

There's No Place Like Home . . .



. . . for Sex Education

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This adaptation was made possible by the support of American Indian parents, physicians, therapists, teachers, community leaders, elders and young people. Let us honor and thank them for their contributions.

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There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Introduction: An Opportunity to Make a Difference

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About this version: Adaptation for American Indians

The resource book, **There's No Place Like Home ...for Sex Education** was first written in English as a series of newsletters to support parents in talking with their children about sex in an age-appropriate way. This book has since been translated into Spanish, Russian and Romanian. The decision to develop an adaptation of this resource book that is culturally appropriate to American Indians grew out of the realization that very few culturally sensitive materials about sexuality and reproductive health exist for American Indian families. A parent from any background will tell you that talking to their children about sex can be a challenge. It makes it that much more difficult when there is a lack of educational materials that are respectful of cultural needs and values.

As Native people, it is important for our children to learn healthy sexual attitudes in an atmosphere that supports our own cultural values. The underlying belief driving this project is that American Indian children should be learning their core values about sex and reproductive health at home. Because of the historical trauma experienced by Native people, many families still experience an intergenerational disconnect in communication of values.

In undertaking this project, we hoped to adapt **There's No Place Like Home ...for Sex Education** to be culturally sensitive to our needs and values so that American Indian parents have a resource to help them pass on their values about living a sexually healthy life.

The adaptation of this resource took place in partnership with the author, Mary Gossart at Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon (PPHSSO). It was funded by in part by PPHSSO and by a grant from the Herbert A. Templeton Foundation. Jacqueline Sequoia (Cherokee/Creek/Oconee) initiated this project after a needs assessment of culturally sensitive reproductive health education materials indicated a lack of resources for Native parents (needs assessment funded by the Compton Mentor Fellowship, Compton Foundation, Menlo Park, CA).

From the beginning, community participation was a top priority. Native advisory members in California and Oregon helped evaluate and improve the document. Members included American Indian physicians, health care providers, parents, community organizations, and educators. Talking Circles of Native parents and community members were conducted in San Diego County to learn what issues needed to be addressed in a more sensitive way and about how the document could be made more useful, etc. One talking circle with youth was also held to find out what they believe is the best way for their parents to talk to them about puberty and sexual issues.

Every effort was made to adapt this document to be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the Native communities. The diversity of opinions, customs, beliefs, values and historical experiences among our people are too great to count. Even within tribes, some customs vary. Rather than speak to the tribal/Native experience of any one group we have chosen to be inclusive and focus on general concepts that apply to most families regardless of their tribal background. Some examples contained within this document are tribe specific, but are only intended as examples, and we urge you to connect or reconnect with your own customs and traditions in sharing this resource with your community. It is important to acknowledge how each individual has a different experience as a Native person in today's world. We hope that our efforts to adapt this resource book to the needs of the Native community will be well received and that the information contained within will be a tool to help restore a healthy balance to our urban communities and reservations.

There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education



Acknowledgements

The adaptation of this document has been possible only with the assistance and support of many committed individuals and organizations. For all those who have helped make this project possible, we thank you for your time, commitment, sensitivity, creativity, honesty, and patience.

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About the Authors

Jacqueline Sequoia, part Cherokee/Creek/Oconee, began work in culturally sensitive sexuality education for American Indians during her Compton Mentor Fellowship. During this fellowship project year she completed a needs assessment of reproductive health education materials for American Indian communities.

Jacqueline received her Bachelors degree in Biology from Berea College and a Masters of Public Health in Epidemiology from San Diego State University. She is attending medical school and expects to receive her M.D. in 2009.

In addition to reproductive health, she is also interested in minority and underserved health issues. Throughout this time Jacqueline has been involved with the California Native American Research Center for Health (CA-NARCH), and expects to continue her commitment to the American Indian community during her career as a physician.

Mary Gossart has worked in the field of sexuality and health education since 1975. She been a classroom teacher, a university instructor, and has been a part of the education department at Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon where she holds the position of Vice President of Education.

In addition to "**There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education**", Mary has authored numerous published articles and has developed education sessions designed to promote family communication about sex. Her approach invites parents to gain awareness, learn new information and skills, and feel supported in a way that honors diverse values and beliefs.

Mary is also a parent. She credits her 23-year-old son, Lucas, with being one of her greatest gifts and teachers.

Planned Parenthood Health Services of Southwestern Oregon was founded in 1966 as an affiliate of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. The organization's mission is to ensure the right of all individuals to manage their sexual and reproductive health by providing health services, education and advocacy.

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To Teachers, Health Care Providers, Spiritual Leaders, and Tribal/Community Organizations

Today's children and youth are facing a difficult challenge. Sexuality and reproductive health have become more complex issues than they were in the days of our ancestors. Our young people need your help to face these changes in sexual attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and values.

American Indian families have faced challenges, such as boarding schools, that have disrupted and impaired the circle of communication between the generations that is critical for our youth to grow up with a strong foundation in their tribal values.

The importance of sexuality education has never been greater. Today, more than ever families, schools, and communities are looking for ways to work in partnership to provide that education.

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education is designed to promote that partnership. This resource book consists of **reproducible handouts which can be photocopied and distributed via schools, health care facilities/providers, religious organizations, tribal centers, community agencies, etc.** This resource can also be downloaded and printed by going to www.noplacelikehome.org. Four or more handouts are available for every age/grade level, pre-school through grade twelve. Each issue contains sexuality information relevant to a particular developmental stage, useful strategies, and communication hints that support families in the role of primary educators of their children.

This valuable tool assists families in communicating more openly about sexuality and can serve to:

- ⊕ Allow for the sharing of family and cultural values
- ⊕ Provide accurate information to children
- ⊕ Build effective decision-making skills
- ⊕ Counteract negative and exploitive sexual messages
- ⊕ Reinforce the value of tribal customs and traditions

Family communication about sexual issues can be a vehicle for shaping positive, affirming attitudes around sexuality, and it can help to reduce the consequences of sexual ignorance: embarrassment and discomfort, early sexual activity, unintended teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and exploitation. These problems hurt us all, not just the people involved.

For the health and well-being of our people, both tribal and urban, we have the responsibility to help re-establish the circle of communication and restore the knowledge of healthy sexuality to our communities.



YOU ARE WELCOME TO PHOTOCOPY THE ENCLOSED SET OF NEWSLETTER MASTERS AND PROVIDE THEM TO THE FAMILIES YOU SERVE.

As you distribute these informative newsletters, you seize the opportunity to make an important difference... to children, their families, and your community as a whole.

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To Family and other Caregivers

Dear Parents, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Guardians, and Caring Adults,

Today's children and youth are facing a difficult challenge. Sexuality and reproductive health have become more complex issues than they were in the days of our ancestors. Our young people need your help to face these changes in sexual attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and values.

Experience tells us that most parents and caregivers want to talk openly with their children about sexuality, yet often don't know how. When to start? What to say? How to best express the family and tribal values that you want so much to share with your children? These are a few of the issues surrounding family communication about sexuality.

Traditionally children learned values through stories, ceremonies, and teachings of the elders. Sexuality was a healthy, natural part of life and the great hoop offered daily opportunities to teach our children this value simply by watching nature. American Indian families have faced challenges, such as boarding schools, that have disrupted and impaired the circle of communication between the generations that is critical for our youth to grow up with a strong foundation in their tribal values.

The importance of sexuality education has never been greater. Today, more than ever families, schools, and communities are looking for ways to work in partnership to provide that education.

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education is designed to promote that partnership. This resource book consists of **reproducible newsletters** to assist you in your important role as the primary sexuality educator of your child. This resource can also be downloaded and printed by going to www.noplacelikehome.org. Four or five newsletters are available for every age/grade level, pre-school through grade twelve. Each issue contains sexuality information relevant to a particular developmental stage, useful strategies and communication hints which support you in your efforts. You are welcomed and encouraged to photocopy this material for your use and to share with family and neighbors who may also benefit from this resource.

Family-based sexuality education can:

- ⊕ Allow for the sharing of family and cultural values
- ⊕ Provide accurate information to children
- ⊕ Build effective decision-making skills
- ⊕ Counteract negative and exploitive sexual messages in the media
- ⊕ Reinforce the value of tribal customs and traditions

Family communication about sexual issues can be a vehicle for shaping positive, affirming attitudes around sexuality, and it can help to reduce the consequences of sexual ignorance: embarrassment and discomfort, early sexual activity, unintended teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, and exploitation. These problems hurt us all, not just the people involved.

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Cultural Aspects of Sex Education

Please provide this page to accompany any newsletters distributed from this resource guide

Commonly in our communities, extended family is called on to help raise children. Though often in the newsletters from this resource guide you may see the word "parent," we intend this to include all members of the child's "extended family" who fill the roll of parent. We honor the tradition that "It takes a village to raise a child" and want to acknowledge that there are many different members of the child's extended/adopted family that participate as "parents." Regardless of what type of guardian or caregiver you are, whether you are a grandparent, aunt or uncle, older sibling, adopted/foster parent, or other extended family, we honor your roll as a "parent" and respect you for your desire to help prepare and educate your child to make healthy and responsible sexual decisions.

Despite our best efforts, many Native parents feel unprepared and uncomfortable discussing sensitive issues such as sex, especially with our children. It is important for you to know that you are not alone; most Native parents also feel embarrassed to bring up these issues. Realize also that as a people we are overcoming this and getting through to our youth. Historical trauma scars the hearts and souls of our people and each day as individuals, we are faced with issues that challenge us to heal. The scars can be passed to the next generation or each of us can do our part to heal the circle. Boarding schools have stripped our people of Native parenting skills and non-Native ideologies have taught us to feel ashamed of our bodies and our sexuality. It is no surprise that many Native parents don't know where to begin when it comes to teaching their children about healthy sexuality. Our responsibility is to the generations of the future to help them grow up with knowledge that sex is a natural part of life and that we must have respect and honor for ourselves and partners.

Native elders have shared that they witness derogatory and negative attitudes toward sex far more often than positive and respectful attitudes. One grandmother shared that the best way to raise a child with a healthy, respectful attitude towards sex is to have a positive respectful attitude yourself. How can we, as Native people, raise our children to see sexuality as a natural and normal part of life, as a gift from the creator? This is your challenge as a family member raising a child. Putting the embarrassment aside and being honest about the facts is difficult, but we owe it to our people and future generations to teach a respectful attitude towards our bodies and our culture.

Native elders have suggested that parents search for words in their Native language for gender roles, body parts, activities, etc, that will help them include cultural values in their teaching. Many tribes still practice ceremonies that celebrate the development of a child to a young adult. Learning about how your tribe honors the natural processes of growth and sharing those traditions with your child can reinforce the value of culture, while strengthening your relationship with your child.

When we say "talking about sex" or "sex education" we really mean talking about a wide range of sexual issues such as: relationships, puberty, making decisions about sex, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual protection, birth control, sexual abuse/rape, masturbation, and negotiating skills. And that isn't the whole list. As Native people, we often must walk two roads. Each road has its challenges and lessons. Our young people must learn the skills to walk both roads. How will you help your child learn these skills?

***Two ways of life, two views of sexual activity.
You have an important role in helping your child choose his/her path.***

View of Sex

Where seen?

How is sex presented?

Aspects of sex emphasized?

Acknowledges risks?

Committed relationships encouraged?

White road

T.V., Billboards, Movies, Internet

Often focused on physical dimension

Attractive physical appearance and early sexual activity

Inconsistent

Sometimes

Red road

Ceremonies, behavior of elders and spiritual leaders

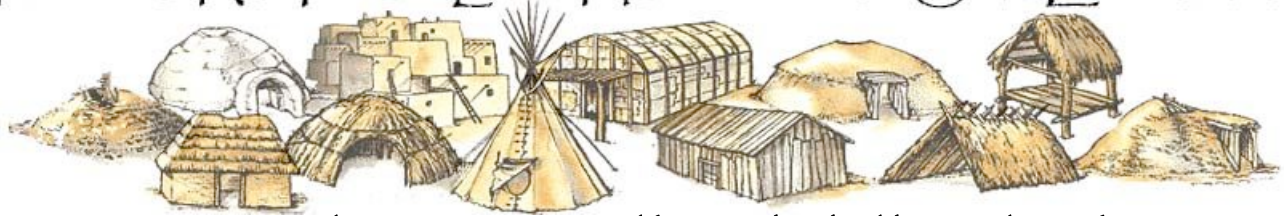
Multi-dimensional: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical

Respect for partner, cultural traditions, alternative activities preferred to postpone sexual activity

Sometimes, depends on family

Always

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Age 3

It is never too early ... Start your 3 year old on a path to healthy sexual attitudes

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Growing up with healthy attitudes

By age three, your child has already received a wealth of messages about sexuality... 3 years worth! **Remember, sexuality is a broad topic... and not just about sex.** Just think about it:

- When infants are touched and cuddled, they learn that they are loved and lovable.
- Choices of clothing, toys (dolls vs. trucks), playtime activities all present messages about male/female roles and expectations.
- Seeing a brother, sister, or parent in the shower teaches about physical differences between males and females.
- A parent's willingness or reluctance to respond openly and honestly to the question, "How does the baby come out?" conveys a particular attitude about the subject of sex.

Children begin forming attitudes and learning values about sex from the day they are born. Even very young children deserve thoughtful, purposeful sexuality education. As a parent or caregiver, you are your child's most important sex educator. Your child has learned your values and attitudes toward sexuality all along by hearing your responses and watching your reactions. You have been educating your child about sex through your words, actions and even through your silence. The family experiences you shape for your child will determine to what extent s/he develops positive, healthy feelings and attitudes about sexuality.

Too much too soon?

You needn't worry about telling your child too much too soon. (Be more concerned about your child learning too little, too late.) Children simply absorb what they can and quickly grow bored with the rest (you know the signs: glazed eyes, yawning, leaving the room...).

Nevertheless, your comments are not wasted. Your child may not understand all the detail, but your willingness to talk about these issues conveys the message that mom and dad are "askable". When parents are approachable and respond openly and lovingly, they set the stage for healthy family sex education.

Teachable Moments

Q: Shouldn't I just wait until my child asks?

A: Children are interested in sexuality long before they can verbalize the questions. For example, a preschooler may want to watch daddy in the shower or touch mommy's pregnant belly. These times present ideal "teachable moments" to pass along lessons on anatomy, reproduction and birth. These opportunities also affirm your willingness to discuss sexual issues with your children. This helps establish an atmosphere of comfort and trust which encourages children to seek additional sexual information from parents in the future.

Is your sexism showing?

During the pre-school years, parents have some of the greatest opportunities to influence their children's sexual attitudes - including ones about gender expectations. It's a wonderful time to plant the seed that both boys and girls are capable of just about anything they wish. When parents are careful to avoid stereotyping male/female roles, children learn that life options need not be limited by their gender. This awareness does wonders for their self-esteem.

Take advantage of the many simple opportunities to broaden your child's perspective with regard to sex role expectations:

- **Share** household chores.
- **Allow and encourage** children to play with toys and take part in games that cross traditional lines. It's fine for boys to play with dolls and for girls to play football.
- **Read and tell** stories to your child - ones in which males and females are portrayed in a variety of roles.
- **Pay attention to language** that implies gender role limitations (i.e. "fireman" vs. "firefighter"). Use "he or she" in reference to doctors, nurses, etc. It's awkward, but makes an important point.

Simplistic? Pointless? Don't let the subtlety fool you. When parents refuse to pigeonhole male/female expectations, they allow their child's "self" to blossom.

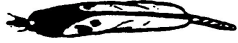
There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



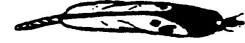
Age 3

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Honesty is the Best Policy



As Native people, we pass on our heritage to our children through stories and song. Smiling Wind may have prayed to her ancestors for a child and awoke on a spring morning to find a baby wrapped in white elk skin at her side. It is important as we tell these stories that we also express to our children that the baby grew inside its mother, Smiling Wind, for nine months. It is important to balance the stories of our tribal past with our modern knowledge of health and reproduction. If your only response to your child's question about where babies come from is the story of Smiling Wind, s/he might believe s/he just appeared in bed with you one day.

When your child asks you a serious question about where s/he came from, or any other sexual question, share your culture, tell your traditional stories, and supplement with accurate information. Children's questions deserve truthful answers - scaled to their level of understanding, of course. For example, when told that a baby is growing in mommy's tummy, a 3-year-old, whose view of the world is quite literal, may wonder, "Why would mommy eat the baby?" The image becomes one of baby and food together inside mommy's stomach (tummy). A more helpful answer would be, "A baby grows

inside a special place in the mommy's body. It's called the uterus." Simple, truthful answers prevent confusion. Beyond confusion, honesty can prevent a sense of mistrust that might develop if a child is only told by her parents that an eagle brought her, and later she discovers the truth. Care must be taken. When parents share factual explanations, the message implied is that sex is a subject to talk about openly and honestly.

When a young child asks, "Where did I come from?" a parent may at first say, "What a fine question! Do you have any ideas about that?" This accomplishes four things. It: affirms the question; clarifies what the child is really asking (S/he may simply mean "what city," in which case you're off the hook); buys the parent some time to collect his/her thoughts; and provides a sense of how much the child may already know.

The next response can be something simple and honest: "You started as a tiny cell inside mommy's body." This alone may well satisfy the child (although probably not), yet it leaves the door open for further discussion. The point is, honesty really is the best policy. There's certainly no need at this stage to deliver a lengthy description of intercourse, conception and birth. That's not what your 3-year-old is interested in now. S/he just wants some basic information. So relax. For the young child, sex doesn't have the same emotional significance as it does for an adult. Keeping this in mind can be a great help to parents as they encounter their children's normal sexual curiosities.

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There's a Time and Place ... Or Is There?

Pre-school children fondle their genitals for many reasons. They may be sleepy or bored, nervous or upset... and it's comforting; they may be in circle time listening to a story, or engrossed in a TV show. Pre-school children also fondle their genitals because it feels good. If parents find this hard to acknowledge, perhaps it's in the challenge of accepting that children are sexual beings.

Masturbation is a normal part of development. Most experts agree that this can be a healthy expression of sexuality, regardless of age. However, some people disapprove of masturbation for religious or other reasons.

The way in which parents react to their child's genital play is important. Punishing, scolding, or pulling the child's hand away sends a message that the genitals are bad or dirty. It can foster guilt, shame and embarrassment.

Parents who disapprove of masturbation could explain to their child - calmly and lovingly - that they believe this behavior isn't acceptable. Simply telling the

child, "STOP THAT!" is rarely effective ... as is trying to distract them with another activity.

Many parents do not object to their child's genital play, yet feel compelled (and rightfully so) to discourage its occurrence say, in the middle of the grocery store.

It's perfectly fine to respond with something like: "Sara, I know it feels good when you touch your genitals. And it's something you do in private - not where other people can see you." This sends a message about appropriate behavior and respect for others. At the same time, sexuality is kept in a positive light.

Parents who accept masturbation may worry that their child is "doing it too much." Children will stop when they are satisfied, or if they become physically uncomfortable. Compulsive masturbation - compulsive *anything* - may indicate a problem. If a parent notices his child is masturbating to the point where it interferes with other normal activities, it is time to consult a physician or other professional.

The "Askable" Parent

Attending to your child's sex education may be an awesome task. The reality is you are the ideal person for the job. After all, you can best convey the family values and beliefs surrounding this issue. Keep in mind a few tips to smooth the journey:

- ✓ **Parents: talk with one another** about the messages you want to give to your child about sex.
- ✓ **Anticipate** sexual questions and behaviors. Plan and practice your responses.
- ✓ **Answer questions as they arise.** Replies such as, "Not now" and "You don't need to know that," teach children it's not ok to ask. You can delay a discussion with "This isn't a good time now. Let's talk after dinner." Then follow through!
- ✓ **Tell your child** if you're uncomfortable. A comment like, "This is hard for me to talk about, but I'm willing to try" is wonderful! S/he will appreciate your honesty.
- ✓ **Answer simply and honestly**, leaving the door open for further discussion.
- ✓ **Initiate discussion** about sex. Ask, "Have you ever wondered about how you were born?" Use picture books; visit a pregnant friend.
- ✓ **Use everyday events** as "teachable moments" for passing along family and tribal messages about sexuality.

Your child's initiation into the lifetime process of sexual learning can be wonderful or difficult. You can choose.

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Names for Body Parts

An ear is an ear and a penis is a penis, not a “wee-wee;” a vagina is a vagina, not a “down there.” When parents avoid using correct names for sexual body parts, the message is that these parts are somehow different or that there is something wrong or unmentionable about them. This can result in children learning to be embarrassed or ashamed of their genitals.

Studies have shown the value of teaching children the proper names for sexual body parts. Aside from promoting a positive sexual attitude, accurate terms are empowering. For example, **if a child is trying to describe an injury or inappropriate sexual touch, s/he needs to be equipped with language more precise than “down there.”**

Frequently a child may refer to sexual body parts using terms s/he's heard from friends. It's perfectly fine to say something like, “Some people call it a “wee wee,” but that's just a made-up word. The real name is “penis” and that's the word we like you to use.” Such a simple, matter of fact response may seem somewhat trivial to us. To a child however, it's an important lesson - one which encourages respect and a healthy attitude toward his body and sexuality in general. This is a good time to share names for body parts in your Native language. Your tribal resource center is an excellent place to start looking for this information if you don't know it.

About this time, a girl begins to wonder what happened to *her* penis, and a boy wants to know “what those are” (pointing to mommy's breasts). Opportunities abound for sharing information on sexuality, growth and development. You will have to decide how you wish to handle your child's questions. Here are some ideas about how you might respond:



What happened to my penis?

You never had one. Only a boy has a penis. A girl has a clitoris.



Can I see where the baby came out of you?

The baby came out through an opening between my legs called the vagina. I prefer not to show you my vagina because it's a private part of my body. Would you like to look at a book on how babies are born?



Why does Paul stand up to pee, and I have to sit?

It's easier for girls to urinate sitting down. Their “pee” - the real name is urine - comes out through a small opening near the vagina. A boy urinates from his penis.



Can I have a baby when I get big?

Only a woman can have a baby, Johnny. She has a special place in her body called the uterus where the baby grows. Daddies help to make babies. You can be a daddy when you grow up if you want to.

Children are seeking basic information at this stage, and deserve simple, *honest* answers. The important thing is for parents to respond in a supportive manner. It's a nice time to get a little practice. Take advantage of the easy questions now... it will help you respond to the hard ones later.

Talking about Touches

Sexual abuse is a very real threat to young children who often lack the vocabulary and language skills to communicate what has happened to them. You can help protect your children by helping them understand about touching. Sexual abuse comes in many forms and so it is important for your child to know when touch is appropriate or not appropriate. Examples of times when it might be appropriate for a grownup to touch your child's penis or vulva include at the doctors office or during bathing. It is also important to explain that a child should never be asked to touch the private parts of a grown up. Young children will often believe whatever a grownup tells them, and so it is important that your child hears from you first about what kinds of touch are okay and what kinds aren't!

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Show Me Yours and I'll Show You Mine...

At age 3, a child is intensely curious about bodies - and not just her own. There's particular fascination with sex differences and body functions. This interest may be demonstrated in a variety of ways: "playing doctor," wanting to watch mom/dad in the bathroom, genital play, comparing body parts to other gender friends or siblings.

Hmmm. Your 3-year-old Jenny and her little friend Will are playing quietly upstairs - *too* quietly. What are those kids up to? Uh-oh. Jenny's door is closed. Resisting the urge to waltz right in (you've been teaching her about privacy these days - respecting closed doors and all that), you knock. Giggling bubbles up from within Jenny's room and you think you hear a faint "come in"... so you do. There stand Jenny and Will thoroughly enjoying that classic preschool pastime, "playing doctor." They have shed their clothes and are busily examining each other.



Now what do you do?!

Option 1- You could respond with shock and anger:

"What are you two doing? Put your clothes on *right now*, and don't ever let me catch you at that again! Will, I'm taking you home!"

Message: The children are bad; curiosity about bodies is wrong; nudity is wrong. This of course leaves the children feeling confused, ashamed and hurt. After all, they were just acting on a normal 3-year-old's interest in bodies.

Option 2- Perhaps you remain unruffled and acknowledge the children's curiosity:

"It looks like you two are interested in how boys' and girls' bodies are different. While you put your clothes on, I'll get a picture book we can look at that explains all about bodies."

Message: It's ok to be curious about bodies; I prefer you keep your clothes on; I'm willing to help you learn.

There are a number of ways a parent might react to this type of situation. **When choosing your response, remember to see the behavior from a child's perspective.** Pre-school children are fascinated with bodies. Their desire to check out the differences between "yours and mine" is a natural part of their developing sense of self and sexual identification.

Since "playing doctor" is universally popular among young children, it's likely you'll be dealing with it in your own family. Plan your response ahead of time, keeping in mind the messages you wish to express. In this way, rather than reacting in a knee-jerk, perhaps negative manner, you can offer a thoughtful, positive response.

A final thought...

No matter how you deal with this situation, it's important to discuss it with the other child's parents. They may or may not agree with how you handled things, but will appreciate being informed. It gives them a chance to convey their own family values and beliefs to their child.

HELP!!!

Relax. There's a lot of help out there... in the form of books, films, classes, and resource people. Community schools and colleges may offer parenting classes that include sexuality education. Planned Parenthood is an excellent source of speakers, books and pamphlets. Your local Indian Health Service, your county health department, private physicians, family counselors and spiritual leaders and especially elders all have valuable insights into family-based sexuality education.

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Age 4

A four year old learns by asking questions ... LOTS of them!

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Sex Is No Secret to a Four Year Old

Just how much sexuality education has your child had by age 4? Plenty. And where has most of it come from? Probably you... hopefully in thoughtful, purposeful and loving ways.

Families are teaching about sexuality every day...from the moment their child is born. Showing love and affection to children - touching, hugging, cuddling...these are all ways of giving positive messages about sexuality.

How parents and caregivers respond (or not) to a child's natural curiosity about sexual differences, body parts, where babies come from, etc. – certainly these present loud and clear messages about sexuality.

Beyond the home front, children also receive plenty of sex education - some of it negative, or at least questionable. Media messages about sex bombard the

senses...from billboards to TV, magazines and music. You may think your 4-year-old is oblivious to these messages. S/he isn't. So why not use them as opportunities to share your own values and attitudes around sexuality?

At age four, your child may not fully understand your message, but one thing will be clear: it's important to talk about sex openly and honestly.

Even at pre-school, children share lots of (mis)information about sex with each other. Some of their ideas can be pretty wild... and they may not check them out with you.

Considering all this "sex education" that goes on with or without parent consent, you'd be wise to get your two cents worth in too!

Wait a Minute. Haven't We Discussed This?

Don't be surprised if your 4-year-old's sexual questions are the very ones you thought were taken care of when s/he was three. Throughout your child's early years, you will be called upon to repeat the same "sexplanations" again and again... and yet again. A 4-year-old learns by asking questions - LOTS of them!

As you respond to sexual questions **patiently**, **openly**, and **honestly**, you let your children know:



"You're important to me. I am willing to take time with you," and

"I'm glad you asked me. This is a good topic for us to talk about."

Your child's sexual curiosity may surface at the most inopportune times: during dinner at grandma's, at a ceremony, in line at the checkout stand. If you're unwilling to discuss it at that moment, let your child know it's the *timing* that's bad, not the *question*. "I'm glad you asked me, Michael. We'll have time to talk about it on the way home." This is far more supportive and positive than a stern "Hush, Michael!" or worse yet, silence.

So your child's questions cause a bit of embarrassment, or the timing's awkward. Be happy s/he feels comfortable asking you.

When young children don't ask mom and dad about sex, it isn't that they're not curious.

Typically they've learned it isn't ok to ask, or that the subject causes discomfort. Having such feelings reinforced as they grow up, children often turn elsewhere to satisfy their sexual curiosity... to friends, the media, personal experimentation. The unfortunate result is misinformed, vulnerable youth.

Clearly, parents want to provide (and children want to receive) information and guidance in the area of sexuality. You can make that happen!

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Curiosity about Bodies and Nudity

"At what point do I insist that my child - or my partner - wear clothes around the house?" Parents often wonder what impact nudity in the family has on children.

While their children are young, many parents have a relaxed attitude about nudity. Beyond the toddler stage however, especially with children of the other gender, parents may begin to question its appropriateness. Parents should examine their comfort level around being undressed in front of their children. Comfort suggests a feeling of "ok-ness" or self-acceptance about the body. This is a healthy attitude for children to learn.

During pre-school years, nudity among family members in natural situations (taking a shower, getting undressed) provides opportunities for children to find out about body parts and sexual differences... between males and females, kids and grown-ups.

If parents are uncomfortable being undressed around their children, they can certainly use another method, such as picture books, to teach about bodies. It's important to talk with children about when and where nudity may be appropriate (ie. at home, with family members vs. in public

places). A natural follow-up could be a discussion about respecting privacy.

Often the whole question of nudity in the home takes care of itself when the young child (perhaps as early as age 4) begins to act a bit more modestly. S/he may be less inclined to be seen undressed in front of others, and may even prefer that parents remain clothed. Families should respect those feelings.


Realize too, that many children may be quite comfortable with nudity in the family, even through their elementary school years. Often as children grow older, they will ask for explanations about why things they did when they were younger aren't okay anymore. For example:

Q. Mommy, why can't I take showers with you anymore? Steven showers with his mom.

A. That's something each family decides on, David, depending on what they feel ok about. I like having my privacy now when I shower.

This is reinforced when parents in turn respect their children's right to privacy.

Reinforce the importance of respecting the privacy of others by showing your child that you respect his or her privacy.

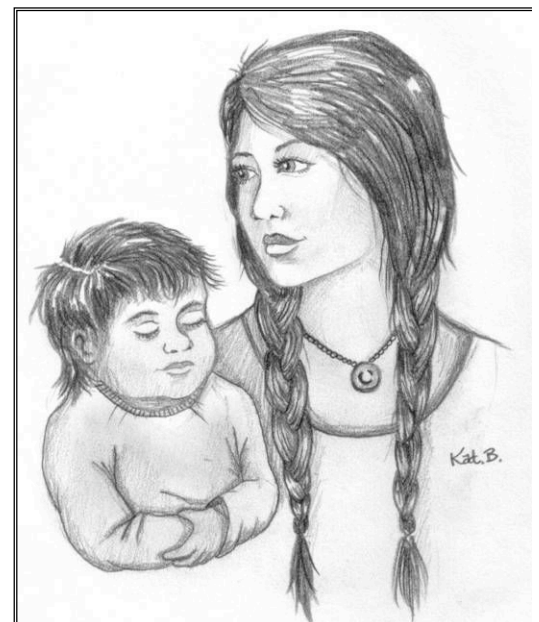
 Knocking on a closed door, allowing private use of the bathroom - these let your child know you honor his/her wish for privacy.

