



Central Michigan District Health Department
Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities

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Dear Parent,

This folder contains some tips, scripts, and statistics on how to help a parent have a conversation with their middle school child about puberty, gender identity, consent, and how to talk about sex.

The Central Michigan District Health Department understands the importance of parents speaking with their children about abstinence and sexuality. We also understand the difficulty parents may face when discussing these sensitive topics. The resources contained in this packet are meant to assist you in your communication with your child when these discussions arise.

Thank you for picking up the parent informational pack. We hope that you will find this information and resources helpful. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please feel free to contact Nadia Ashtari at (989) 773-5921 Ext:1460 or nashtari@cmdhd.org.

Sincerely,

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Identity

- Sexual orientation and gender identity are 2 different things. LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (or queer). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual are labels that describe sexual orientation, just like straight or heterosexual.
- Transgender and gender nonconforming are terms that describe the gender identity of people who don't identify as the gender they were given at birth. Cisgender describes the gender identity of people who do identify as the gender that they were given at birth.
- Questioning means figuring out your sexual orientation or gender identity. Queer has many different meanings, but it's often used as an umbrella term to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender presentation that's not straight and cisgender.

Even though sexual orientation and gender identity are 2 separate things, many people who are lesbian, gay, or bi and those who are transgender or gender nonconforming have similar experiences growing up. They may grow up with a strong sense that they're different from the people around them, and fear rejection from their families and friends.

If your teen has recently come out and you're finding it hard, know that you're not alone. You may feel worried about your teen's health or their acceptance in your community. You may feel guilty for your attitude toward LGBT individuals in the past, like using words that you now know are hurtful. But it's never too late to show your support and create safe spaces for your teen.

What should I do if my teen comes out as lesbian, gay, or bi?

Do let them know you love them. LGBTQ teens may need more reassurance than straight teens that their parents love them.

Do use the same word your teen uses to describe their sexual orientation. Make note of the word your teen uses to describe their orientation and use only that word. And if your teen doesn't want to use a label to describe their orientation — even if they're in a same-gender relationship — that's okay, too.

If you suspect your child is LGBTQ, don't pressure them to admit it. Some people don't question their sexual orientation until later in life. Others figure out their sexual orientation while they're young but don't feel ready to come out to their parents or anyone for many years — and that's okay.

Don't assume it's just a phase — but be aware that sexual orientation can be fluid for some people, and labels sometimes change. No matter what, the important part is that you accept what your teen says about their own sexual orientation and know that there's nothing you can do to change it.

Do respect your teen's wishes about who they want to come out to. Some people choose to come out to everyone in their lives and some prefer to tell only a few people. It's up to your teen to decide. Encouraging your teen to hide their sexual orientation sends a message that you don't approve of them. Do your best to support your teen in their choices about being out.

Do help them figure out how to come out to people. Discuss different ways they might handle the situation if coming out doesn't go as planned. This is a skill your teen will need to have throughout life, so helping them now will show you love them and are there for them.

How to create a safe space

Home needs to be a safe space for your teen to grow, explore their interests, and work towards their hopes and dreams. LGBTQ teens have a slightly different set of needs when it comes to feeling safe, secure, and supported at home.

- Ask your teen what they need from you to feel supported.
- Look for signs of depression or self-harm, and if you notice any, ask your teen if they're okay and if they want to speak with a therapist or counselor.
- Ask them about their friends and welcome their LGBTQ friends into your home.
- Meet anyone they're dating, ask them questions, and check in with your teen about the relationship over time.
- Talk with them about safer sex and birth control. (Yes, even lesbian and gay teens should know about how pregnancy happens and how to prevent it because many LGBT-identified youth have sex that can put them at risk of unplanned pregnancy at some point).
- Make it known that homophobic or transphobic speech — including jokes — isn't acceptable in your home.
- Let them read books and watch TV shows and movies about LGBTQ characters and let them explore online LGBTQ communities. (But be sure to talk about how to stay safe online).
- Let them wear the clothes they want to wear.

Sexual Consent

“Sexual consent is an agreement to participate in a sexual activity. Before being sexual with someone, you need to know if they want to be sexual with you too. It’s also important to be honest with your partner about what you want and don’t want. Consent is required every time you are being intimate, and you should never feel pressured to do something, even if you have done it in the past. Both people must agree to sex – every single time – for it to be consensual. Without consent, sexual activity (including oral sex, genital touching, and vaginal or anal penetration) is sexual assault or rape.”

