



## Explaining Sex to Kids

Let's say that little Billy has gone shopping with his dad for the afternoon and you steal half an hour to lie on your bed with your Beats bolted to your ears, eyes closed and fingers massaging a very important place between your legs. You are all alone and the sensations begin to feel wonderful. Next thing you know, the headphones are being yanked off your head by Billy, who is asking, "Mommy, what color napkins were we supposed to get for the birthday party?"

Or you assume Chloe is fast asleep and you begin enjoying an all-too-rare moment of sex when a small hand suddenly taps you on the shoulder and you hear the words, "Daddy, how come Mommy's sucking on your penis?"

The pages that follow don't pretend to have all the answers about children and sex; they are simply a way of getting you to think about the subject before most parents do, which is sometimes too late for an effective response. Topics range from talking about genitals and masturbation to periods, sex play and porn.

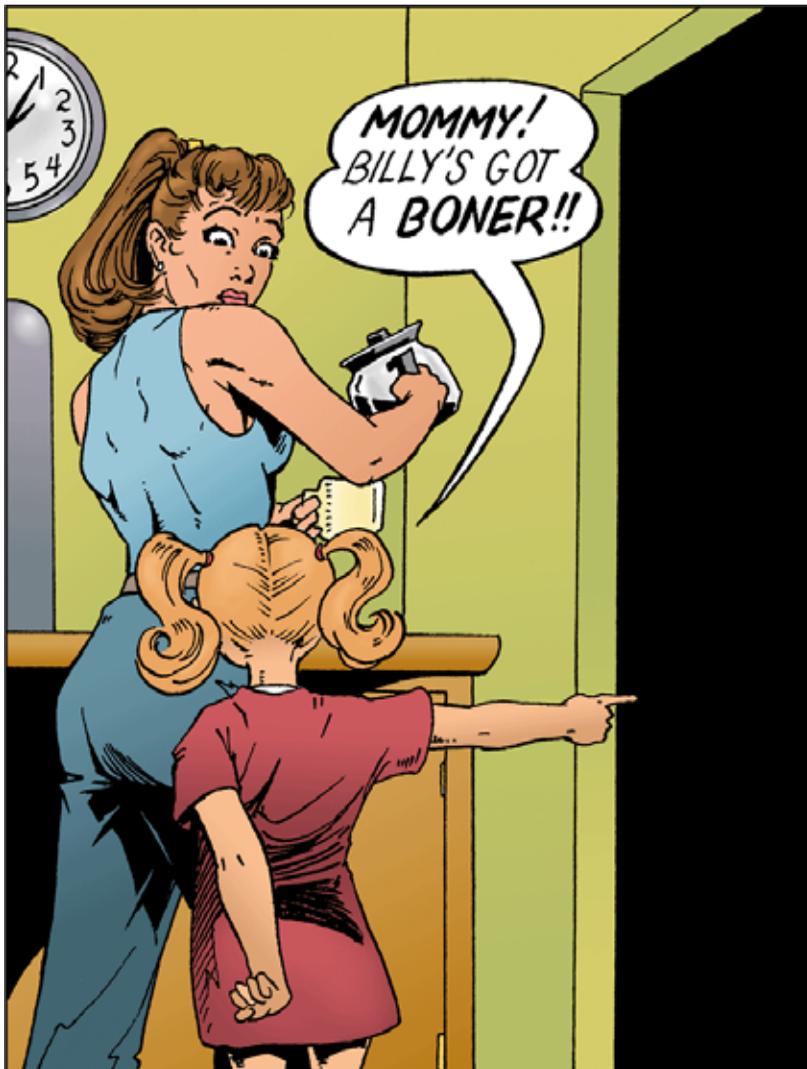
### Children's Sexual Development

People often think of sex as something that happens once we become teenagers. Not true. Most of us started having sexual feelings when we were babies. Each time someone changed our diapers and powdered our private parts we had sexual feelings in the most basic sense—nice physical sensations down where the Pampers go.

As children become a few years older, they often enjoy playing sex games with friends and relatives, same sex or otherwise. Sometimes they compare and contrast; other times they enjoy doing things that big people do, like sucking on each other's genitals. Occasionally they might explore by sticking fingers, penises and heaven knows what else up each other's front and rear ends. Eventually you might encounter a

third-grade child who has both hands in his or her pants, happily rubbing away, while claiming how yucky it would be to ever kiss on the lips.

As children's minds grow and become more complex, so does their ability to have sexual fantasies that include others. With time, the thought of making love doesn't seem so yucky anymore. Eventually, they might even want to read books like the *Guide to Getting It On*. In the meantime, one parent might wonder if it is normal for her four-year-old boy to be playing with his penis, while another might say, "Thank heavens he's got his penis to play with. It's a never-ending source of pleasure for him!"



## **Telling Children about Sexual Enjoyment**

Parents usually tell their children all there is to know about blowing noses and wiping rear ends, but rarely do they mention that genitals can be a source of good feelings. As a result, children learn it's okay to seek their parents' wisdom on just about everything but sexual feelings. This is unfortunate, because kids need their parents' guidance on sexual feelings as much as they do on wiping their rear ends or learning to drive a car. They will especially need it when they turn nine or ten and start watching porn.

