



awareness to action
Wisconsin
Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

HOW TO TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (5-8 YEARS OLD)

Keeping the lines of communication open with your children – regardless of their age – will help you have open and honest discussions about sexuality. Take some time to understand your own values, feelings and beliefs. Remember, children learn by observation, so how you express yourself non-verbally is just as important as what you say to them.

HEALTHY BEHAVIOR

- Gender identity solidifies and stabilizes (understand physical, behavioral, and emotional distinctions between males and females)
- Should have basic understanding of puberty (some children, especially girls, will show early signs of puberty)
- Should have basic understanding of human reproduction
- May understand differences in sexual orientation
- May masturbate in private
- Will develop more stable friendships
- May engage in consensual genital exploration with same age (and often, same sex) peers
- Will begin to be modest about nudity

TIPS FOR FACILITATING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Child should respect other's boundaries/privacy and have their boundaries/privacy respected in return.
- Talk with your child about your family values and why they are important.
- Talking with child about bodily responses, especially those that are precursors to sexual response (e.g., "it feels good to touch one's body), and about what is and is not appropriate during peer interaction
- Modeling healthy, intimate adult relationships characterized by effective communication
- Teaching child about male and female puberty (by 7-8 years old)
- Using everyday opportunities to teach child about sexuality, even the mechanics of reproduction (children should know the "birds and the bees" by no later than 9 years old—It's important to know that research shows that children whose parents talk with them about sexuality are less likely to become sexually active at an early age)

