



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,

Nadia Ashtari

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MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

AGES 9-12

Adolescence is a time of transition. Adolescents at this time grow physically, try new activities, think more critically, develop more varied and complex relationships.

Below are 5 changes that will be seen in an adolescent.



Physical

-hormonal changes and development



Cognitive

-changes in the way the brain functions



Emotional

-how adolescents process emotions and stress



Social

-changes in familial, social, and romantic relationships



Morals and Values

-how adolescents regard their place in the world

PUBERTY



Females

Will see changes in where fat appears on their body. For example, breasts become fuller and hips grow wider. Females typically experience their first menstruation (or period) during adolescence.



Males

Shoulders will become broader and their muscles will get bigger. The penis and testicles grow, and males begin to experience erections and ejaculations that are both voluntary and involuntary (sometimes while happening while asleep). Male's voices also deepen during this time and may crack during the shift

How a parent can support this change

Let adolescents know that what they are going through is normal. Although “normal” development covers a wide range, even older adolescents (and sometimes, their parents) are concerned with “fitting in.” Remind teens that despite their concerns, their personal developmental path is okay, even if it is different from that of their peers. People develop at different times and not all bodies will look the same even when fully developed. Variation is not at all unusual.

Encourage adolescents to have a positive view of their bodies. Beyond reassuring that the timing of changes in the body varies from person to person, parents and caring adults can help adolescents appreciate their own bodies and developmental experiences. Reminding teens that they are valued and accepted no matter how they look can help nurture self-respect and self-esteem in adolescents and counter negative body image issues or other anxieties.

Show adolescents how to discuss and maintain their health. Adolescents should receive regular healthcare, including vaccines and preventative care such as “well visits.” Parents and other adults also can help adolescents by giving them the skills to comfortably and effectively communicate with doctors and other healthcare professionals, as well as time alone with healthcare providers to discuss health concerns in private. This support matters even more for adolescents who have chronic conditions or disabilities.

Make sure adolescents get enough sleep. Sleep helps adolescents grow and strengthen their bodies and perform better in school, sports, and other activities. Strategies for parents include having a “lights out” rule, limiting the number of electronic devices (e.g., cell phone, computer) in a teen’s bedroom, and encouraging routines that help adolescents relax at the end of the day, such as reading a book before bed.

Help adolescents eat well. Parents and other adults play a large role in adolescents’ nutrition, by modeling healthy eating, following dietary guidelines and making sure adolescents have access to healthy foods. Keeping healthy snacks at home and limiting junk food goes a long way to promoting solid nutrition. Consider preparing and sharing meals with your teen to promote healthy eating.

Gender Identity: Helpful Definitions

Sex at birth: When children are born, sex is assigned based on external genitalia. A child who has a penis is said to be male. A child who has a vulva is said to be female. A child who is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the description of "female" or "male" is referred to as an intersex child.

Gender identity: Gender identity is "who you know yourself to be". It is important to know that gender identity exists on a spectrum. A person's gender identity can be masculine, feminine, or other.

Gender expression: This is how you express your gender to others, whether through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, the name you choose to go by, etc. Words to describe someone's gender expression could be "masculine," "feminine," "androgynous," etc.

Sexual orientation: This refers to sexual or emotional attraction that one feels for another person.

Transgender: When a person's gender identity is not the same as the assigned sex at birth, they may be referred to as "transgender" (often shortened to "trans"). For example, a child born with female genitalia may identify as a boy. A child may also say that they are not a boy or a girl, but just "themselves" because they don't want their sexual characteristics to define who they are. Some cultures and Indigenous people use the term "two-spirit" to represent a person who embodies both a masculine and feminine spirit. Two-spiritness has many subtleties of a spiritual and cultural nature.

Gender dysphoria: Describes the level of discomfort or suffering that can exist when there is conflict between the assigned sex at birth and gender identity. Some transgender children experience no distress about their bodies, while others may express significant discomfort. This distress can be more obvious as puberty begins, and the body starts to change.

For more resources check out: caringforkids.cps.ca

Expressing Gender Identity

Younger children may express their gender very clearly. For example, they may say “I am a she, not a he!”, “I am not your daughter, I am your son.”

Children may also express their gender through their:

- Clothing or hairstyle
- Choice of toys, games, and sports
- Social relationships, including the gender of friends
- Preferred name or nickname

Remember: Gender *expression* is different from gender *identity*. You can't assume a child's gender identity based on their gender expression (for example, their choice of toys, clothing, or friends).

My boy likes to wear dresses. Should I let him?

Some children go through a phase of resisting gender expectations. Remember that gender expression and gender identity are two different things. The way you express yourself does not necessarily define your gender.

Children do best when their parents or caregivers show them that they are loved and accepted for who they are. Discouraging your child from expressing a gender can make them feel ashamed. Give them unconditional support. In doing so, you are not framing a gender, but simply accepting who they are and how they are feeling.

For many children, this is a phase. No one can tell you whether your child's gender identity or expression will change over time. What children need to know most is that you will love and accept them as they figure out their place in the world. In older children, you can also gently help prepare them for negative reactions from other children, for example, by role-playing how best to confidently respond to teasing.

For more resources check out: caringforkids.cps.ca

How can I support my child?