Some parents assume that a 3-year-old who is rubbing her genitals has the same intent and fantasies as a 23-year-old. They either try to stop her or pretend that nothing is happening. Perhaps it would be helpful for parents to understand that their masturbating 3-year-old isn't thinking about how good her day-care bestie might be in bed. The child is simply touching her genitals because it feels good. It is perfectly normal for hands to reach between legs when a child is happy or excited, or at naptime and even when you are reading Dr. Seuss to her. All a parent needs to do is to occasionally affirm "It feels good when you touch yourself there." This gives mom and dad credibility about such matters and lets the child know it will be safe to talk to the parents about things of a sexual nature.

Boys have erections from a very early age, yet parents seldom explain to them that males get erections when they are having fun with their penis, and at other times like when they are waking up in the morning. Parents tell boys they have nice eyes, ears or even feet, but they avoid telling a boy much about his penis or saying anything nice about it. Nor do they tell a girl positive things about her genitals or let an older girl her know that her vagina will sometimes feel moist or wet. Yet girls get wet as often as boys get erections. (Parents may need to distinguish between the sexual kind of wet and the peeing-in-your-pants kind of wet.)

## **Nanny Interruptus**

Everyone these days is worried about nannies shaking their baby to death or kidnapping them. Few people think to ask the nanny how she will respond if she encounters your child playing with his or her genitals. It does no good to encourage a healthy attitude about sex when

your nanny is slapping the kid's hand and warning of a thousand curses if your child ever touches him or herself again.

Ask about this when you are interviewing for a nanny. Discuss how you'd like these matters handled. Otherwise, much of your hard work may be for naught.

### **Opportunity Knocks, and Knocks, and Knocks**

*Four-year-old girl:* Daddy, how come boys have penises?

*Dad:* I don't know. But I do know that boys and girls are both really lucky to have something between their legs that feels so good when they rub it!

The wonderful thing about explaining sex to kids is that you usually don't have to bring up the subject. It comes up on its own. Whether it's dogs mating in the backyard or your kid rubbing her genitals while you read her a good-night story, opportunities abound to make talking about sex a normal and natural part of growing up.

However, parents who explain sex in an open way should be prepared for nasty glares from other adults, because their children won't know it is bad to talk about sex; e.g., "Mr. Johnson, my daddy gets erections. Do you?" or "Sister Mary Elizabeth, does your vagina tingle when you feel excited?"

This kind of embarrassment is nothing compared to how it will feel if the first time you talk about sex is when your 15-year-old daughter tells you she is pregnant. (In some European countries, where children have better access to sexual information from a younger age, the rate of teenage pregnancy is way lower than in the United States. There is no downside in talking to your kids about sex from an early age.)

### **Playing with Themselves**

Since few parents talk about masturbation, their children may regard it as a dirty secret. You can explain it to a child by saying, "Masturbation is when you touch yourself between your legs in a way that feels good." Or, if your kid loves to hump her favorite bear or some other object, you can say, "They have a special word for humping things. It's called 'masturbation.'" When a boy is yanking on his penis or stroking it, it's no problem to say "When you do that in a way that feels good, it's called masturbation."

If your child asks for details and you feel comfortable about it, you can make a pretend penis with a finger while saying, "This is how boys do it" or point two fingers downward and rub the knuckle part to explain how girls do it. Or you can say, "It's what you've done since you were little and you put your hand between your legs about 50 times every day." Also, it might be reassuring for an older boy to hear his father say, "I started masturbating when I was your age" or for a girl to hear her mother say, "I masturbate, too."

Keep in mind that masturbation is very common for kids between the ages of 2 and 11, and it's not unusual for a younger child to hump or rub their genitals up against anything that suits their fancy.

### **Public vs. Private Regarding Parents**

In doing research for this book, the author met with a class of high-school students to talk about sex. Before he had even introduced himself, one of the boys yelled, "Do you masturbate?" It's not the sort of question he is used to being asked, let alone by a punk with baggy pants and a strange haircut. Embarrassing? You bet, yet to have said anything but "Sure" would have created a serious credibility gap, and it would have been dishonest. Beyond that, it would have been inappropriate for him to have discussed details about his private sex life with the young and restless.

It's the same when you are parent. It is fine for parents to let their children know that sex is a fun and important part of their lives. But it is neither necessary nor advisable for parents to discuss the details of their private sex lives with their children.

### **Public vs. Private Regarding Children**

When it comes to their genitals, younger children may often need help in learning the difference between public and private. You may need to remind your 3- or 4-year-old numerous times that it's okay to play with their genitals in their room, but not in the yard.

For super-permissive parents who feel that putting limits on children destroys their spirits, keep in mind that children won't feel safe with their sexuality if it is allowed to explode all over the place. If a child won't stop masturbating in a public place, there is no harm in saying, "I know that feels really good, but you should consider stopping it right now if you ever want to eat ice cream again."

Also, older children who constantly rub their genitals might be dealing with emotional anxieties that have little to do with sex. You need to consider how the child is doing with the rest of his or her life. Is this one of many things that isn't going right, in which case a psychological consult could be in order, or is it an isolated problem that you simply need to address.

### **Naming Private Parts**

Parents usually have no problem telling boys that they've got a penis and testicles between their legs, although little boys rarely refer to these items by their proper names. For that matter, neither do big boys.

