

What about using bad words?

- **Children age 6 and under often use new words to see how you will react.** They will often repeat bad words because it gets them more attention. If this is the case, you may want to ignore bad words. Most children outgrow this stage quickly.
- **Listen to the words you use and change if you need to.** Your child may copy you if you use bad words.
- **If your child swears or uses a bad word, ask him or her to tell you what the word means.** Often they do not know what it means. Explain what the word is and that you do not like them using the word or words. Help them think of words they can use.

What about nudity?

- **If you feel okay about nudity in your daily family life,** your child will learn to accept it and to feel okay about it as well.
- **Do not be naked in front of your children if you are not comfortable with it.** This will cause your child to be confused if you pretend it is okay when it is not.
- **If your child does not feel right about seeing grownups naked, he or she will let you know most of the time.** Watch for signs – like your child covering their eyes or looking away. Change what you do if your child seems uncomfortable seeing you or another adult naked.

What about masturbation?

- **Even babies like to touch their sex organs.** This is a natural and normal part of growing up. Do not worry if your child does this.
- **Young children often touch or hold their sex organs.** They may do this when they are playing, watching TV or when they are tired or worried.

- **By the age of three or four,** your child should know that while touching themselves may feel good, that is should only be done in private.
- **If you don't approve of masturbation, explain this to your child.** Teach them your values and why you feel this way.
- **If your child seems to masturbate all the time, check with your doctor or clinic.** Try to find out if your child is worried, scared or feeling tense about something.

Planning Ahead

- **Before you talk with your children, think about what values you want to teach them.** Be sure that you have all the facts you need and understand them. Take a few minutes to learn what is normal for each age.

Teach your child:

- To feel good about being a boy or a girl and to feel good about how their bodies look.
- The right words for all body parts, not nicknames or slang words.
- To ask you any questions they have about sex.
- How they should act in public and how that is different from how he or she acts in private or at home.
- Your values and what you expect from him or her.
- That things they see on TV about sex may be confusing and may not be the way you want them to behave.

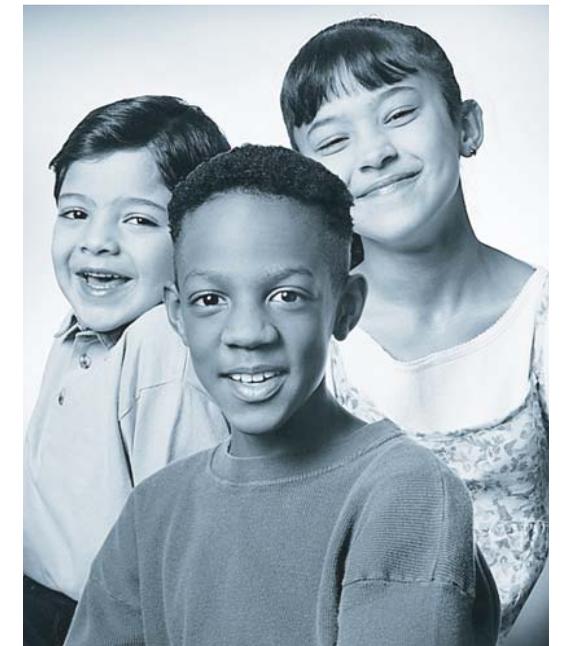
Things to remember

- **Listen to your children.** Be sure you know what they are asking you, then answer the question they asked. When they ask questions, give them your full attention.
- **Use the right words.** Children take things literally! If you tell your child that there is a seed growing in Mommy's tummy, he or she may think you have a plant growing inside of you. Stay away from books or videos that talk too much about how animals have babies – this can confuse your child.
- **Give your child simple, factual answers that are right for his or her age.** Very young children are not ready for details about sex and reproduction. Your three-year-old may only need to know that mothers have a special place for a baby to grow. An older child may want to know how the baby got in his mother's tummy.
- **Answer your child's questions as soon as they are asked.** If you put your child off, he or she will quit asking.
- **If your child has not asked you any questions by age five, bring the subject up yourself.** A good time to bring this up is if your child starts to use sex words or if you have a friend who is expecting a baby.



For help or more information,
call your local health department
or the **Info Connection** toll-free at
1-800-545-1098

Talking with Your Child about Sex





Talking with your child about sex

It is best to start talking with your child about sex when he or she is young. Questions about sexual issues often begin at an early age. Answering your child's questions now will make it easier to handle harder questions later on.

Talking to your child about sexual subjects is not easy. You may feel embarrassed or just not know what to say. It is still important to talk about these topics because you are your child's best teacher.

Knowing about the different stages that your child will go through is a good way to start. Certain things happen at different times. Knowing what to expect will give you an idea about how to answer your child's questions. For example, young children need simple, factual answers. Older children will want more details. This brochure is set up to help you answer your child's questions.

1 1/2 - 3 Years of Age

- **When children learn to “go potty,” they become very aware of their private parts.** Learning the correct names for their body parts, such as penis and vagina, is one way to help them have a healthy attitude about their bodies.
- **Do not use nicknames for your child's sex organs.** Using the correct words will let your child know that it is okay to talk to you about their private parts.
- **Remember that it is normal for children this age to touch their sex organs.** This happens at about the same time they learn about their bodies and how their private parts work.

3 - 4 Years of Age

- **This is the time when children learn more about how to act in public and in private.** It is about this same time that children begin to learn about respecting other people's privacy.
- **Because going to the bathroom is still a new experience for many children this age, talking about going to the bathroom or “potty” is common.** Children this age are often curious about what other people do in the bathroom and like to use bathroom words, like “You're a stinky doo-doo!”
- **Children's curiosity about their bodies may cause them to “play doctor” or want to see a child of the opposite sex.** This is very common for a four-year-old.
- **Children who are upset may grab their sex organs.** This is due in part to the fact that children this age – boys more than girls – have more feelings in their sex organs.
- **Children often ask where babies come from around this age.** If they do not understand the answers, they will make up their own. You will probably repeat your answers many times. At this age, a simple, truthful answer is best.

5 - 6 Years of Age

- **Now is a good time to start talking to your children about things that have to do with sex and to encourage your children to talk to you.** They will hear many new things about sex from other children at school. You should talk to them at home about these things so they don't get confused.
- **Some children want to know more about babies than other children.** Most children want to know more about how a baby is born than in how it is made.
- **By five years of age, many children want to get dressed and use the bathroom in private.**
- **Children at this age start to notice more about the differences between boys and girls.** They make more friends of their same sex and they are more interested in men's and women's roles.
- **Lots of times, children at this age will use “naughty” words** to see what their parents will do.



Questions Everyone Has

Many people have the same questions when it comes to talking about sex. Below are some common questions and some answers to help guide you.

What about “Playing Doctor”?

- **It is normal for young children to be curious about their own bodies and those of the opposite sex.** “Playing doctor” is often a child's way of satisfying his or her curiosity about how another child's body looks. Almost every young child will “play doctor” at some point.
- **If you find your child playing some type of sex game, try to act calm and natural.** Most of the time, any harm from sex play comes from the parent yelling, spanking or making the child feel guilty about it.
- **You may want to tell your child that because their body is private, it is not to be used for games.** This is also a good time to talk to your child about not putting anything into a body opening, including their private parts. Be calm but firm. Let them know that even if it feels good, it is not OK to play “touch” games with their private parts.
- **If you are not sure what to say, you can find books to help you at the public library or at the bookstore.** You can also call to speak with a nurse or social worker in private at 1-800-545-1098.