Stress the importance of asking, listening, and respecting someone’s comfort level and choice! You can also ask, “If a person’s date or romantic partner touches or kisses them without their consent, what is that called?” Explain that forced sexual contact, which includes touching and kissing, is called sexual coercion ([Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance](#), 2018).

Statistics from Love Is Respect

One in three girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence.

Eighty-one percent (81%) of parents believe teen dating violence is not an issue or admit they don't know if it's an issue.

One in 10 high school students have been hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a significant other.

One in three (36%) dating college students has given a dating partner their computer, email, or social network passwords – and these students are more likely to experience digital dating abuse.

Here are some common misconceptions from One Love's [Five Big Myths About Consent](#):

- **MYTH #1: Boundaries aren't essential** – It is important in every relationship that partners have time and space to do things on their own. Each person should appreciate the other's individuality.
- **MYTH #2: Consent is only about sex** – Consent is about many things, from sex to kissing in public, to disclosing private things, and more.
- **MYTH #3: Silence means yes** – Not true! Consent should be explicit. If someone is silent, their partner should ask how they are feeling and if they feel good about proceeding.
- **MYTH #4: No takebacks** – You have every right to change your mind. You may consent to something and then change your mind as things progress or in another situation. Consenting once does not mean consenting every time.
- **MYTH #5: All's fair when you are drunk** – If you or your partner are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, you are unable to give consent. Drugs and alcohol can affect our cognitive activities such as decision-making, response inhibition, planning, and memory. Wait until everyone is sober to make sexual (and other!) decisions. Explain to youth what the effects of drugs and alcohol are on our decision-making processes.

Many teens start having serious romantic relationships during high school and early college. Crushes, first kisses and hook-ups, and first heartbreaks — these are big emotional moments. Even though it may sound like puppy love, and even though these early relationships usually don't last longer than 3 months or so, they're important for your teen.

Early relationships can teach teens lessons for future relationships. Unhealthy relationships can lead to emotional and physical harm. Your teen's first romantic relationships are a good opportunity for you to help them understand what it means to be in healthy relationships, so they can continue to have healthy, happy relationships throughout their life.

Be your teen's go-to for relationship advice. Don't wait until they're in a relationship to talk about consent and what's healthy and what's not. It's never too early to get your messages about healthy relationships out there. Plus, some teens' sexual experiences start with "hook-ups," meaning sexual encounters without monogamy or any commitments — rather than more traditional dating.

When they're in a relationship, stay involved. Ask questions and be a caring listener. If you can make yourself one of their go-to people for advice and support, they'll be better off. Get to know the person they're in a relationship with — and get to know their parents or caretakers. When parents know the person their teen is dating and the parents of that person, the teen is less likely to have sex before they're ready.

You can play a big role in helping your teen understand what a healthy relationship looks like. You can help them expect good communication, respect, trust, fairness, honesty, and equality.

Start these conversations before your teen is in a relationship. Ask them questions about what they think makes a good relationship.

If it makes sense, tell them stories about your life — how you knew someone was right or wrong for you, and what kinds of things you expect in a relationship. Show them you value their opinion, and keep the door open to more conversations about romantic relationships by talking about couples on TV, in movies, or in the world around them.

If you find out they're in a relationship, here are some questions you can ask to help them figure out if their relationship is healthy:

Do you talk about your feelings with each other?

Are you able to work through disagreements?

Do you listen to each other's ideas?

Do you trust each other?

Do you always feel safe around each other?

Do you want each other to spend time with their own friends and family?

Talking About Consent and Healthy Relationships at Every Age

Talking about these issues is a lifelong conversation for parents and their children. These are some examples of specific messages parents can give to help prevent unhealthy relationships and sexual assault, or know what to do if something happens.



When they're 8 years old or younger you can say things like:

- "You don't have to kiss or hug anyone you don't want to."
- "You should never touch someone else if they tell you not to."
- "Good friends are nice to each other and take turns talking and listening to each other."
- "If anyone other than me or the doctor ever touches you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, or touches your penis or vagina, tell them no and to stop. If they won't stop, tell an adult like me or (another trusted adult)."