Female sexual anatomy is mislabeled from day one. What you see from the outside is not a vagina, but this has become the generic term for what is nestled between a woman's legs. Contemporary sex educators get into a snit when people refer to women's genitals as her vagina when it is technically her "vulva," which means lips. (The vagina doesn't appear until after the vulva is spread open, and even then you only see the outer rim of it.)

However, what makes way more sense is to use a term you are comfortable with, and if that's vagina, then call it a vagina. Give it a name that you and your child are comfortable using and that conveys a sense that's way more positive than simply saying "down there." Also, try to avoid cutesy or childish terms, because what you call it now is how your daughter will be referring to her genitals when she's a teenager and an adult.

It is also helpful for parents to label the clitoris. There are illustrations in Chapter 11: *What's Inside a Girl* that you can show your daughter, or simply point to it when she's running around naked and say something like "That's your clitoris; it's a wonderful part of your body. Most women find that it feels really good when they rub it or play with it."

Parents should inform boys about girls' genitals. This way, girls' genitals won't seem like such a mystery and it will help boys be more comfortable in having meaningful discussions about sex with their partners as they get older. Also, it is through such talks that parents can teach boys to respect girls' genitals and to view them as a part of a

woman's entire person as opposed to being an object that's there just for sex. Otherwise, how are boys expected to learn such things? From porn?

As for the truly bizarre but popular notion that talking to kids about sex will make them more interested in it—it's hard to know what planet the people who claim this were raised on. Curiosity about sex is hard wired and for many children it can be quite significant whether their parents do or don't ever say a word about it. When it comes to sex, ignorance about our own bodies and the bodies of others is a recipe for pain, discomfort and negativity.

### **The Difference between Semen and Pee**

In earlier editions of this book, before the average eight-year-old could easily access porn that features women "squirting," this part of this chapter was about explaining to an older child that semen is different from pee, and that semen comes out of a man's penis when he has an orgasm, which is called ejaculation.

A concern in explaining ejaculation to a child who had not yet gone through puberty was that he or she might assume you are talking about pee. So it was important to say something about what semen is, and how it is very different from urine.

But now, it would be unusual for a boy (and girl) to not have seen male porn actors ejaculating long before he or she has entered puberty. So most children have at least had a visual showing of how different semen is from pee, not to mention the difference in what a guy has to do to produce semen as opposed to just taking a leak.

Where you'll need to be on your toes is when a young child has seen porn and is confused about it, or maybe your kid has never seen porn and the old rules will still apply.

Before the proliferation of porn, children might have assumed a man pees inside a woman's vagina to make her pregnant. One way of avoiding this confusion was and is to explain that there is a big difference between pee and semen. Pee is thin and mostly clear like water and there is a lot of it, while semen is white and thick, and a man produces less than a teaspoon of semen at a time. It might also help to explain that semen is produced when a man is having sex, while urine is produced when he has to go to the bathroom.

It wouldn't hurt to explain that nature was very smart about this and made it so that a man pees when his penis is soft and will usually only release semen when his penis is hard. You can say that when a man has intercourse or masturbates and his penis is hard, there comes a point that it starts to feel really good and warm, and that's when semen squirts out. Most children will either think this is funny or gross.

Be sure to explain that semen is the stuff that can get a woman pregnant, and that boys don't start making semen until they go through puberty, which starts to happen during middle school. Also explain that a man can't get a woman pregnant by simply hugging her or kissing her.

### **Squirting or Female Ejaculation—Thank You Porn!**

Thanks to porn actresses training their bodies to shoot out large quantities of urine during their so-called orgasms, a parent's job has become more challenging when it comes to explaining semen and ejaculation to a child.

If your child has seen porn where the women squirt, you'll be safe to say "While many women release a teaspoon or so of liquid when they are having sex, the women who squirt out lots of liquid in porn are actresses who are usually just peeing and pretending it's something else. This is not something most women do when they are having sex."

Do not get into a conversation about the origins of "female ejaculation." There are few trained sex educators who would know how to explain this to a child, and there is very little research on the subject to begin with. What is known about "female ejaculation" is discussed in Chapter 11: *What's Inside a Girl*. The only reason it would or should ever come up in telling your children about sex is if they've seen porn that features porn actresses who "squirt" and ask you about it.

### **Child-Abuse Warnings**

Now that our society is so revved up about child abuse, we've got parents and teachers telling young children, "Don't let anyone ever touch you down there!" Think about this.

In this day and age, the first time parents mention sex to children is often through warnings about sexual abuse—complete with deep, measured parental tones that barely hide mom and dad's fear and concern. Consider how dumb it would be if the first thing parents told kids about bike riding is how many scraped knees, broken bones and fractured

skulls they are likely to get. At best, the child would learn to hide his excitement and questions about getting a bike from mom and dad. And if the kid did have a bad encounter on a bike, it is only natural he or she would try to hide that, too, and perhaps feel horribly guilty.

Why not establish a good rapport about sex with your child from early on? Then your child can take in your warnings about child abuse with intelligence rather than guilt or trepidation.