Somebody's Sleeping in My Bed

Even at four years of age, many children love to climb into bed and snuggle with their parents. It's safe, warm, cozy... all those things that feel good to a little one. Some parents worry about allowing their children into bed with them. **Many experts discourage parents from routinely allowing their children to sleep with them. Yet there's certainly no harm in a morning family cuddle in bed.** It can be a great time to talk, read a book, and tell stories... all good fun and sharing time.

If your 4-year-old is wanting to sleep with you, try to find out why. Maybe she's afraid of the dark and dislikes being alone in her room; maybe he's feeling the need for more attention or physical closeness to you.

Once you've identified the underlying reason behind your child's request, you can then attend to the real issue. Satisfying the basic needs of the child (security, love, etc.) will often resolve his/her desire to sleep with mom and dad.



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Speaking of Privacy...

You forgot to remind Ricky not to enter your bedroom without knocking; or maybe he's concerned about the noises, and thinks mommy and daddy are fighting. Whatever the reason, there he stands. You're caught in "the act!"

Keep your cool!

While it's the ultimate challenge for parents to remain cool under such circumstances, it's important that they do so.

AVOID:

- **Yelling** ("What are you doing here? Get back to your room!") or
- **Scolding** ("How dare you come into our room without knocking!")

Acting this way causes Ricky to feel hurt and shame. Add this to the confusion he's experiencing, and you may have a very upset, frightened child.

INSTEAD TRY TO:

- **Stay calm and reassuring** ("Daddy and I are playing together and loving each other. This is our private time, so please go back to your room.")
- **Reinforce respect for privacy** at a later time ("Remember, when our door is closed, please knock and wait for us to say 'come in'.")

Through a child's eyes and ears, intercourse can seem like "daddy is hurting mommy." If caught in the act, parents need to be calm and reassuring. Later, parents can follow up, repeating that mom and dad were playing and loving each other, not fighting. It's also a chance to reinforce respect for privacy. Handled with understanding and love, this can be yet another "teachable moment" (although a challenging one) for providing valuable lessons about sex.

What Did You Say!?

Dad says (or rather, hollers): "Mary! Don't ever let me hear you say that word again!" *He wants Mary to learn that "dirty" language is unacceptable.*

Mary thinks: "Ok. I'll only say it when you're not around." *She realizes that certain words make daddy holler. She's not sure why. She doesn't know what the words mean... or why they're not ok. What's really confusing is, why doesn't daddy holler at mommy or his friends when they use those words? And why does he say them?*

Now... how successful do you think dad has been in getting his message across to Mary? Typically, parents are upset when their children repeat "dirty" words they've heard at pre-school (or at home, for that matter). In deciding how to respond, it's helpful to understand the reasons a child may be using those words:

S/he wants attention: In this case, the parent may choose to ignore the initial use of such language.

S/he wants information: A young child often uses inappropriate language without knowing what it means. S/he may sense the word is shocking or provocative, and want confirmation. A parent might ask, "**Mary, what does that word mean?**" **then offer the correct definition.** "**Is that what you want to say?**" This response neutralizes the word, provides information, and demonstrates the parent's willingness to talk about sexual issues/terminology, etc.

S/he is angry/frustrated: It's important that parents acknowledge those feelings, and help the child choose alternative words to express them. "**You sound angry. That's ok, but I don't like the words you're using. Can you think of different words to show your anger?**"

Certain parent responses can be counterproductive, resulting in a child's continued use of offensive language: laughing implies the behavior is cute or funny; strong reaction and severe punishment may lead a child to become angry or resentful; ignoring the behavior for an extended period of time implies that it's acceptable. Finally parents and caregivers need to remember to monitor their own language. Since young ones love to imitate grown-ups, it's unrealistic to expect they'll parrot only "correct" behavior.

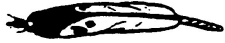
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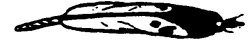
Age 4

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Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse



It's an unfortunate reason to talk to the kids about sexual issues - and it's a compelling one. Sexual abuse: a subject we shudder to even think about, much less talk about. One of the most concealed and most disturbing crimes against children, sexual abuse occurs far more frequently than we'd like to believe. In mainstream society, an estimated 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys, or more, are sexually abused during childhood. Ten percent of all victims are less than six years of age. Estimates are much higher for Native children. Our cultural teaching of respect for elders can backfire sometimes with children fearing that they are disrespecting their culture and community by reporting an elder who has abused them. Additional challenges faced by our communities such as drug and alcohol abuse also increase the impact of sexual abuse on our communities and reservations.

Over 70% of these cases involve a person known by the child, such as a step-parent or babysitter; almost half of the abusers, the overwhelming majority of whom are male, are family members.

Sexual abuse and rape was a weapon of our oppressors, and we as Native people are still healing from that historical trauma experienced by our ancestors. The cycle of sexual abuse continues through generations and yet it is our own inability to communicate about it that allows it to continue. Open and honest communication about sexuality and sexual abuse is essential to heal our people and protect our children.

One of the best approaches to protecting children against sexual abuse is to help them be empowered. To do this, they need awareness, knowledge and skills:

Explain the difference between good and bad touching.

- Tell your child that **good touch feels comforting, pleasant and welcome...** (examples might be hugging or cuddling - as long as it is appropriate and with permission)
- **bad touch hurts physically or is uncomfortable in some way** (being pinched; having someone touch your penis/vulva when you don't want them to; a hug that is too tight - or forced upon you).

Impress on your child that ***"your body is your own, and you have the right to say 'no' if anyone touches you in a way you don't like."***

Allow your child to decide whether s/he wants to give or receive hugs and kisses. Insisting that Jimmy kiss grandpa is unfair. Offer affection to your youngster rather than impose it. Substitute ***"Can I have (or give you) a hug?"*** for ***"Give me a hug."*** This helps your child feel a sense of control over his/her body.

Emphasize that no adult or older child has the right to touch a child's penis (vulva, etc), or to ask a child to touch his/her genitals. Explain that this includes family members. ***"I need you to tell me if that ever happens. It's important that you let me know... and not be worried that I might be upset."***

Tell your child s/he does not have to blindly obey all adults. ***"It's wrong for a grown-up to ask you to lie or steal. It is wrong for a grown-up to touch you, or ask to be touched, in the bad ways we talked about. You should say 'no,' then come tell me."***

Differentiate between "secret" and "surprise." A "surprise" is something which is ok to reveal at some point (like a birthday present); **tell your child s/he should not be told to keep secrets from you.**

Practice "what if" with your child. ***"What if a stranger asked you to help find her lost dog; or the babysitter promised you more ice cream if he could touch your penis/vulva? What would you say/do?"*** Rehearse exact words and actions to help your child react in uncomfortable or threatening situations.

These suggestions merely scratch the surface. Several excellent resources are available to help parents and children prevent sexual abuse: Call your local Indian Health Service, Tribal Resource Center, Planned Parenthood, health department, physician or sexual assault center for additional suggestions.

The point is that awareness, communication, and assertiveness serve a child well.

Instill these in your children, and you promote their protection and safety.

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Age 5

Kids Need to Know ... parents need to tell them.

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By age 5, your child has a good idea about where you stand on the subject of sex...

and whether it's ok to even *talk* about it. From birth, children receive an array of messages about sexuality from their parents/caregivers:

- **infants** who are held and cuddled learn about loving touch;
- **toddlers** exploring their bodies quickly discover their sexual parts - and their parents' reactions to their exploration;
- the **pre-schooler** who asks her dad, "Where's *my* penis?" becomes aware if sexual questions are ok to discuss (or not) in her family.

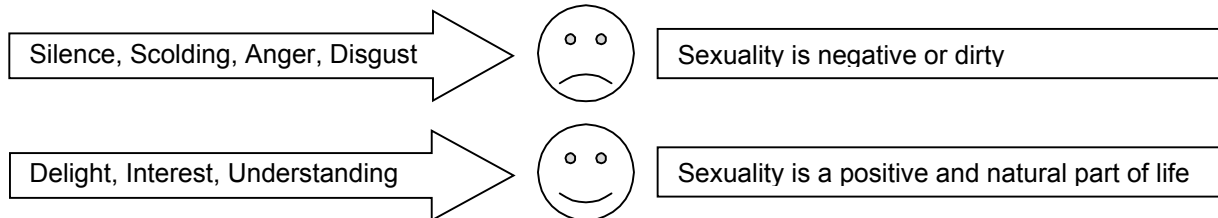
Your 5-year-old has had a bit of experience in the world: interactions with family; exposure to other children and differing beliefs; TV, movies, the Internet, magazines, advertising, music... All of these things influence the developing sense of sexuality, either directly or indirectly. **Children cannot avoid the sexual messages that permeate life today.**

Natural situations, everyday moments and events lend themselves to a child's sex education. With or without your consent they occur, as the life and learning processes of your children unfold.

You can help your child develop a healthy attitude about his or her sexuality by responding to questions in a loving, honest way, thereby teaching that sexuality is a wonderful part of being human.

Ways you respond to your child's questions about sexuality:

Message your child gets:



Open and honest family talks about sex create trust and allow parents to pass along important family and cultural values. Children have the opportunity to gain accurate information and a positive regard for sexuality.

The time to start this dialogue is early - earlier in fact than many parents would suspect. In today's complex world, perhaps even more so than in the past, children need and deserve thoughtful, purposeful sex education **from day one**. But it's never too late to begin. And while you as a parent will not be your children's *only* sex educator, you can be (and *are*) their **first and most important**.

"Worried about how people will react to your openness with your child about sex?"

"But what if he goes around the rez, sharing this information with all his friends? Then what?"

Everyone has his/her own feelings about sexuality and about messages that are appropriate for children. Chances are you'll find family members, friends and neighbors whose ideas and values are very different from your own. This can challenge your resolve to communicate openly and honestly with your child about sex. It may help to keep in mind what's at stake here... and **what's more important: your child's needs, or the opinion of others?**

It is **IMPORTANT** for your child to be able to depend on you to respond to sexual questions and concerns with respect, support and honesty, regardless of what other people think. Let's face it. Kids frequently compare information with each other about sex, whether parents want them to or not. Usually it's *misinformation*. The bottom line here is that children deserve quality sex education. Parents need not apologize for providing that education - no matter *who* objects.

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Here We Go Again... "I know I've already answered that question"

The sexual curiosities of your 5-year-old aren't so different from the ones at ages 3 and 4. You may think, "I'm *sure* I told you where babies come from," or "We've already discussed what "belly-buttons" are all about, remember?" Your 5-year-old probably *doesn't* remember. There's so much to learn... and this is complex stuff. Maybe your child *does* remember (sort of), and is just checking to make sure it's still ok to talk about sexual issues with you. Please be patient and supportive.

The goal of family sex education goes beyond the mere presentation of facts. **Ideally, families seek to nurture in their children positive attitudes toward their bodies, gender, and sexuality.** One way to do this is to continue to be "askable" ... encourage sexual questions, acknowledge and discuss sexual behaviors, and initiate conversations about sexual issues.



Different families and tribes have different values and attitudes

As your 5-year-old becomes more involved with others (in pre-school, kindergarten, etc.), s/he will also be exposed to differing family attitudes and values. It can be terribly confusing, so it's important that parents reemphasize personal beliefs and values. For example:

Johnny: *Scott's Dad got really mad today. He yelled at us for taking our clothes off.*
Dad: *What did he say?*
J: *He said we were nasty. We told him we were just pretending to be doctors, but he yelled at us again and made us put on our clothes.*

COMPARE

Scott's dad was alarmed at seeing his son and another boy undressed, looking at and touching each other's body. Perhaps he worried this was "abnormal," maybe he was upset because he believes nudity is inappropriate. His anger left the children feeling hurt, ashamed and "nasty."



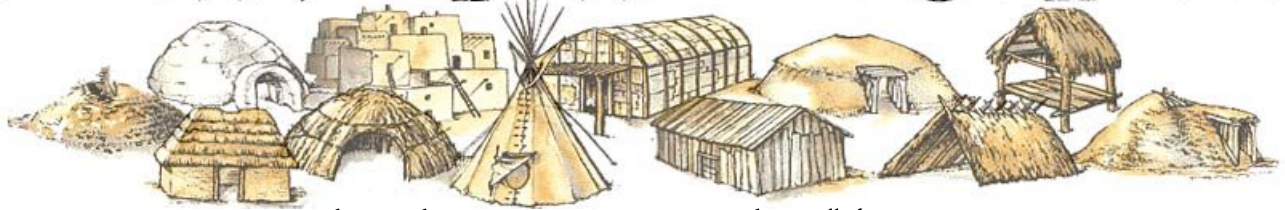
Johnny's dad believes that "playing doctor" is a normal childhood experience - between same *and* other gender children. At this age, they're fascinated by bodies - how they look, feel, work ... and are especially interested in "how yours compares to mine."

- He realizes that often parents forget that a child's sexual behavior does not have the same emotional significance that it does for adults.
- He also appreciates that families have different values and beliefs surrounding sex.
- His concern right now is to restore Johnny's positive feelings about himself, his body and his sexuality.

Dad: *Why do you suppose Scott's dad was so angry?*
Johnny: *He thought we were being nasty.*
D: *Do you think you were?*
J: *No.*
D: *Neither do I. You and Scott were interested in finding out about bodies. That's pretty normal.*
J: *Scott's dad thinks it's bad.*
D: *Well, he may believe it's not ok for kids to play without their clothes on. Some families feel that way. So when you're playing with Scott, be sure to respect that, and keep your clothes on. It's ok to be curious about bodies. In fact, I have a book that shows all kinds of bodies, and how they work. Let's read it!*

Johnny has heard some valuable messages: his dad reinforced his willingness to discuss sexual issues with him and emphasized a positive attitude toward sexuality. He acknowledged that family beliefs differ, and it's important to respect that. Good work, dad!

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Another Tough One ... Masturbation – Facts You Should Know

There's no right or wrong answer for the question of masturbation. Each family must make a decision based upon personal values and beliefs. Along with this guideline, consider the following:

- Most children fondle their genitals - often when they're tired, bored, nervous - as well as for pleasure!
- Masturbation is normal; not masturbating is also normal.
- There is no physical or psychological harm associated with masturbation. If a child masturbates excessively (interfering with other normal activities), it may indicate a problem. Parents would want to call their physician or health care provider.
- In most Native cultures, masturbation is considered natural and healthy. However, every family has different religious and cultural values. It is important to explain your values to your child in a calm and loving way.

If you disapprove of masturbation:

Express to your child why you disapprove without causing your child to feel ashamed or guilty.

If you accept that masturbation is a normal activity:

Help your child understand the concepts of appropriate time and place: *"I know it feels good to touch your genitals. But do so in private - not where others can see you."* This sets important limits for the child.

For some parents, masturbation may never be a comfortable topic to discuss, yet it's important to do so. If parents merely ignore the behavior or try to divert the child's attention with a toy or different activity, they've missed an ideal "teachable moment" to share information and values.

Talk About HIV/AIDS with a 5-Year-Old? You're Kidding, Right?

As parents of a kindergarten age child, you're totally baffled. **Just *what* and *how* do you discuss HIV/AIDS with a 5-year-old?** Your child doesn't need confusing details about the complexities of sexual relationships, sexual transmission of infection, etc. S/he *does*, however, need you to address this scary topic that everyone's talking about. It's an ideal time to discuss general concepts of wellness and staying healthy.

Help your child appreciate that much of his health is under *his* control. Habits such as hand-washing, dressing appropriately, eating nutritious foods, exercising, and getting plenty of rest promote good health.

Discuss basic facts about disease: Some diseases like colds, flu, and chicken pox are caused by germs, which spread from person to person. If those germs get into his body, he may become ill. Ask if he has heard of AIDS (he'll likely say yes). Let him know that AIDS is a disease caused by a germ called a virus. This may suffice for now, but continue the conversation if he shows interest or anxiety.

Find out what s/he's heard about HIV/AIDS, and correct any misinformation. Contact your child's school to see how teachers are dealing with the subject. Discussions at home can build upon information s/he's learning in school.

Appropriate messages about HIV/ AIDS for a 5-year-old:

- AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV.
- Some viruses like HIV can only spread in special ways (for example, by blood from an infected person getting into another person's body).
- We don't have to avoid people who are HIV+ or who have AIDS. HIV is **not** easy to get. It is **not** spread by casual contact (e.g., shaking hands, hugging, sharing food, etc.).

We can't ignore the subject of HIV/AIDS and other STDs. Neglecting or refusing to discuss this with children may only cause unnecessary alarm. On the other hand, initiating discussion can help ease their fears while providing important information to protect their health. At the same time, you're reinforcing open family communication about sexual issues.

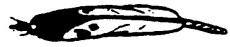
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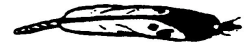
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Pregnancy/Childbirth 101 ~ The Baby-Making Process



Little ones are fascinated by the baby-making process. **Most 3- and 4-year-olds are interested in how baby “gets out of mommy.” Your 5-year-old’s concern is a bit trickier: “how baby gets in.”**

Not one to put curiosity on hold, s/he’s likely to insist on an explanation while you’re eating at a restaurant, selling popovers at a Pow-wow, shopping for groceries, or at some equally inconvenient spot.



Should the time or place be awkward for such discussion, say so - while at the same time supporting your child’s interest. A parent might say, “What a wonderful question! Let’s talk about that when we get home.” (Then do!)

Brief explanations about intercourse are appropriate for the 5-year-old.

Many parents are tempted to get themselves off the hook by telling their children fables and magical stories of babies being found on door steps or being brought by animals. Some of these stories are an important part of our tribal heritage and we owe it to our children to tell them.

We also owe our children honest and accurate information. So in addition to our Native stories we also must explain the simple truths of reproduction. If we share accurate information with our children in addition to our cultural stories, our children will learn to trust us and respect our values. Not responding honestly to sexual curiosities adds to a child’s confusion or discomfort about the issue.

A parent may simply choose to say: **“When a mother and father want to have a baby, the father puts his penis into the mother’s vagina. This is very loving and special. Sperm made by the father’s body move through his penis into the mother. If a sperm meets an egg cell made by the**

mother’s body, a baby will start to grow inside the mother’s uterus.”

When providing this detail, keep in mind that a 5-year-old is very literal. The term “egg” needs clarification, lest your child envisions mommy producing chicken eggs. Remember too, the correct word “sperm” rather than “seed” avoids the notion of flowers blooming in mommy’s uterus.

Some Native American grandparents have shared that seeing animals mate is a “teachable” moment they have used to help their grandchildren understand the circle of life and reproduction. The natural world is full of these teachable moments if we only watch for them. Our children are certainly watching and waiting for us to share our values and knowledge.



If you’ve successfully made your way through the baby-making talk, congratulations! The topic’s not been laid to rest, however - just as you suspected. Your 5-year-old will ask this one several more times (over the next few years) before s/he’s gotten it straight. You can look forward to a lot more practice. Even if the baby-making talk doesn’t go so well, that’s okay. Keep trying! There are lots of resources available to help you. Your local library is a great place to start. Seek guidance from community elders about ways to talk to your child about reproduction. You owe it to your child to provide honest and accurate information.

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When Children Don't Ask . . .

Find teachable moments to educate your child about sexuality. If your 5-year-old doesn't seem the least bit interested in sexual issues and hasn't asked any questions, it's time to initiate discussion. The easiest way to begin is with "teachable moments" - everyday events that lend themselves to conversations about sexuality (a neighbor is pregnant; the hamsters are mating, etc.). Make deliberate attempts to educate your child:

- Children's **picture books** on sexuality can be wonderful! Read them together.
- Look at **family albums** with pictures of weddings, of mom - when she was pregnant, or pictures of the new baby coming home.
- Comment on a **news item** that deals with sexuality.
- Watch **movies/TV** together. Ask your child to draw a **picture** that shows a baby being born.
- Talk about the process.

You might consider that your child has indeed been asking about sexuality - often in non-verbal ways - since birth. You may not have recognized it as such, or perhaps you've given an impression that it's not ok to ask. Whatever has or has not been going on, start something now. Your children are learning about sex whether you tell them or not. Surely you want to get your 2¢ worth in too!

Talking about Moon Time ...

Jim: *Hey dad, do you use tom-toms sometimes too?*

Dad: *What do you mean, Jim?*

J: *You know, **tom-toms**. Like mom has.*

D: *Jimmy, tom-toms are drums. Mom has drums?*

J: *No...come on. I'll show ya.*

With that, Jimmy drags dad to the bathroom, opens the cabinet and pulls out a blue box. Dad's face breaks into a grin. "Oh **those!** They're called **tampons**, not **tom-toms!**"

Why clutter up a 5-year-old's head with talk of menstruation - and a boy at that! Well... because he asked. While shopping with his mom, Jimmy saw her pick up a box of tampons. Naturally curious, he asked about them - and, valuing family communication about sexual issues, his mom explained. Jimmy has since forgotten what "tom-toms" are all about, so he's asking dad.

Dad: *Do you know what tampons are for, Jimmy?*

Jim: *Mom told me, but I forget.*

D: *Well, each month, inside a woman's uterus, a special lining grows. If the woman becomes pregnant, that lining is needed to help the baby grow and develop. If the woman doesn't become pregnant, the lining passes out of her body through the vagina. It's called having a period or Moon time. The lining has blood in it, and the tampon is placed in the vagina to catch the blood so it doesn't stain her clothes. The bleeding is very normal. Make sense?*

J: *Well, sort of.*

D: *Only women have Moon times, so I don't need to wear tampons - and neither will you.*

A young child might be alarmed if s/he discovers a used tampon or sanitary pad. Associating blood with injury, s/he may fear mom is hurt. So it's important to give children accurate information. Besides the fact that Jimmy deserves an honest answer, his parents appreciate that he will be interacting with females throughout his life. He needs to understand how their bodies work, as well as his own. There's no point in keeping body functions a mystery. By explaining issues such as menstruation as normal and healthy, parents help children accept them as so. And remember, there are age-appropriate picture books on this and other sexual health topics that help young ones better understand what might be a complex subject.

There's No Place Like Home . . . for Sex Education



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Let's Talk

This is it. First grade - *real* school. The *big time*. Time to experience delight and pride as you watch your child learn, develop, grow. It's also a time when many parents feel a twinge (at least) of discomfort - some anxiety about the dose of outside influences to which their children will now be exposed.

First graders are gaining a stronger sense of themselves in relation to a larger social world; they begin to measure themselves against new friends and school acquaintances; what they see, hear and read makes an impression. The importance of having that backlog of trust and open communication with your child suddenly becomes perfectly clear - especially in the area of sexuality.

If such a history hasn't been established, it's not too late to begin. But please, **do begin now** - for the early years are critical as your child develops attitudes toward sexuality. And, it's far easier to initiate discussions about sex while children are young.

Open family discussions about sex can:

- allow parents to share important family values;
- assist children in forming a positive attitude and healthy respect toward sexuality;
- ease fears and anxieties children often have about sexual curiosity;
- build trust, understanding, and support;
- increase the likelihood that children will seek out parents for information and guidance in the future.

Your child is launching his school career. What better gift to give him than your commitment to support growth and understanding in *all* aspects of his personhood - including sexuality.

OK...Where Do I Begin???



Begin by appreciating where 1st graders are at with their sexual curiosity. At this age, many children are hesitant about asking questions related to sex. By the time they're six, children have developed a fairly perceptive radar alerting them to topics, behaviors, etc., that adults find unacceptable or uncomfortable. So they're wary of saying or doing things that might cause trouble.

The early grade school child is naturally curious about many sexual issues - *whether that interest is verbalized or not*. It is the wise parent who encourages communication.

You might try asking questions about sexual issues you think may be of interest to your child. For the 1st grader these usually include:

- where babies come from
- body parts/functions
- male/female differences, roles, and expectations
- sexual language

In discussing these issues, with your child, remember:

- **You are the expert** at passing along family values about sexuality. You do have the answers in your heart, though you may need some practice with the words.
- **Listen to your child's questions** - and be sure you understand what s/he's really asking.
- **Answer simply and honestly.**
- **You needn't worry about telling "too much, too soon."** Children absorb what they are ready to, and are not over stimulated, encouraged, or whatever by more detail. **The real danger lies in "too little, too late."**

Family sex education offers you, as parents, a wonderful opportunity to speak from the heart to the children you love. **Enjoy!**

There's No Place Like Home . . . for Sex Education



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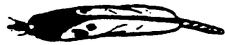
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Silent No More: Sexual Abuse is a Real Threat to our Children . . .

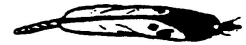
"Don't take candy from strangers." Remember the classic warning from your own childhood? Usually coupled with "Never talk to strangers," this rather vague precaution never quite spoke to one of mom's and dad's *true* concerns. Today, we don't dare skirt the issue. **We must talk with our children, in no uncertain terms, about sexual abuse.**

Studies suggest that **1 out of every 4 children in this country experiences some form of sexual victimization before age 17**; 15% - 20% are boys. Contrary to the early warnings of our own parents the typical child molester is *not* the stranger who entices children with candy. The majority of sexual abusers are adult heterosexual males who are rarely strangers. In fact, 70-80% are known to the child - and often are relatives.

By fostering self-reliance and assertiveness in their children, parents help protect them against sexual abuse. But what else can be done? First, families must abandon the idea that "it can't happen to me." Sexual abuse crosses all socio-economic lines, all religious and ethnic walks of life. On some reservations, studies have found rates of sexual abuse as high as 52% of girls and women. The historical trauma suffered by our people continues to be relived each time the cycle of sexual abuse repeats itself. Open and honest communication about sexuality and sexual abuse is essential to heal our people and protect our children.



Every child must learn safety information and skills



- Have your child use proper terms for body parts. Substitute "penis," "vulva," etc. for vague descriptors like "private parts" and "down there."
- Emphasize that your child's body is his own - no one has the right to touch him in ways he doesn't like. He has the right to say "no" to unwanted or uncomfortable touch.
- Let your child decide whether to be affectionate. Insisting upon hugs and kisses is unfair, and lessens a child's feeling of control over her own body.
- Explain that no adult has the right to touch a child's penis (vulva, etc.) or ask a child to touch his/her genitals. This applies to family members too (explain possible exceptions such as a parent helping at bath time).
- Tell your child she has the right to say "no" to any adult who asks her to do something wrong. "It's wrong for a grown-up to ask you to lie or steal; to touch you or ask to be touched in the ways we talked about. You should say 'no,' then come and tell me."
- Explain that no one should insist your child keep secrets from you. "If someone touches your penis/vulva, and warns you not to tell me, it may be because it was wrong for them to do that. Secrets and surprises are different. Surprises (like the present mom bought dad for his birthday) can eventually be told."

Practice the "WHAT IF" game with your child

Here are some sample "WHAT IF" questions to get you started and space to write some of your own:

- *"What if the babysitter promised you could stay up later if you touched his penis?"*
- *"What if a stranger came to the door while I was in the shower?"*

Rehearse specific words and actions. Help your child know what to do if s/he feels threatened - where to go and names of trusted adults who can help if parents are not available.

Talking about sexual abuse isn't easy. You worry about frightening the children, about what to say, how to say it. Much anxiety stems from the discomfort people often have about discussing sexual issues in general. In addition to the general tips offered here, there are excellent resources available through your local Planned Parenthood, Indian Health Service, Family Resource Center or sexual assault center.

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No Gender Limitations

"That's girl stuff," insists Tim when you ask him to help set the dinner table. "Boys aren't supposed to do girl stuff."

Cringing at the hint of superiority in his voice, you think, "Wait a minute. Where did *that* come from?" This isn't the non-sexist attitude you've encouraged in your son. Recently he's made several comments smacking of limiting male/female stereotypes. What's up with that?

The school-age child has ventured into a world where s/he is exposed daily to individuals with a lot of old habits. Historically, expectations - and *limitations* - based on gender have been a way of life in this society: one set of standards, values, and behaviors considered acceptable for boys; a different set established for girls. Our general attitude about this is changing, yet in many families, gender-limiting biases persist.

In some traditional Native cultures, male/female roles were fixed and responsibilities were divided between the sexes. Yet in other traditional Native societies, women and men shared responsibilities such as men cooking and women hunting. The gender stereotypes your son Tim brought home are probably values of mainstream

and not necessarily that of you, your tribe, or your culture. Just like mainstream society, some Native cultures have very sexist attitudes towards one gender or the other. Yet other Native cultures teach respect of both sexes. It is important to share and reinforce **your** cultural values with your child.

The "liberated male" you've been raising these last six years is beginning to feel the tugs of peer influence. For the most part, he'd rather hang out with the guys at school; their opinions about him carry a lot of weight. Pressures to conform, fit in, be one of the group (and *think* like the group) start competing with family influence.

It's an important time to remind the 6-year-old that **goals and expectations need not be limited by gender**. Help your child appreciate that both boys and girls are capable of a myriad of accomplishments. This can boost his/her self-esteem and foster personal growth.

To broaden your child's perspective regarding gender role expectations:

- **Share** household chores.
- **Read** stories portraying both males and females in a variety of non-limiting roles.
- **Use** language that avoids stereotyping (e.g., mail carrier rather than mailman, flight attendant instead of stewardess; he **or** she in reference to doctors, nurses, etc.) Awkward? Perhaps... but well worth the effort.

As parents work to expand their children's horizons, they may find themselves at odds with influences of the outside world. Rather than set up a "We're right, they're wrong" struggle, it's useful to approach it as "here's *another* way to look at things." Certainly in the arena of sex role expectations, it's empowering to offer children another way to look at things.

Talking about Offensive Language – "What Did You Say?"

A 1st grader may use a "dirty" word without having the vaguest idea of its meaning. The word's an attention getter, and maybe that's all s/he wants. Or, s/he may be curious about the term, but unsure how to ask for permission to discuss it.

Either way, by calmly defining the word, parents *neutralize its shock value, provide accurate information, and reaffirm their willingness to discuss sexual issues*. A parent could say, for example: "That word is a mean way of saying _____. It's often intended to be hurtful. Please find other words to say what you're feeling."

