

# CHILD SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

## Tips for Talking With Children

Learn more about how to talk with your child about normal and healthy sexual development.

### What Is Child Sexual Development?

Child sexual development refers to the:

- Physical changes (puberty, starting menstruation, having wet dreams)
- Behavioral changes (showing affection, masturbation, partner intimacy)
- Sexual knowledge development (what gender is, what sex is, what sexual orientation is) that a child goes through in their youth.

The foundation for sexual development starts when a child is a baby. At each age, your child should show some behaviors that seem sexual.

### How Can You Help Your Child Have Healthy Sexual Development?

Help them understand what is normal and healthy at each age. There are age-appropriate ways for you to talk to and teach your child about their development. Have open, honest conversations at every age. You are one of the most important teachers in your child's life.

Your child is learning and growing. At times, these age-appropriate behaviors may call for a teaching moment, rather than discipline. Consider how your personal beliefs and family values may impact your child's sexual development.

### What Are Some Tips for Talking About Sexual Development?

Here are some ways that you can keep the lines of communication open when talking about sexuality with your child.

**Be honest.** Some topics might be hard to talk about. If a conversation feels tough, it is okay to say so. Admit the discomfort and share correct facts.

**Learn together.** If your child asks a question that you don't know the answer to, say so. This shows it is okay not to have all the answers. Then, find the answer together.

**Respect feelings.** Think about your own values and feelings about sexuality. Your child will form their own thoughts feeling over time. Even if their view is different from yours, try to avoid judgment. Shaming them can be harmful. It may harm your relationship with them.

**Ask questions to understand.** If you are not sure what your child is asking or talking about, ask simple, open questions. This will help you better understand them.

**Use words your child can understand.** Even young kids should learn the correct medical words for their body parts.

**Respect curiosity.** Kids of all ages may be curious. Encourage this curiosity by answering the questions they ask. Try not to say things like, “You’re too young to know that!” Instead, try to give as much information as right for their age.

**Use word that include.** Your child may be learning about the different ways that people experience sexuality. Using words that include all sexual orientations and identities can help with open communication.

**Talk about the joys of sexuality.** Help your child know they deserve to enjoy their sexuality, and they should voice their needs, wants, and limits.

**Talk about consent.** When talking to your child about sex, discuss that it is important to ask, listen, and look for consent. Teach your child to say yes or no depending on how they feel.

**Be a good role model.** Children learn from others around them. Show them what a healthy relationship looks like. Use healthy communication in your relationships and when talking about body image.

## What if You Need Help Talking to Your Child?

There are many reliable places to find information to share with your child. Talk to your child’s provider if you have questions or need support talking with your child.

## Resource

### Healthy Development at Every Age