As for an abuse prevention strategy, try giving young children a sense that their bodies belong to them and no one else. Tell them they don't need to give hugs or kisses if they don't want to. If parents respect this in their interactions with the child, then the child will learn from an early age that it's okay to say "no" to unwanted physical touching. Although good luck making that one fly when grandparents or other family members arrive and want to hug junior, and you find yourself glaring at your reluctant kid with a forced smile, saying "Give your grandmother a hug!"

When your child is older and able to speak with you about sexual matters, be sure to tell she or he that "No one should touch you in a sexual way unless it's what you want." Inform girls that this especially includes boyfriends.

Let your child know that no adults should ever touch his or her genitals and bottoms or ask to see them undressed unless it's at a doctor's office when mom or dad are present, or it is with a helping teacher whom mom and dad say is okay. If anyone ever touches them anywhere on the body or takes pictures of them and says to keep it a secret, they should tell you anyway. Also encourage them to tell you about any kind of touching that makes them feel strange or uncomfortable. And tell them if a stranger ever asks for their help in finding a lost pet, to come straight home and get you.

Some parents tell their children there are "good kinds of touch" and "bad kinds of touch." This is too abstract and is seldom helpful, as children often confuse "good touch" and "bad touch." Any child abuser worth his or her salt will be able to turn this around to his or her advantage.

One of the greatest tools you have in combating child abuse is to spend lots of time with your child, being a real and vital part of his or her life. Children who only get limited amounts of time from their

parents (aka “quality time”) are far more likely to be interested in the attention that child abusers have to offer. Child abusers are very savvy in their ability to select children who aren’t getting enough attention at home or who have lots of unanswered questions about sex. They then become the involved, exciting and understanding adult figure the child longs for. They end up doing your job for you, and, unfortunately, more.

### **Children’s Questions about Sex**

Some parents overwhelm young children with biological facts about sex. A five-year-old can’t understand the concept of Fallopian tubes! If a child under the age of five asks, “Where do babies come from?” it’s fine to say the baby grows in mommy’s uterus and point to your lower abdomen. A child might want to know how the baby gets out. You can explain there’s another hole between their poop hole and pee hole called the vagina where the baby comes out.

When you explain sex, try to make it a “we” thing when possible. This means that if children want to know how sperm gets from daddy’s body into mommy’s body, consider saying, “Mommy and Daddy place Daddy’s penis inside of Mommy’s vagina,” and not “Daddy places his penis inside of Mommy’s vagina.” For birds-and-bees information, you might find a book with fun illustrations and read it together with your child.

Once a child asks you an actual question about sex, it often means they have already created a scenario or answer to the question in their own mind. So instead of diving into an answer, you might start by asking your child to tell you what he or she thinks the answer is. That way, you may get more clues about what he or she really needs to know. If there is no evidence your child has already formed a hidden hypothesis, answer the question the best you can.

When it comes to questions about sex, or anything else for that matter, don’t be afraid to tell a child that you don’t know the answer. Acknowledge that it’s a really good question, and say you will do your best to find an answer. Then ask a friend, find a book or do a browser search. This way your children will know you take their questions seriously and they will feel free to ask for your help in the future.

Keep in mind you may be asked the same question about sex ten or twenty times. It could be that young children have a need for repetition, or maybe they get a secret sense of joy from seeing mom and dad break

have a breakdown after they've been asked the same question so many times. Also be aware that you will be giving a very different answer to a 5-year-old's question about intercourse than you will to the same child when he or she is 10 or 15. Just because you answered a question when your child was five doesn't mean you won't be answering the same question every couple of years, but each time in a more age appropriate way.

### **A Normal Five-Year-Old's Feelings about Sex**

"In second grade, a little boy kept squeezing my vulva and it felt so good and tingly and warm and throbbing that I waited quite a while until I told my teacher!" *female age 23.*

One day, the mother of a 5-year-old girl whose lifelong best friend had been a boy of her own age was shocked to find both kids buck naked with the little boy's fingers between her daughter's legs. The mom's first thought was to break every bone in the little boy's hand, but her daughter was just as happily involved as he. So she went into the kitchen and forced herself to count to 20. She then decided the last thing she wanted to do was respond as her own mother would have.

Rather than being guided by her initial response to protect her daughter, the mother asked the little girl how she felt about the way her friend had been touching her. Realizing that it was safe to answer truthfully, her daughter replied that it felt so wonderful she simply couldn't find a way to say no!

Since then, this little girl has asked her mother questions about who can touch her genitals and how to say no if she doesn't want them to. She asked these questions on her own initiative without being prompted by her parents. Few moms and dads have "perfect" answers for such questions, but just letting your child discuss it with you can be amazingly helpful. It helps the child learn how to use reason when dealing with sex.

It is likely that when this little girl becomes a young woman she will have more respect for her own sexuality than the vast majority of her peers. Her sexual decisions may even be the result of good judgment, instead of the all-too-common adolescent rush to just do it because the opportunity presented itself. Also, it seems she values herself and won't be agreeing to sleep with a boy out of fear that he will go away if she says no.

Don't for a moment think you should avoid setting limits on your children's sexual behavior. Parents who set no limits on their children's behavior raise obnoxious brats. Instead, why not think about strategies that might be more effective than simply yelling NO!—although there are times when your meanest stare and a firm “no” are fine parental responses.