When they're 9-11 years old you can say things like:

- "People who care about each other treat each other with respect, even when they disagree with each other."
- "If anyone tries to make you do anything you don't want to do, you can tell them 'I don't want to do that. Let's do something else instead.'"
- "If someone is treating you in a very mean way or bullying you, it's not ok and it's not your fault. Come talk to me if anything like that happens to you or a friend."



When they're 12-14 years old you can say things like:

- "What things are important to feel safe and cared for in a relationship? What wouldn't be OK with you?"
- "Technology and social media can help us stay connected with the people we love, but can also lead to miscommunication, spreading gossip, or following where you're going (stalking)."
- "In a relationship, it's never OK for one person to pressure the other to do anything they don't want to do."
- "Rape and sexual assault are crimes and are never the victim's fault. They are always the fault of the person who committed the crime."



When they're 15-18 years old you can say things like:

- "Consent is how you and your partner both know that sex is OK and wanted by both of you. You always need to ask for consent if you want to have sex, and you always have the right to say yes or no to sex."
- "If you were in an unhealthy relationship, how would you break up with someone safely?"
- "If you're drunk or high, it can be really hard to read someone's signals to know if they're consenting or not."
- "There are resources in our community to help people who are sexually assaulted. If you or one of your friends is ever in that situation, you can go there, and of course you can always come to me for help."

A FEW WORDS ABOUT CONSENT...

CONSENT IS...

- a clear and enthusiastic “yes”.
- an active, voluntary, and verbal agreement.
- a process and a conversation.

Consent can always be withdrawn.

HOW EARLY CAN WE START TALKING?

As early as age 1, we can begin teaching kids that “no” and “stop” are important words and should be honored by children and adults. We can teach even very young children that they have a right to have their “no” and “yes” respected too.

WHY TALK TO MY KIDS ABOUT IT?

Communication, respect, and honesty are the building blocks of healthy relationships, and consent is about all of those things.

Teaching kids about the skills of consent can help reduce sexual coercion, harassment, and even assault.

When we teach kids about consent, we help them learn how to express what they want and don’t want. We give them tools to express their limits. We teach them that they deserve to be treated in a respectful way.

Teaching consent also means teaching kids that it’s just as important to respect others’ limits and wishes. We teach them that their friends have a right to say “no” and “yes” and have that be respected.

Two ways parents can show young children we respect their limits:

- 1 Ask your child if they would like to play a tickle game; listen for “yes”. If your child says “stop”, stop and wait for them to invite you to play again.
- 2 If your child does not want to hug or kiss a relative, offer them an alternative rather than forcing them: “Would you like to give Grammy a high-five instead?”

IT’S NEVER TOO LATE

Talking about consent can start at any time...and it’s never too late to begin the conversation.

You can begin by asking kids for their consent in a variety of ways.

HERE’S AN EXAMPLE...

The more you talk about consent, the more normal it will become, so talking openly and respectfully with friends and partners will become second nature.

“ I’d like to post this great picture of you on my social media. Can I get your consent to do that? ”



SPARKING A CONVERSATION



The **ASK. LISTEN. RESPECT.** video was created for kids ages 11-16 to show concrete examples of:

- how to ask for consent
- what enthusiastic, verbal consent looks like
- how to respond to "no" respectfully

You can use the video to spark conversations with your child/teen about respectful relationships, the importance of consent, and how teens can ask for and give consent in their friendships and dating relationships. The video is approximately 1 minute long.

VIEW THE **ASK. LISTEN. RESPECT. VIDEO** ([AT WWW.TEACHCONSENT.ORG](http://WWW.TEACHCONSENT.ORG)) **CONVERSATION STARTERS AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO:**

- "This video is about consent. What does 'consent' mean to you?"
- "Can you spot 2 or 3 examples in the video for how each teen asked for consent?"
Here are the examples of asking for consent in the video:

o Girl: "Can I come over?"	Boy's response: "Sure"
o Boy: "Want to shoot some hoops?"	Girl's response: "Um no, not really."
o Girl: "Do you want to play [this video game]?"	Boy's response: "Yeah"
o Girl: "Hey, do you want to go see a movie?"	Boy's response: "Nah..."
o Boy: "You want to kiss?"	Girl's response: (smiles) "Yeah!"
- What are a few specific examples from the video of the teens not giving their consent? How did each teen respond when the other said "no"?
- In the video, the teens ask direct questions to see what the other person wants to do. How do you ask for consent with your friends? What do these conversations look like and sound like in your life?