If a child uses bad language out of anger, frustration, etc., it's helpful to let her know that while the emotion is perfectly acceptable, the language is not. Then assist her in finding alternate words to express her feelings. Finally, parents might want to monitor their own vocabulary. "Do as I say, not as I do" has little impact.

Model the behaviors you wish to encourage.

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But What If... Answers to Some of Your Concerns



Many parents admit to avoiding discussion of sexual issues with their children. With great relief, they'll seize any opportunity to get off the hook, assuming that somewhere along the line, kids will learn what they need to know. It's likely that these very same parents truly *want* to be involved in their children's sexuality education...yet feel ill-prepared to do so. Fear, confusion, and embarrassment are just a few barriers that often get in the way.

Let's see if the way can be smoothed a bit by addressing some of the concerns parents and caregivers have expressed:

I'm worried that giving my child too much sexual information will make him even more curious and encourage him to experiment. This is related to the fear of telling too much, too soon. The fact is, a child's interest in sexual issues needs no encouragement. That natural curiosity is alive and well from birth! When efforts to learn about sexuality are ignored, denied - or worse yet,

punished - children may become preoccupied with the subject, and more compelled to experiment.

But she's only in 1st grade. Isn't that too young? For lengthy, graphic detail? Of course. Your explanations can be simple, clear, and factual. At the same time, leave the door open for further discussion. Remember, now is the time to establish the foundation for open communication... an environment in which your child knows it is safe and appropriate to ask questions or voice opinions. Remember too that **every day your 1st grader hears a great deal about sexuality ...** from friends ... from the media ... S/he certainly deserves to hear it from you.

I don't want to frighten or confuse my child. Parents often voice this concern specific to topics such as sexual abuse, childbirth, etc. Truly, the bottom line is that children are more concerned and confused when they only have bits and pieces of information... or misinformation. It leaves much to their imagination, which can fabricate some rather frightening details. Know that by 1st grade, your child has heard *something* about sexual abuse, childbirth, etc., even if s/he has not heard it from you. It's best to introduce such topics, discuss them calmly and openly, and allow your child to express any concerns or questions.

I'm not sure I have my facts straight. That can be the *least* of your worries. If you don't know the answer, say so. Then offer to look it up. Better yet, suggest that the two of you go to the library or Internet, and look it up together. In addition to providing factual information, many excellent resources offer help in the "how to" department. Check with your local Planned Parenthood, Indian Health Service, or Tribal/Community Resource Center. Unfortunately, children are hearing the most about sex from friends and the media. Surely parents do not *prefer* this. When offered information, skills, assurance, and support, parents can embrace their role as family sex educators with confidence!

Intergenerational Disconnect and Historical Trauma

Some Native parents, grandparents, and other caregivers have expressed the concern that many basic parenting skills are never learned in tribes where children were raised in boarding schools. The boarding school experience is an important part of the past that continues to haunt our people in the present. Healing this historical trauma means recognizing the disconnect between the generations and beginning to rebuild those ties of trust and reliance. Whether you are a grandmother, uncle, biological parent or other caring adult, you are faced with a great challenge of helping heal the great hoop. You must help bring the circle of communication about healthy living back to our people by your teachings to the next generation.



Talking about sex and sexuality is particularly difficult for Native people because of the many traumas we've experienced. Many of us never learned the "facts" about sex and sexuality from a caring adult. Often distorted ideas have been carried for lifetimes. We can choose to put down the shame and fear of talking about sexual issues. We must make the choice to heal so we can protect and teach the children who will carry on our culture and values.

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It's All About Self-Concept

First grade is a big achievement for your child. Along with accomplishments, perhaps your first grader has also experienced some failure and frustration. How has s/he fared? As a whole, has the year been a joyful experience? A positive introduction to the academic world? And just *what* does any of this have to do with sex education? Plenty. It's all about self-concept.

You see, **research tells us that the sexual decisions and behaviors of adolescents are influenced in part by their feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.** High self-esteem correlates with an increased likelihood that choices will be positive, healthy, and responsible.

It is during the early years that children begin developing a sense of their "OK-ness."

The development of self-esteem during the pre-school years is based largely on input from the family. If Steven is constantly told he's a "bad boy," he'll soon define himself as such - and act accordingly. If, however, his parents emphasize that it is his behavior that is unacceptable (not Steven himself), he maintains his personal sense of "OK-ness" and self-respect.

Upon entering the educational system, a child is exposed to pressures, demands, and expectations that reach beyond the home front. It becomes especially important for parents to reassure their child that a sense of worth comes from within - and is not a function of appearance, being a math whiz, or getting the lead in the class play.

As with all other aspects of growth and development, children need assistance in feeling competent, connected, and valued. Through their childrearing practices, parents either foster or stifle that development.

Approval - Children have a special need for praise. For them, parents' approval is a measure of their own value. Frequently recognize and praise your youngster for a job well done or a good effort.

Acceptance - While recognizing your child's strengths and abilities, assist him in accepting his weaknesses. If he acts inappropriately, be sure he understands that while you do not like the behavior, you still love him.

Attention - By demonstrating sincere interest in your child's day to day activities, you let her know she is important. Having mom's and dad's undivided attention - however brief - helps a child feel very special indeed.

Achievement - Children learn by doing... and need opportunities to practice new skills. Allowing them to make decisions will encourage a sense of competence and responsibility.

Respect - *Children are people too*, and they deserve to be treated fairly - with dignity and respect.

All of this may seem so obvious. Yet it's amazing how much good, common-sense parenting gets lost in the daily bustle of family life. Consider this simply a reminder.

The way children feel about themselves colors the way they live and relate to the world around them. Children who grow up feeling loved, competent, and worthy are far better equipped - as adolescents and adults - to deal with the issues of life... including sexuality.

There's No Place Like Home...for Sex Education



Even in Elementary School, Kids Are Learning About Sex ...from Friends, Media...from ???

Surely, **they deserve to learn from a loving parent or guardian**. It should be no surprise to parents that young children gather lots of sexual (mis)information on a daily basis. Why, remember just last weekend when you stumbled upon Nick, your little 2nd grader and his buddy, Craig? They were having quite a chat... intense and lengthy whispers punctuated by fits of giggling. All of that came to an abrupt halt the moment they spotted you! Chances are good their conversation had something to do with sex.

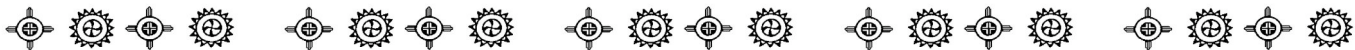
And what about the movie you took the family to see the other day? You were careful to select an appropriate show for the children. What you hadn't counted on were the steamy coming attractions for next week's feature. You were more than a bit uncomfortable - and somewhat unnerved by Nick's obvious interest in the whole thing.

Let's face it. Your children are hearing about sexual topics whether you tell them or not. There are advantages to having you tell them. **You are the expert when it comes to passing along your family and cultural values related to sexuality**. You may need a little encouragement - some assistance in

overcoming your discomfort. Perhaps you'd like a few tips on how to begin - or how much to say. That's all fine-tuning. But **the heart of the message** - your values and attitudes surrounding sexuality - **is within you**.

When parents are actively involved in their child's sexuality education, they can ensure that accuracy prevails. **We know that children are exposed to massive doses of misinformation and exploitive, irresponsible messages about sex - from their friends... from the media...** So it makes good sense for parents to blaze a trail of honest, informative communication. Be available to dispel the myths, and set the record straight. (*Of course, be sure you have the facts straight yourself!*)

Ultimately, we wish for our children a sense of appreciation and high regard for their sexuality. We want them to enjoy and celebrate that very special part of their being. We want them to have self-respect - good feelings about themselves... *every part of themselves, including their sexuality*. What better way to promote that vision than by providing loving, thoughtful sex education at home and in the context of our cultural values.



Media, Values and Sex

The U.S. has one of the most intensive sex education programs in the world. Sadly, it's not happening in homes and the classroom. It's broadcast in the media (TV, advertisements, music, Internet, etc.). Numerous studies show the potential for media to influence the knowledge and attitudes of young people:

- By age 18, the average student has spent 15,000 hours watching TV as compared to 11,000 in school.
- A Junior Achievement study reports that media ranks 3rd behind peers and parents in influencing values and behaviors of youth.

Media messages replete with sexual references, innuendoes, and behaviors assault the senses. What's a parent to do? Demand censorship? Isolate children? While we can set boundaries, it's unrealistic to think these messages will be completely eliminated from our children's lives. *We can* however, monitor what children listen to, watch and read, what chat rooms and web sites they visit. **We can listen, watch and read along with them - then discuss it as a family**.

Rather than criticize and blame the media, use it to your advantage. It's a wonderful discussion starter! Call attention to sexual messages conveyed by programs, ads, music videos, web sites, etc. Ask your children how they feel about them, and share your own values surrounding the issue. The media "teaches" about a broad spectrum of sexuality-related concerns: relationships, stereotypes, sex roles, etc. Take note of these too.

By helping young children recognize and examine media messages about sexuality, caring adults assist them in developing critical viewing skills. Not only does this equip children with a "filter" through which to process the messages, it also provides opportunity to strengthen family communication about sex.

There's No Place Like Home . . . for Sex Education



Grade 2

Second grade means harder questions . . . important answers

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Now What Do I Say??? Handling Questions about Sexual Orientation and HIV/AIDS

Dana: Mom, what's "gay" mean?

Mom: Well... it depends how the word is used. (*good strategy...that bought you a little time*) Tell me what you've heard. (*nice... clarify what she's really asking*)

Dana: At school today, David called Max gay, and said he was going to get AIDS.

OK mom, that settles it. Dana's not referring to the happy-go-lucky "gay." It also sounds like she's wondering about both sexual orientation and HIV/AIDS. You're on. Consider this a great opportunity for you and Dana to have an informative discussion. I know, I know... you're a little nervous. OK - a *lot* nervous. Dana's only seven! She's asking some pretty sophisticated questions!

Kids *are* growing up fast these days. The AIDS crisis has sped up the process as the subject is frequently aired in the media - and in the schoolyard. It can be confusing and alarming to a 2nd grader. The good news is that this disease has created wonderful invitations for parents and kids to talk about sexual issues.

Dana's mom can be pleased that her daughter felt comfortable asking this question. By responding calmly and honestly, mom will reaffirm her willingness to discuss sexual topics with Dana. But, exactly *what* should she say? She might try something like this: "Some men have loving relationships with other men rather than women. That's called being gay. Some women have loving relationships with other women rather than men." She could also point out that these relationships are important and fulfilling for the couple. This may lead to further questions like, "Is that bad?" or "Why do people do that?"

Talking with children about sexual orientation can stir up complex emotions. In discussing this issue, parents can help their children avoid developing prejudices.

If a parent disapproves of homosexuality for religious or other reasons, s/he might say: "Families have different opinions about this. What I believe is..." No matter what, be sure your child clearly hears that it is never OK to hurt or discriminate against someone because of their sexual orientation.

Often, children repeat derogatory terms they've heard such as "fag", and may have little or no idea of the meaning. Parents can define the terms, explaining that they are cruel labels intended to hurt and tease.

Dana has also raised the subject of AIDS. This is a hot topic, with a mix of fear and misinformation being passed back and forth. *It's best they have a chance to hear from a caring adult like you..*

Your 2nd grader can be told that:

- ◆ AIDS is a serious disease that is caused by a virus called HIV.
- ◆ The virus is passed from person to person *in specific ways*: for example, if someone has unprotected sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected person, or shares needles that are used for injected drug use with an infected person. Children should never come into contact with someone else's blood or pick up needles or syringes they find on the ground.
- ◆ AIDS doesn't just happen to people who are gay. It can happen to anyone who behaves in specific ways that might put them at risk. (Be prepared to further explain what those risky behavior include)
- ◆ We don't have to be afraid of people with AIDS. *The disease is not spread by casual contact.* We can hug them, share food with them, sit next to them, etc.
- ◆ AIDS can be prevented by being knowledgeable and making healthy choices.

As with all sexual issues, it's important to leave the door open for further discussion of AIDS. A good rule of thumb is "*if they ask the question, they deserve an honest answer.*" Young children may not need graphic detail. They do need to know they can depend on you to respond to their questions.

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Sexplanations: You Thought That Was Hard - Wait 'Til You Try This...

Remember the days when, as a pre-schooler, your child showed great interest in how babies were made? At times you may have fretted that the interest felt more like preoccupation. In reality, your youngster was just naturally and appropriately curious about a fascinating subject.

As a 2nd grader, your child may be no less fascinated by the baby making process (although s/he is more sensible now about blurting out the question in a crowded elevator). **Resist the temptation to assume that your previous discussions have thoroughly covered the topic.** Despite the eloquent explanations you may have delivered in the past, the story bears repeating, yet again. You see, at this age children have some difficulty grasping the notion of intercourse. Even more confusing to them is “why *anyone* would want to do *that*.” And of course, the most incredulous wonder of all is that “since there are two kids in our family, mom and dad actually did that – twice!”

Talking with children about sexual intercourse in the context of making babies often causes some anxiety for parents. But really, it's pretty straightforward. On the other hand, **the thought of helping your child realize that mom and dad experience sexual intimacy for pleasure may stop you cold in your tracks.** *Is that ok to talk about?* Of course. It's important - and only fair - that children learn about this aspect of sexuality. **Parents are truly the ideal source of this information, for they can provide it within a framework of love and values.**

There are ample opportunities to bring up the subject of intercourse. Perhaps a neighbor is pregnant, you've just dug out your child's baby pictures, or there's a TV special on about pregnancy and childbirth. These “teachable moments” provide a springboard for discussion that might go something like this:

Dad: I'll never forget the day we told you mom was having another baby. You were about 4 - and so excited! You had a million questions about how babies are made.

Son: Did you tell me?

Dad: Of course! We explained that when a man and woman have intercourse, a sperm cell from the man's body may join an ovum - or egg cell - made by the woman's body. This is how a baby starts. Do you remember what intercourse is?

Son: I'm not sure.

Dad: When a man and woman want to be very close with each other in a special, loving way, the man puts his penis into the woman's vagina. That's called sexual intercourse.

Son: So people do that when they want a baby?

Dad: Yes, but that's not the only reason. People have intercourse to share a loving, pleasurable experience with each other. It may be hard for you to understand - and that's OK. Intercourse is not for children to do. It's a sexual sharing for adults.

At some point in the not too distant future, you will want to begin discussing this issue in a much larger context: risks and responsibilities involved in sexual intimacy, the decision to become pregnant, teenage pregnancy, etc. Open and loving communication with your 2nd grader will help pave the way.

You're Not Alone

Many parents say they have a harder time discussing the emotions, values... the “intangibles” of sexuality with their children than they do talking about the mechanics. Seeing and hearing some ways to go about dealing with the “intangibles” may be helpful. Beyond books, what other assistance is available something with a more personal touch?

- **Community schools and colleges** frequently offer parenting classes including aspects of sexuality education.
- **Physicians, family counselors, and spiritual leaders** may also provide valuable insights.
- **Your child's school or the local school district office** may have suggestions on programs available for parents.
- **Planned Parenthood** is an excellent source of education programs and materials.
- **Indian Health Service** or Tribal Resource Center may have programs and educational materials.

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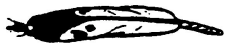
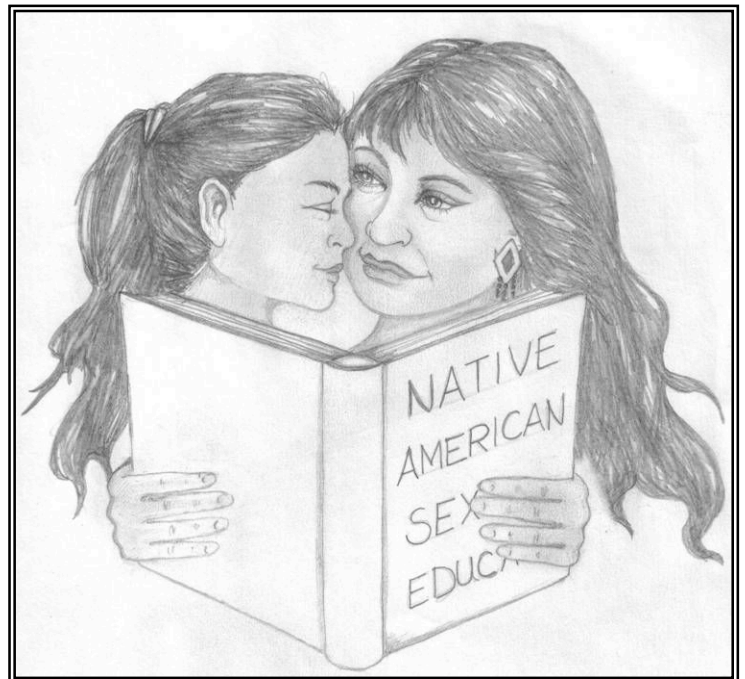
More Than Meets the Eye

When you think about sex education, what topics come to mind? Anatomy... intercourse... pregnancy... puberty...? Anything else? While these are all components of sex education, they're only a *tiny fraction* of the subject. These are the issues that relate to the plumbing part of sexuality - or as some kids call it, the "organ recital." You know ... the mechanics.

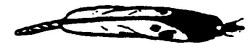
Let's **consider sexuality education in much broader terms**, consisting of all of the above, as well as issues like **body image, self-esteem, love, relationships, respect for self and others, values, decision-making**, and much, much more. It is truly a massive, complex, and fascinating subject. As a parent or guardian, you routinely address these issues within your family in many ways. While doing so, you're also providing the bricks and mortar for your child's developing sexual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

It's all a matter of "sex" vs. "sexuality": *sex* being a fairly narrow term, usually meaning either gender or intercourse; *sexuality* referring to that integral part of our being which defines who we are as males or females; our attitudes, values, and feelings around that; and how this affects our relationship to the world - and the world to us.

A tremendous amount of sexual curiosity and learning has occurred for your 2nd grader over the last 8 or so years, whether you've taken an active, positive role or not. Your responses (or lack of) to questions about "plumbing"; the modeling of relationships between you and your partner, family members, and friends; sharing of values; nurturance of your child's self-esteem... all this and more have formed the bulk of your youngster's sexuality education. In years to come, the sexual specifics - those issues more readily identified as "sex education" - will become increasingly complex: puberty, gender orientation, teenage sexual activity, birth control, and sexually transmitted infections. In giving your child the facts, your continued attention to the fundamentals of self-esteem, love, respect, etc. will help insure a positive - and practical - learning experience.



Self-Esteem: A Fundamental Building Block



Second grade is a time of busy social development for children. Along with increasing concern about "what my friends think of me," there's a natural desire to further separate from mom and dad. Don't be fooled by this surge of independence. Back off enough to allow your youngster to "test his wings," *but don't back off too far*. Despite close ties to outside friends and activities, *children need to feel secure in their parents' love for them*.

While your 2nd grader may resist - even *refuse* - your hugs and kisses (especially where others can see!), s/he still appreciates the offer. So please don't automatically withdraw usual displays of affection, assuming your child no longer wants or needs them. Continue to check in with, "Hey, I'd sure love to give you a kiss. What do you say?"

Children of all ages need to feel loved and valued. When parents or guardians take time to remind them how special they are, it bolsters their self-esteem. The link between self-esteem and adolescent sexual behavior has received much attention. Healthy self-esteem increases the likelihood of healthy, more responsible choices - about sex as well as other issues. A young child's self-esteem requires conscious tending and nurturing. Parents are just right for the job.

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It's Time to Talk

How was the subject of sex handled in your family when you were growing up? Was it a fairly open topic? Were your parents, aunts, uncles, or grandparents willing to talk about sexual issues in a frank and honest manner? Did they encourage you to discuss questions or concerns you might have?

If the answer is yes, consider yourself fortunate - and unusual. *Those raised in families that placed a high priority on open, honest communication about sex are truly rare, especially in Native communities where boarding schools created disconnect between the generations.*

In mainstream American society, sex education has often been of the "too little, too late" variety if taught at all. Perhaps it was assumed that "when the time comes, the kids will figure out what they need to know." Unfortunately, many Native communities have also adopted this attitude. That approach didn't work well when it was first introduced by settlers - and it certainly doesn't work *now*. ***So... how many of you want to do things differently with your children?***



Traditionally, children in Native families grew up learning about sex and sexuality in a healthy and natural context through story telling, ceremony, and honest communication in daily life. Historical trauma has taken a toll on our families; many parents and grandparents grew up in boarding schools and never learned Native parenting skills that include passing on values about reproductive health. Now is the time to heal the sacred hoop and open communication back up with the future generations

We live in a sexually explicit world. Children hear all kinds of sexual references and (mis) information at an early age. If parents were privy to the schoolyard conversations of typical 3rd graders, they might well be shocked! **Sexuality is fascinating to these kids - a subject they chatter about with significant inaccuracy.** This isn't surprising, considering ***their two main sources of information tend to be each other and the media.*** Not a comforting thought.

The issue is not "sex education: yes or no?" but "sex education: when and by whom?"

First and foremost, parents need to be the "whom." After all, ***as a parent, you are the expert when it comes to passing along family values around sexuality.*** You are the one who can best speak from the heart, offering guidance and support to the children you love. This is not to say that accurate, useful information is unavailable elsewhere. But certainly parents need to be the key providers of that education.

Ideally, the "when" would be from birth. Truly, this is the time to begin establishing a conscious and loving family environment designed to promote positive attitudes toward sexuality. Remember that parents communicate - in both verbal and non-verbal ways - perceptions, beliefs, and judgments about sexuality. This communication begins, often unconsciously, with the birth of a child. And it has powerful, long-term impact on that child's developing attitudes.

Children raised in families that value and promote open communication about sex are more likely to form a positive, respectful outlook toward sexuality. We know this from research, from experience and from just plain common sense. We also know that over the years, this translates into greater ability to make positive, healthy, and respectful decisions about sex.

It may be tempting to shrug all of this off with "Hey, I didn't get much sex education from my parents - and I turned out ok." But keep in mind: our world has changed dramatically since we were kids. What may have sufficed in the past is grossly inadequate now.

Keep in mind too that you needn't go it alone. There are many excellent resources to support and assist you. Check with your local Planned Parenthood, health department, Indian Health Service or physician.

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Teachable Moments: You Did What????!!!

The note from Danny's teacher left you speechless. It seems your 3rd grader and some of his buddies were caught poring over a "girlie" magazine brought to school by an older boy.

"This must be one of those 'teachable moments' I keep hearing about," you say to yourself. But at this point, you're frozen with disbelief, anger... perhaps a mixture of emotions you haven't quite sorted out yet.

This must be one of those
'teachable moments' I
keep hearing about...

Take time to sort out what you're feeling, and why.

That will help you figure out how to best respond to this incident. An "emotional inventory" will take some time - which you can buy with a simple "**Danny, I need to think about this awhile before we talk. Let's discuss it after dinner.**"

You may decide you're feeling *embarrassed* by Danny's behavior ("What must his teacher think of me? Maybe she thinks we have those kinds of magazines around our house!"); angry ("How could Danny look at that trash!"); *betrayed and hurt* ("I've worked at teaching Danny to be positive and respectful about sexuality. Then he turns around and does something like this!").

Now that you've identified *how* and *why* you feel as you do, **take a moment to consider why Danny might have been interested in such a magazine.** Of course, the easiest way to do this would be to *ask him*. In fact, be sure you do so. Not only will this give him a chance to explain, it will likely provide a good opening for a frank discussion about sexual issues.

But for now, consider some possibilities:

- **Danny was curious** to see what female bodies look like
- he wanted to **go along with his friends**
- **it was tempting to do something "forbidden"**
- all of the above

You remember reading somewhere that **it isn't at all uncommon for young children to sneak a look at "girlie" magazines out of curiosity.** A harsh parental response often leaves them feeling embarrassed, guilty, or ashamed of their sexual curiosity. In fact, it may further encourage curiosity as they try to discover why the big upset.

In any case, keep in mind that children this age continue their fascination with the human body. **During this pre-puberty phase, it would be helpful and reassuring for Danny to learn what bodies are all about at various stages of development.** Please don't hesitate to use one of the many educational books available on this topic. Read it with him, explaining how bodies look and function; how male and female anatomy differs; how bodies change during puberty, etc.

Along with this, **remind Danny how you feel about magazines which are sexually exploitive.** Help him appreciate that these publications can be *offensive*, and portray sexuality in a *negative light*.

You're feeling better now, pleased that you took the time to size up the situation and put it in perspective. After all, the "knee-jerk" reaction often results in messages you later regret. Such a response can be more damaging than the original offense itself.

You now have a clear sense of what you want Danny to learn from all of this, and how you want to present your message to him. "Danny, let's talk."

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Typical Questions of 3rd Graders

It is commonly believed that 3rd graders haven't the slightest interest in the subject of sex. *While it's true that many children this age hesitate to ask adults questions about sex, it's not because of a lack of interest.* On the contrary, 3rd graders are bursting with unanswered - typically unasked - questions about sexual issues. The reality is they've often learned the subject is not ok to discuss. A few disapproving looks or shocked, angry responses are all it takes to drive that message home.

In your own family, you may have worked hard to establish an environment that supports and encourages communication. But remember that your child's immersion in the outside world brings many influences into his life. Like it or not, societal attitudes toward the discussion of sexuality are still fraught with guilt, embarrassment, shame, fear, etc.

So you may find yourself needing to prod a bit more to get the conversation flowing. There's no need to force the issue - but do continue to remind your child that you're eager and willing to talk.

The following are **typical 3rd grade questions** (and possible - not absolute - responses) that are often left unshared between parent and child:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Q. How old do you have to be to have a baby? | A. As soon as a girl begins to menstruate, she is able to have a baby. Some girls begin menstruating as young as 10 or 11. Just because she is old enough to become pregnant doesn't mean she's ready to be a mother. Being a parent is a big job. It's best for girls to wait until they're grown up before they have babies. |
| Q. What about boys? When can they become fathers? | A. As soon as a boy begins producing sperm, he can cause a pregnancy. Some boys are producing sperm at age 13 or 14. But again, just because he's physically able to make a baby, doesn't mean he's ready for the responsibilities of fatherhood. |
| Q. When will my breasts grow? | A. Different people develop at different times. You're getting close to the age when your body will begin changing... including your breasts getting bigger. I was about 11 when I started developing. Maybe you'll take after me. |
| Q. Do boys have periods? | A. No. Remember that a period is the shedding of the lining that develops in a woman's uterus. |
| Q. Why is my penis so small? | A. Your penis is just the right size for your age. As you get older and start developing, your penis will get bigger. |
| Q. Brian's sister is having a baby and she's not even married. How can that be? | A. If a man and woman have sexual intercourse, whether they're married or not, the woman might get pregnant. Personally, I would want to be married before having a baby. I think that's the best way for me to raise my family. Other people may have different beliefs about that. |
| Q. Kelsey got in trouble for saying f--k. Why's it so bad? | A. It's a mean word for sexual intercourse. It's usually said in anger, or to hurt someone. |

Children can be pretty resourceful. *If they really want answers to these questions yet presume they can't approach mom and dad, they'll find other ways to satisfy their curiosity.* Some of those ways may be useless, inappropriate, or harmful.

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Winds of Change

I know what you're thinking: My child's only in 3rd grade. There's no sense in filling his/her head with talk about development, body changes during puberty, etc. **When s/he starts to develop, then we'll talk.**"

The trouble about this attitude is that **it overlooks the value of preparing children - ahead of time - for the experiences of puberty.** Certainly, parents stack the odds in favor of smoother sailing if they address these issues well in advance. This allows children the benefit of knowing what to expect, and the opportunity to hash out questions, concerns or fears they may be having about the process, *before it even begins.*

Remember that **puberty is not something that plays out overnight** - or even within the course of a few months or years. It's a process of change occurring over a period of perhaps five years, with the preliminaries beginning as early as age 8 for girls, and age 10 for boys. You can start now, discussing this issue in a positive, reassuring, and age-appropriate way.

At this stage, the bottom line for children is appreciating that *each person develops at his/her own rate* - all of which is perfectly normal for the individual. Children who have not been offered this basic information can spend years worrying that "there's something wrong with me." As a parent, you're in a great position to help your child avoid that kind of anxiety.

Consider too, the importance of helping children understand development in *both* sexes. After all, where is it written that only girls need to know about menstruation, or only boys are privileged to hear about wet dreams?! **Since males and females interact with each other throughout the course of their lifetimes, it makes perfectly good sense that they appreciate how each other's body works.**

Since the 3rd grader may be very modest and perhaps even painfully shy about his/her body, there can be some reluctance to talk about this issue. A gentle way to encourage the communication might include digging out pictures of your youngster at various ages, from birth to present day. Comment enthusiastically about "how much you've grown and developed over the last 9 years!"

Explain that there are many changes yet to come - changes which, if anticipated and understood, can be an exciting, positive experience.

Parents further facilitate the discussion by sharing what it was like for *them* - *their* feelings, thoughts, and experiences during the early years of puberty. Besides building trust and intimacy, this sharing can be a source of great relief to the child who suddenly realizes "I'm not the only one who's ever felt this way!"

Puberty can be wonderful, exciting, painful, and scary - *all at the same time!* It is the wise and thoughtful parent who assists his child - well ahead of time - in preparing for the journey.

Preparing for the journey of Puberty

Children raised with firm roots in their tribal traditions have special tools to help them journey through puberty.

If your child hasn't had a chance to learn about the special traditions and symbols of their American Indian heritage, it is never too late to begin sharing with them. The hoop or circle is an excellent teaching tool. Some tribes focus on an open circle while others value the medicine wheel. You might want to use some simple symbols like these to help you explain your values about respect, sexuality, relationships, family, and tradition.



Some Native parents have said they've found it meaningful to have special prayers and the giving of meaningful feathers, rocks, or other gifts from nature in small ceremonies. These ceremonies can mark the transitions that a child goes through as s/he journeys through puberty.

These ideas might also help you in creating the talking space to open the door to communication with your child. Have that special time for talking about life's lessons might help build the trust between you and your child that you will need in the coming years.

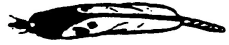
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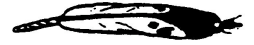
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Decision-Making: An Important Skill for Health and Safety



Remember that sexuality education involves far more than just teaching sexual specifics. In addition to information, children need to learn skills which will assist them in appreciating and handling this aspect of life.