### **When Children See (or Hear) You Having Sex**

If a young child walks in when you are having sex, cover up slowly and try not to look like you were doing something bad, because you weren't. One of you should take the child back to his or her own bed and tuck the kid in. It's a good idea to ask the child in a fun voice, “What did you think Mommy and Daddy were doing?” This will help you to know what they saw and how they interpreted it; e.g., “Daddy was hurting you!” Resist saying, “I'd be very happy if daddy hurt me like that more often!”

If the child has a negative read on what he or she saw, kindly disagree with their interpretation and give it a positive spin. You might say in a reassuring voice that you and daddy were having sex which was a lot of fun and you will be happy to talk about it in the morning. Even if the child doesn't ask, try to raise the issue the next day.

Parents who make a fair amount of noise when they are making love should consider telling their young children about it, saying that mom and dad sometimes make noises at night when they are sharing sexual feelings. Explain that these are happy noises which are very different from the noises that mom and dad make when they are fighting. This is an important distinction to make.

The good thing to know about being seen by your kids is that Dr. Paul Abramson and colleagues at UCLA completed an eighteen-year longitudinal study about this. 18-year-olds who, as kids, had walked in on mom and dad when they were having sex showed no differences from other 18-year-olds. In fact, young boys who walked in on mom and dad actually seemed to demonstrate a better long-term outcome than those who didn't.

### **“Why Can’t I Watch You and Mommy Have Sex?”**

You’ve worked hard to be an open, honest parent about sex and your child suddenly rewards you with the statement, “I want to watch you and Mommy have sex!” Instead of convulsing with panic, regard this as yet another opportunity to talk about privacy and sex. “One of the things that makes sex so special for Mommy and Daddy is that it’s private, just between the two of us. Since sex between us is private and personal, I wouldn’t feel comfortable having anyone else watching.”

“Well, what about that time I saw you kissing Mommy’s vagina. Will you kiss mine?” “Your vagina is very sweet and nice. But I wouldn’t feel comfortable kissing it like I kiss Mommy’s because it’s a private sexual thing that I only do with her.”

### **Nudity at Home**

“Nudity was a normal part of bathing, dressing, getting up in the morning or going to bed at night. I think this is ideal. Kids get a lot of reassurance and education from the occasional observation of natural (not contrived) nudity.” *female age 35*

“My daughter always felt comfortable walking around the house naked, but my teenage son is so modest that nobody can remember seeing him naked since he was five years old!” *male age 65*

Is nudity around the house good or bad? A retrospective study of college students compared how much nudity they reported when growing up with their current levels of sexual activity. There was no correlation between high levels of nudity at home and sexual promiscuity at college. Kids who reported higher levels of nudity at home seemed to report more feelings of warmth or security when away at college. Perhaps one reason for this is because it’s easier for them to adjust to communal bathroom and shower situations that are common in college life. It’s also possible they feel better about their bodies.

### **Parents’ Sexual Feelings about Their Children**

Our society gives parents little guidance about sexual feelings toward their children except for blanket condemnation. Children of all ages are able to evoke sexual feelings in parents, from a nursing experience that leaves a baby’s mother with pleasant genital sensations, to

a teenage son whose developing body gives mom an occasional sexual stirring, perhaps reminding her of the excitement she used to feel when seeing the boy's father when he was younger. The problem isn't in having occasional sexual feelings about your children; it's in what to do with the feelings.

For instance, let's say a dad is playfully wrestling with his young daughter and finds he is getting an erection. A healthy dad might think to himself, "Oops!," beg out of the roughhousing, and say to his daughter, "Why don't you grab the mitts so we can work on your pitching?" or "How about a game of Scrabble?" A less-healthy dad might keep doing the same activity over and over without adjusting to the reality of the situation.

Upon discovering their own arousal, some very good dads withdraw from all physical and sometimes even emotional contact with a child. In these cases, dad's own harsh superego can ruin a very important parent-child relationship. This can be quite sad for both parent and child, assuming the relationship had been a healthy one to begin with.

As for mother-son feelings, let's say that mom enjoys rubbing her teenage son's back, but finds she is starting to have a sexual response. Maybe it's time to give Junior a quick hug instead and realize it is more appropriate for him to have his back rubbed by girls his own age. Or maybe mom enjoys the way her son's teenage body looks. This is fine, but it starts to cross the line if she ends up in his bedroom when he is getting undressed. Particularly troublesome are lonely moms who encourage their sons to share the bed with them, unless such conditions are dictated by poverty. The same is true for lonely dads.

Problems sometimes abound in families where the parents' sexual relationship is not a particularly good one. One of the children might decide it's up to him or her to be a replacement spouse. Especially destructive are situations where the parent alternates between being seductive and puritanical.

### **Why There Aren't Universal Standards**

It's not possible to set specific rules and standards for all households. For instance, nudity in one family might be perfectly healthy, while nudity in another family might be part of a syrupy, seductive mess. And while it would be best for parents to put boundaries on one

child's sexual expression, another child might do well with the opposite kind of response. A teenager who is an exhibitionist with his or her naked body can use some limit-setting, while a highly-inhibited child who is embarrassed about his or her body might find it helpful to hear that it's okay to be naked.

Another example involves a young child who enjoys masturbating before naps. This is perfectly normal. However, a child who rocks and masturbates anxiously throughout the day needs help.

