys going through puberty. Physical and emotional changes discussed in plain language.

- *Girls and Puberty: Almost Everything Girls Will Ever Need to Know About Body Changes and Other Stuff!*, WA Department of Health

Easy to read and informative book for girls going through puberty. Discussion of body changes and the feelings that go with them.

- *Hair in Funny Places*, Babette Cole

In this book Mr and Mrs Hormone, two hairy monsters, mix potions that turn children into adults. We see some of the changes that result from these potions. *Hair in Funny Places* can be a good conversation starter, easing the way for more detailed discussions about puberty.

- *Let's Talk about Where Babies Come From*, Robie H. Harris.

This book includes topics such as How Babies Really Begin, Growing Up, What's Love?, Sperm and Egg Meet, Pregnancy, Birth and Adoption, and 'good' and 'bad' touches.

- *What's the Big Secret? Talking about Sex with Boys and Girls*, Laurene Krasny Brown & Marc Brown

This book covers topics such as Are boys and girls different on the inside? How do you tell girls and boys apart? Do girls and boys have the same feelings? Is sex a dirty word? What does being pregnant mean? How do you get a belly button? Tell me about when I was a baby?

- *Secret Boys' Business*, Fay Angelo, Heather Pritchard & Rose Stewart; illustrations Julie Davey

For older primary school children. A book to help boys understand the changes they go through when reaching puberty.

- *Secret Girls' Business*, Fay Angelo, Heather Pritchard & Rose Stewart; illustrations Julie Davey

This attractive book about periods will particularly appeal to younger girls. Suitable for all girls who are beginning this transition.

- *Special Boys' Business*, Fay Angelo, Heather Pritchard & Rose Stewart.

Supports boys with special needs, their parents and carers through the changes experienced at puberty.

- *Special Girls' Business*, Fay Angelo, Heather Pritchard & Rose Stewart.

About managing periods – for girls with special needs and their carers. It includes a handy hints section for mums, dads and carers, and another section especially for school staff.

- *Let's Talk About Sex: Growing Up, Changing Bodies, Sex and Sexual Health*, Robie H. Harris

At last! A book that tells pre-teens and teenagers what they actually need to know about sex. Informative, interesting, reassuring, responsible, warm and charming – with a generous splash of humour as well. What a great resource for 9 to 16 year olds.

### For teenagers

- *Puberty Girl*, Shushann Movsessian

This illustrated book lets young teens know what to expect, physically and emotionally.

- *Relationships, Sex and Other Stuff: A Few Things Teenagers Will Need to Know About Relationships, Sex and Other Stuff!*, WA Department of Health

Written for teenagers, this answers real questions (What if my heart gets broken? How do I learn how to kiss?) in a straightforward, helpful way.



- *Puberty Book: A Guide for Children & Teenagers*, Darvill & Powell

This Australian book gives children and teenagers accurate and up-to-date information about themselves, their bodies and growing up. In simple, straightforward language the authors discuss the changes that happen at puberty, sex and sexuality, health and looking after yourself, relationships, pregnancy and birth.

- *Boys' Stuff: Boys Talking About What Matters*, Wayne Martino & Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli

What do guys think about friends, sex, sport, drugs and everything else that matters? In *Boys' Stuff*, teenagers write about their lives. 'If I haven't done it by the time I'm 21, I'm going to cut it off and become a monk.' Johnny. 'I've never really attempted suicide. I merely went through the motions.' Keith

- *Girl Stuff*, Kaz Cooke

*Girl Stuff* has 'everything a girl needs to know about things such as friends, body changes, shopping, pimples, sizes, hair, embarrassment, what to eat, moods, smoking, handling love and heartbreak, exercise, guys, school stress, sex, beating bullies, your rights, drinking, cheering up, getting parents to take you seriously, why diets suck, drugs, earning money, confidence and being happy with your own true self.'

### For parents of children with special needs

- The article 'Sex Education for Children with Intellectual Disabilities' can be obtained at: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- The article 'Sexuality Education and Asperger's Syndrome: Information for Parents and Carers' can be obtained from: [www.fpq.com.au](http://www.fpq.com.au)

Other resources I have found:



# Endnotes

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