A skill of major importance is decision-making... something one doesn't learn to be good at overnight. Your 3rd grader has made a number of decisions up to this point: who to be buddies with at school, what games s/he prefers to play, what books to select from the library, etc. *Often, the choices are impulsive and readily influenced by others who have some clout.*

As s/he matures, life issues become more complex, decisions more involved, and outside influences more intense. The wise parent will consciously assist his child in preparing for the challenge.

Young people develop a sense of competence - and confidence - when allowed to make their own decisions. Give your child the opportunity to do so. Certainly a 3rd grader can choose what to wear to school, what to buy with the birthday money grandma sent, or where the family might go for a Saturday outing.

You can assist your child in learning the art of decision-making:

- Help your child **gather information and weigh options** when making a decision. Help him/her **consider possible outcomes of each option.**
- Help your child understand that decisions have **consequences**. Play "what if..." "What if you chose not to study for your math test?" "What if you go out for gymnastics instead of basketball?" "What if a friend talked you into stealing gum from the store?"
- **Be accepting of your child's decisions** - as long as they are not harmful. Understand that s/he makes choices based on personal preference and taste. The decision may not be what you would have selected.
- **Set limits** for decision-making. If your child decides on something clearly inappropriate or dangerous, explain why you cannot accept that choice.

The ability to make good decisions is a skill that must be learned. Children who are encouraged and guided in acquiring this skill are well on their way to developing and accepting responsibility.

In the adolescent years to come, your child will be faced with a myriad of choices about which s/he will need to make decisions. One of these areas, sexual decision-making, is especially critical.

Much attention has been paid to the connection between self-esteem, decision-making ability, and adolescent sexual behavior. **Evidence supports the notion that young people who have a positive sense of themselves, and who have the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices, are more likely to do just that.** This applies to sexuality as well as other aspects of their lives.

It may be tempting to assume that "it will be a long time before my youngster has to worry about *those kinds of decisions.*" But keep in mind that media/peer influence and pressure hit hard - and early - these days. In any case, the skill of decision-making takes time to nurture and refine. It also takes practice.

Help your child practice *now* - when the issues are not so vital. Begin *now*, and your child will be well prepared when the time comes for "*those kinds of decisions.*"

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Talk to Me - Please!

You're not the only one who's been noticing your 4th grader's growth and development. S/he has too - often with more concern and embarrassment than pleasure. In fact, there have been quite a few experiences lately that are ... well ... just different. Like ... attraction to peers in more than just a friendship way; and classroom teasing about boyfriends and girlfriends. Things are definitely changing. *And s/he's not at all sure how s/he feels about it.*

While exciting, the "newness" is also scary. Yet **this is a time of such privacy and shyness about change that children often hold their fears of "Is this normal?" and "Am I normal?" deep within.**

Your 4th grader is conscious of the impending onset of puberty (that's right ... it won't be long now!). Whether s/he's started to develop yet or not, it's likely s/he has friends or classmates who have. In fact, *girls may begin developing as early as grade 3 or 4; boys usually a few years later.*

In any case, parents need to anticipate this, and prepare their children *in advance*. This helps ease the countless anxieties and questions which are certainly there - although often unspoken. **No matter how scary it is for you as a parent, go outside your comfort zone and talk to your child and STAY INVOLVED!** If your family has a history of open, honest communication about sexual issues, your child may likely check in with you about these anxieties and questions. If not, well ... don't worry. It's not too late. *But do begin now.* Already your child has gathered a wealth of sexual information (and misinformation) from a number of other sources: friends, TV, music, the Internet, magazines... you want to get your 2¢ worth in.

The approach to puberty offers an ideal opportunity for discussion ... but don't limit the topic to physical growth and development. Children want - and need - to hear their parents' thoughts, feelings, and values around a variety of sexual issues. They want - and need - factual information, reassurance, guidance, and support. If you find it difficult or awkward to initiate such discussions, here are a few tips to assist you:

- Let your child in on how it was for you as a 4th grader. Share feelings, concerns, and experiences you remember having while growing up.
- Take advantage of the useful publications available for pre-adolescents. Leave them on the coffee table, in the family room, or somewhere your 4th grader is likely to stumble upon them.
- Use TV, movies, the Internet and other media to begin a discussion about sexuality. Let your children know how you feel about sexual messages delivered by the media. Ask about their impressions.
- Call attention to newspaper articles dealing with issues linked to sexuality: HIV/AIDS, gay marriage, infertility treatment, teen pregnancy, sexual abuse ... these are but a few topics noted daily in the headlines.

Open family communication about sex does far more than just ease the journey through the growing up years. It allows for the *sharing* of family values; the *provision* of accurate - and valuable - information; the *promotion* of a positive, respectful attitude toward sexuality; the *alleviation* of fears and anxieties; the *building* of trust, understanding, and support. If you've already established these lines of communication within your family, great! Keep up the good work! If not, begin today. You and your child have everything to gain.

In some tribes the tasks of talking with young women about women's issues is the Aunt's and Grandmother's job while the Uncle's and Grandfather's job is to talk to the young men. This is a valuable time for traditional sharing of values. It is also important though to remember that open communication about sexuality is the *family's job*, and the more everyone gets involved, the more balanced and effective it can be.

In addition to information and family values, parents offer their *personal perspectives*, as male or female. It's important and useful for dads to share this with their daughters and moms with their sons. Children will be relating to males and females throughout their lifetimes and need to understand about each other. For example, boys deserve know about female anatomy and physiology. They can learn an appreciation of the female perspective. Girls deserve an understanding and appreciation of males.

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“What's Happening to Me?” – Your Child’s Body is Growing Fast . . .

Puberty isn't the *only* sexual topic that bears discussing with your 4th grader, but it's likely to be uppermost in *his/her* mind. Even under the best of circumstances, this time of great change for youth may occasionally be confusing and scary. Advanced preparation for puberty is likely to result in a more positive view of the process.



General order for girls:

1. Breast budding (between ages 8 and 13, on average)
2. Hips broaden
3. Straight pubic hair
4. Growth spurt
5. Pubic hair becomes kinky
6. Menstruation or moon cycle (about 2 yrs. after start of breast development)
7. Underarm hair (in some people)

General order for boys:

1. Growth of testes and scrotum (between 10 and 13, on average)
2. Straight pubic hair
3. Early voice change
4. First ejaculation (about 1 year after testicular growth)
5. Pubic hair becomes kinky
6. Growth spurt
7. Underarm hair (in some people)
8. Significant voice change
9. Facial hair develops (most Native men do not get facial hair)

Menstruation (moon time) and first ejaculation are often seen as landmarks which signal “puberty has arrived.” In reality, *puberty is a stage of life marked by a series of events - a process that unfolds over the course of several years.* Menstruation and first ejaculation actually occur later in the process. Yet for some reason, they're seen as “highlights” - perhaps because they're such obvious signs of growing up.

At any rate, *helping your child understand the time frame of puberty can serve to alleviate classic fears* like, “Why am I growing so much faster than my friends?” “How come my friends are growing and I'm not?” “When will I get 'it'?” “What's wrong with me?” “Am I *normal*?” Children who have had little explanation of developmental differences can become obsessed with these concerns - anxiously worrying. Surely you know what that's like from your own perils of puberty. Do you recall thinking years later, “If only someone had explained what was going on with me. I could have coped much better!” As a parent, you can be that “someone” for your own child. Since we tend to assume that children know far more about their bodies than they actually do, a good rule is to *explain everything* ... even that which seems most obvious. In this way, you're likely to cover many of the unspoken concerns and questions.

At 4th grade (which is still early in the puberty game for the majority of kids), *one of the most useful pieces of information you can share with your child is a rundown of the puberty chain of events.* While it's true that children will begin developing at different times, the *sequence of events is fairly, but not absolutely, predictable.* Learning about this is far more helpful to a youngster than merely having mom and dad say, “Don't worry, honey. You'll grow.”

Of course, puberty consists of more than just physical change. *Emerging sexual feelings, emotions, relationships, stresses* all are parts of the metamorphosis. Children often feel ambivalent about growing up, and need reassurance that such feelings are perfectly normal. The journey through puberty will never be a piece of cake. But parents can do much to alleviate some of the strangeness and fear. One of the most useful ways is to *communicate.* Talk with your child now about these issues - even if you think it's a little early yet. Chances are **it's later than you think.**

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Talking With Children About AIDS: What They Need to Know... NOW!

You never thought you would have to talk with your children in such explicit terms. But at this time, there is no vaccine against HIV infection and no cure for AIDS. The only protection you can offer your child is education. Surely you want to offer that.

You know that your 4th grader has heard a lot about AIDS - whether *you've* told him or not. There are a lot of advantages to having *you* tell him. **From the kids at school, he hears rumors, speculation. From you, he can hear the facts.** You're in a position to provide those facts in a gentle, non-threatening way... in a way that will enlighten and empower, rather than frighten him. **Along with information, you will share family values - something he won't be getting elsewhere.**

Certainly by 4th grade, children should understand that AIDS is a serious disease which is caused by a virus spread from person to person. They should be reassured that **people do not become infected through casual contact** (hugging, sharing food, sitting next to an HIV+ person); rather the virus must be introduced into a person's *bloodstream* in order to cause infection.

During the pre-teen years (9-12), be prepared to offer your child more detailed information about HIV transmission and prevention. At this age, children need to know that:

- ⊕ HIV can be transmitted while sharing needles with an infected person. These include needles used to inject drugs, steroids or vitamins and needles used in tattooing and body piercing. Children should be warned against "blood brother or blood sister" rituals.
- ⊕ HIV can be found in body fluids such as blood, semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk; it can **spread during unprotected vaginal, anal and oral intercourse with an infected person**; an HIV+ mother can transmit HIV to the fetus during pregnancy and/or birth. She can also transmit HIV to her baby through breastfeeding.
- ⊕ People can protect themselves by **not having sex, and not sharing needles.**
- ⊕ **Latex condoms** reduce the risk of HIV infection for people who have sexual intercourse.

Granted, it's difficult to discuss these issues. But when a child's education about AIDS is left to hearsay, s/he winds up with an incomplete, often inaccurate picture. The result is needless worry and confusion. Such a child may fear for the health and safety of his friends, his family, and himself.

Basic education can help prevent that needless worry and confusion. And when parents are the source of that basic education, they have an ideal opportunity to pass along important values to the children they love.

Same-Sex Exploration: Before You Jump to Any Conclusions...

Wait a minute. You understood it when your child "played doctor" in pre-school. But this is 4th grade! What's going on here!? What's going on here is not exactly "playing doctor," but it's the 4th grader's version of checking out what bodies look like - AND - whether his looks like it should.

You see, **it's common at this age (although not widely discussed) for same-sex friends to examine each other's bodies. It's all part of a child's natural curiosity, and the need to confirm that his physical development is OK.**

This shouldn't be interpreted as "my son or daughter must be gay." Both gay and straight youth engage in same-sex exploration. It's important for both families and young people to know that automatic assumptions about sexual orientation should not be made based upon this. This is both a natural and normal part of development, so stay calm and trust that your child is simply following his/her developmental path. Also keep in mind that Native traditions honor and respect two-spirited people. No matter what happens along your child's path, he/she will need to know you can be trusted and relied on for support. Open the door of communication early; you won't be sorry.

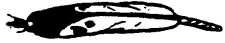
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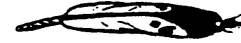
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Dealing with Peer Pressure



It's been apparent for some time now that the influence you have over your 4th grader is waning a bit. Let's face it, *as far as your child's concerned; when it comes to certain issues, friends have more clout.* Don't give up, stay lovingly involved.

Just because you know full well that this is a sign of normal, healthy development, doesn't mean you have to *like* it. **At this age, kids are increasing their separation from the folks, testing their wings, and becoming more independent.** Scary, isn't it? The world is a far different place than when *you* were 10. Today, **4th graders experience pressures that you didn't confront until high school - even college!** Drugs, alcohol, sex, violence... elementary school students are grappling with *adult issues and decisions!*

It's not enough to tell your child, "*Don't!*" **The need to belong and to be accepted by the peer group can be powerful enough to make kids break the rules.** But it is helpful to your 4th grader when you:

- **Acknowledge** how tough it can be to go against the group.
- **Assist** him in recognizing what peer pressure looks like - the subtle and blatant forms.
- **Share** your experiences with peer pressure. Explain how you dealt with the situations. (Share your failures as well as your successes!)
- **Practice** "what if." Help her analyze consequences of various choices; brainstorm ways to respond - what could be said and done.
- **Encourage** him to come to you if he feels pressured and unsure of what to do. Offer to be his "out," his "excuse" if he needs one. Often, kids look to parents to say "No" in order to get them off the hook with their friends.
- **Reassure** her that even if she gets into trouble, you will always be there. You may be upset, and you may even yell, but you will always be there for her.

Peer pressure isn't just a childhood dilemma. It affects young and old alike. Skills you teach your child *now* will serve him throughout his life.

The Importance of Hugs

Development occurring in middle childhood can bring anxiety and awkwardness for parents and children alike. Feeling unsure, parents may begin backing off on the physical touch and affection they freely gave before. That can be confusing to a child.

This is a time when children are preoccupied - almost *obsessed* with being normal; bodies experience furious changes in size and shape; emotions and moods can skyrocket, and then plummet - all in the course of a few hours. *This is a time when kids need that support and reassurance, that physical touch and affection which says, "You're OK."* A hug is an important way to show your child that s/he is loved.

As children mature, they initiate their own "hands off" policy. It's somewhat erratic and unpredictable. On one hand, they may show obvious distaste for parental displays of affection, flinching whenever mom and dad attempt to bestow a hug or kiss (especially if anyone else is around!). On the other hand, there are times when kids *ache* for a warm touch, but don't - or *won't* - ask. (Parents are just expected to sense this, and respond appropriately.)

At any rate, children need their parents - **BOTH** parents - to continue *offering*, but not *forcing*, physical affection. (And they will need this - whether they're 2 or 42!) Let them know you still enjoy giving (and getting) hugs and kisses - and that you respect their right to accept, to refuse - and to change their minds!

Talk with your children about your own uncertainty or discomfort. Encourage them to air their feelings. Decide together how to handle this "touchy" issue. Rather than automatically assume what the kids want and when - **ASK THEM!**

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Grade 5

A time of transition – puberty has begun

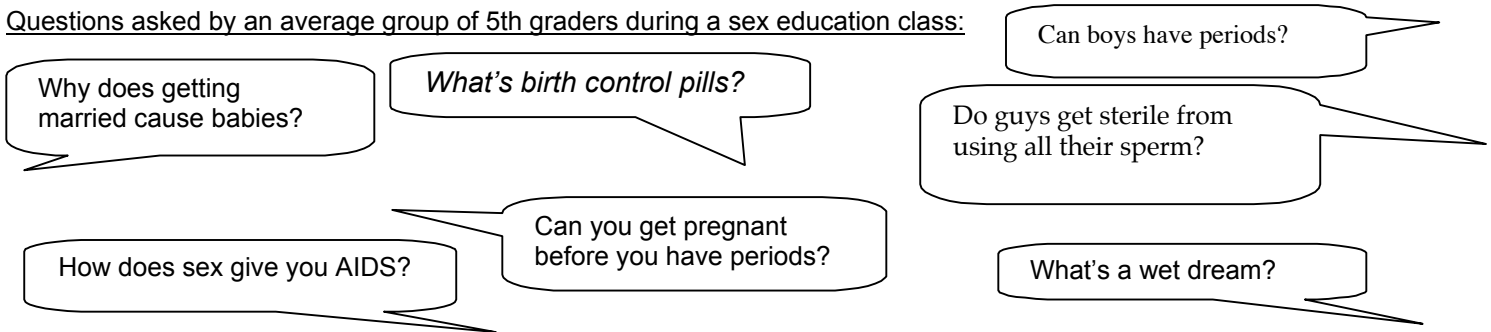
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Sexplanations: “What I Want to Know Is ...”

Talking with your 5th grader about sex and puberty is HARD, but there are some ways to make it a little easier.

- You don't need to hold a formal session; the more informal the better-you'll both be more comfortable.
- Keep talks short and voluntary.
- Tell your child that it isn't easy for you to talk about it either. “You know, sexuality has always been a hard subject for me to talk about...” This tends to make it easier for both of you and make him/her more receptive. “I do think it's important and want to answer your questions, to listen to your concerns and views. I also want to share with you my values around sexuality.”
- Stay calm, regardless of the question...some of them might shock you.

Questions asked by an average group of 5th graders during a sex education class:



Some questions may surprise you, appearing rather simplistic. You're thinking, “Surely 5th graders know *that!*” Others shock you. “I can't believe they asked *that* - in 5th grade?!”

You'd be amazed at how much 5th graders have heard about sex, and how little they really know.

It can put parents in an awkward position. On one hand, they frequently assume (incorrectly) that children understand far more than they actually do. Consequently, many overlook the sexuality basics, neglecting to pass them on to their children. On the other hand, parents may hold back on more explicit sexual issues, assuming (again incorrectly) that “5th graders don't need to know such things.”

The reality is, children are bombarded with sexual messages from friends, TV, movies, songs, the Internet. Many messages are inaccurate, perhaps irresponsible, even exploitive; a few may be factual; *typically none contain the values you want your child to learn.* Is it any wonder 10-year-olds ask sexually simplistic AND explicit questions?

The best way to ensure that your child receives accurate, values-based sexuality education is for you to be the primary provider.

This is not to suggest that sex education doesn't belong in schools. On the contrary, there are excellent school-based programs (and for some students, these programs are their *only* source of factual information). But these programs need to be viewed *in conjunction with, not in*

place of, parent-child communication about sex. A home/school partnership is ideal.

Don't be discouraged if you've had little open discussion about sex with your child. It's never too late to begin. Perhaps your reluctance was due to embarrassment, uncertainty, fear, or maybe you were simply unaware of the need.

Take advantage of naturally occurring “teachable moments” - a magazine article about teenage pregnancy, a news report on HIV/AIDS, a local program on sexual abuse. These are wonderful discussion starters. If your child has not begun experiencing the changes of puberty, surely some of her friends have. This is a perfect issue to address with 5th graders, since typically they have many questions and anxieties about it.

There are all kinds of opportunities and sexually related topics, if only you're open to them. And remember to address those issues you assumed were too advanced. As witnessed by the sampling of questions, children have bits and pieces of hearsay, a lot of confusion, and an abundance of curiosity about sex. A good rule is to explain what you think they want to know - and more.

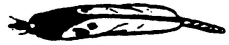
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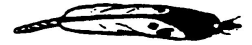
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The Secret to Communication During Puberty is Persistence



If puberty is someone's idea of a joke, nobody's laughing. To say that this can be a difficult stage for child AND parent is clearly an understatement. The most important thing during this time is to keep the communication open by being persistent. "I'm here for you and I'm willing to talk." Don't be pushy, or make a big deal of it... simply seize opportunities which allow the topic of sexuality to come up.

For children, puberty is the time of life when they typically: hate their bodies, no matter *what* the dimensions; feel weird, and can't figure out why; *"know"* they're not normal; don't want to grow up or be treated like kids; and quarrel a lot with parents who *"just don't understand!"*

For parents, puberty is the time when they typically: don't know what's gotten into their kids; feel awkward, excited, and nervous about their child's changing body; *"can't do anything right!"*; long for the days when they and their youngster could communicate - *without* yelling; panic at the pressures facing youth these days.

How can I help my child?

You can help your child on his/her journey through puberty with good preparation. With knowledge, skills, and a good attitude the journey can be rather exciting ... or at least a bit more pleasant ... OK - let's just say *tolerable*. Your 5th grader needs solid information about developmental changes that occur in *both* sexes during puberty.



Knowing this *well in advance* can lessen anxiety.

Perhaps during no other phase of life do people undergo such physical and emotional transformation. While excited at the prospect of growing up, many kids (and parents) feel, "I'm not sure I'm ready for this."

- Let your child know that the way s/he feels is common.
- Encourage him/her to talk about feelings s/he has toward growing and changing; what s/he's looking forward to, or is concerned about.
- Share *your* stories about puberty. Kids love being in on their parent's lives. It builds trust and reassures children that parents appreciate what they're going through.
- Reassure them that each person has his/her own timeclock. The body develops *when it's ready*...some begin early, others later. Even if they're not satisfied with their personal development schedules, children are relieved to hear they're normal.

If your child is embarrassed or genuinely uncomfortable discussing these issues, acknowledge this. You could say, "A lot of people are embarrassed to talk about these things. If you're feeling that way, I understand. I'm feeling a bit awkward too. Maybe we can help each other."

If s/he's reluctant to talk, don't force it. You might comment, "I can see this is hard for you to talk about now. Is there something I could do to help? Would you like to try again another time?"

There are many ways to share information with your child. Be creative. **Take advantage of the excellent books written specifically for youth.** Leave them around the house where your child is sure to find them. (You read them too. Remember what it's like to have puberty strike. Such a refresher can provide you with facts you've long since forgotten... or perhaps never knew!) At a later point, offer to discuss the books with your child.

Many tribes have special ceremonies to honor and celebrate puberty. If you don't already know these traditions, community elders, as well as your tribal resource center, are wonderful resources. The preparation and planning for ceremonies usually include special rituals for the youth. These activities can help ease the tensions of puberty by giving it special meaning.

Puberty consists of a series of events which unfold over the course of 4-5 years. Why not do all you can to ease the transition through those years? Your child will not be the only one who benefits!

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Grade 5

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A Check List

It's a good time to assess exactly what your 5th grader knows (or not) about sexuality. Take inventory of what's important to understand by this age, and catch up on items that haven't yet been addressed.

By 5th grade, children should have knowledge about:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| ≤ anatomy and changes during puberty for both sexes | ≤ sexual intimacy |
| ≤ reproduction and birth | ≤ your related values |
| ≤ HIV/AIDS | ≤ sex role stereotyping |
| ≤ sexual abuse, exploitation, and date rape | ≤ relationships |
| ≤ sexual orientation | ≤ decision-making |
| ≤ masturbation | |

This is by no means a complete list. It's merely a reminder of the knowledge that becomes even more critical at this age for your child. If you're looking at this list thinking, "We haven't covered *half* of this!", don't panic. But do get moving! The 11-year-old needs solid information - often on issues that parents assume are "too advanced."

Urges and Surges

The physical and emotional changes which occur in children during puberty are plainly evident to their parents. But the accompanying transformation in sexual feelings, urges, and fantasies are not so obvious - in fact, they are typically kept hidden.

Without a chance to hear that it's perfectly normal for sexual feelings and urges to intensify, and for fantasies to become more frequent during puberty, children may find themselves a bit shaken ("Is this *supposed* to happen?").

It's also during this stage that masturbation is usually rediscovered (if it had ever been forgotten), along with any guilt or anxiety which may have been previously attached to it. Rarely asked questions about whether masturbation is good/bad often plague children. *Give children reassurance that the hormonal changes of puberty can result in new and intense sexual feelings.* This is normal and all part of the wonder and excitement of growing up!



Now is a good time to share your family and tribal values about masturbation. You might want to explain that it can be a natural and healthy way for young people to deal with sexual urges and that traditionally some Native people have used it as a form of birth control. You could share with your child that it is normal to feel the sexual feelings s/he is feeling and that there are times when it may be appropriate and preferable to masturbate than to seek sexual contact with others...*if this is what you believe.* Parents may worry that saying masturbation is acceptable will encourage their children to become more sexually active. But this has not been shown to be the case.

If you believe masturbation is acceptable, healthy exploration, say so! If you do not believe masturbation is acceptable, explain that in a loving way, without causing your child guilt or shame.

This is an important time to share honest information about facts and values. You are trying to help lessen the stress and anxiety of the journey through puberty, so remember to stay calm, honest, and open.

If you've not built a foundation upon which to discuss some of these emotionally charged issues, it makes it tougher ... *but not impossible.* Here are some possible icebreakers to get the conversation started:

- I remember being 11, experiencing a lot of new feelings and urges. I wasn't quite sure what to make of them. I know a lot of my 11-year-old friends felt the same way, but unfortunately, no one ever talked about it.
- When I was your age, I felt uncomfortable talking with my folks about sex, but I had lots of questions. How can I help you feel comfortable talking with me about these issues?

There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education



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Facts vs. Fears about Sexual Orientation

Around 5th grade, young people begin wondering (perhaps *worrying*) about sexual orientation: How can you tell if you're gay or lesbian? What *causes* it? Does masturbating mean you're gay? Are lesbian and gay people normal?

When you think about it, at this age, these questions are not at all surprising. Puberty is the time when children are at the height of growth, change, AND worry! **The events of puberty can arouse anxieties, uncertainty, and confusion as perhaps no other stage of life can.** It seems the overwhelming fear is that of being different from their peers.

As part of all this, concern about sexual orientation may begin to sprout. There's a lot of fuel for the fire: same-gender play is common, with friends checking each other out, partly in an effort to validate their own development; sexual fantasies may include same-gender friends; young people frequently develop crushes on same-gender teachers, coaches, etc. Add to all this, the pervasive assumptions about HIV/AIDS and the gay community, along with the common derogatory schoolyard remarks about people who are gay and lesbian.

Top it off with a lack of understanding or someone to even talk to about these things, and you've likely got a confused kid on your hands.

Whether your child has asked you about sexual orientation or not, now is a good time to address it. There are many leads to the subject, including TV shows, news reports, or a negative term overheard in reference to people who are gay or lesbian.

You can help your child by pointing out some of the common misconceptions. This is also a good time to share traditional Native American values on respect and tolerance. You might want to talk about how "Two-spirited" people were often considered to carry sacred medicine and that the Great Spirit gave them special roles in early Native American culture. Additionally, we now know:

- People do not choose their sexual orientation.
- No one can *cause* another person to be gay, lesbian or heterosexual.
- Being gay is not a sickness or mental illness.
- Being gay or lesbian is not something that can or needs to be "cured."

Encourage your child to express his feelings. Ask what he's heard from the kids at school. This may allow him to discuss some of the anxieties he has about his own sexual development. In addition to reassurance, you can offer your personal values and perspectives around sexual orientation. Be prepared to answer the question: Is it bad to be gay?

Explain that people have different opinions about sexual orientation. Then specify yours. While sharing your beliefs, be sure to emphasize that it is never OK to discriminate against someone because of sexual orientation. Point out that a word like "fag" is offensive and meant to hurt. This and other derogatory terms are used in anger or to ridicule.

Be sure to acknowledge that gay and lesbian couples have loving relationships that are as wonderful and important to them as any other couple's relationship is to them.

Let your child know that you would love and support him, no matter what his own sexual orientation might be.

Once again, you're faced with a difficult subject that needs to be discussed - for *everyone's* sake. It's an issue that evokes a lot of emotion, judgments, values - as well as a hefty dose of misunderstanding... which is exactly why many parents choose to avoid the subject.

Please don't be one of those parents. You have a big responsibility to your child and to your culture. Take advantage of this opportunity to reinforce respect and tolerance and you will be helping to heal the sacred circle.

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Tell Me I'm OK

Your 5th grader needs to be reassured that s/he is okay and normal. Many 5th graders are anxious about the rapid changes they're experiencing, both physically and emotionally; they're worried about their bodies: **Am I too short? Too tall? Why am I so flat-chested? When will my penis grow? I hate my nose!**

They feel uncoordinated as arms and legs grow, completely out of sync with one another; their moods are erratic, for no apparent reason. Of course, it wouldn't be cool to ask anybody about this stuff, so they frequently just suffer in silence. **No wonder self-esteem can take a nosedive during puberty!**

Self-esteem is something which parents have nurtured (or not) in their child since birth. In fact, it's during the very early years that children develop a sense of their "OK-ness." For example: Even if you are angry about his behavior, by reassuring your son that you still love *him* you can promote a positive sense of self; When your fifth grader is encouraged to attempt new skills, to stretch her abilities, and then is praised for the trying, it promotes self-esteem; remind your child that differences from others (whether physical, intellectual ... whatever) make him/her the unique and special person s/he is - that builds self-esteem.

How do I nurture self-esteem?



At this stage, parents and guardians would do well to be especially aware of their children's need for encouragement and support. Young people have a difficult lesson to learn: self-esteem is not and cannot be based upon what others think of them. The bottom line is how a person feels about himself. As one grandfather told his granddaughter: "Annie, not everyone is going to like you. And that's ok. What counts is that you like yourself." That's a difficult concept for adults to accept, much less children!

As parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents, we can offer our children encouragement, understanding, trust, praise, and appreciation. We can help them feel successful, acknowledging their successes, and teaching them to learn from the failures. Taking time out to teach young people the traditions and culture of their tribe can help build their sense of self-worth. You don't have to know how to make a drum or brain tan a hide. Elders in your community or on your reservation can help you identify

activities that you and your child can learn together. The time you spend learning together will help build trust and even create a safe space for talking about values around puberty and sex. Resources for sharing your culture and values with your child are all around you. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Along with this, we can provide complete and accurate information about growth and development about the physical, emotional, and sexual issues which are all part of puberty. *With factual background, the unknown becomes less scary, less likely to cause confusion and worry which so often threaten self-esteem.* Research tells us that the **sexual decisions and behaviors of adolescents are greatly influenced by self-esteem.** High self-esteem correlates with more positive, healthy, and responsible choices.

Young people sometimes operate under the illusion that a sexual relationship proves they are loved, worthy, etc. They may agree to or even seek out sexual activity in a misguided effort to prove their self-worth. Yet premature sexual activity can leave young people hurt, confused, guilty, scared - perhaps even pregnant or infected with a sexually transmitted infection. Needless to say, the ultimate outcome can sometimes be the further erosion of self-esteem. We owe it to young people to discuss these issues with them in depth; to share our perspective about the place of sexuality in one's life; to answer their questions; to listen to their thoughts, opinions, and concerns. Rather than assume that your 5th grader has plenty of time for such discussion, realize that children are growing up much faster these days. We must prepare them to grow up safely - informed and self-assured.

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Grade 6

Keep it open, positive and real

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Make Your Best Effort to Keep Communication Open and Honest

You don't get it. You pride yourself on the relative ease with which you've discussed sexual issues with your child in the past: answering questions honestly; initiating conversation; creating an environment in which sexuality is viewed as a special and positive aspect of ourselves.