It would be nice to say that common sense should prevail, but when it comes to sexual development, there isn't an abundance of collective common sense in our culture.

### Explaining Puberty

"When I got my first period I was excited, but then my mother wouldn't let me climb trees or play with the guys anymore."

*female age 55*

"My mom had always been really open with me, so I was prepared when my body started changing. I was even glad to get my period. *female age 19*

"None of my clothes fit anymore. I'd consume everything in the refrigerator and would still feel hungry. My armpits had never perspired or smelled. Suddenly, it was like someone had turned on a faucet under each one. I dreaded being called on in morning classes, because I'd often have a raging hard-on. My beard was uneven and strange. So I appropriated one of my dad's razors and started shaving. I didn't know why I was suddenly having wet dreams, and I used to hide my underwear and wash them myself so my mom wouldn't see the stains. I was sure I was damaging myself by masturbating, but couldn't stop to save my life. Hair started growing from my neck down. And suddenly there were zits. That's what I remember of puberty. It would have been nice if a parent or some adult had taken a moment to explain some of these things to me." *male age 44*

It never hurts to let your children know their bodies will change as they get older. You will need to address the issue in different ways

depending on your child's age. For instance, it's usually enough to tell a 7-year-old that puberty is what happens when you start looking like an adult—that boys get taller, their voices deepen, they start getting hair under their armpits and around their genitals. You can say that girls' hips start to get wider, they grow breasts, and their armpits and genitals get hair too.

When your child is a few years older, you can explain that puberty is a process that takes a couple of years to complete and it usually starts to happen for girls when they turn 10 or 12 and for boys when they turn 12 or 14, give or take. Mention that puberty is the time when girls start having periods and boys start to produce semen when they have orgasms, and that everyone's genitals start to look more adult-like (this is nothing they won't know from having seen porn, but it's good to hear it from you). Be sure to talk about teenage boys and unwanted erections, (see Chapter 5: *On The Penis*).

Kids can be awfully cruel toward other kids who are in the throes of puberty. Let your child know you will wring his or her neck if they make fun of another kid whose body is changing.

### **Explaining Periods to Girls and Boys**

"Puberty was not a really big deal for me. I read *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*, so I knew what my period was when I got it, although my mom never bothered to tell me." *female 25*

"I was afraid I would just start bleeding sometime and that it might go through my clothes and I would be embarrassed." *female age 49*

"My first period was a celebration. I was at my friend's house and I noticed bleeding between my legs. I rushed home to tell my mother, fully aware I was having my period. She was thrilled, and we went out to dinner to celebrate." *female age 18*

Besides warnings about sexual abuse, the only time when many parents mention sex to their daughters is while explaining menstruation. What a sad association, bleeding and sex.

As children, we learn that blood is a sign of bodily injury. We are never told that some bleeding is good for us. So when girls start having their periods, remind them that period flow is a sign of health. Periods

are the body's way of giving their uterus a monthly makeover (out with the old tissue, in with the new).

Girls are now menstruating at ages 10 or 12; their grandmothers started menstruating when they were three to four years older. The bodies of girls are more developed than their grandmothers,' but their emotional development is about the same. This means they will need encouragement and support from their parents in negotiating the puberty process, especially if they started having periods earlier or later than most of their friends.

Periods can also represent a loss of control that a girl formerly had over her body. It can feel unfair that girls get periods and guys don't, and some girls get really bad cramps, which is more unfair. You'll want to be sensitive and empathic about the downsides of menstruation, without going overboard. For more on periods, see Chapter 27: *Surfing the Crimson Wave*.

It's also important for boys to learn about periods and period gear. Too many boys act strange, disrespectful and downright mean about women's periods. Instead, they should be taught to be kind and helpful when a girl is having her period, and thankful that they don't have periods themselves. They won't learn any of this unless parents take the time to teach them.

### **Growing Girls**

Young girls tend to be self-conscious about physical changes, especially around fathers and brothers. If that's the case, don't be talking about tampons and bras when the guys are around. Hopefully your daughter won't be too sensitive, because these things are a normal part of life and it shouldn't feel strange to talk about them when dads and brothers are present.

If your daughter matures earlier than her friends, you'll need to be aware that other girls might shun her and boys might tease them. Keep reminding her that things will be fine in a year or two when everybody else has started to mature. It can help if she is involved in activities like sports or clubs, where value is placed on achievements and abilities.

Also, you can't tell your daughter often enough how the models in most magazines are *Photoshopped*. Most women don't really look like that. And remind them that a lot of skinny actresses think nothing of barfing up a perfectly good meal so they won't get "fat."

## **Teenagers & Sex**

"I used to pretend my friend Heather was another boy that I liked in school in fifth grade and we would touch each other's vaginas and breasts and have a lot of fun until my Mom found out and sent me to a psychiatrist for being a lesbian!" *female age 24*

If you ask a group of teenagers if they are emotionally ready to have sex, most will say yes. If you ask their parents whether their teenagers are emotionally ready to have sex, most will say no. Chances are, your teenagers do not view sex the way you wish they would.

As a parent, you can't expect a teenager to be verbal about sex just because you have suddenly decided to offer wise counsel. Having an open dialogue about sex is an option that some parents lost when the child was 3 to 5 years old and the parents avoided saying anything about sex. This is why it's so important to at least tell young children the names of their genitals and be open to talking about in a way that's age appropriate. If mom and dad ignored doing this when their child was young, it might be uncomfortable for the child who is now a teenager to suddenly start talking about sex.

