

## Let's Talk About Sex, Part 2

8/11/23

Sarah here. We're continuing our mini-series on challenging conversations. Last week, I started tackling the sex talk by focusing on when and how to start that conversation. Hopefully you did your homework from last week! Remember that I had you think about your own experience of learning about sex as a young person and consider what you want your child's overall learning experience to be like. Today, I'll dive into some highlights to cover when you have the talk.



I want to cover a few important considerations at the front end. First, **talking to your child about sex does not increase the likelihood that they will have sex.** Giving your child appropriate information will not actively encourage them to have sex. Talking about sex—especially in the context of healthy relationships, boundaries, and communication—*does* increase the likelihood that your child will be equipped to deal with situations that arise as they get older. They will be better able to make safe and informed decisions. Second, **talking about sex is not incompatible with being religious.** Again, the goal of the conversation is to provide age-appropriate information about sex, which is a natural part of life. You can incorporate your religious views into the talk, but the key facts won't change. Third, **if you do not talk to your child about sex, they will learn about it from someone else.** By having the talk with your child proactively, you provide the framework for their knowledge about sex. You'll also ensure that they have the facts rather than misinformation.

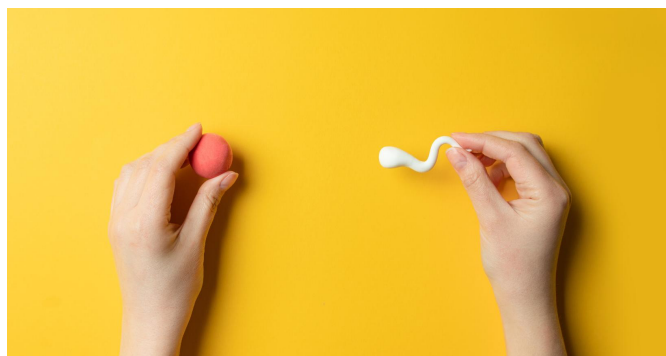
Now that we've covered those important considerations, I hope your resolve to have this conversation is strengthened! Once you've assessed what your child knows about where babies come from, how babies are made, sex, and physical intimacy (see last week's blog for more on this), you'll be ready to take the plunge. Exactly how you talk about sex and what information you share will depend on your child's age and what they already know. Rather than providing a detailed script, we're going to provide some talking points and examples that you can use or adapt as needed.

### **Where do babies come from?**

Even very young children (4- to 5-year-olds) can understand a simple explanation of where babies come from. You can talk about how babies grow inside of their mother's body. It's helpful to use actual names for body parts. So, you could say something like, inside a mom's body is something called a uterus and that's where babies develop and grow until they're ready to be born.

### **How are babies made?**

If your child is really young (less than 8 years old), you can tell them that to make a baby you need an egg and a seed. The egg comes from inside the mommy's body, while the seed comes from inside the daddy's body. And what happens if your young child asks how the seed gets in mommy's body? Tell them the truth. It's okay for them to know that when a mommy and daddy want to have a baby, they have sex and that's how the seed gets to the egg. It's also okay for them to know that sex is something that's only for grownups and it's something you'll talk with them more about when they get older.



If your child is a little older (8-11 years), then you can tell them that to create a baby, you need a tiny egg from a woman's body and a tiny "seed" called a sperm from a man's body. When a seed gets planted inside the egg, a baby develops. Adults do something called "having sex" to create a baby. To have sex to create a baby, a man's penis fits inside a woman's vagina.

### **Safety and what seeing/touching is acceptable**

It is important to make sure your child knows that no one is allowed to touch their bodies without their consent. This is especially true for touching the parts of your body that your clothes cover up- your chest and your private parts. Teach your child the actual names for their body parts. When your child is young, it can be helpful to talk about how their penis/testicles or vagina and their butt are private- they are just for them! Make sure your child knows who is allowed to see their private parts or touch their bodies- this is a short list and generally only includes parents, pediatrician, and any caregiver who helps with bath time and getting dressed.

While families may differ on how they view physical affection, it can be a good place to encourage your child to assert their own judgment. Think about it- would it be normal or appropriate if someone *required* you to hug or kiss them? Nope! While it's often expected that children kiss and hug their families, it's also okay if a child does not want to do so. Just be sure to talk with your family about this ahead of time, so people don't get their feelings hurt or feel your child is being rude. It's not rude to say that you aren't in the mood for a hug or kiss!