CONVERSATION STARTERS ABOUT CONSENT IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS:

This is a great time to explain the importance of asking permission (consent) to touch or kiss someone.

- "How do you know when someone gives their consent?"
- "How can someone tell if the other person is ready to touch or kiss?"

Explain that only "yes" means "yes". Just because someone doesn't say "no", it does not mean that person is giving consent. Ask. Listen. Respect.

- "If a person's date (or anyone else) touches or kisses them without their consent, what is that called?"

Explain that forced sexual contact (which may include touching or kissing) is called coercion and may be assault.

REMEMBER...

You don't need to set aside a huge chunk of time to have these kinds of conversations. You can have conversations anytime you're together without lots of distractions: in the car, at mealtime, etc.

Teaching about consent works best when it's talked about regularly in lots of different ways.



Parents' Checklist to Support their Children's Sex Education



What you can do at **HOME**

Talk with your children and teens regularly throughout their lives about a broad set of topics related to sex and sexuality such as:

- Healthy friendships and relationships
- Personal safety, bullying, boundaries and consent. Remember to talk about both in person and online interactions.
- Sexual health, including, for adolescents, preventing STIs including HIV, birth control, and how to talk with healthcare providers
- Positive body image and identity, including gender stereotypes, gender identity, and sexual orientation
- Making healthy decisions, including skills to deal with peer pressure, how to say no to sex until they're ready, and how to be prepared for whenever they are ready to have sex
- Where to find reliable sexual health information in books or online

Learn more about how to talk with children of all ages about these topics and more at plannedparenthood.org/parents.



What you can do to find out and help improve what is happening in your **LOCAL SCHOOLS:**

Ask your children what, if anything, they've learned about these topics in school.

Find out if they're happy with this, feel included in it, and what they wish school would teach that they're currently not.

Find out who is providing health and sex education at your local school.

When you call or email the school, ask to speak with whoever oversees health and sex education programs.

There may be a program coordinator who oversees health and sex education classes, or who coordinates the external organizations that come into the school to provide programming, which can include health and sex education. There could also be an individual teacher who is responsible for providing health and sex education.

Find out how often and when sex education is happening.

When you speak with the person responsible for health and sex education programs, the first question you can ask is how often and when health and sex education occurs. Ideally, health and sex education occur each year of school, in the same way that math and science do. Unfortunately, this rarely happens, and health and sex education usually occur only at certain grade levels. *continued...*

Find out what topics are being covered in sex education.

Once you have an idea of when and how often sex education takes place, ask what topics are covered each time sex education occurs.

At minimum, information on the following topics should be covered: anatomy and physiology, puberty and adolescent development, pregnancy and reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, healthy relationships, personal safety.

For more information on this, check out the Future of Sex Education's [National Standards for Sexuality Education](#).



What you can do at the STATE AND FEDERAL LEVELS:

Learn about the sex education requirements in your state.

You can find them at the [Guttmacher Institute's website](#).

Contact your members of congress (senators and representatives) and tell them you want them to:

- Support the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP) and the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), as these programs fund evidence-based approaches.
- Oppose increased funding for the Sexual Risk Avoidance Program, which funds Abstinence-Only Until Marriage approaches.
- Support the Real Education for Healthy Youth Act, which calls for an end to Abstinence-Only Until Marriage funding and supports states in funding better sex education programs.

Spend more time listening than talking, and get to know the world our teens live in.

What pressures are they dealing with? What do they consider normal? It's often tempting to jump in and give our point of view, but if we spend some time just listening and asking questions, we help our kids learn how to explain their ideas clearly. We get to know each other even better, and we build trust by showing we really care about their thoughts and feelings.

Try to understand what motivates teens.

It's important to communicate with kids about the importance of delaying sexual behavior until they are old enough to protect themselves and their partners. To do that well, it's helpful to understand and keep in mind the reasons teens give for having or delaying sex. Teens often cite a desire to feel closer to a boyfriend or girlfriend, or the erroneous belief that "everyone's doing it" as reasons for having sex. In contrast, they cite a fear of upsetting their parents or that sex will interfere with their future endeavors as reasons for delaying sex. We can talk with our teens about what motivates them around sex so we can better understand how to help them make the best choices for themselves.