If there is tension between you and your teen, or if the kid is engaged in reckless acting-out behavior, you might do better to solicit the help of a favorite aunt, uncle, teacher or therapist to whom the teen is more apt to open up to. And if there are problems, you will need to become more involved in their lives than you might currently be.

### **When Teenagers Ask on Their Own**

Let's say your teenager asks you one of the following questions about sex: "What if you get so nervous before having sex that you feel like throwing up?" or "Would I have to leave home if I got pregnant?" or "How do you know if you're gay?" Don't assume that she or he is thinking is about to have sex, is pregnant or is gay. Maybe your kid saw something on the TV or YouTube and is putting him or herself in the other person's place. Or maybe not.

Try to respond by saying things that will help expand the question into a discussion, such as "What are your thoughts about that?" or "I'll be able to give you a better answer if you could tell me more about your question." This buys you precious time, which parents can never

have enough of when being asked questions about sex, and it helps you squelch any potential screams that are about to explode from the depths of your parental soul.

You might take solace from the following words by sex educator Debra Haffner: "Like most parents, I have found myself at a loss for words when a question I never expected popped up. There have been times when I have responded in ways that I later regretted. I struggled with how to respond to my daughter when she asked about the Bobbit case, and then about Michael Jackson, and Monica Lewinsky." (Debra's kids are now grown, but there will never be a shortage of bizarre stories about sex in the news.)

If yet another actor dies from erotic asphyxiation or your child stumbles across an anime version of her favorite Disney princess having sex with an octopus, don't think you need to come up with perfect answers when your kid looks at you with a puzzled face. The most important thing is to provide an atmosphere where a child can ask difficult questions and know it's okay to think out loud about sex.

### Wouldn't It Be Nice If...

Parents seldom talk to their children about the qualities that are desirable in a lover, or provide them with questions to ask themselves about someone who they are thinking of having sex with. Perhaps you will find some of the following to helpful to raise with your child about what they might want in a sexual partner.

 What are some of the reasons why I want to have sex with this person?

 Why does he or she want to have sex with me? Is it for fun, romance, a personal quest? Is this person truly interested in me?

 Am I physically excited about having sex with him or her?

 Does having sex mean something different to him or her than it does to me?

 Do I know what it feels like in my body to be sexually excited?

 Do I want to have an exclusive relationship? If so, at what point should we have the exclusivity talk?

 Am I aware that sexual arousal can happen in different ways for women than for men and that it can occur more quickly for one partner than for the other?

 Does the person I want to have sex with know that there are major differences between sex in porn and sex in real life?

 What kind of stimulation would I need before we have intercourse in order for it to feel good?

 Would we feel comfortable discussing what we do and don't want to do ahead of time?

 Are there ways we could please each other sexually without having intercourse?

 Who sticks his penis in when we have intercourse, and how can we do it in ways that will make it feel better?

 How do I get feedback from my partner about what felt good and what didn't? How do I tell him or her what felt good and what didn't for me?

 How do I say no to someone who is pressuring me to have sex?

 What are the most effective methods of birth control, and how do we make sure we are using one of them?

 Am I aware that some of the cleanest, nicest and best looking people can give me sexually transmitted infections that are difficult to treat and could make it impossible for me to ever have children—infections that they don't know they are carrying because they don't have any symptoms?

🤔 What would we do if we had intercourse and became pregnant? Who do we turn to? How would we tell our parents? Would we face it together? Am I ready to be a parent? (No teenager should begin dating without discussing ways of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections with his or her parents.)

### **The Qualities of a Sex Partner**

The mere thought of asking an 11-year-old what qualities she would want in a sexual partner would send most American parents into shock. But let's think about it. If you as a parent don't introduce the notions of consent and respect in sex, where else are your children going to learn? From porn? From the other kids at school?

There is nothing wrong with talking to your child about the difference between a partner who's just trying to get into your pants and one who is going to be a caring and loving sexual companion. Ask your kids what they think about someone who says "I won't go out with you anymore if we can't have sex."

Make sure it's you who plants questions about a potential partner's character in your child's mind; eg: Are his or her friends good people? Do they drink or get loaded a lot? Is he or she responsible and caring toward family and friends? And what about introducing the expectation that a good partner is one who is trustworthy and dependable and says things such as, "How can I help?" or "I'd really like to please you. What can I do?"

None of this is going to stop your kid from shacking up with someone who is truly despicable, but it does kick into motion the idea that it's important to choose your sexual partners wisely. With enough intelligent concern and involvement on your part, your kid may even search out a sexual partner who has some of the characteristics and values that you do.

### **How Porn Is Impact Boys and Girls in Middle School and High School**

Porn has become the sex educator of our young. It is having a massive influence on how young boys think sex should be in real life. Please, have talks with your pre-teen and teenage sons and daughters about the differences between sex in porn and sex in real life. If you need

ideas, there are four chapters in this book on porn (Chapters 32-35): *The Fairy Pornmother*, *Porndoggie's Dirty Dozen*, *How the Internet Killed the Plumber in Porn*, and *When Women Watch Porn*.

