

“My parents were great about talking things through - whatever we asked. It made a big difference to the way we felt about ourselves and others.”

18 year old

Growing Up

Children and young people are learning about sex and relationships, not only from you, their parents, but from soaps, magazines, adverts, and their friends. They need and want their family to help them to sort out fact from fiction, to understand what is happening to their bodies as they grow older and to talk about their feelings and their relationships. Remember that the earlier you start talking the easier it will be to tackle some of the more difficult subjects as they grow up.

WHAT TO SAY WHEN:

Aged two to four **"What's this do?"**

Toddlers are into exploring everything and are getting interested in how their body works. This makes it an ideal time to start to talk about how your child's body will grow and change by for example, talking about what different bits of their bodies do. By doing this, you are building up their confidence about their body which over time will lead them to have pride in who they are and how their body is.

It's OK to be embarrassed! Equally the more open you are with your children, the less embarrassed they will be about asking questions in the future. Make your chats a part of everyday life. By making it completely normal to talk about growing up and relationships early on, you are encouraging your children to talk to you about anything that troubles them, now and in the future.

Aged four to eight **"How do babies get into tummies?"**

Kids of four and five are getting more interested in the biology of how things work and in other people's bodies. They are curious about pregnancy and birth and what will happen when they grow up. Even at this age, things they see on TV can puzzle them.

This is a great time for dads to start talking, particularly with their sons. Boys will then know they can turn to their dad whenever they need to talk about their body and the changes that will happen over the next few years. It doesn't matter whether a dad is not living with the family, the fact that they can talk is more important here than whether they live together.

It's time to talk about puberty. Boys and girls need to know about what puberty means both to them and to the opposite sex. Girls can start periods as early as eight. Schools are increasingly teaching about puberty as part of early sex education. If you find it difficult to talk about this, you could ask the teacher for any information or material which may help you explain body changes. Don't forget, it's not just girls who need to know about periods. Boys too need to understand what happens to a girl as she grows up.

Aged nine to twelve **"I don't want to talk about it!"**

This is the time when kids grow up very fast and when they begin to shut out parents and families, and start relying on their mates and the media for their facts. Parents are often bemused, worried and even saddened about the pace of change and how their young children seem to be desperate to grow up before their time. Girls can start wearing alarmingly grown up clothes; experiment with make up; seem to be obsessed about celebrity role models and demand they spend more and more time with their mates. Boys too become heavily influenced by role models and begin to spend less and less time with their parents.

Using stories from soaps, movies, song lyrics and books to get messages across can make it easier to talk about sex, relationships and feelings, and to fill in the gaps. By twelve, kids are beginning to be heavily influenced by what their mates are saying or doing and they may well be getting very misinformed. This is particularly true of boys who often say they learn much of what they know about sex from male friends. Messages about contraception and safe sex need to be made now. Once again, you can use stories from the media to bring up the subject and to reduce any feelings of embarrassment you might feel.

Teenagers **"I know all that stuff - leave it out."**

Being a parent of teenagers can be tough. Our sons and daughters may clam up overnight, sulk or do nothing but argue. They may say things that upset you, and do things that frighten you. The good news is that most children get through this - and so will you.

The world has changed since we were teenagers. Young people nowadays are faced with different problems and pressures. We can't ignore these things and nor can they. We need to be open about the risks they may be taking - from having sex to experimenting with drugs. They need help and advice that makes sense to them. And that means we must listen to them as well as expecting them to listen to us.

Most things about their world are changing; don't let your love be one of them. More and more teenagers are trying drink and drugs in their early teens, often encouraged by the press, TV and their mates. Young people often have sex for the first time - without using a condom - when they have been taking drugs or have been drinking too much. Many who have had sex after taking drugs or drinking wish it hadn't happened.

FURTHER HELP

If you need someone to talk to, try Parentline on 0808 800 2222 or email parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk. If you are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment, try our free textphone on 0800 783 6783. Parentline Plus produces information on parenting issues. Try our website for more information on parenting www.parentlineplus.org.uk

There are a number of excellent online sites and helplines which can help teenagers find out more. Some parents find it easier to tell their teenagers about these and suggest that they look at the facts. If you opt for this, remind them you are always there for them if they want to talk. You can make sure you know the latest facts from these sites and helplines as well. Other parents say that leaving magazines and leaflets written for young people around helps to break the ice. Most of the organisations below can help with this.

R U Thinking

Information, advice and guidance to young people 12-18 on sexuality and sexual health.

Helpline: 0800 28 29 30

www.ruthinking.co.uk

FFLAG

Works to combat prejudice and discrimination in the family, in school and in society.

Helpline: 0845 652 0311

www.fflag.org.uk

FRANK

Information and advice on drugs.

Helpline: 0800 77 66 00

www.talktofrank.com

ADFAM

Information for family members facing problems with drugs or alcohol.

www.adfam.org.uk

fpa

Information and advice on all aspects of sexual health.

Helpline 0845 122 8690

www.fpa.org.uk

Brook

Information and advice to young people under 25 years on all aspects of sexual health.

Helpline: 0800 0185 023

www.brook.org.uk

Drinkline

Information and advice on sensible drinking and alcohol misuse.

Helpline: 0800 917 8282

Parentline Plus: 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 1TL

Free Parentline: 0808 800 2222

Free textphone for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment: 0800 783 6783

Web: www.parentlineplus.org.uk Email: parentsupport@parentlineplus.org.uk

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