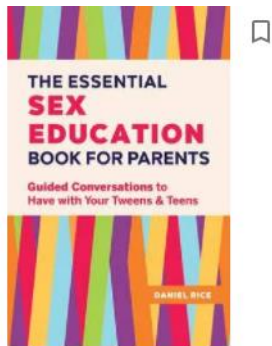
Don't just talk.

Parents can follow a few simple guidelines that will make teens less likely to engage in risky behavior such as drinking, smoking, having unprotected sex, or having sex before they are ready:

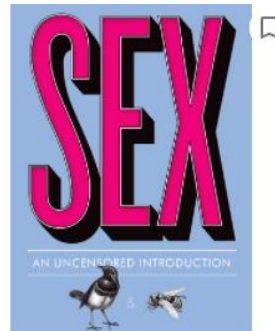
- We should know where our teens are and whom they are with, and we should not allow them to spend a lot of time alone without adults present.
- When teens are invited to each other's house or to a party, we can find out if there are going to be adults present.
- We can also discourage our teens from going out on school nights and dating or hanging out with older teens.
- Our teens are less likely to engage in risky behavior if we know their friends' parents, so getting to know the parents of our kids' friends, and especially the parents of anyone our son or daughter is dating, is a good idea.

We can talk with our teens about what motivates them around sex so we can better understand how to help them make the best choices.

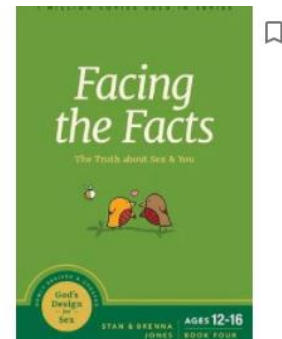
Book Resources:



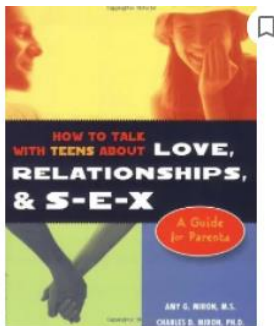
The Essential Sex Education Book for Parents: Guided Conversations to Have with ...



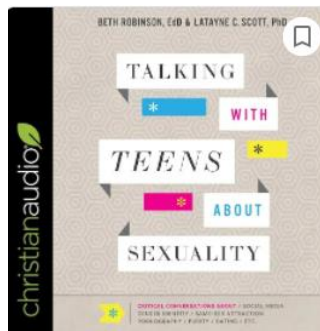
Sex: An Uncensored Introduction [Book]



Facing the Facts: The Truth about Sex and You [Book]



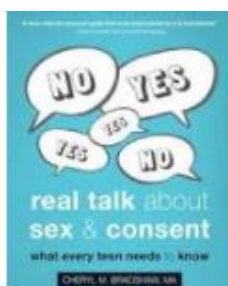
How to Talk with Teens about Love, Relationships & S-E-X: A Guide for Parents [Book]



Talking with Teens about Sexuality: Critical Conversations about Social Media ...



I Think Our Son Is Gay 01



Real Talk about Sex and Consent: Wha...



More Than Just the Talk: Becoming...



Let's Talk About Hard Things -...

Website Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-

<https://www.cdc.gov/>

Central Michigan District Health Department-

<https://www.cmdhd.org/>

Planned Parenthood-

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/>

U.S Department of Health and Human Services (OASH)-

<https://opa.hhs.gov/>

Sex Positive Families-

<https://sexpositivefamilies.com/>

Solid Ground-

<https://www.solid-ground.org/>

Central Michigan District Health Department:

Health Promotion:

HIV Testing and Counseling-

(989) 773-5921 Ext: 1409

Sexually Transmitted Disease Control Program-

(989) 773-5921 Ext: 1406

Breast and Cervical Control Program-

(989) 773-5921 Ext: 1406

Family Planning Program-

(989) 773-5921 Ext:1406

Personal Health:

Childhood Immunizations-

(989) 773-5921 Ext: 1405

Children Special Health Care Services-

(989) 773-5921 Ext: 8405

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)-

(989) 773-5921 Ext: 1405