What happened? Suddenly, your 6th grader has decided the topic is off limits. S/he's appalled (embarrassed, disgusted, nervous ... take your pick...) whenever the subject comes up. That's just what you've been trying to prevent... why you've worked so hard to communicate. And it's come to this? So you wonder, "What did I do wrong?"

Nothing. You have a typical 6th grader. As 6th graders go, sex is gross, embarrassing, stupid, funny, or all of the above. B.P. (Before Puberty), things were different: talking with the folks about sex wasn't a big deal; the issues were matter of fact, non-threatening. Your child was an interested bystander.

D.P. (During Puberty), sexuality becomes terribly personal! Bodies blossom, fantasies and strange new urges arise; simmering concerns about what's normal result in considerable uneasiness; many 6th graders know of someone - a friend or classmate - who is actually experimenting with sexual activity (Yes! Unfortunately some children become involved very early!)

Keep your sense of humor... and use it. This needn't be a heavy subject. Take comfort knowing that your child is moving toward A.P. (After Puberty).

A typical 11-year-old's response to the topic of sex: *Suddenly, sexuality is hitting too close to home, it's scary...and "I'd rather not talk about it!"*. It's now especially important that parents muster patience, understanding, and support in order to teach children what they need to know:

- **Continue** broaching the subject - keep it light, don't push. Settle for a monologue if need be...at least it's putting out your message.
- **Avoid** preaching. As sex becomes more of a real issue in a child's life, it's easy for parents to fall into the lecture mode. "Do this... don't do that" is likely to fall on deaf ears - spurring even more resistance to discussion. When parents *truly listen* to their children, and encourage them to express personal views, communication is enhanced.
- **Encourage** your child to examine, clarify, and discuss his own values about sexual issues. Parents hope the family values will be accepted. Be prepared to hear that some of your child's views differ from yours. *Make it safe for him to disagree; help him know your love and support are not contingent on his acceptance of your views.*
- **Acknowledge** both your child's reactions, *and* how you feel...something like:
 - "You look uncomfortable talking about this. How can we make it easier?"
 - "When I was young, I was so confused about sex that I had a hard time asking questions. Is that how you feel?"
 - "I'm frustrated that you seem to be tuning me out. I'd like to us be able to talk about this *together.*"

Give yourself a break. Your influence on your child is a powerful one...and only one of many. Remember, you can take neither credit nor blame for the ultimate outcome. *You can only give it your best effort.*

There are a lot of resources available to help you get through these tough years of puberty. Often celebrating cultural and tribal traditions can help bring parents and children closer. Some Native parents and grandparents have shared that creating ceremonies for the young people and holding talking circles has helped ease the tension around talking about sex, puberty, development and relationships. If you don't know where to start, your local tribal resource center should have some ideas and suggestions. Many Native elders have special experiences and teachings that can help you in communicating with your child. Remember to keep an open mind and an open heart. The fact that you are trying to help your child on this journey is important. Don't be too hard on yourself, and just keep trying.

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Grade 6

Keep it open, positive and real

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Teen Pregnancy – It's Time for More Advanced Discussions with Your Son or Daughter

Sexual attitudes and behaviors of mainstream culture are influencing our lives as Native Americans whether or not we choose to participate. Our youth walk two paths, and we must not forget to give them the skills and knowledge they need to be healthy and safe on both those roads. The issues our people - especially our youth - are facing are difficult and complex. Sexually explicit messages permeate our lives. The impact is especially powerful on young people who lack the maturity, wisdom, and insight through which to filter the messages. We cannot pretend that these issues don't exist. Our youth need our help and cultural wisdom to to support them.

Youth who don't have adequate knowledge and understanding about sexuality are more vulnerable to the risk of premature sex, unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, sexual abuse, and exploitation.

Consider this:

- Approximately 900,000 teenage pregnancies occur each year in the U.S.; 78% are unintended.
- More than 45% of high school females and 48% of high school males have had sexual intercourse.
- Each year, 1 in 4 sexually active teens gets a sexually transmitted infection.
- The U.S. has one of the highest teenage pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates in the industrialized world.
- Risky activities like alcohol and other drug use are related to increased sexual risk taking.

Open, honest family communication about sex can help reduce the risk of a child becoming one of the statistics.

What better way to ward off the tragedies of sexual ignorance than to take preventive measures early on ... such as ... education?

Most parents recognize the importance of sexuality education, and in fact, are eager to provide it. Yet many are not prepared for the *depth* of information and skills that is important during the middle childhood years. It's time for more advanced discussion: sexual relationships, birth control and sexual protection, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy, etc.

Some parents fear that addressing such issues will condone, encourage, or promote sexual activity... put ideas into the kids' heads. Not so. Surveys of young people clearly demonstrate the ideas are already there!

All the more reason for you to initiate discussion, provide information, and share values. In fact, some studies show that **children raised in families with open, honest communication about sexual issues are more likely to delay first intercourse and, if they do become involved in a sexual relationship, they are more likely to protect themselves.**

BASIC RULES OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION:

- 1. Teach them what you think they need to know... and more. Remember that you are not only providing this education for today, but for their future as well.**
- 2. The best time to talk is *now*.**

For the majority of 12-year-olds, these more advanced sexual issues can still be addressed at a fairly non-threatening, non-emotional level, since most young people this age are not yet personally involved. This is not likely to be the case a few years down the road. And once the issues become more pertinent in their lives, the discussion can become more challenging.

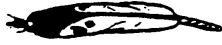
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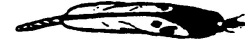
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Its Time to Talk about Relationships



You're likely to have a few ideas about when your child will be old enough for a boyfriend/girlfriend. Your child is likely to have some ideas about that too - perhaps vastly different from yours.

As parents and concerned adults, we know that kids are pressured to grow up too fast these days. We can do something to help them deal more effectively with the situation. Being there for them and listening to what they are feeling and going through helps ease the pressure.

No one is suggesting that children be encouraged into social situations prematurely. But realize that elementary school children, some as early as 4th or 5th grade, play with the concept of relationships ... boyfriend/girlfriend, etc... some more seriously than others. And be sensitive too that these interests and attractions may not all be toward the other gender.

There's the usual scribbling of hearts and initials on notebooks, phone calls and passing love notes and text messages. Unfortunately, some 6th graders (more typically 6th grade girls with older boys) get more involved in various levels of sexual experimentation ... a rather sobering thought. **It isn't too early to talk about feelings (and pressures) that often accompany interest in romantic relationships.** This is another example of addressing an issue *before* (hopefully) it *becomes* an issue! It's a chance to talk about friendship and about relating to both the other and same gender comfortably, respectfully. You can help prepare your youngster for the fun and excitement of such relationships, as well as for the frustrations, uncertainty, and disappointments that sometimes result.

Establishing supportive and loving relationships is not something people automatically know how to do.

There are skills involved - skills which can be taught and nurtured throughout childhood. But young people are less likely to look to their parents for help with these skills if they fear being teased, not taken seriously, or met with "You're too young to be interested in boys/girls." Talking circles with Native American young people revealed that these are some of the reasons they often didn't talk to their parents about relationships. If it's hard or awkward to have these conversations with your child, acknowledge that. See if you can figure out together how to make it more comfortable for both of you.

The importance of talking with your child about social relationships - ahead of time - cannot be overemphasized. Just as different children experience vastly different rates of physical development, so too with social development. This can result in worry... embarrassment... pressure... and confusion...

"All my friends talk about boys constantly, but I'm just not interested. What's wrong with me?"

"I'm a girl, and I like other girls!"

"I've got to have a girlfriend/boyfriend because everybody in my class does."

"My folks tease me whenever girls call the house. I hate it!"

Concerns about being popular, dressing right, looking good, fitting in - these are major issues for 6th graders! By talking about this, parents give children a chance to vent their feelings. It may take a bit of encouragement. After all, many children (and parents) are reluctant to talk about such personal things.

Kids need help negotiating the complexities of relating to others. Without it, they may stumble through... some with more difficulty than others. Just by being there for them and listening you can make a big difference. Be sure to remind them that they are developing at the rate that is right for them. Sharing one of your own growing-up experiences with them can be reassuring as well.

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The Media ... The Message

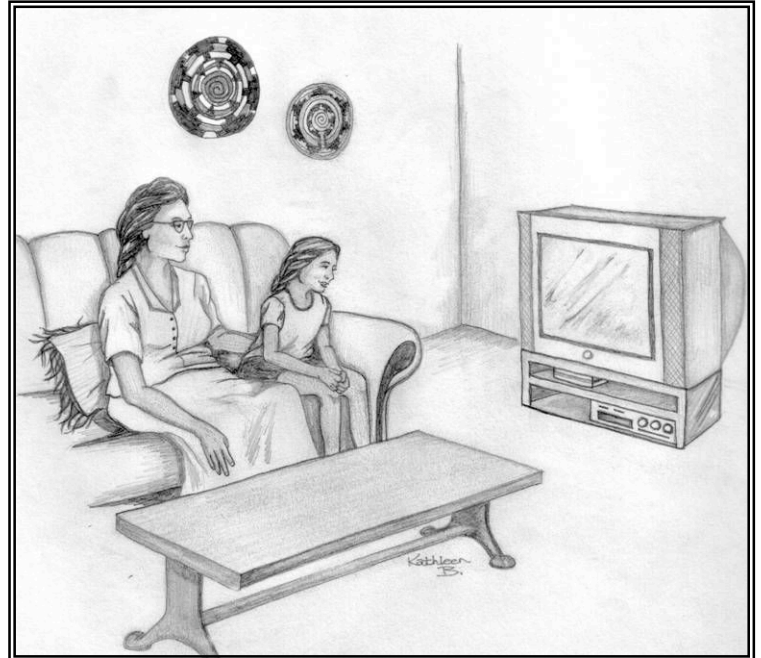
- By age 18, the average student has spent 11,000 hours in school, compared to over 15,000 hours watching TV.
- Young people cite the media as one of their major sources of messages about sex.
- A 2005 report on teens and technology indicates that 87% of US youth ages 12-17 use the Internet, exposing them to wonderful education sites, as well as highly questionable ones.

Sexually explicit messages permeate our lives. What's a parent to do? A good first step is *awareness* - recognizing the frequency and impact of these messages.

It also makes sense to monitor DVDs, T.V., radio and web sites our children tune into, realizing ***we can never completely isolate them from questionable or offensive messages.*** Despite house rules and guidelines, children are often exposed to inappropriate media without our knowledge or consent.

Help your child develop a filter through which to sort and interpret the messages. Teach him to be a discerning viewer, to *identify* and *evaluate* content. Assist him in *recognizing exploitive, irresponsible, and unrealistic sexual messages.* A good way to do this is to watch movies and TV. surf the 'Net, etc., with your child, and then have a discussion about it.

Encourage your child to express his opinions (for example: "What do you think about the way women were portrayed in that movie?" "Why do you suppose advertisers show sexy people to sell their products? What message does that send?" "What do you think about the teenager in that film having a baby?") Share *your* thoughts and values too. We needn't analyze all media to death... just be alert to the messages. It's a good way to put a powerful influence into perspective.



Peer Power

It's important to talk with 6th graders about sexual (mis)information and peer pressure. A good way to broach the subject is to share a bit of your own past (which kids love!). "I remember the wild ideas we heard about sex when I was young. Like: you can't get pregnant the first time you have sex; or having sex proves you're grown up. What kinds of things have you heard?"

Impress on your child that when it comes to sexuality, accurate sources are important. Suggest some options: parents, teachers, school nurses, counselors, etc. Realizing they have several alternatives, young people may be less inclined to accept their peers as "sexperts."

Make it safe for your child to discuss sexuality with you.

- **Listen** to his concerns, questions, etc., knowing that interest in the subject doesn't mean he's sexually active or considering it.
- **Respect** his right to express views which may differ from yours.
- **Present** facts along with your values, *being careful to differentiate between the two.*
- **Trust** his ability to make good decisions, if given information, taught the skills, and provided support.

Peer influence isn't confined to sex, OR youth. We deal with it at some level throughout our lives. Your child will benefit from learning how to handle it now.

There's No Place Like Home ... for Sex Education



Grade 7

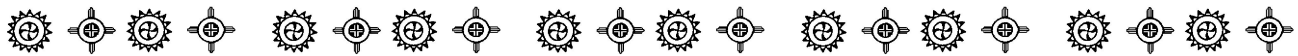
Emotional roller coasters, boyfriends/girlfriends, lots of worries

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What Do I Say About ...

When it comes to discussing sexual values with your children, **say what you believe.** It's that simple (or that difficult).

It is up to you to share your values and beliefs. Even if it seems that your sixth grader is closing you out, hang in there and keep trying. Resources for sharing your culture are all around you. Community and tribal elders are wonderful sources of advice and wisdom. The secret is to never give up trying to communicate with your child.



Sexual feelings. Having sex. Sexual orientation.

These are a few of the issues milling about the minds of 6th graders. When given the opportunity in an atmosphere of trust and safety, many young people ask lots of questions about these and other sexual topics. They're anxious to hear the facts... AND what *you* think. Maybe you're not sure *what* to say or *how* to say it. Do you avoid the subject altogether, hoping the kids won't bring it up... which they won't if they get the sense you would rather not talk about it. Don't be scared to talk to you kids. They want and need to hear from you about these issues.

But you might be thinking:

"I don't want to encourage her." It's a common fear, but listen: your youngster needs no encouragement. She's getting *plenty* from peers, from the media... maybe it's time she heard from *you*.

"I don't want to preach." Good. Your children don't want that either. But expressing your personal beliefs about an issue isn't the same as trying to force someone else to accept them. It's all in the delivery. For example, a parent might say, "I believe teens are too young to have sex. There are good reasons to wait (such as: there's a lot of responsibility and emotional implications which most teens are not ready to accept; they may feel pressured into sex, and wind up feeling regretful; there could be risk of pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections)."

"I don't want my son to think that as long as teens use birth control, it's ok for them to have sex." Fine. Don't tell him that. Informing youth about birth control is not an open invitation for them to have sex. Parents may fear they are giving a double or contradictory message ("Don't do it... but if you do, use a condom."). Such is not the case if information AND values are shared. The result is a loving, helpful message. For example: "I don't think teenagers should have sex. And, I realize that many do. It's important that they protect themselves from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections whenever they do decide to have sex."

Could it be that some parents avoid discussing controversial sexual issues for fear their children may not accept their beliefs? "Then what would I do? How would I handle *that*?" It's a tough one, all right... facing the fact that ultimately our children form their own opinions and develop their own value systems – which may or may not be in line with ours.

It's also true that most children eventually adopt many of the family and cultural values. Nonetheless, they need the opportunity to examine, question, challenge. Would you rather your child test out ideas and views about sexuality in an arena of open communication with loving parents or guardians - or through experimentation?

Encourage the discussion of sexual issues, remembering to *listen to your child's views* as well as *state your own*. Take on the controversy. **Say what you believe, taking care to present the facts as well as what you value... while not confusing the two.**

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The Wonder Years . . . Putting Your Ideas into Their Heads!

Remember what the middle school years were like? An emotional roller coaster: hormone madness and changing bodies; being self-conscious; novel interest in the same or other sex - which is exciting, awkward, confusing - all at the same time; a simultaneous *craving for and fear of* new freedom... independence from mom and dad.

Middle school: the wonder years.

Young people wonder, “Will I ever be normal?” Parents wonder, “Will this ever end?”

Clearly, life's a challenge in middle school... for all involved. It's a time when parent/child conversations of any sort can be tough; conversations about sexual issues...seemingly *impossible!*

For parents, there's a temptation to shy away from the subject. Old anxieties come back to haunt us. Concerns like: “Maybe all this discussion with children about sex isn't such a good thing. We don't want to *encourage* them... you know, put *ideas* into their heads.” Or: “Is it a *mistake* to talk about this so openly with kids? Why not let them stay innocent as long as they can? There's plenty of time for them to learn about all this adult stuff.”

Sound familiar? Rest assured the *very least* of your worries are the “ideas” you might put into your child's head. The reality is that your 7th grader is exposed to a daily barrage of sexual messages... from peers and the media. The messages are frequently inaccurate, irresponsible, and even exploitive!

As parents, **you're in an ideal position to clean up sexual “myth-information.”** The “ideas” you'll be putting into your child's head are about your family and cultural values around sexuality; they're about accurate information; respectful, positive attitudes toward sexuality; and about love, trust and support.

But what about the fear that knowledge equals activity - that giving kids information on all this adult stuff might encourage sexual experimentation? No worries.

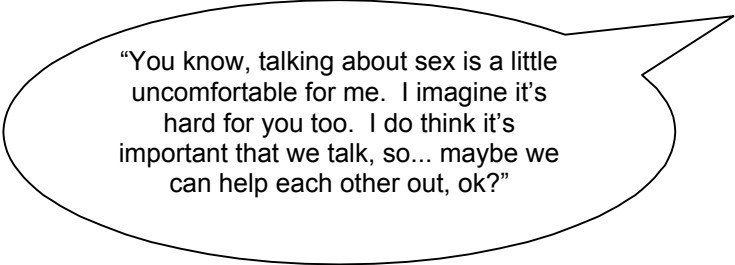
Research shows that teens are far more likely to learn by doing when they have been kept ignorant (innocent?); have been given little or no opportunity to talk openly with parents or other trusted adults about sexual issues; and when their sex “education” has been left to peers and the media.

Surely, as a parent or guardian you do not want to leave your child's sexual learning to chance. The results of “trial and error” sexuality education are disheartening at best. Often they are devastating: premature sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections. These are just a few of the consequences of sexual ignorance.

So, put those old anxieties back where they belong - and remember what you already know: your children need and deserve to hear from you about all the issues of importance to their lives... including sexuality.

During the wonder years, kids *and* parents have loads of things they're concerned and confused about,. Making it safe for the family to talk about sexuality lightens the load. Difficult? Uncomfortable? Awkward? Maybe... and well worth the effort.

Stuck for an icebreaker? Try something heartfelt and honest.



“You know, talking about sex is a little uncomfortable for me. I imagine it's hard for you too. I do think it's important that we talk, so... maybe we can help each other out, ok?”

Broach the subject by using “teachable moments” like a news story on HIV or teen pregnancy. Watch TV together and discuss the sexual messages you notice.

Take any and all opportunities you can to put your ideas into your child's head!

There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education



Grade 7

Emotional roller coasters, boyfriends/girlfriends, lots of worries

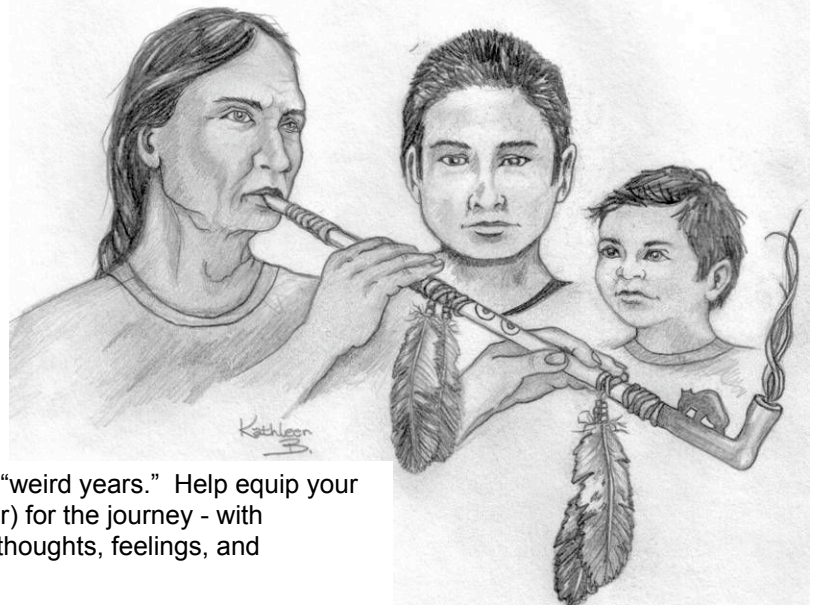
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Puberty 101

Puberty. Almost sounds like a disease. For those experiencing it, it often feels like one. Of course, much of that has to do with the incredible physical changes that occur: hormones surging, bodies transforming (usually into sizes and shapes that are NEVER right!).

And let's not overlook (as if we could) the emotional upheaval that accompanies puberty: intense feelings of excitement, anxiety, happiness, anger, sorrow, delight... perhaps all within a matter of hours! Imagine experiencing such major change without having a clue that it's all perfectly normal!

You can ease your child's passage through the puberty "weird years." Help equip your son/daughter (or niece/nephew/grandson/granddaughter) for the journey - with information, support, and plenty of opportunity to share thoughts, feelings, and questions.



Although they're dying for answers as well as reassurance, many 7th graders are reluctant to approach mom and dad with their concerns. Don't mistake their silence as a sign that they know it all or don't want to talk about it. Sometimes their confusion is so great, they don't even know what to ask or how to begin! Add to that the awkwardness that often goes along with conversations related to sexuality... and you can appreciate their dilemma. So, initiate the conversation.

Just in case your memories of puberty have mellowed over time, here are some of the more pressing concerns:

- ⊕ I'm the tallest (shortest, skinniest, fattest) kid in the class. I hate it!
- ⊕ Will my penis ever grow?
- ⊕ Why am I so flat chested?
- ⊕ I'm the only girl I know who hasn't gotten 'it' (my period).
- ⊕ **AM I NORMAL?**

General order for girls:

1. Breast budding (between ages 8 and 13, on average)
2. Hips broaden
3. Straight pubic hair
4. Growth spurt
5. Pubic hair becomes kinky
6. Menstruation or moon cycle (about 2 yrs. after start of breast development)
7. Underarm hair (in some people)

General order for boys:

1. Growth of testes and scrotum (between 10 and 13, on average)
2. Straight pubic hair
3. Early voice change
4. First ejaculation (about 1 year after testicular growth)
5. Pubic hair becomes kinky
6. Growth spurt
7. Underarm hair (in some people)
8. Significant voice change
9. Facial hair develops (most Native men do not get facial hair)

Parents can spare their children anxiety by sharing the details of how this puberty business works. People grow and change at their own rate, whether they like it or not. AND, they begin the process of sexual development at the time that's right for them. Some start early, some late... either way, it's perfectly normal.

Offer your 7th grader a rundown of physical changes to expect during puberty. The entire process takes place over 4-5 years. It's marked by a series of events which occur in a fairly predictable sequence, although some young people follow a slightly different sequence - and that's normal too! Explaining this to your child is far more useful than simply saying, "Don't

worry. Your body knows exactly what it's doing."

When children can gauge their own development against this kind of roadmap, they feel more assured that they're on track. Remember too, that puberty is more than just physical change. Emerging sexual feelings, emotions, relationships, stresses... these are all part of the journey, and can be especially difficult to discuss.

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The Dating Game

Middle schools are filled with many who worry, "What's wrong with me!?" if they're not interested in the other gender. Media and peer pressure to be involved in early relationships heighten the anxiety.

"I'm just not interested in having a girlfriend, but that's all my friends talk about! Am I weird or something?"

"I wish I was popular like Karen. All the boys like her." Disappointment, bruised self-esteem, secret fears and hurts may rarely be expressed to anyone - especially parents.

Many 7th graders sample boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. Help your child understand that people develop social readiness at their own rate.

Acknowledge it's often confusing to be surrounded by friends who vary greatly on the readiness scale. Even if your child hasn't expressed concerns about this, bring it up... just to be sure. Break the ice with your own recollections of 7th grade:

"I remember 7th grade. It seemed like everyone was paired up or had a crush on someone. Me? I could have cared less at the time, but I didn't dare admit it. My friends would never let me live it down! But you know, I bet a lot of them secretly felt the same way I did."

"I wonder about young people who are attracted to their same gender friends. With all the pressure to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, they must feel pretty isolated and afraid to talk about their feelings."

This kind of conversation is a nice acknowledgement that not all people have romantic feelings for or relationships with someone of the other gender. It opens the door for your child to discuss this with you if they are questioning their own sexuality. By initiating discussions about these issues, you can help relieve the social pressures your children may be experiencing. Explore feelings and situations that can arise when romantic interests begin to emerge.

Even if your child isn't ready (or willing) to talk freely about this, you won't be wasting your time. The message will still be heard: "If you find you're feeling confused about this, please know that I'm here for you. I'll listen, try to understand, and who knows? Maybe I can help."

A Little Help from Friends...

The depth of sexuality education required by 7th graders may be more than parents realize. One mother commented, "I didn't know half that stuff 'til I was out of college!" Her husband added, "A lot of it I still don't know!"

It's true. Today's adolescents confront sophisticated, complex issues. In trying to provide information and guidance parents often recognize deficiencies in their own sexual knowledge. It's easy to feel overwhelmed about what to say and when to begin...

If you value family communication about sex, if you recognize that complicated issues must be addressed, and if you are committed to working through any discomfort or resistance you and/or your child may feel about discussing these issues, you're well on the way.

Specifics and practical "how to's" of family sex education can be acquired as you go along. There are many resources to assist you.

- Planned Parenthood is an excellent source for speakers, books and pamphlets.
- Community schools and colleges may offer parenting classes that address sexuality issues.
- Physicians, family counselors, tribal elders and members of the clergy often have valuable insights on sex education.
- Tribal health centers and Indian Health Service may be able to help you learn about these issues in the context of your tribal and cultural traditions and needs.

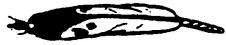
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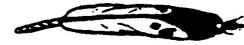
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Sexual Knowledge Supports Sexual Health



“How do you make a baby?” Remember the first time your little one posed THE QUESTION? You recall with amusement the delight with which s/he repeated (and *repeated*) the question - for all the people in the grocery store to hear! S/he delivered the line with such volume, such clarity... *and* determination!

“How do you make a baby?” A legitimate question, yet one that so frequently catches parents off guard and unprepared. Why? Maybe we just never expected the issue to crop up at such an early age. That little one is now a 7th grader... perhaps with parents who are still caught off guard and unprepared when it comes to sexuality and youth.

It's easy to understand how this can happen. After all, sexual involvement, unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, birth control... surely we would never expect these issues to crop up at such an early age. Yet they are the very issues parents need to address, especially with their 13- and 14-year-olds.

Comparatively speaking, “How do you make a baby?” is a piece of cake. Now the questions are far more intense. Given the social/ sexual pressures faced by adolescents today, clear, open and explicit family communication is essential.

Please know that family discussions about sex need not be conducted with a sense of urgency or doom. Parents are encouraged to address issues such as sexual intercourse, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections early - before they become immediate issues, and thus a possible source of controversy between parent and child.

Most 7th graders are capable of understanding the broader implications of sexual relationships. Not yet deeply involved, they're better able to have calm, rational discussions with you about why some teens might choose to have sexual intercourse - including the responsibilities involved and possible consequences.

Granted, the conversation may feel a bit awkward or uncomfortable at first, especially if the family has little history of open sexual discussion. That's ok. The process may take time. Be patient and gentle - with your child and yourself.

This is a perfect opportunity for parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other guardians to share personal values and attitudes around sexuality, in a non-threatening, non-judgmental manner. It's also a good time to clean up any misinformation about the mechanics of reproduction... as well as other sexual issues.

Despite all that young people have heard about sexuality - from family, peers and the media, it's amazing how little they really know or understand. And, it's surprising how much they need to know... at such an early age.

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Have You Hugged Your Kid Today?

Puberty is truly an awkward time for mom and dad. Watching sons and daughters mature sexually is both delightful and disconcerting as parents struggle to relate to their new "growing up person." Ambivalence toward your child's blossoming sexuality is perfectly normal.

Uncertainty can be especially great for the other gender parent who may misinterpret puberty as a signal to "back off" physically. Vague questions can arise about "appropriate" touch, particularly between fathers and daughters.

Whatever the reason, hugs, kisses, and physical touch so freely shared before may now become awkward and strained.

It's painful and confusing to a child experiencing the usual insecurities of puberty. Unexplained withdrawal of affection is especially troubling. The result can be loneliness, confusion and lack of connection, for both parents and children.

When struggling with questions of physical touch and affection, parents might consider this: Puberty is a time when young people desperately want to feel normal, accepted, and loved. It's a time when kids need support, reassurance, and appropriate physical contact which says "You're OK."

The need is there, and often intense. Yet a 7th grader rarely admits, "I'd sure love a hug right now." To confuse you even more, s/he may outwardly resist your offers of affection. Respect that, certainly - and, recognize it's still important to offer.

It's truly a dilemma: parents are expected to have a magical sixth sense about their children's needs and feelings (despite the fact that they are often masked by contradictory behaviors)!

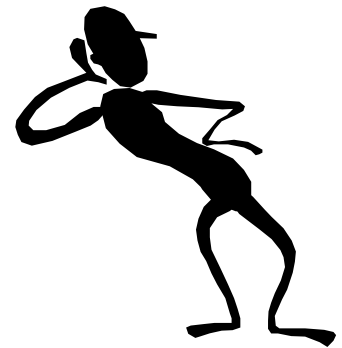
Puberty is indeed a difficult time ... made even more difficult by miscommunication, and reluctance to acknowledge and talk about the fears. Why not share with your child your uncertainty?

One father expressed it to his 13-year-old daughter this way: "Sara, I often find myself wanting to scoop you up and hug and kiss you just like when you were a little girl. I really miss that. And I respect that you're not a little girl anymore. I'm not sure whether you feel comfortable with all that physical affection, so I find myself being cautious about touching you. Can I count on you to let me know what's OK and what isn't?"

Of course, remind your child, "No one - including family members - has the right to touch or approach you in ways that make you uncomfortable. Listen to your feelings, and tell that person to stop. Tell an adult you trust."

This whole "touchy" business is very personal - and different from family to family. Some of us were raised on a diet of hugs, kisses, snuggling... and we feel more or less comfortable with that. For others, overt displays of affection are, and perhaps always were, uncomfortable. There's no right or wrong way to feel about this issue. The point is, whether it's a hug, kiss, squeeze of the shoulder - whatever - giving and receiving appropriate physical touch that

expresses warmth and caring is important to all of us. Our need for that doesn't change - even with puberty. If anything, perhaps the need becomes greater. So, rather than presume to know your child's feelings or how s/he wants you to act around this issue....ASK!



On Listening ...

In talking circles held with Native American seventh and eighth graders, many young people said that they were afraid to talk to their parents about sex because as one young man said it, "If you talk about sex they assume you are doing it."