Strong parent support is key!

- Love your child for who they are.
- Talk with your child about gender identity. As soon as your child can say words like “girl” and “boy,” they are beginning to understand gender.
- Ask questions! This is a great way to hear your child’s ideas about gender.
- Read books with your child that talk about many ways to be a boy, a girl, or having another gender identity.
- Don’t pressure your child to change who they are.
- Find opportunities to show your child that transgender and gender-diverse people exist and belong to many communities who appreciate and love them.
- Ask your child’s teachers how they support gender expression and what they teach about gender identity at school.
- Be aware that a child who is worrying about gender may show signs of depression, anxiety, and poor concentration. They may not want to go to school.
- Be aware of potentially negative issues that your child may face. Let your child know that you want to hear about any bullying or intimidation towards them.
- If you are concerned about your child’s emotional health, talk to your child’s family doctor, pediatrician, or other mental health professionals that specialize in the care of transgender and gender-creative children.
- Some parents have a hard time accepting that their child’s gender identity is different from the assigned sex at birth, often in cultures and religions where this is not easily accepted. If you are having difficulties, please seek additional help through websites, printed resources, support groups or mental health providers.
- For more resources check out: caringforkids.cps.ca

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](http://WWW.TEACHCONSENT.ORG) (AT 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.

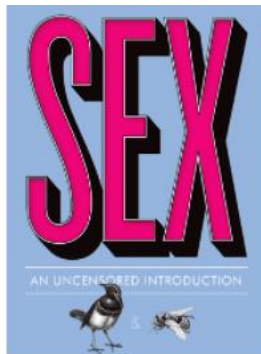
Don't just talk.

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:



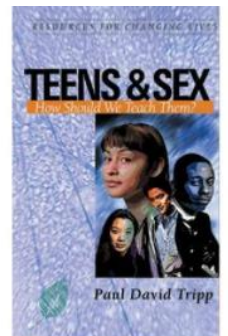
Sex: An Uncensored Introduction [Book]



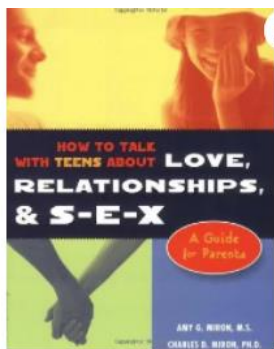
They Asked You What?!: Middle School Sex Ed. [Book]



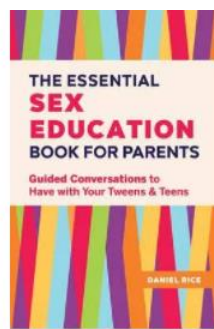
5 Things Every Parent Needs to Know about Their Kids and Sex [Book]



Teens and Sex: How Should We Teach Them? [Book]



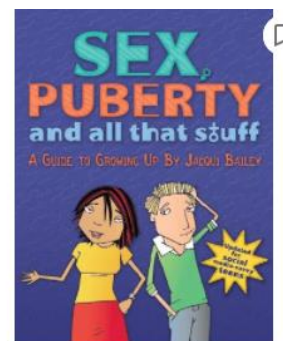
How to Talk with Teens about Love, Relationships & S-E-X: A Guide for Parents [Book]



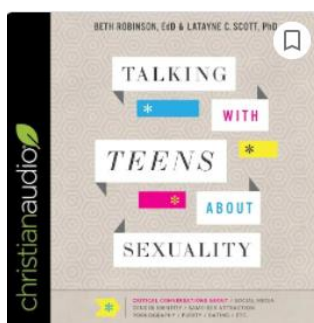
The Essential Sex Education Book for Parents: Guided Conversations to Have with ...



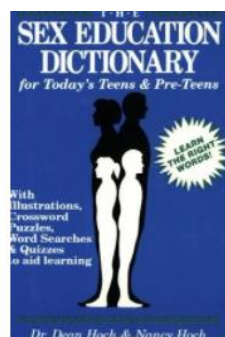
Making Sense of It: A Guide to Sex for Teens (and Their Parents, Too!) [eBook]



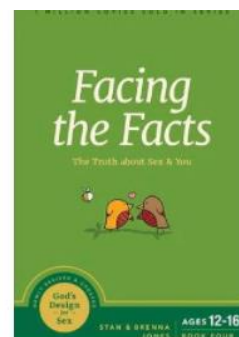
Sex, Puberty and All that Stuff: A Guide to Growing Up [Book]



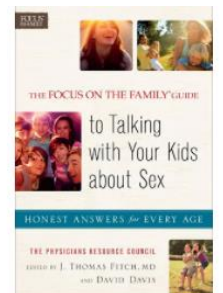
Talking with Teens about Sexuality: Critical Conversations about Social Media ...



The Sex Education Dictionary for Today's Teens & Pre-teens [Book]



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



The Focus on the Family Guide to Talking with Your Kids about Sex: Honest Answers ...

Website Resources:

Caring for Kids-

<https://caringforkids.cps.ca/>

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

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

Planned Parenthood-

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

Central Michigan District Health Department-

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

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-

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

American Academy of Pediatrics-

<https://www.healthychildren.org>

Sex Positive Families-

<https://sexpositivefamilies.com/>

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