Encouraging your child to make their own choices about physical affection also teaches them that they are in charge of their own bodies, not anyone else.

### **Sex in the context of a trusting, caring relationship**

Younger kids respond well to clear rules and instructions, so you can let them know that sex is only for grownups. Depending on your child's age as well as your beliefs, you may say that sex is only for when people are married. Otherwise, you need to convey that sex is only okay when it happens in the context of a trusting, caring relationship. This does leave latitude for many kinds of relationships—not just marriage or monogamy. The important point here is that regardless

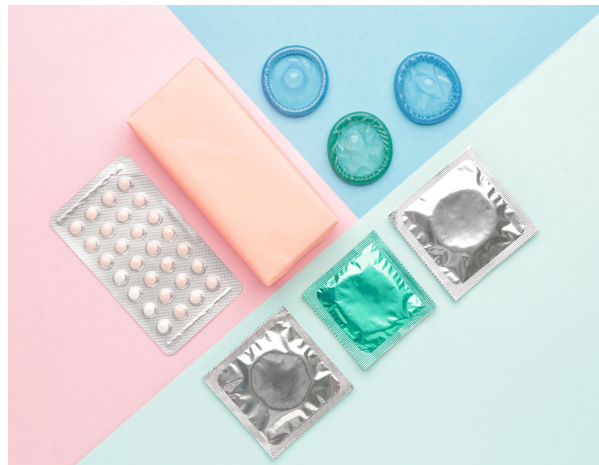
of how committed or casual a relationship is, sex is a really intimate, personal thing that you should not do with someone you don't trust.

If you are talking to a tween or teen, this is a great place to open the discussion to them. How would they know whether they were ready to have sex? How would they know if they could trust the person? How would they know if the person really cared about them? Remember- this isn't a one-shot conversation. You will circle back to discuss sex, relationship issues, and intimacy multiple times. And even if it seems like these aren't things that tweens need to worry about, the truth is that a tween who is well-informed, has thought through these issues, and knows how to speak up and be assertive is a tween who will know how to deal with stressful situations that could come up. With all of this in mind, here are some points you may want to bring up in this part of the discussion:

- Kissing, hugging, sex, and any other physical intimacy is only okay when both people want to do it. If one person isn't sure or doesn't want to, then it should not happen.
- *If you can't talk about it, you shouldn't do it.* In other words, if you cannot even say the word "sex" aloud without turning beet red, much less have a conversation about it, then you aren't ready to have sex.
- If you're going to have sex or be physically intimate with someone, make sure that person respects you and your wishes. You should not be with someone who pressures you into doing something you don't want to do.
- While sex is a natural thing that can be enjoyable, it isn't always. It's important to be with someone who is considerate- not someone who is only thinking about themselves.
- Because sex can result in pregnancy, if you aren't ready for the possibility of having a baby, then you aren't ready to have sex. Your child needs to realize that if they were to get pregnant (or get someone else pregnant), that would effectively change their lives forever. If they don't want to deal with that possibility, then they aren't ready to have sex.

### **Safer sex practices**

If your child is older (tween or teen), it will be important to also discuss safer sex practices. Again, talking about these things does not mean that your child will have sex. But it does mean that whenever they decide to do so, they will know how to keep themselves safe and healthy! It's important for your child to know that having unprotected sex can lead to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and not just pregnancy. Make sure they know they should talk with their potential partner about both of their sexual histories and that once they begin being physically intimate, they will need to get routine testing for HIV and STIs, even if they only ever have protected sex. Your discussion about safer sex should include key methods: condoms, oral birth control ("the pill"), and any other legitimate methods that may be utilized (e.g., implant, vaginal ring, birth control patch, etc.). It will also be important for your child to know that it is their responsibility to take care of their own health and safety- it is not something they should assume someone else will do for them.



Phew- we made it! While this 2-partner on talking about sex didn't cover everything under the sun, we hope it gives you some ideas on how to start this conversation. You'll revisit this topic throughout your child's growing up years. More than anything else, make sure your child knows that you are someone that they can talk to about sex and relationships and everything else. Let them know it's okay to have questions or talk about stuff, even if it feels awkward or embarrassing. And, let them know that you're there for them. If they know those things, then they'll come back to you with their questions and concerns when the time comes.