When your child brings up something that *could* be a sensitive subject, rather than jump to conclusions or fall into the lecture mode, listen with interest and with an open mind. This could be your chance to clear up misinformation and build trust for harder topics down the road.

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Grade 8

Already a teenager . . . rebellion, turmoil and what you don't know

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Strains and Gains

Guiding children through adolescence is an incredible challenge. Despite the wisdom gleaned from their own life experiences, parents often feel unprepared for issues currently facing teens. Lessons from our own adolescence may not hold true for today's youth.

It's also true that during their children's teen years, parents are given an amazing gift: the opportunity to guide and support a young person in becoming capable and independent. "You call raising adolescents a 'gift'?" laughed one parent. "It's the biggest struggle of my life! Rebellion! Turmoil! The complete absence of rational discussion. Hah! Some gift!"

It may be tempting to equate adolescence with horror... but to the extent parents focus on the difficulties and pain, they miss the joys.

For young people, two major tasks are at hand:

1. establishing independence - asserting themselves as separate and distinct from parents.
2. defining/clarifying a personal value system.

Simultaneously, parents face their own tasks:

1. letting go - allowing children the freedom to develop their separate identities.
2. establishing an atmosphere of safety and acceptance - in which attitudes and values can be explored, tested, challenged.

Heavy stuff... thus the "horror, pain and difficulty." Yet, when you understand the parent/child roles during adolescence, you can more effectively offer guidance and support.

For parents, it's unsettling to realize, "I don't have the ultimate power to create how my child's life will be." Long before their teen years, we recognize that in the long run, kids make their own decisions. Parent influence carries some weight, but wanes over time. Which is ok. After all, we're raising children to be responsible adults, capable (we hope) of making healthy choices in their lives.

Teens may select paths and adopt values that are different from ours, or not what we'd prefer. That's hard for parents to accept, particularly when the issues are *so very big*: relationships, sex, drugs, etc. Amidst all of this, parents are expected to let go, yet still provide guidance. This requires that they:

- offer opportunities for their children to make their own mistakes... then assist them in learning the lessons;
- express the family values and beliefs... then accept that the children may not fully embrace them;
- listen to ideas expressed by their children... then recognize the need to offer input - not dictates - based on personal beliefs.

Sounds good... but how to apply it? Especially with tough issues like sex? How can parents help kids make wise choices about their sexual behavior in a world that is sexually explicit and permissive?

You can only do your best... and there are no guarantees. Still, you can build the odds in your child's favor. Speak truthfully and sincerely with your child about sex. Offer the facts s/he needs to be informed and safe - along with your personal values - without suggesting they are one and the same.

Your 8th grader deserves to hear information about sexual development, feelings and behaviors; intercourse, sexual protection and pregnancy; sexual orientation; sexually transmitted infections and HIV... and more, including your beliefs around these issues. Many young teens are experimenting with sexual behaviors. And it simply isn't enough for parents to say, "Don't!"

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But I'd Rather Talk to ...

As young people physically and sexually develop during adolescence, they're inclined to want to discuss related concerns with the same-gender parent or adult. (Assuming they're OK talking about the issue to begin with!)

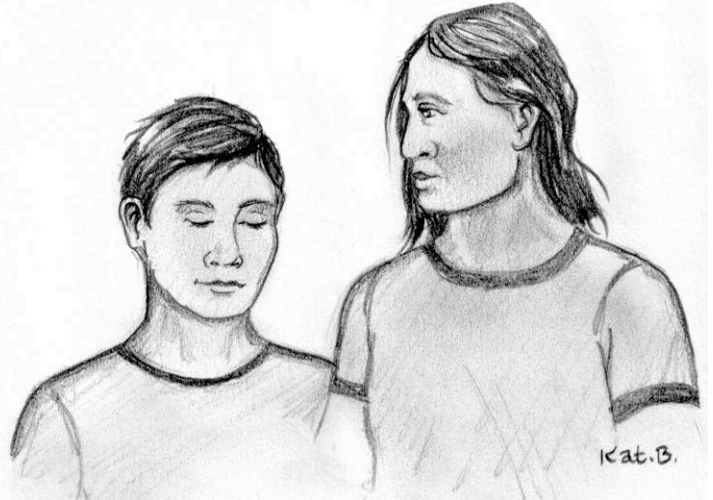
"I've always had such a close relationship with my son, Tim," one mother recalls. I prided myself in talking openly with him about sexuality since he was very young. Tim's dad rarely involved himself in those discussions."

"So, I was surprised - and I admit, hurt - when Tim began confiding more in his father. Now he prefers to talk to his dad about sexual issues. I wonder if I've said or done something wrong."

Sounds like Tim is a typical young man, gravitating toward dad, especially when the subject turns to sexuality. That doesn't mean, mom, that your input is no longer important. Continue to let Tim know you're there for him. And, respect that at this stage of his life, Tim feels more comfortable discussing "guy stuff" with a guy. This is a nice opportunity for Tim to develop the sharing and trust with his dad that he's long enjoyed with you.

So what about single parents or families with gay or lesbian parents? Parents working to be both mom and dad to their teenagers confess they struggle with sexuality issues. They might consider calling upon grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. to fill their child's need for same-gender role models.

As parents address these special adolescent needs, they create opportunities to keep communication open, share information and family values, and assist children in feeling confident and comfortable with their changing sexual selves.



Confusing Connections?

"I understand this business of same-gender role models and confidants during adolescence. What I don't understand is this intense attachment Rick has to his teacher, Mr. Brown. It's as though Rick has a crush on the guy! Is this... normal?"

It's not necessarily an indication that Rick is gay, if that's what you mean. And crush is a good description of what may be going on. It's common for adolescents to develop a strong connection to a same-gender person of importance in their lives: a teacher, coach, perhaps even a classmate. This person might be someone they greatly admire, or someone they want to be like. Such friendship may offer them a deep sense of being cared about. The special bond they experience with this person often allows them to feel safe to seek advice or share their feelings and concerns. They may try to spend as much time as possible with this person, and may even feel jealous or upset if the relationship changes.

Such feelings can be terribly confusing to a young person - and to parents. If you're concerned about the relationship or believe your child may have concerns, talk with him or her about it. Have an open discussion about what defines a healthy friendship. Talk about the importance of honesty and respect in a relationship - no hidden motives or manipulation. Friends care about each other with no strings attached. If that's not the case, maybe it's time to reconsider the relationship.

Adolescents have many hidden anxieties about sexual orientation. "How can you tell if a person's gay?" "If a person masturbates, does that mean s/he's gay?" "Lisa and Ann are always together. They must be more than just 'friends,' don't you think?"

Lots of questions, confusion... whether they're verbalized or not. Initiate the conversation, and help your child sort it out.

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Knowledge Is Power

Talking with your teenager about the pleasures, responsibilities and risks of sex does not imply that you sanction teens having sex. When parents are forthright and honest in discussing a range of sexual topics, they help their children develop respect for intimate relationships.

As part of this, of course, parents share personal and cultural values, religious beliefs, moral viewpoints, etc. Children want, need, and deserve that.

While no one suggests that these discussions be a "how to" manual, sexual specifics are important to the health and well-being of teenagers. Without such information, they are less able to make positive, appropriate choices around sexuality. Facts about birth control and sexual protection, risk of pregnancy, how HIV and other STD's

can be contracted *and* prevented: how does a parent approach such sensitive topics without worrying about giving a double message ("Don't do it... but if you do, use a condom.")?

You *can* communicate a loving, practical message. A parent might say something like: "Your father and I believe that teenagers are not ready for the emotions, responsibilities and risks that go along with sexual intercourse. We believe in waiting until... (you fill in the blank: marriage, a particular age, a committed, mature relationship... whatever you're comfortable with). If young people do have sex, they need to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy by using effective birth control and reduce the risk of infection by using condoms."

"Our hope is that you confide in us if you're ever wrestling with decisions about sex. We'll do all we can to listen and to offer you information and guidance to consider in making your choice. Our highest priority is your well-being, so we want you to be informed."

"I've told you how I feel. I'm interested in hearing your thoughts about this."

Remember the importance of listening to your children's opinions... even though at times, their views may be quite different from yours (and thus, hard to hear). Make it safe for your teenager to express personal thoughts without fear of judgment or repercussions. If s/he is met with anger or intimidation, s/he won't be back a second time. And you will miss the chance to explore and evaluate a variety of ideas with your child.

Within such discussions, many worthwhile points can be made... about love, intimacy, reasons why people have sex (both good and not-so-good), peer pressure, exploitation, delaying sex... a wealth of important stuff! A genuine give-and-take of ideas can allow your child to sort out the issues and draw some conclusions - hopefully before s/he is confronted with making the choices.

Cultural Wisdom for a Difficult Time

Our Native culture celebrates a universal respect for life and nature. Inherent in this is an appreciation for the cycles of life. Adolescence is special part of that cycle and it will be over before you know it. Hopefully you have been able to raise your child with knowledge of his/her culture and an understanding of the rite of passage s/he is going through.

Youth with a strong sense of cultural identity are much more likely to make healthy decisions about sexual activity.

Customs and traditions vary greatly between tribes. Your Tribal Resource Center is a wonderful place to begin searching for ways to bring ceremony and cultural wisdom to your discussions with your teenager about growing up, relationships, and sex. Often tribal elders are willing to help you discuss these issues with your teenagers in a way that builds trust and honors tradition.



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Things American Indian Eighth Graders Wish Their Parents and Caregivers Knew:

In talking circles, Native teenagers shared their ideas, opinions and suggestions for parents trying to talk to kids about sexual issues. Some of their suggestions are listed below.

“My mom tells my aunt everything I tell her, so I don't talk to her about personal stuff anymore.”

- **Keep talks with your teenager confidential** – kids said:
 - Don't go gossiping or sharing secrets
 - Don't tell other people what the kids tell you
 - Be trustworthy

Though some things may seem harmless or unimportant, it might be important to your child. In small communities like ours, and especially on reservations, things travel fast by word of mouth. Your child's trust in you is on the line. Try your best to be worthy of their trust.

“I can't trust my parents not to run their mouths if I tell them anything.”

- **How to have talks about sexual issues** – kids suggested:
 - Start slow and stay simple.
 - Don't be afraid to talk- just come out and say it.
 - Don't assume kids are clueless or treat them like they are “dumb.” They know a lot more than you think they do.
 - Be relaxed and just go for it.
 - No matter what they say, DON'T get angry. It makes them not talk to you about it again.
 - Make yourself available when THEY want to talk.
 - Don't go on and on. Once they get it, stop. To know if they get it, ask, “Do you understand?”
 - Don't force kids to talk. Let them know your door is open when they are ready.
- **When to have talks** – here are some of their ideas:
 - Pick a comfortable, casual, *private* setting for talks about growing up issues.
 - Use times when topics come up on TV to initiate discussions... not dinner time.
 - Set aside some special time to spend together, go on a walk with child, go driving, go out together
- **Including culture in your talks** – what would be helpful to them:
 - Some tribes use humor and joking to deal with uncomfortable issues. Be careful about when you use this humor because it might be a sensitive issue for your teen. One young woman said her parents don't take her questions seriously and make jokes about it. If you want your child to come to you with questions, use good judgment about when to use humor and when to be serious with your conversation.
 - Several teens said that they would like to know native words and phrases in their language for body parts, behaviors, and important attitudes.

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Already a teenager . . . rebellion, turmoil and what you don't know

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Facts About HIV/AIDS

- **More than 45% of high school females and 48% of high school males have had sexual intercourse.**
- **Each year, 1 in 4 sexually active teens gets a sexually transmitted disease.**

The same activity that puts young people at risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) also puts them at risk of HIV infection.

You never imagined talking so explicitly with your children about sex. Yet currently, no vaccine or medication can prevent or cure AIDS. You're painfully aware that some teens have sex at young ages, and their experimentation with sex and drugs puts them at risk of HIV. You know the best protection you can offer is education. Surely you want to provide that.

It's time for significant detail about HIV transmission and prevention... to clear up misconceptions or fears your children may have.... and to keep them safe.

Preview the HIV curriculum being used at school to supplement and support the program at home. While many students receive classroom instruction on this and related sexual issues, family input is essential as well. This provides reinforcement of information and opportunity to share family values and parental guidance.

8th graders should understand the following:

- AIDS is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). Once in the bloodstream, HIV weakens the immune system so the body cannot effectively fight off disease.
- The 4 body fluids known to transmit HIV are blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk. Risk behaviors are activities that involve exposure to these fluids, for example: unprotected intercourse (vaginal, anal or oral) with an infected person; sharing needles (used for injection drugs, steroids, etc.) with an infected person. (Do not share razors, body piercing needles or tattooing instruments.)
- HIV can be passed from mother to baby during pregnancy, birth or breast feeding.
- People have contracted HIV from blood transfusions. Since 1985, donated blood and blood products have been screened for the virus, so the risk of receiving infected blood is miniscule.
- HIV does not discriminate. It affects people of all ages, races, religions. It is not confined to gay men or injection drug users. Anyone engaging in risky behaviors can be exposed to the virus.
- HIV is not transmitted by casual contact like hugging, kissing, sharing food with an infected person. Being sneezed or coughed on by an HIV+ person does not spread the infection... but could spread colds or flu!
- AIDS cannot be cured at this time. HIV infection *can* be prevented. The only 100% prevention is abstaining from sharing needles and risky sexual behaviors.
- There are medications that can slow down the progression of HIV, but they are not effective for everyone, and they aren't a cure. The person is still infected with HIV, and can infect others.
- If a person does have oral, anal or vaginal sex, s/he should know that: the more sexual partners, the greater the risk of exposure; correct and consistent use of latex condoms and barriers such as dental dams offers protection against the spread of HIV and other STIs. (Share information on correct condom use. This is not a 100% guarantee, but is highly effective. Birth control pills and other contraceptives reduce the risk of pregnancy, but only abstinence and latex condoms protect against HIV and other STDs.)

Although family discussions about HIV / AIDS / STDs can be uncomfortable and difficult, they can also be empowering... that's the good news.

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Media Mania: Sex Sells

Parents need to recognize that while they strongly influence their children's lives, they're not the *only* ones. In considering decisions about sexuality, young people hear many voices: parents, friends, media, health professionals, spiritual and religious leaders - each contributing influence and pressure that affect their choices.

You can't guarantee that your sons and daughters won't have sexual intercourse during their teen years. You can, however, assist them with information, guidance, and strategies for dealing with pressures that encourage sex among youth. While the pressures are many and powerful, some of the most dramatic stem from the media. Consider the following national survey results:

- The average viewer is exposed yearly to 20,000+ sexually explicit messages on TV.
- Teens spend approx. 24 hours per week watching TV; 16 hours per week listening to the radio.
- By age 18, the average student has spent 15,000+ hours watching TV, but only 11,000 hours in school.

Explicit media messages about sexual behavior permeate our lives - every day. Sex is used to sell everything from swimwear to toothpaste. TV sitcoms sizzle with passionate interplay and sexual innuendoes. Song lyrics, music videos, web sites and billboards graphically depict sexy images.

Media Messages: Insecurities, Stereotypes, and Active Viewing

The media affect people in many ways. Those "perfect" faces and figures may leave us feeling inadequate about our own bodies. For adolescents in a stage of dramatic (usually awkward) development, the impact can be devastating. By suggesting that the ultimate love life and a desirable body are of utmost importance, the media promote unrealistic expectations. This can set teens up for disappointment and dissatisfaction with themselves and their relationships.

Sometimes the message is more subtle. Consider sex role stereotyping. In ads, for example, who usually touts laundry soap, diet foods, or quick and easy dinner menus? Women. Often associated with domestic chores and "softer" job responsibilities... a great looker, but not too bright... the traditional female stereotype is perpetuated by the media.

Male roles tend to be equally stifling. True, they're cast as more assertive, independent, powerful, successful, intelligent... all of which are viewed favorably. Yet they also model lack of sensitivity, a "one-track mind" approach to relationships, and the "macho" image which discourages healthy social/emotional development in males.

The sadness of it all is that we've become so accustomed to the limiting stereotypes in the media, that we're almost oblivious to them!

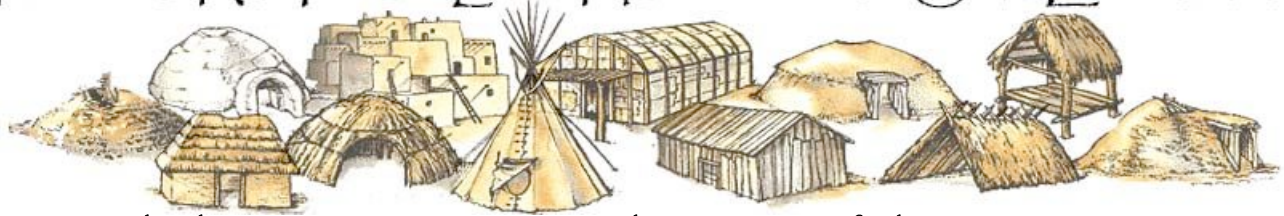
We can challenge this! We can empower our children by alerting them to the pervasiveness and implications of sexual messages. **Confront these messages whenever they appear. Assert your feelings about them, and encourage your child to do the same.**

As a family, examine how distortions of the media influence attitudes and decisions about many sexual issues: body image, relationships, male/female roles and expectations, readiness for sex, sexual responsibility, etc.

By critically viewing and discussing media messages, we help young people put media influence into perspective.

As a Native people we have an obligation to our youth to help them realize their dreams. Though some Native cultures have certain reserved roles for men and women, most Native societies historically encouraged equality between men and women. It is important to help our young people learn to respect both genders and honor the way that their strengths complement each other.

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Things Your 9th Grader Really Wants to Know...

**How can you tell you're in love? What's it like to have sex? Do you just know what to do?
How old should you be? How do you know if it's the right person?**

A typical group of 9th graders asked these questions at a recent parent/teen workshop designed to help families talk about sex. When asked to write down (anonymously) what they really wished they could discuss with parents, many teens listed these items. Surprised? The parents were – at first. But on further reflection, parents found they weren't really surprised by the questions. Rather, they were caught off guard – and unprepared to answer.

Teens wonder about love, sex, relationships. They want details: how, why and when. They have lists of curiosities and concerns, and are rarely encouraged to voice them. Often they don't feel safe enough to speak with parents about such intimate matters.

Assume that given the chance, your 9th grader would ask you about all of this. Wouldn't you like to share your ideas? After all, peers and the media certainly spread their messages about sex.

If you added your message, what would it be?

These questions may cause you discomfort. You're being asked to look deeply into your own values. You may have difficulty putting your feelings into words at first... that's ok. The words may not come easily, but that's no reason to avoid the subject. Your children do care what you think, feel and value. They want to hear from you.

So how do you begin - especially if you and your teen rarely (or never) talk with each other about sexuality? First, realize this needn't be THE BIG TALK. **Young people aren't just interested in sex. They want to know about the whole business of living: connecting and relating to others and understanding themselves. Sharing your innermost feelings about your own life, your own growing up years, can give kids insight... and comfort. It opens doors for discussion of lots of things... including sex.**

To start a conversation, consider the following interview used in the parent/teen workshop. This can be a special sharing time for you and your child.

Begin by agreeing on ground rules, for example:

1. All that is shared is confidential;
2. You can speak honestly, without fear of consequences;
3. You can pass if you choose; etc.

FOR TEENS TO ASK PARENTS:

- *What did you enjoy most about being a teenager? What was most difficult?*
- *What did you learn growing up that now helps you as an adult?*
- *What's the best part about being a parent? The most difficult?*
- *Tell me about the day I was born.*
- *How did you feel about other and same-gendered friends when you were my age? Did you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? When were you allowed to date?*
- *What was expected of you because of your gender? How do you feel about those expectations now?*
- *How have you felt about physical changes in your body?*
- *What would you change about your body... if you could?*

FOR PARENTS TO ASK TEENS:

- *What do you enjoy most about being your age? What's most difficult?*
- *What's most important in your life now?*
- *What do you see as pros & cons of being male/female?*
- *What are some things you look for in a friend?*
- *What do you wish we could talk about more openly together?*
- *How have you felt about the physical changes in your body?*
- *What would you change about your body... if you could?*

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Walls ... and Bridges

Imagine having a frank and open discussion with your 9th grader about these issues. What fears, concerns or emotions get in the way for you?

Communicating with youth about sex.... As parents and adult family, we *should* be doing it ... most of us *want* to be doing it ... but often *don't*. Because of the stuff that gets in the way.

Stuff like:

FEAR *"What if my son rejects the values I so want him to live by?"*

CONFUSION *"If I discuss birth control or 'safer sex' practices with my daughter, won't she think I approve of her having sex?"*

EMBARRASSMENT *"I feel awkward even using the words 'penis' and 'vagina'... how in the world can I possibly talk about anal intercourse as a behavior that can increase the risk of HIV infection?"*

LACK OF INFORMATION *"Menstrual cycle... wet dreams... I know the basics, but I haven't a clue about all the details."*

Even parents who were fairly open about sexual discussions when their children were little will often find themselves stuck, unnerved, or just plain at a loss once the adolescent years hit. Yes, the issues *are* far more complex... AND, it's *more* than that. The parent/child roles change significantly. With small children, parents essentially set the rules, promote the values, and select the paths for learning and growth. With adolescents, parents discuss (perhaps negotiate) rules and offer a rationale for their importance. Values continue to be emphasized and promoted... but at times with a panicked assertiveness (which can trigger anger, frustration... and an end to the conversation).

A very real fear is that our children may reject some core beliefs and attitudes we want them to embrace.

Ultimately, teens challenge, test, and accept, reject or modify their parents' values. Studies show that adolescents endorse many of the family's basic values and beliefs. It is also true is that they accept (at least temporarily) the values endorsed by their peers.

You can create safety *within the family* for your children to discuss or question differing values.

Encourage them to think out loud, to examine beliefs and the possible impact of going with (or against) those beliefs. Frank discussions in which parents and children listen to and speak with (not at) one another enhance young people's ability to make thoughtful choices.

As you speak with your child about issues such as sexual relationships, birth control, sexual protection, teen pregnancy, etc., you have the responsibility to present family and cultural values and a responsibility to provide factual information. Teenagers can accept a parent message that endorses abstinence as well as the importance of sexual protection for those choosing to have a sexual relationship. *These are not mutually exclusive values.* They're not contradictions. This is a loving message that helps teens in developing positive, respectful attitudes and behaviors around sexuality. Unlike "Just say *no*," it's a message that gets through to kids; that supports growth, maturity and thoughtful decision-making.

Remember: the stuff that gets in the way of open parent/teen communication about sex is the same stuff that sabotages the growth of positive and responsible sexual beliefs and behaviors. It is the very stuff that results in kids at risk. And... it is also the stuff we can confront, challenge, and change!



Premature sex
HIV/AIDS
Sexually transmitted infections
Confusion, Hurt
Teenage pregnancy



Safer sex
Love & Commitment
Relationships
Preparedness
Awareness
Protection

Communication changes the Balance

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Peer Power, Pressures, Set-ups: How You Can Prepare Your Teen

In a nationwide poll, teens named social pressure as a major reason young people don't wait until they're older to have sexual intercourse. Males and females said they personally felt pressured by peers to go farther with sexual activity than they wanted. Peer influence is especially powerful during the teen years. Eager for approval, acceptance and popularity, young people often see no other alternative than going along with the crowd.

Parents feel anxious about this for many reasons, including the recognition that their own influence is declining. It's tempting to simply lay down the law: "No argument... just do as I tell you." This may bring short-term compliance from a teen (along with anger and resentment). But the long-term goal gets lost: teaching adolescents to make thoughtful decisions; to deal with challenges and peer pressure when mom and dad are not there.

Parents can help teens build knowledge, skills, and a vocabulary to confront peer pressure around sexual decision-making. This requires an appreciation of how that pressure might work. For example:

Some young people feel pressured by boy/girlfriends:
"If you loved me, you would." Or, "What's the big deal? Everybody else is doing it."

Encourage your teen to find creative replies to such lines: "If you really cared about me, you wouldn't push me into something I'm not ready for." "I know everyone's not having sex. And besides, I make my own choices." It helps to practice words in response to verbal pressures.

Given an opportunity, many boys express frustration with pressure they feel from male peers. "You didn't do anything? What's wrong with you? Come on, be a man." "Look, even if she says 'no,' she probably just wants to be talked into it."

The typical locker room is filled with tales of sexual exploits: little truth, and lots of fabrication. For a sexually inexperienced male, the anxiety mounts. Having a quick response can take the edge off. Something like... "What my girlfriend and I do together is no one's business. I don't need to prove anything to you or anyone else."

Let your teens know you **understand how intense sexual feelings can be during adolescence**. Remind them that these perfectly normal feelings can be confusing. It may be difficult to know what to do, how to act.

Help your children sort out the possible effects of sexual decisions before they face the choices. Ask them to weigh any consequences of saying "no" to sexual activity, as well as saying "yes." Describe situations and ask them to consider the outcomes.

Talk about "set-ups" - in which sexual activity is more likely to occur. For example: "What if Diane decides to spend the day at her boyfriend's when no one else is



home?" "What if Kurt and his girlfriend go to a party where they drink alcohol (or do drugs)? How might that affect their decisions about sex?"

Help your teenager decide on acceptable, responsible ways of expressing love, affection, and sexuality. If you believe that sex is *not* OK for teens, by all means, say so... then discuss what sexual expression is OK.

Young people need support in preparing for sexual pressures they're likely to face. Don't just assume they know enough to stay out of those situations. Help them develop the skills to *get out of those situations* - just in case they land in one.

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The Rest of the Story: Sex is About More than “Baby Making”... and Your Teen Knows It

Amidst all the teen pregnancy statistics and dangers of sexually transmitted diseases, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that responsible sexuality is a richly exciting and special part of life. **Some parents tend to focus solely on the horrors that result from “sex too soon,” and neglect to share the rest of the story.**

It's important - and only fair - that parents present intercourse as more than just “the baby-making process.” **Kids deserve to understand that people have sex for many reasons, including intimacy and pleasure.** (Teenagers strongly suspect this anyway, so why not talk about it?!)

Of course you will talk with your 9th grader about sexual expression within the context of your own beliefs and values. Whether you wish to emphasize marriage, or a mature, committed relationship, or whatever... please reinforce that sex, at the right time, can be a delightful expression of love, sharing, and connection.

Yes, sexual relationships can also lead to serious problems, especially for the young, the uninformed, the unprepared. If we present only that angle, however we're giving incomplete, distorted, sex-negative messages. Our people were taught these sex-negative messages during the boarding school era when shaming and abuse left scars on our people that will take many generations

to heal. Keep our history in mind when you talk to your teen and begin to heal the circle for the next generation.

It is important to teach young people that sex means different things to different individuals. Misunderstanding a partner's views or expectations of what sex is all about can result in confusion, unhappiness... crises. Such is the pattern we frequently see with teenage sexual activity - when sex typically happens with little or no communication beforehand. The experience is often disappointing at the very least... and many times filled with anxiety, guilt, embarrassment, regret.

Because parents want to warn against all of this, they often focus on the crises that can follow teen sex. They may do so with the best of intentions: to spare children pain and unhappiness; to point out possible dangers; perhaps to promote certain values and beliefs.

In our culture, where so much historical trauma still haunts each Native person's self-image, it is important for American Indian youth to develop a complete, healthy, and balanced view of the natural sexual side of themselves. Sexual intimacy is believed to be a special gift from the Great Spirit by many Native cultures. We owe it to our youth and future generations to pass on a culture of honor and respect for one another.

Honest, loving family discussion about sexual experience does more to prevent the difficulties of “sex too soon” than any scare tactics or half truths - no matter how well intentioned.



Raising “good lovers” – its about honor and respect

When we talk to our youth about sexual feelings and relationships, we want to pass on our cultural beliefs and values. This means teaching our young people about the importance of honor, respect, and responsibility. One father explained:

“I want to raise my child to be a good lover. Not a performer, but a good lover. To me that embodies love, respect, honor, maturity, responsibility, honesty, commitment, growth, intimacy, joy and pleasure.”

Think about what this means to you and how you can pass on these values to your teen. What does it mean to respect your partner? To respect yourself? To honor your values?

Imagine if all families raised their children to be such “good lovers.” The impact on their lives could be tremendous. And society may well see a reduction in the difficulties of teen sexual behavior. Restoring these Native values to our youth will begin to heal the scars left by the past.

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Time to Reinforce an Understanding of Bodies and Sexual Development

Many of the sexual topics discussed with your child when s/he was younger take on more urgency and evoke new or immediate interest during adolescence. You may think you have explained to death such issues as the menstrual cycle, sexual relationships, pregnancy, childbirth, etc. Surely your teen has a clear understanding of all this by now! Not necessarily. At any rate, it doesn't hurt to review, especially now that the issues are more pertinent.

This is a good time to remind both boys and girls about the development and workings of each other's bodies. Let's not isolate by discussing the menstrual cycle only with daughters, or wet dreams only with sons.

So parents, remind your children that:

- Depending on a woman's cycle, pregnancy may still be possible, even if intercourse happens during (or just before, or just after) your period. Assume there is no "safe time" for teens to have unprotected sex.
- You can get pregnant if you only have sex once... or once in a while.
- Birth control pills offer protection against pregnancy, but not against sexually transmitted diseases or HIV.

Misconceptions about sexual issues are even held by many adults. Don't be too surprised if you're one of them. And you needn't be concerned if you don't have all the answers or if you're unsure about the details. You don't have to be a "sexpert" to communicate with your children. There are many resources to help you.

It's not within the scope of this newsletter series to provide thorough coverage of sex education issues. Rather, "**There's No Place Like Home...**" is designed to help parents become more aware of the kinds of information young people need; it's intended to encourage family communication about sex, and to suggest ways in which that communication might be fostered.

Question: "I don't know if my son/daughter is having sex. I'm hoping s/he's not. Nevertheless, I want the message about safer sex to be clear. How can I do that?"

Answer: Share your values *and* share the facts. Consider asking your doctor or health care provider to talk with your teen during a routine check up (when you aren't in the room). Their discussion will be confidential, and your teen may respect the advice of a medical professional and take the safer sex message seriously. Remember too that having condoms and contraceptives on hand does not promote sex. It *does* promote the importance being prepared.

Your daughters and sons will be interacting with the other gender throughout life. It's important that they understand and appreciate how each other's bodies function. It's appropriate to ask help from Aunts, Grandmothers, and female elders to explain to a young woman how her body – and how a young man's body – works. Similarly, Uncles, Grandfathers, and male elders can assist in these discussions with young men.

This is also an ideal time to re-emphasize cause and effect with regard to sex and possible pregnancy. Talk frankly about oral, anal and vaginal sex and the need for protection with each of these activities. Many young people think that "having sex" means vaginal sex only!

Helpful resources are listed in the Appendix of this manual. Your local Indian Health Service or Tribal Resource Center is a great place to start for finding information about improving family communication and for culturally relevant materials about sexual issues. Also we encourage you to discuss your experiences communicating about sexual issues with tribal elders and spiritual leaders. The wisdom of these leaders can give you helpful insights for communicating and getting through to your teen.

Your family doctor or health care provider may also be a good source of correct information.

There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education



Grade 10

Talking to Teens... ask questions... but don't forget to listen too.

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Talking to Teens

"I've never really talked much with my daughter about sex. But she's in 10th grade... it's a little late now, don't you think? Anyway, she'll learn what she needs to in health class."

It's never too late to talk with your child about sex. True, the ideal is to begin when they're small. Still, your input is valuable at all stages of your child's development. And few schools provide comprehensive sex education these days.

Teens need to know more than just sexual facts. They want answers about the intangibles of sex. They're curious about the emotions, about values and morals; they want support with relationship pressures and expectations; they're confused about sexual feelings and urges; they wonder about love.

Much of what they'd really like to know is highly personal. Surveys and talking circles have shown that teens wish they could ask mom and dad.



You wonder... **why don't teens just ask?** A major obstacle is **fear of being judged:**

- ◆ *"If I asked my dad about sex, he'd think I was doing it!"*
- ◆ *"I'm still trying to figure out my own feelings about sex... like when is the right time, who's the right person, and all that. My parents have pretty set ideas: you only have sex if you're married...period. I'm not sure if I agree with that, but I wouldn't try to talk to them about it. They'd just get mad."*
- ◆ *"I think my parents would really be hurt if I didn't agree with their views about sex. So I don't talk about it."*

Other teens avoid the subject because they think parents won't take them seriously:

- ◆ *"My folks still think I'm a kid, and that kids don't need to know this stuff."*
- ◆ *"If I even hint that I think some guy at school is cute, mom teases me. No way could I have a serious discussion with her about sex."*

Could some of these concerns be getting in the way for your teen? Imagine sitting down with your 10th grader and saying something like this:



"I really do care how you feel about things, and I understand we won't always agree. That's ok. Just because we have different views doesn't mean our relationship is going to fall apart. I love you. I hope you can come to me with your questions, concerns, ideas - no matter what the subject: sex, drugs, relationships, school. I'll do my best to listen, to understand, and help if I can. I don't often talk to you about these sorts of things because I wouldn't want you to think I'm grilling you. But I am interested, and I'm here if you need me."

Opening doors

No matter what your child's age, it's never too late to open doors. There may be disagreements on important issues. Can you accept that... and still keep the doors open? Seen through adult eyes of experience, your teenager's concerns may seem trivial. Can you accept that, and still treat those concerns seriously? While your input is wanted and needed, ultimately your teenager has to take charge, be allowed to grow, and trusted to make personal decisions. Can you accept that, knowing that in the process s/he may choose differently from you, or that s/he will make mistakes? It takes effort to open doors and keep them open - extra effort if parents and kids have not talked much about these personal issues in the past. But do try now. Parents have so much to offer... and young people are so eager to know.

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What's a Parent To Do!?

This parenting business is an awesome task ... awesome as in stressful, challenging, rewarding, scary, delightful, frustrating, powerful, and incredibly BIG... all at the same time. Wanting the best for their children, parents struggle to find the right answers, deliver the appropriate guidance and create the ideal experiences. And as parents face the awesomeness of parenthood; their kids face the awesomeness of "kidhood," which can be intense too.

Specific to sexuality, the confusion and anxieties of both parents and teens reach new heights. No longer is it as simple as, "What about pregnancy?" Sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/ AIDS, abortion... the stakes are high at a time when many young people are sexually active and sexually ignorant.

Gaining knowledge and skills to make responsible sexual decisions is one of the most important challenges facing teens. Parents cannot guarantee right answers, appropriate guidance, and ideal experiences. Even if they could, there are no guaranteed results. Parents can, however, build the odds in their children's favor:

1. BE A HEALTHY, POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

Watching their own parents and other caring adults relate with one another, teens learn about love and intimacy. Through your behavior, you can teach your children how to create mature, loving relationships (and how to cope with difficult ones). Help them see that sex is wonderful, AND it has its place as part of the larger picture. Emphasize commitment, love and communication as some of the other critical pieces.



Married and single parents alike can model loving, honest relationships. The value of such example is clear. According to Dr. Sol Gordon, an expert in the field of sexuality education:

"The quality of love and caring by parents or other important adults in a child's life is the single most significant component of a child's sex education."

2. REMAIN CONNECTED



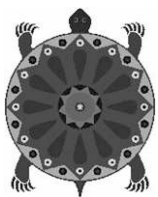
Parental expressions of love, attention and support do not lose their importance or appeal during the teen years. While they may not directly request - and may at times resist - signs of affection from mom and dad, **teenagers need to hear and feel they are loved.** Hugs, kisses, a squeeze of the hand, a pat on the back - whatever is agreed upon - **please stay "in touch" with your teen.** Experiencing family love and support builds a young person's sense of self worth and can reduce the need to seek love, touch and human connection in less healthy ways.

3. PROMOTE A SENSE OF THE FUTURE



Help your teenager plan and reach goals. Encourage dreams, ambitions and exploration of career opportunities (avoiding stereotyped male/female options). Vision and goals for a bright future will encourage responsible choices.

4. PAY ATTENTION TO THE PROCESS



Growing up is just that - a process. Great opportunities for learning and insight occur all along the way. They're easily missed if adolescence is viewed as a race or survival course, the sole purpose being to get to the end.

Help your teen take the process slowly, to remain attentive and to recognize that it's the experience of the process — appreciation of and learning from growth — that results in true knowledge, awareness and maturity.

Children raised with firm roots in their tribal traditions have special tools to help them journey through adolescence.

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Coming of Age in a Different World

Our ancestors certainly didn't face the kinds of challenges today's teens do. Even our parents and grandparents didn't feel the intense pressures of the media, sexually transmitted diseases, and drugs/alcohol the way today's teens do. Traditionally, young couples were chaperoned until families decided they were allowed to marry. Marriage at age 13 or 14 was typical and pressures to have sexual relationships outside the bounds of a committed relationship were practically non-existent. Think about it, at the age our youth are thinking about having intimate relationships, our ancestors were married and raising children. It is a different world now. Postponing sexual activity is an expectation in many families but often young people aren't taught how to deal with the strong sexual urges that accompany these teenage years.

Try asking your teen what s/he thinks about some of the alternatives to having intercourse. How does your teen define "having sex" or being "sexually active"? Have you asked? Many teens *who do not consider themselves sexually active* are participating in mutual masturbation, heavy petting, oral and even anal sex. Wow. As adults, we define these activities

under the category of "having sex" but a lot of young people don't. Does your teen know the associated risks and options for protection?

It can be very difficult to talk about these issues with your children. Acknowledge that to them. By doing so, you relieve some of the pressure and show that you are committed to helping them understand these important topics.

In talking to your teen, you might explain that in many Native cultures, masturbation is almost universally practiced and considered a method of self-control in response to powerful sexual urges. Though you may expect your teen to have perfect discipline and self-control, the reality is that without awareness of alternatives, many teens turn to intercourse as their only option.

Talk about the options with your teen. **Though commonly discussed with young men, few young women are informed about masturbation as an alternative to oral, anal or vaginal sex with a partner.** Many consider

masturbation to be a natural and normal part of being a sexual being. Hopefully, you can get past the discomfort to have a frank conversation about this.

Our youth are growing up in a different world, much different even from the world we grew up in. The challenges of coming of age in this different world call us to find support in our cultural and tribal values. We owe it to our youth to prepare them to face the challenges of their generation with the best factual information available.



There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education



Grade 10

Talking to Teens... ask questions... but don't forget to listen too.

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The Art of Setting Limits

Young people need and want limits. Sure, they grumble, complain, and generally storm about the house insisting: **"That's not fair! You're treating me like a baby! The other kids aren't treated like this."** To which a typical (ineffective) parent response is often: **"I don't care about the other kids. I care about you!"**

Sound familiar? It could be an instant replay of your own teen years. Remember the lines you swore you'd never use if you became a parent?

"As long as you live in this house, you live by my rules."

"So all the other kids stay out late. You're not the other kids."

"I don't have to give you a reason. I said 'no.' That's all there is to it!"

Groan. More and more you use those very words you found frustrating as a teenager. You're not trying to be unreasonable. It's just that you're a parent, with years of life experience, 20-20 hindsight, and memories of being in 10th grade. You want to protect your child. **And if you're totally honest, you might admit that you fear losing whatever control you may have left over this "soon-to-be-young-adult."**

You know all about teen pregnancies, children having children, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS. You feel somewhat justified retreating to the tactics your own folks used with you - the absolute rules enforced for your own good.

Yet you know strict prohibitions can backfire. Rigid dictates with no room for negotiation often create rebellion in teens. Parents can't realistically lock them up. Sure, you can try to keep them from experimenting with sex by refusing to allow dating or by imposing strict curfews. Though well-intentioned, such attempts are frequently misguided and futile.

Consider: Research has shown that for young people, sex often happens at home, after school, when mom and/or dad are at work or not around. It would seem **more useful to agree on expectations for unsupervised times and after school activities:** a routine of homework, chores, organized programs, sports, etc.

You could insist that no friends be in the house without an adult... and your child may complain:

"I can't believe this! Don't you trust me?"

...to which you could respond:

"I do trust you. And it's my job to help you avoid difficult situations you may not be able to handle."

Be up front about your concerns and the basis for your decisions. "Because I'm your parent, that's why!" is ineffective and can trigger resentment and anger.



Try this: *"I know sexual urges and feelings can be so powerful. It's important we agree on some limits which will help you stay in control of your decisions."*

Help your 10th grader set reasonable limits for socializing with friends. **Suggest ways to reduce the potential for problems:** parties must be chaperoned, no alcohol or drugs, dating in groups, etc. Remember, **when kids help set the rules they're more likely to comply. AND, they learn from the process.**

Parents want to minimize the chances of kids getting into situations they're not ready to handle. Young people want to avoid that risk too. Yet they may not have developed skills to anticipate or negotiate those situations. So they're relieved to have the limits, and grateful to use mom and dad as an excuse when they need one. Of course, they won't admit to appreciating the boundaries, but that too is part of being a teenager... remember?

There's No Place Like Home . . . for Sex Education

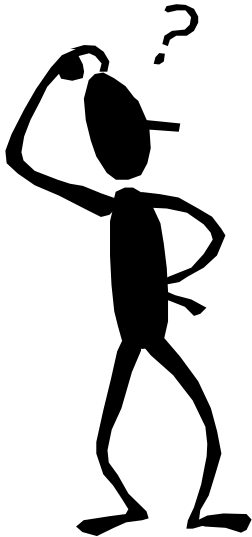


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Why Should the School Take a Parent's Place as Sex Educator?



It shouldn't! In an ideal world, parents and kids would talk together about sexual issues with ease, grace and comfort. Conversations would be open; accurate information would be presented, values shared, and positive, healthy attitudes toward sexuality promoted. In an ideal world.

The reality is, both parents and kids are looking for assistance with this sex education business. More so than ever before, parents recognize the importance of providing children with the information and skills they need to understand and appreciate sexuality. During the teenage years, certain issues become even more pertinent: peer pressure, dating, sexual decision-making, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV...

In the past, "just say 'no'" might have been enough. It's certainly easier when they're 10. You simply say, "*You're not ready for sex. Period.*" But what do you say when they're 17 or 18?

Parents realize that, given the times we live in, "just say 'no'" is no longer enough to offer our teens. Parents realize that part of their job is to teach adolescents about handling challenges when mom and dad aren't around. Parents are wanting help with this, and increasingly, they seek that help from the schools.

Studies show that nearly 90% of parents favor sex education in the schools. Yet ironically, fewer than 10% of students nationwide receive comprehensive sexuality education programs. **Usually sex education in schools is far too little, far too late.** And these days, the huge influx of federal dollars (\$170 billion in 2005 alone!) for abstinence-only-until-marriage education has resulted in many schools abandoning effective programs that help teens make informed, healthy decisions about sex.

Young people deserve accurate, balanced sex education that offers information and teaches the skills they need for their health and safety – whether they choose to have sex or not. It's important that parents let their school boards and administrators know that they value that kind of education for their children

Active parent involvement in the curriculum process is an education and an opportunity. It allows for the building of agreement and trust with regard to both the content and quality of the program.

And the outcome?

Research shows that comprehensive school-based sexuality education can make a difference. It can:

- increase knowledge
- increase parent/child communication
- enhance negotiating, communication and decision-making skills
- help teenagers resist premature, exploitive or unprotected sexual experiences
- give sexually active teens the information and confidence to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases

Those are noble achievements. As parents and schools work in partnership for the sexuality education of youth, our children reap the benefits. They emerge the winners. So does the family, communities, tribes, and society as a whole.

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Sex is more than "Plumbing": Lessons from a Parent-Teen Talking Circle

The program was entitled *"Let's Talk About Sex."* The purpose was to bring parents and teens together and help them find ways to discuss sexual issues with each other in more comfortable, honest and thoughtful ways. **When asked why sex is so hard to talk about**, they described embarrassment, uncertainty and lack of information.

Parents worried that giving too much information could encourage sexual activity...

"My folks never talked to me about sex. I turned out ok," one dad offered.

"But it's different today," said another. *"Teens have sex at younger ages, become pregnant, get abortions, have babies... they need information! I'm just not sure how to give it."*

Teenagers feared their parents' judgment...

"I'm not having sex, but if I start asking a lot of questions, my parents might think I am."

"Most kids who are having sex know their parents would be furious if they knew. They're not going to talk about it!"

One young man added, *"Adults get kind of preachy about what they think is right for their kids. Nobody likes getting preached at. Anyway, it doesn't work."*

Interestingly enough, **when asked how well their own families communicate about sex, parents and teens had very different opinions.** Parents saw themselves as more open and willing to discuss sexual issues than their kids did. The teenagers assumed mom or dad wouldn't want to talk about it, so they didn't bother to ask. Many agreed that parents covered the basics of sex... "the plumbing": menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, etc. But **they wanted to know so much more!** "Like what?" the teens were asked. **"What else do you wish you could discuss with your parents?"**

What an eye opener! Here are some of their responses:

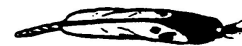
- What's wrong with teens having sex if they really care about each other and if they use protection?
- How does a person know if s/he's gay? Can s/he change?
- How do you know what to do when you have sex?
- My best friend thinks she has some kind of STD. Nobody else knows. What do I say to her?
- I know a girl whose boyfriend forced her to have sex with him. He said she lead him on. Is that rape?

Parents were amazed at the depth and complexity of the issues. It hadn't occurred to them that 15-year-olds wondered about some of this stuff. **"I'm not sure what to say,"** one mother exclaimed. She was not alone.

It was useful for parents and teens to hear from each other about the anxieties and discomforts that might get in the way of talking together about sexuality. To parents, teens suggest: **"Listen, as well as talk; please respect our differences; discuss, don't preach; don't wait for us to ask."** And the parents advised teenagers: **"Listen, as well as talk; please respect our differences; discuss, don't argue; Don't wait for us... ASK!"**



Be Aware: Date/Acquaintance Rape



If your 11th grader is becoming more interested in relationships and dating, it's a good time to discuss yet another difficult issue: date rape. Statistics tell us that 70-90% of all rape victims were either dating or at least acquainted with the rapist. One third of the victims were teenagers.

Here are a few pointers to share with your teens:

- Say what you mean – firmly, confidently and clearly.
- Set limits before any sexual expression takes place.
- You can say "no" at any point.
- "No" means "no" – not "maybe."
- No one owes sex to a date.
- Trust your feelings.
- Avoid being alone with someone you do not know well.
- Beware of someone who does not take "no" for an answer on other issues.
- **It is NEVER ok to force ANY sexual behavior on someone.**

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Share Your Wisdom

Adolescence is not a disease. It is a time of explosive growth and development at many levels. Love and patience are tested to the limits. Teens are like chameleons: one day wise, mature and responsible; the next day inappropriate in their behavior, lacking in sound judgment.

Not a particularly good time for sex to enter the picture. Yet, at this stage, it often does. Studies show that almost half of all 17-year-olds have had sexual intercourse. Typical, everyday kids: from all social, economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Just like the kids next door. Just like *your* kids. **Maybe you should talk.**

OK, so it's hard. You acknowledge that, and go on. What do you say? It's up to you. **You're the expert when it comes to your family values and beliefs around sexuality.** You may need help gathering your ideas or forming the words. But you do know what to say. Look into your heart. What messages do you have for your children? What do you wish for them?

As you consider this, remember that a lot of 16-17 year olds wonder:

What's wrong with teens having sex as long as they're responsible?



You might suggest that responsibility goes far beyond preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Many believe sex is for marriage, or at least for the adult years. Parents need to share their beliefs about this with their children. Whether or not the kids agree, it still needs to be said.



You might talk about whether teens are emotionally ready for the intense impact that sex can have on a relationship. Initiating sex in the teen years usually results in more partners over time. Ask your teen to imagine the emotional effects of ending a relationship that included sexual intimacy. Add to this that more partners equal greater risk of exposure to STDs.



Parents know many good reasons why even "responsible" teens might choose to delay sex until they're older. Share those reasons with *your* teen. Throughout these discussions, reinforce your love for your children, no matter what they decide. And reinforce the importance of protection if and when they do have sex.

How can you tell if you're really in love?

- ⊕ Talk about the difference between love and sex. **Sexual attraction creates powerful feelings which may be mistaken for love.** The passion of the moment can be overwhelming. People are "swept away," often with unfortunate results.
- ⊕ Love takes time and work. It's about respecting each other; sharing and communicating; wanting to be together; love is supportive and honors agreements; it doesn't pressure or coerce; it doesn't take advantage. **Love may or may not include sex.**
- ⊕ Teens get confused. They live with a language that calls "having sex" "making love," regardless of the relationship. They presume being "turned on" is the same as being "in love," and is therefore a justification for "making love." Nobody has bothered to explain the difference!
- ⊕ Explain the difference to your teen. S/he may say, "Come on, I already know this stuff!" Be persistent. Say something like, "I know you do, but bear with me, ok? I'm checking in to be sure I've got it straight."
- ⊕ At some point your child will be making choices about sex. Regardless of when that happens, it's important s/he have a clear understanding of issues like sex, love, infatuation, attraction, etc.

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Talking About Abortion

Each year approximately 1.3 million abortions occur in the U.S.; about 1/5 are to teens. **Abortion is an intense, emotionally charged issue.** Individual views are affected by deeply held religious convictions, personal values, culture, life experiences, etc. Your teenager would welcome and benefit from your willingness to explore with them the facts, feelings and controversy around the issue.

Be thoughtful and accurate with your information. Misrepresenting facts in an effort to sway opinion one way or another is a disservice to teens. **Discussion about abortion should not be seen as a debate, or an attempt to challenge or change another's values.** Rather it is an opportunity to share information and personal ideas and to explore the complexities of the issue. It's an opportunity to listen as well as talk.

Abortion is a powerful social issue which is likely to affect your children, personally, at some point in their lives. They may confront that decision themselves one day, or a friend, loved one, or family member may face that decision. Certainly the more informed your children are, the more they can be of support, regardless of whether they agree with the ultimate choice. It's likely that within their lifetime, your children will be called upon to vote on an abortion related measure. They will want to be informed.

Family discussion about abortion offers an ideal opportunity to address a vital, underlying issue: unintended and crisis pregnancies.

The concept of planning for parenthood embodies the belief that children are important... certainly important enough to be consciously and carefully planned. **Children are far too special to allow them to happen by chance.** Yet we see hundreds of thousands of teenagers in this country becoming pregnant by chance...having babies by chance...

In our Native culture, life is celebrated and children are gifts from the Creator. Out of respect for past and future generations, we have an obligation to be sure that every child is wanted and loved. Expressing to our youth the importance of responsible sexual relationships at any age is critical.

Help your teenager appreciate the importance of pregnancy prevention

The sharing of tribal values and cultural wisdom with our youth is a special gift for our youth. From the design of primitive condoms using animal skin to preventing a monthly cycle using herbs, our people have a long history of planning parenthood. Medicines and herbs for ending pregnancy were also used in some tribes. Built into our culture is the knowledge that everything has a balance, purpose, and cycle. One of the greatest strengths of our culture is the respect we have for life and balance. Even though it is very difficult, help your teenager learn about issues such as abortion, unplanned pregnancies, and pregnancy prevention. It will ultimately honor our people and strengthen our culture.



Remember - preventing unplanned pregnancies is one of the best ways to prevent abortions.

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You Need To Talk: HIV/AIDS

Even families that openly talk about sexuality may have fewer discussions as children get older. Perhaps it's that the issues are more complex and value-laden. Not knowing quite what to say or how to say it, parents often avoid the subject.

Some parents mistakenly believe that kids, by their junior or senior year, pretty much know what they need to about sex. Nothing could be further from the truth! This assumption can, at best, lead to confused, misinformed youth, and at worst, sexually active, sexually illiterate youth at risk of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and exposure to HIV.

“HIV?” you say, “Surely teenagers don't need to be that concerned about HIV and AIDS... unless they're gay or injection drug users.” WRONG. Interestingly enough, that's the same misconception many teens have. Let's clear it up for you *and* for them.

By grade 11, your teenager needs the following information about HIV/ AIDS:

1. AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). A person infected with HIV can pass the virus to another during unprotected vaginal or anal sex; by sharing needles (used for injecting drugs, steroids, vitamins) and possibly through oral sex.

2. HIV can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding.

3. HIV has been contracted through transfusions with infection blood or blood products. However, since 1985 all donated blood and blood products are screened for the virus, so the risk is very, very small. HIV is not contracted by donating blood.

4. Currently there is no cure for AIDS. Medications can greatly help some HIV+ people, but not all... and these medications are not a cure.

5. Even with no obvious symptoms, an infected person can still pass the virus.

6. HIV infection can be prevented. Abstaining from sex and needle sharing is the surest way. If a person has vaginal, anal or oral sex, the more sexual partners, the greater the risk; it's important to know the sexual history of any sexual partner; anyone who has engaged in unsafe sex practices should not be considered a safe partner; correct and consistent use of latex condoms offers great protection against infection (discuss the correct way to use a condom).

7. Sharing razors, needles or piercing and tattooing instruments is risky.

8. HIV is not spread by casual contact. It's safe to hug and touch an HIV+ person, share food, utensils, towels, etc. with them; you're not in danger if an HIV+ person coughs or sneezes on you; HIV is spread only through infected blood, semen, vaginal fluids or breast milk.

Contact your local Planned Parenthood or local health department for updated HIV/AIDS information.

Difficult? Sure. Uncomfortable? You bet. But no one has ever literally “died” of discomfort. People – *teenagers* - have died, literally, from AIDS. **You need to talk.**

HIV/AIDS in Native Communities

Think HIV/AIDS is not an issue in Native communities? Think again! AIDS is on the rise in Indian communities. The number of Indian AIDS cases has steadily increased from 322 cases in 1991 to 3,026 in 2003 ([Centers for Disease Control](#)). Sure, as family members, it is easier just to say, “My teen isn't having sex.” But the reality is that we don't always KNOW that. Help keep our youth safe by educating them about HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Your teen can reduce his/her risk of contracting the HIV virus by:

- abstaining from sex
- using condoms (latex rubber) when having vaginal or anal sex; using latex barriers with oral sex
- limiting his/her number of sex partners
- not sharing needles (that may be used with drugs, steroids, vitamins, tattoos or body piercing)

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Nurturing Self-Esteem

Don't be fooled by the adult-like packaging or independence of your high school junior. Appreciate the progress, and remember that 11th graders are still in the thick of adolescence.

There are fluctuations - one day self-assured, insightful, responsible; the next, childish, self-centered, temperamental. These flip-flops cause confusion and frustration *for all*. Add to this the pressures, expectations, unknowns of the high school years - you see how your teen's self-esteem might need repairs.

The powerful influence of self-esteem cannot be overstated. Teens with confidence in their own self-worth are more likely to make positive decisions - about school, friends, relationships, sex, drugs - whatever! The parent's role in nurturing a child's self-esteem is critical. Studies have shown that Native teens with a positive self-image and knowledge of their culture are less likely to participate in high-risk activities. This means that cultural identity and self-esteem are key ingredients to the recipe for a healthy young adult.

This is not about heaping empty praise on your children. It's not about comparing your child to others: "I think you're better than... stronger than... smarter than..." This level of "support" won't serve to build true self-esteem. To be of real assistance, **help your child acknowledge personal value, abilities and strengths.**

Ask your teen to complete the following: "*I like myself because...*" S/he is to talk for a full minute, listing as many reasons as s/he can. Then, you feed back what you heard: "*You like yourself because...*"

Don't be surprised if your teen feels self-conscious or runs out of things to say before time is up. You may find yourself prompting, even *adding* items not mentioned by your child. They may be qualities you value in your child that s/he overlooks or doesn't believe are so. Discuss why self-acknowledgment is uncomfortable... and why it's so *important*.



Adolescence can at times be brutal on a young person's self-esteem.

Some things you can do to help:

1. Point out the growth you've noticed by showing appreciation for good things your teen does and for improvements in behavior. If you want to increase the behavior, use positive reinforcement like: "**Thanks so much for remembering to call when you thought you would be late**" or "**That was really a grown-up way to handle that problem. I'm really proud of you for taking care of that on your own.**" By letting your teen know that you notice the good things s/he does, you will see more good behavior. And don't forget the importance of telling your child often: "I love you."
2. When a reprimand is in order, focus on the *behavior* as unacceptable, *not the person*. Remind your teen that even though you disapprove of his/her behavior, you still love him/her.
3. Help your teen process negative comments. Your daughter's friend says, "Dana, you jerk! You never keep your eye on the ball." Teach Dana to turn it around and say *what's really true*: "My concentration may not be as good today as it usually is. That doesn't make me a jerk." Your child may find it awkward to practice correcting negative comments, but it's important. **The more we quietly accept negative comments and personal slams, the more we come to hold them as true.**
4. Help your teenager deal with disappointments in ways that promote learning and acceptance. If your son doesn't get the lead in the school play, acknowledge his hurt and commend his effort. Help him plan for improving his skills.
5. **Urge your child to repeat image building statements (affirmations) everyday**, such as: "I am capable of making good choices." "I like and respect myself." "I have a good attitude."
6. **Work with your child to set short term goals at which s/he can be successful; give him/her the freedom to make decisions, take on responsibilities, make mistakes... and process the results of each.** With each success comes higher self-esteem. And **with higher self-esteem comes greater opportunity for a positive, fulfilling life.**

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Yet Another Challenge

As usual, you checked the pockets of Mike's pants before washing them. This time you found a condom. Rushing off for school, Sara dropped her purse and out fell a brochure marked **Planned Parenthood Teen Birth Control Clinic**.

How do parents respond to the suspicion that their 17-year-old might be having sex? What should they do? And not do?

First: *breathe* ... slowly, deeply... taking time to move beyond the shock, anger - whatever the initial, gut reaction is. **Don't attempt a discussion when you're upset.**

Consider the facts: Mike has a condom. Is it to use or for show to impress his peers? The telltale "O" imprinted on a young man's wallet or back pocket is considered a mark of sexual experience. How much truth there is in that is anybody's guess.

And the brochure listing teen clinic services, hours, cost... maybe Sara got it in class the day a guest speaker talked about teen pregnancy. Maybe it's for a writing assignment. Or... maybe Sara *is* having sex.

If you ever face this dilemma, don't leap to conclusions, but don't ignore the situation either.

Take time to identify what you know vs. what you suspect. This lets you calm yourself, gather your thoughts, and do what must come next: talk with your teen.

Both parents (if possible) should first agree on the messages they want to present. Then share your concerns - *honestly* - with your teen. Emphasize the values, attitudes and expectations you hold about teens and sex. **Ask your teenager what s/he believes, and take those opinions to heart - even though you may disagree.**

If your teen is having sex:

- **Avoid** comments like "I'm crushed!" or "How could you do this?" Shaming and blaming will not help matters.
- **Focus on the behavior.** If you think teen sex is inappropriate or unwise or risky, say that - or whatever you believe. You can disapprove of the behavior without being disapproving of your child.

Ultimately teens make their own decisions about sex.

Parents can only do their best to inform, offer guidance and share values. If your teen *is* sexually active, ask that s/he examine the reasons and circumstances surrounding that choice. Discuss the relationship and level of commitment. Why has sex become part of it? Is there pressure for sex? Does s/he see any drawbacks? Explore possible implications. **Consistently reaffirm that you love and support your child even if you disagree with the behavior.**

Resist the urge to forbid your teenager to see his/her partner again. Rarely effective, this merely drives their relationship underground. Ultimatums and threats breed resentment, anger, resistance - none of which serve **the most important purpose: keeping communication open so you can help your child make wise decisions.**

Though they may not approve of the behavior, parents still have a responsibility to help children deal with the choice to be sexually active. Information is critical - about the emotional consequences and risks, about pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, contraception... *just as the sharing of feelings and values is critical.*

In the end, your teen may continue to be sexually active. Then again, s/he may see value in your arguments and choose to reconsider. Either way, the sharing and guidance which is so essential to your child's well-being can continue only if open communication is maintained. Stay calm, caring, and concentrate on that goal, and you just might be amazed at the results.

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Grade 12

Values, family, and respect

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The Value of Values

There's all this talk about teaching "values" around sexuality: sharing family "values"; respecting that the "values" of others may be different; acting on one's personal "values." **Just what are these things called "values" anyway?** Where do they come from? Do they change over time, and if so, does that mean they weren't really "values" in the first place?

Values are personal truths upon which we base our life decisions.

We may not recall consciously choosing our values: they just seem to be there, influencing our attitudes and behaviors. With such vagueness about values, we can have difficulty explaining them to children. Parents may have little experience defining or examining their values around sexuality, so attitudes and beliefs may be passed on without much active discussion.

It's important to revisit our core beliefs from time to time; to clarify, alter if necessary, and reaffirm what is true for us. This can be scary, since it forces us to examine what we say we value and what we truly value. It also makes us face how well our behaviors match our beliefs. This process of "e - value - ation" allows us to better guide our children in developing their own personal values about sexuality.

This process is healthy - and sometimes painful - as people examine long accepted codes. Families confront the possibility that the kids' values may not always line up with the folks'. And it's incredibly enriching to discover there is common ground.



We teach children values around sexuality through words, but perhaps **more importantly by modeling behaviors we see as right and just.** Participation in cultural activities and ceremony together can strengthen your relationship with your teen. As Native people, we appreciate the value of leading by example and our youth need us to set that example for them.

Media and peers also promote values (or lack of) in the messages they deliver. Moving toward independence, teens need opportunities to question, examine, and test values. Then they can freely and consciously form their personal value system. This allows them to truly "own" their values - to have the conviction to live by them.

It's a difficult balance for parents: striving to support sons and daughters in choosing their own values, while at the same time offering input and guidance. It requires trust that children are capable of choosing values that will work well for them in their lives.



We can help our teens by communicating openly about issues such as love, relationships, sexual intimacy, birth control, sexual orientation, abortion, pregnancy, parenting, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. Parents and teens need the freedom to express to one another what they know, feel, value and expect around each of these issues.

The following exercise can help in clarifying values around sexuality. Parents can do it alone or with their teens.

For each statement, explain why you agree, feel neutral, or disagree:

- *Sex outside of marriage is wrong.*
- *Teens should have access to birth control without parental consent.*
- *Abortion should be legal.*
- *If a 15-year-old becomes pregnant, she should place the baby for adoption.*
- *Gay and lesbian couples should have the freedom to marry.*

Your 12th grader's decisions around sexuality will be greatly affected by the ability to clarify, express, affirm and act on personal values. These are skills which improve with practice. If parents encourage such practice within the safety of the family, they better prepare their teen for life beyond high school.

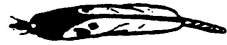
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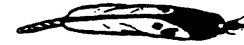
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Deciding About Sex



Teens may think the only choice to be made about sex is: "Should I or shouldn't I?" But in reality, **sexual decision-making involves a lot more than merely deciding whether to have sex, and if so, when and with whom.**

Life after high school brings increasing opportunities to decide about sex. If your family hasn't addressed this issue thoroughly, **NOW IS THE TIME!** Avoiding open discussion about sexual decisions only serves to leave young people unprepared. For teens, it can be incredibly complicated... so many conflicting messages from "Just say 'no'" to "Go for it!" No wonder they're confused. In fact, that's a good place to begin a conversation with your teen about this whole business of sexual decision-making. Consider using the following exercise:

You and your teen complete these statements:

About sexual intercourse,

my parents tell me _____
my friends tell me _____
my religion tells me _____
the media tells me _____
I believe _____

Discussion questions:

How do the messages differ? What conflict can this cause? How might the conflict be resolved? Who can assist?

Repeat the process for several topics, including relationships, sexual intimacy, birth control, abortion, sexual orientation, etc. This isn't about who's right or wrong; it's about identifying and evaluating the range of sexual messages out there. Ultimately your teen must clarify what s/he truly believes. Only then can there be informed and thoughtful decision-making.

This exercise requires safety to address such personal issues. To create that safety, establish some agreements, for example:

1. Our discussion is confidential.
2. You can speak honestly, without fear of consequence.
3. You have the right to speak without interruption.
4. You may pass at any time.

(NOTE: Establish only those agreements that you and your teen will honor and follow. If you have difficulty with agreements, consider asking for assistance from a third party, like a family friend or counselor.)

A little help: What you might say to your teen...

- ⊕ "Your body belongs to you. You decide how to express yourself, sexually and otherwise."
- ⊕ "Right now, you have the ability to say 'yes' or 'no' to sexual expression, regardless of pressure you may feel from your peers, your parents - whoever - to make the decision they want you to make. Ultimately it's up to you. Whatever you decide, choose thoughtfully."
- ⊕ "Consider how you make your decisions. If it's by impulse, have you truly thought things through? If your judgment is clouded (by drugs, alcohol, stress, etc.), how might this affect your decisions? If you let someone else decide for you, do you risk going against what you really believe and feel? If you don't make and clearly express a decision, might this encourage someone else to step in and decide for you? If you evaluate options and then decide, how might that increase your power to make choices that are consistent with your personal values?"

Important decisions in life deserve thought, evaluation, and careful consideration. Help your teen appreciate that personal power, freedom and self-respect come from taking charge of one's life choices. Sexual decision-making is a very big deal for teenagers today. What's sad is that most are totally unprepared for the challenge. Your teen needn't be one of them.

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Cleaning Up the Myths about Two-spiritedness (Homosexuality) – a Father's Story

When my son John asked to talk to me about a friend he was worried about - a friend with a problem - I got worried. As a kid, whenever I was in trouble and needed answers, I never admitted I was the one with the problem. It was always, "I've got this 'friend,' and he's got this problem..."

"He thinks he might be gay, Dad," John continued.

"Who?" I almost *demanded*. I wanted to shout, "John, who are we *really* talking about here?" But I contained myself. I value the openness John and I share... on lots of issues, including sexuality. I didn't want to jeopardize that now.

"I don't want to say, Dad. But I need to talk about it. All I ever hear about gay people are crude jokes and negative comments. Some people are pretty hateful. Maybe they just don't understand. I don't understand... and I'm not sure what to do for my friend."

The tradition of condemning homosexuality is firmly embedded in mainstream culture, but not in our Native culture. Native people have traditionally recognized that all members of the community have a special role to play. Two-spirited men and women, people who are gay or lesbian, are commonly believed to be gifted with special medicine and insight. Unfortunately, assimilation has overtaken many Native beliefs and often two-spirited people in our tribes and communities feel rejected. AIDS has added fuel to the fire of homophobia - fear and hostility toward people who are gay or lesbian. The result has been even less tolerance.

Struggling to gain comfort with their own sexuality, teens are especially uncomfortable with the subject of homosexuality. Yet they're intensely curious... about what it means to be gay; what "causes" it, how to tell if someone is gay, etc.

I told John all I knew about the subject, which I confess wasn't much. **He was surprised to hear that many children and adolescents have some kind of sexual experience with persons of the same gender - whether it be "playing doctor," sexual touching... or strong feelings of attraction and sexual fantasies. Such experiences and feelings are common, normal, and not necessarily proof that one is gay.**



"There are a lot of theories, John, but no one knows what 'causes' someone to be either homosexual or heterosexual. Evidence shows that being gay isn't a choice... rather it's a compelling, deeply held orientation. We may not understand... and we don't have to. Their relationships can be just as loving, genuine and fulfilling to them as ours can be to us."



"We also know that sexual orientation isn't contagious. Having a gay teacher, coach, or even a parent doesn't 'turn' someone gay."

I told John that I believe hatred and discrimination against gay (two-spirited) people are wrong. **Differences don't justify mistreatment.**

It turned out John really *was* asking about a friend. But what if he wasn't? I think of all those young people out there feeling confused, ashamed; alienated from their peers, alone with their secret; fearing rejection from their family and friends. And no one to talk to.

The existence of gay youth is often denied. Think about it... sex education, if it happens at all, is phrased almost exclusively in heterosexual terms. In avoiding open, honest discussion, we allow for continued misunderstanding, mistrust, fear, isolation. **If we say nothing to our youth about this topic, that in itself speaks volumes.**

So I encourage you, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other caring adults... John, his friend, and all those like him encourage you... to speak with your teens about sexual orientation. Out of respect for our people, culture, and traditions, we have a responsibility to teach tolerance and understanding to our Native youth. Every member of our community needs to be valued for their special gifts the Great Spirit gave them.

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Take Care: Encouraging Sexual Health

Even those committed to a healthy lifestyle often neglect their sexual health. For example, how many women are diligent about their routine Pap and pelvic exam - or practice monthly breast self exam? How many men perform (or even know about) testicular self-exam? Yet, testicular cancer is one of the most common cancers in males aged 15-34. Learning how to examine the testes properly can be a life saving skill.

Neglect of sexual health is an extension of discomfort about sexuality in general. Embarrassment around touching, examining or paying attention to our sexual anatomy contributes to poor health habits. These include reluctance to practice good reproductive health care (routine exams, treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and appropriate use of protection).

As you promote positive behaviors around sexuality with your family, include support for sexual health.

Young Women – Gynecological Exam and Breast Self-Exam

Women should start having Pap tests three years after they begin having vaginal intercourse, or when they become 21 years old (whether or not they have had vaginal intercourse). Discussing both the value and specifics of gynecological care with your daughter can ease anxiety. It also helps establish a positive attitude toward sexual health.

Explain that the purpose of a gynecological exam is to see if the reproductive organs are healthy, and to detect any problems early on. The Pap test is a simple test in which a sample of cells from the cervix (neck of the uterus) is examined for irregularities. Since Pap tests first became available as a screening tool in 1941, deaths due to cervical cancer have fallen 70%! Annual Paps are one of the most important ways a woman can care for her sexual health.

The first annual exam can have tremendous impact on attitudes toward and comfort with sexual health care. Parents help create a more positive experience by preparing their daughters. **“Pelvic Exam: Your Key to Good Health”** is an excellent Planned Parenthood pamphlet, designed to inform and support young women in safeguarding their reproductive health.

Help your daughter appreciate that she can take charge of these health issues. Encourage her to track her menstrual/moon cycle, noting any problems or changes. Promote monthly breast self-exam (BSE). Breast cancer

affects 1 in 8 women; with BSE, a young woman may detect a potentially dangerous breast lump early on.

Young men – Testicular Self-Exam

Young men should be taught about the importance of testicular self-exam (TSE) for the early detection of testicular cancer. Studies show that most young men know little about TSE, yet have significant fears about contracting testicular cancer. Found early and treated promptly, there is an excellent chance for cure. But the mildness of early symptoms, ignorance, fear, and denial are factors which may cause adolescents to delay seeking medical attention.

Annual Physicals – Encourage your teen to ask questions

Embarrassment, lack of knowledge, and many other factors often keep adolescents (and even adults) from seeking necessary medical attention for sexual health issues such as unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, etc. You can help prepare your teen for a healthy adult life by supporting him or her to visit the doctor for annual physicals alone. Encourage your teen to ask the doctor questions about body changes and concerns. This allows your teen to ask questions that s/he may not feel comfortable asking with you in the room. Additionally, your teen will feel more in control of his/ her health...a step towards being a healthy adult. Educate and support your teen in all areas of living a healthy life, including sexual health.

Helpful Hint: Often adults who didn't learn about sexual health as teens have difficulty talking to their young people about it. There are many ways to learn about sexual health, both for yourself and your teen. Your local Indian Health Service, Urban Indian Health Center, and Planned Parenthood are good first places to look for information about sexual health. Tribal Resource centers as well as local libraries often have books on taking care of your sexual health.

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Ideas for communicating

A Letter of Love

Sometimes it's difficult to verbalize our deepest feelings. Some parents find it helpful to write a letter to their children, expressing their feelings, concerns, and hopes for them. If you choose to do this, remember to keep it positive and loving but don't be afraid to share your fears or the learning from your own teenage years. Here are some ideas you might want to talk about in your letter:

- Your love for your child
- The difficulty you sometimes face in accepting that s/he is growing up and growing into sexuality
- Your respect for him/her as a young adult and your hope that s/he will keep certain values in mind when making decisions
- Explain that "Your decisions about sex are yours and yours alone. Whatever you choose, choose responsibly."
- Your expectations that s/he will be thoughtful, respectful and honorable in sexual decision-making
- Love and sex are not one and the same... remind your child to never confuse them, or misrepresent them to another.
- If s/he is confused, hurt or stuck over any issue - whether it be related to sex, friends, school... whatever... you will be there for support.

Sexuality is such a complex issue, at any age.

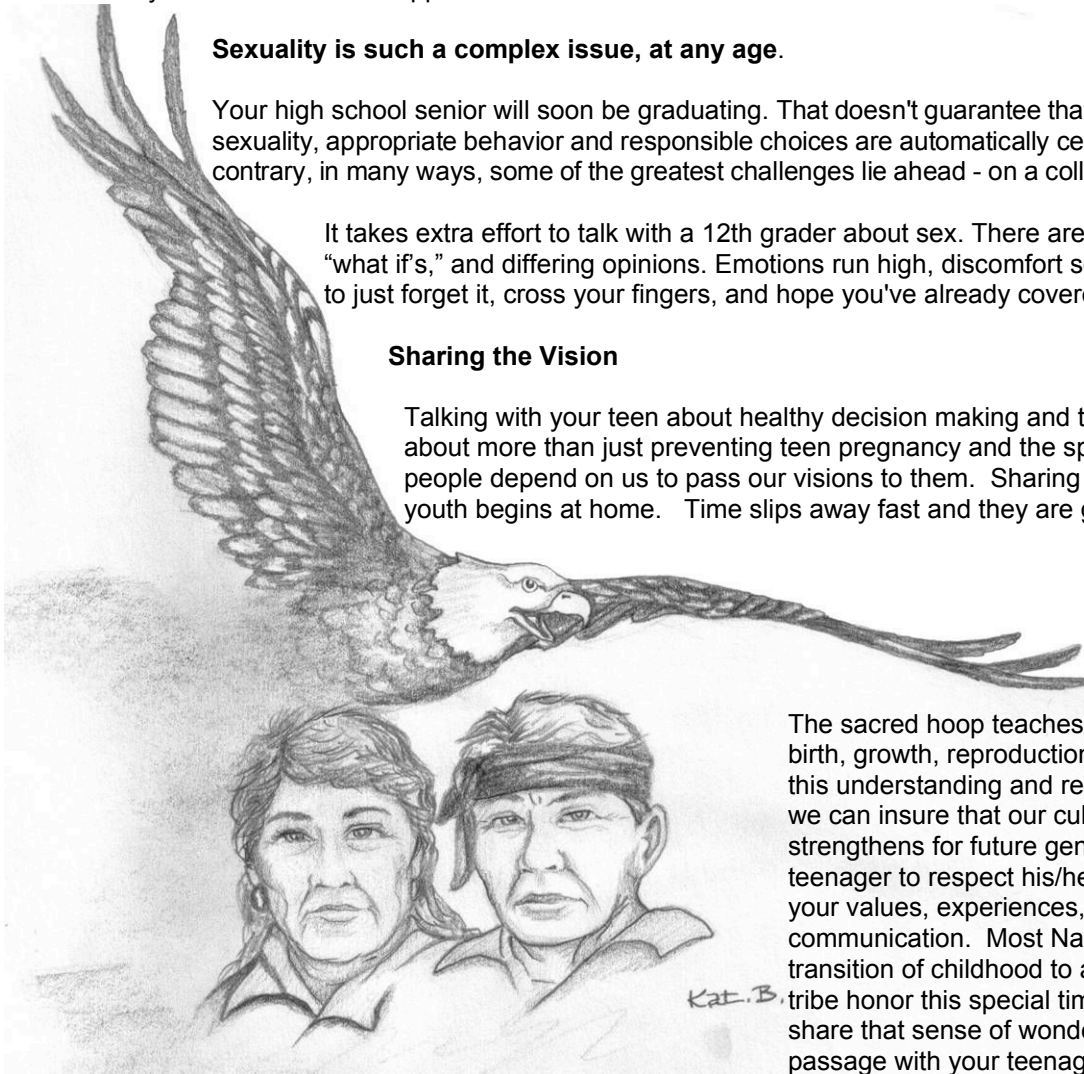
Your high school senior will soon be graduating. That doesn't guarantee that rational thought about sexuality, appropriate behavior and responsible choices are automatically cemented in place. On the contrary, in many ways, some of the greatest challenges lie ahead - on a college campus and beyond.

It takes extra effort to talk with a 12th grader about sex. There are so many shades of gray, "what if's," and differing opinions. Emotions run high, discomfort sets in. Sometimes it's easier to just forget it, cross your fingers, and hope you've already covered it all.

Sharing the Vision

Talking with your teen about healthy decision making and transitioning into adulthood is about more than just preventing teen pregnancy and the spread of disease. Our young people depend on us to pass our visions to them. Sharing our Native culture with our youth begins at home. Time slips away fast and they are grown before you know it.

The sacred hoop teaches us to honor the cycles of birth, growth, reproduction, and aging. If we can share this understanding and respect for life with our youth, we can insure that our culture stays strong and strengthens for future generations. Encourage your teenager to respect his/her self and culture by sharing your values, experiences, and traditions through open communication. Most Native cultures celebrate the transition of childhood to adulthood. How does your tribe honor this special time for youth? How can you share that sense of wonder and respect of this rite of passage with your teenager?



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A Native Mother's Story

I grew up in a small town in the 60's and 70's when sex education just started to be a part of the school's extra curriculum. We had to get our parent's permission to watch sex education videos or talk in class about how a baby is born. In our home, just like the norm at that time, my parents didn't talk about sex. It was a taboo and remained unmentioned. I learned about sex education from my friends, books, TV, movies, and some from school, but not from my parents. My mom called boys and girl's private parts "hotdogs" and "hamburgers". When I was old enough to start menstruating, I felt embarrassed and ashamed to ask my mom about how my body was changing.

My mom survived the boarding school era, but it left painful experiences that damaged my mom for the rest of her life. My dad grew up in a very strict household, where children were "seen but not heard". Looking back, I realized that my parent's upbringing and life experiences affected their parenting skills and how we were raised. As I grew older and had children of my own, I eventually recognized that I was repeating the same parenting behavior that I had learned from my parents. I didn't want to talk to my kids about sex. I still felt embarrassed and ashamed about the subject.

I've been fortunate to attend many Native American "wellness" conferences and gatherings, and acquired additional education on a variety of subjects to further my education. Over the years, I have grown to understand the intergenerational trauma our ancestors endured and how it affects our lives today. Traditional belief is based on respect; western society is "shame-based" and unfortunately we have taken on those qualities.

One day after attending a "Native American Wellness Conference", I heard a national Indian speaker talk about the importance of talking to our children about sex and their bodies. "We will not be ashamed anymore" was her message. When I came home from the conference, I decided to overcome my fear about discussing sex with my teenage son. At first, it was extremely difficult and awkward, but I remained focused on the importance of being there for my son. Teenage years are stressful enough without the peer pressure of sex. Sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancies plague the teenage population. In the beginning of our conversation, my son stated that he knew everything he needed to know about sex and by the tone of his voice I could tell that he felt uncomfortable about the subject. Over the years, my son and I have had many talks about life in general. As a result, that made it easier to sit and chat with him about sex and how his body has changed. Our topic was on masturbation and how it was natural for a young man to get sexual feelings, "wet" dreams, and erections. I know both of our faces were red with embarrassment, but I continued on because I wanted to give my son good information; not for him to rely on the information he had learned from the street.

My son talked about the kids he knew from school, some of them used drugs, some got pregnant early, and most of the kids were dating and have sexual relationships. To him, it was the norm to have sex before you graduate. As I listened, I helped him realize that having sex is natural and masturbation is natural. Masturbation can help him relieve some the tension and can be used as a form of birth control, instead of jumping into a sexual relationship too early. My most important goal in this life is to teach my children self-discipline and respect for themselves and for other people. It is very hard living in a world that teaches impulsiveness and self-indulgent behavior. At the end of our conversation, we both laughed and realized that our discussion strengthened our relationship.

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Additional Suggestions and Resources

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Insights on Ceremony from a Native Elder

Ceremony has an important role in our cultural and tribal traditions. Many Native elders who shared their input on this resource believed that families needed to include ceremony in their teachings to their children. A concern was that many Native families are cut off from their cultural traditions and parents/guardians may not know how to bring ceremony to their children. **The following suggestions to parents/guardians were shared by a Native grandmother:**

It does not matter if the Native parents have *no resources* to do the ceremonies. They already have *all* that they need inside of themselves, in their hearts. But most of all, they have a strong desire to give their children an experience of who they are, where they come from - and most of all, a unique memory.

What I am saying is that there is no wrong way to do a ceremony. The parent or guardian knows what they want for their child. The best way to make a ceremony about something that matters is to create it themselves. The main idea is to have a purpose to convey the values of the parent or guardian.

Sample ceremony of an Indian name-giving...

...or whatever you are wanting to pass on to an important youth or adult:

Start by observing how your child acts or plays or sings; how your child reminds you of one of your relatives in nature, maybe an animal such as a certain bird. Much thought goes into this. One way is to look at all the pictures you have taken of the child, and one thing will likely become apparent about him or her. It does not matter if your child is older and you just now want to name this young person; the same pattern can help you to come up with an Indian name.

If you do not know your language, it does not matter. The Indian name will still come forward, like this: if your child likes to *run*, the name can be "*One Who Runs With the Wind*;" if this child is good with music or art, the name can be "*Singing Painter*." If s/he is helpful, the name could be "*Gentle Hands that Help*." If s/he likes to dance, s/he could be named "*Dancing Sparrow*."

When planning for the ceremony, choose a certain season that has significance to your family and tribe or a certain time that is meaningful in your child's life.

Pay close attention to details, think it through, and write it out from starting point to the end. The ending is as important as the starting point. A meal at the end of the ceremony can be planned. Have a time when you will start and end... and stick to it. Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it. Who do you want to be a part of the ceremony for this child... an uncle, grandparent, a friend of the family? Ceremonies can become very creative.

Use nature: water, a fire, flute music (*even if it's on a tape*), and stones with writing on them, or whatever is significant to your tribal customs.

If the physical arrangement is outdoors, consider the weather. If it is indoors, will the room be large enough and comfortable? Think of your elders . . . will you need chairs? Or you can have everyone stand in a circle with the child in the middle?

The part in which the child receives the name is the high point of the ceremony. Have your child stand in the front of the gathering on a mat or a blanket or something special. If s/he wants, s/he can either keep this item or give it to someone special in the group.

Make sure it is very quiet (*in this day and time not much is quiet*). The ceremony may include special clothing made just for this event. The person who is giving the name will share a short story of how this name has come to this child and how it will stay with them. Have all the family members in this special event, standing, listening and observing all that is going on. This is how you pass the ceremonies down through the generations. Then call out the name and have the members repeat it, *speaking loudly so all can hear*: "***The sun, the wind, the small birds and even the rocks in the creek are happy this day, and they want to welcome (saying the chosen Indian name). S/he will be remembered from this day forward as***" Add other meaningful comments of your own planning.

To complete the ceremony, have your child standing at the front and announce that "***..... (call the Indian name of the child) stands up here and all can come and wish them well.***" Gifts to the person receiving the name can be a part of this ceremony, or the person receiving the name can give gifts to the guests.

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Helpful Resources for Families:

The following list was adapted from an expanded resource list developed by Advocates for Youth.

We recommend previewing all materials to ensure that they are appropriate for your family, religious, and cultural values.

Web Sites Especially for Parents

National Parent Information Network
www.npin.org

Planned Parenthood Federation of America
www.plannedparenthood.org/education/

Sex Ed Mom
www.oxygen.com/experts/sex_ed_mom/bio/

Talking with Kids about Tough Issues
www.talkingwithkids.org

There's No Place Like Home... for Sex Education
www.noplacelikehome.org

Families Are Talking
<http://www.familiesaretalking.org>

Web Sites with Educational Resources for Parents

Advocates for Youth
www.advocatesforyouth.org

American Assoc. for Health Education
www.aahperd.org/aahe/template.cfm

American Medical Association's Adolescent Health Information
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1947.html

Campaign for Our Children
www.cfoc.org

CDC National Prevention Information Network
www.cdcnpin.org

Children's Defense Fund
www.childrensdefense.org

Child Welfare League of America
www.cwla.org

Girls Incorporated
www.girlsinc.org

Sexuality Information & Education Council of the United States
www.siecus.org

Select Organizations

Advocates for Youth
1025 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
P: 202.347.5700
www.advocatesforyouth.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
141 Northwest Point Boulevard
Elk Grove Village, IL60007
P: 847.228.5005
www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW Washington, DC 20024-2188
P: 202.638.5577
www.acog.org

American Medical Association
515 N. State Street
Chicago, IL60610
P: 312.464.5315
www.ama-assn.org

American School Health Association
P.O. Box 708
Kent, OH 44240
P: 330.678.1601
www.ashaweb.org

CDC National Prevention Information Network
P.O. Box 6003
Rockville, MD 20849-6003
P: 1.800.458.5231
www.cdcnpin.org

Search Institute
700 South Third Street, Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415
P: 612.376.8955
www.search-institute.org

Selected Books for Parents & Their Children

All About Sex: A Family Resource on Sex and Sexuality
Ronald Filiberti Moglia & Jon Knowles
Three Rivers Press, 1997
ISBN: 0609801465

Bellybuttons Are Navels
Mark Schoen
Prometheus Books, 1992
ISBN: 0879755857

Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens—From Middle School to High School and Beyond
Debra Haffner
New Market Press, 2002
ISBN: 1557045178

Caution: Do Not Open Until Puberty! An Introduction to Sexuality for Young Adults with Disabilities
Rick Enright
Devinjer House, 1995
ISBN: 0968041507

The Family Guide to Sex and Relationships
Richard Walker
Macmillan Publishing USA, 1996
ISBN: 002861433X

Flight of the Stork: What Children Think (and When) About Sex and Family Building
Anne C. Berstein
Perspective Press, 1996
ISBN: 0944934099

From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children
Debra W. Haffner
Newmarket Press, 2000
ISBN: 1557044260

Happy Birth Day
Robie Harris
Candlewick Press, 1999
ISBN: 0763609749

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How'd I Get in There in the First Place?

Talking to Your Young Child about Sex

Deborah Roffman

Perseus, ISBN: 0738205729

How to Talk to Your Children about AIDS.

SIECUS, 1994

www.siecus.org

It's Perfectly Normal: Growing Up,

Changing Bodies, Sex and Sexual Health

Robie Harris

Candlewick Press, 1996

ISBN: 1564021599

It's So Amazing: A Book about Eggs,

Sperm, Birth, Babies & Families

Robie Harris

Candlewick Press, 2002

ISBN: 0763613215

Lesbian and Gay Youth: Care and

Counseling

Futterman & Ryan

Columbia University Press, 1998

ISBN: 0231111916

Now What Do I Do?

Robert Selverstone,

SIECUS, 1996

www.siecus.org

Out With It: Gay and Straight Teens Write

about Homosexuality

Fell, Paul Cartoons, 1996

ISBN: 0966125606

Period

JoAnn Loulan, Bonnie Lopez & Bonnie

Worthen Book Peddlers, 2001

ISBN 0916773965

Raising Sexually Healthy Children: A

Loving Guide for Parents, Teachers &

Care Givers

Lynn Leight

Morrow, William & Co, 1990

ISBN: 0380708574

Sex & Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's

Guide to Talking about Sex

Deborah Roffman

Perseus Press, 2001

ISBN: 0738205206

Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their

Children about Sex and Character

Pepper Schwartz, Dominic Cappello

Hyperion Press, 2000

ISBN: 0786885483

Two Teenagers in Twenty: Writings by

Gay & Lesbian Youth

Ann Heron Alyson Publications, 1995

ISBN: 1555832822

What's Happening to My Body? A Book

for Boys: A Growing Up Guide for Parents

and Sons

Lynda Madaras

Newmarket Press, 2000

ISBN: 1557044430

What's Happening to My Body? A Book

for Girls: A Growing Up Guide for Parents

and Daughters

Lynda Madaras

Newmarket Press, 2000

ISBN: 1557044449

When Sex is the Subject: Attitudes and

Answers for Young Children

Pamela Wilson ETR Associates, 1991

ISBN: 1560710640

Web Sites Especially for Teens

Coalition for Positive Sexuality

www.positive.org

Giving teens straightforward, frank information that they need to make responsible decisions about sex and encouraging teens to demand complete, honest sex education

Go Ask Alice!

www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

Produced by Columbia University's Health Education Program, offering questions and answers on relationships and sexuality.

gURL.com

www.gurl.com

Offering alternatives to traditional teen magazines, believing that information is a positive thing, and presenting a variety of experiences that are relevant to teens, including sexuality, body image, and emotions.

Iwannaknow.org

www.iwannaknow.org

Created by the American Social Health Association, offering information on STDs, body basics, and dealing with peer pressure.

OutProud

www.outproud.org

From the National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Youth, providing advocacy, information, resources and support to help GLBT youth; offering outreach and support to GLBT teens just coming to terms with their sexual orientation or thinking of coming out.

Sex, Etc.

www.sxetc.org

By teens for teens, helping youth remain sexually healthy and avoid pregnancy and Disease.

Teenwire

www.teenwire.com

Providing information on young men's and women's bodies, safer sex, breaking up, and how to prevent unwanted sex.

Youth Resource

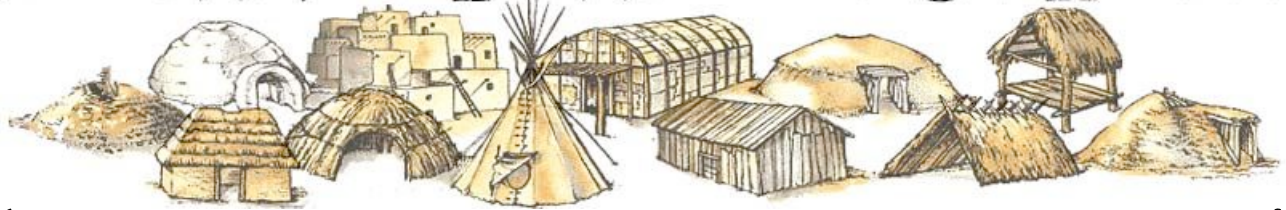
www.youthresource.com

Offering community, sexual health information, and referral for GLBT youth.

Other Sources of Information:

Your local Indian Health Service or Tribal Resource Center is a great place to start for finding information about improving family communication and for culturally relevant materials about sexual issues. Planned Parenthoods are located all over the country and provide trainings, speakers, and educational materials about sexual health and responsible sexual activity. You can also visit your local library to find books with factual information about the way our bodies function, puberty, communication, and much more. Also, we encourage you to discuss your experiences communicating about sexual issues with tribal elders and spiritual leaders. The wisdom of these leaders can give you helpful insights for communicating and getting through to your teen. If your teen asks you about a type of birth control, or the effectiveness of a condom and you don't know the answer, often your family physician is a good source of correct information.

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