With a lot of kids now watching porn since the time they turn ten, boys are being given the idea that any girl should want to have sex at any time, just like the women in porn do. Parents have no idea how much pressure boys are placing on girls to have sex, and how early they start talking to girls like men talk to women in porn. You need to speak to your daughters and sons about this. If your daughter is being impacted by this, complain to the school administration and to the school board. Administrators will often say "It's how culture is today and we can't do anything about it," but that's no excuse for middle school or high school students having to deal with conversations in the hallways that sound like they were scripted by the producers of porn.

#### **Condom Advice—For Teenage Boys**

There is a list of links at [www.guide2getting.com/condom-sampler-packs](http://www.guide2getting.com/condom-sampler-packs) where you can get sampler packs from online condom sellers. Buy a sampler pack for your teenage son that includes different sizes and shapes of condoms and a tube of lube he can stroke his penis with after he tries wearing the different condoms. Tell him these are for him to see what condoms feel like and to find a size and shape of condom that feels best on his penis. Explain that it's a good idea to try masturbating with a condom on, which is the condom equivalent of taking a test drive. (Most boys will try masturbating with a condom on to see what it feels like anyway, but it can help cement the importance of using condoms in your son's mind when his parent is the one who actually suggests he gives it a try. )

Also tell your son to pay attention to how long it takes after he ejaculates before his penis starts to get soft. That's how much time he has to pull out; otherwise the condom might stay in his partner's vagina. Explain that this is why he needs to clasp the condom around the base of his penis as he is pulling out. And show him how to tie off a condom after he's done. Otherwise, his semen will run out of it and make a mess. There's more about condoms in [Chapter 24: Condoms—For the Ride of Your Life](#).

### **Condom Advice—For Teenage Girls**

Give your daughter a handful of condoms, a tube of lube and a penis-sized banana. Try putting the condom on the banana together. If this doesn't result in giggles and laughs, you're being way too serious. For even more fun, blow some of the condoms up as far as you can.

Explain that the condom material comes out of the center of the ring as she rolls it onto a guy's penis. Also explain that as soon as a guy ejaculates, his penis starts to shrink. This means that either he or she should clasp the condom with her fingers and push it against the base of his penis as he withdraws so he won't leave it inside her. Let her know it never hurts to put a little lube on the outside of the condom before having intercourse. This will help it slip and slide better. Maybe you can try reading the condom instructions together.

Be sure your daughter and son have morning-after birth control pills. Discuss how important it is to take them right away if they didn't use the condom, or if the condom came off or broke.

### **More Effective Birth Control Than Condoms**

Condoms are way better than using nothing, and they are the only form of birth control that helps prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. But they aren't the most effective form of birth control, and people don't always remember to use them.

The most effective, hassle free methods of birth control that are a great choice for most teenage girls are IUDs. Many gynecologists use them for their own birth control. Please speak to your gynecologist or local Planned Parenthood about IUDs. (While the implant is highly effective, it can be a hassle to remove if it causes problems, and there can be other side effects that can make the IUD a better choice for a lot of women.)

Birth control pills are more effective than condoms, but how many teenagers can remember to take them every day? (How many adults can remember to take them every day?) The effectiveness of birth control pills goes way down with every skipped pill.

*Teenage girls who know what kind of birth control their mother uses are more likely to use birth control themselves.*

### **Odds'N'Ends for Parents To Consider**

🕶️ If you have a son, make sure he's got a box of Kleenex next to his bed. When it's all used up in three days, don't make smart remarks like "I didn't know you had such a bad cold." Better you have to stock up on Kleenex than on diapers and formula if he gets a girl pregnant when he could have been home jerking off.

🕶️ Teenage girls can become very wet when they are sexually excited. But it's also normal for them to get wet when they aren't sexually excited. Moms need to assure their daughters that getting wet is perfectly normal and it's what vaginas do.

🕶️ If your child has never helped with the laundry before and suddenly begins to wash his or her own underwear or pajamas or starts to hide them, be sure he or she has proper information about periods, masturbation and wet dreams.

🕶️ Abstinence-based sex education does not significantly delay the onset of intercourse. Purity rings are a bad waste of time, and creating guilt about sex never kept a single girl from having an unwanted pregnancy.

🕶️ Let your kids know it's fine to wait until they are older before having sex with a partner and that masturbation is what you do in the meantime, which is why nature made our arms the perfect length in order to masturbate with.

🕶️ Inform your kids that what they see on TV and in movies about sex is usually pretty twisted, exaggerated and outright incorrect.

### **A Final Word about Boundaries**

Good kids do not always make good decisions. If you give children enough rope to hang themselves, most will. On the other hand, no kid ever lost a friend because their parents insisted on knowing where they were and with whom. No teenager ever died because his or her parents set a curfew on weekends. No kid ever shriveled up and blew

away because parents checked in with each other to make sure an adult would be home when their kid was sleeping over.

Your kids will have plenty of time to do what they want once they are adults. Until then, it is your job as parents to get them there as safely as you can.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:** *The Secret Lives of Teen Girls: What Your Mother Wouldn't Talk About But Your Daughter Needs to Know* by Evelyn Resh, Hay House. As parents, we often deny our daughters' emerging sexuality or make it clear that we expect them to deny it. Evelyn Resh's book for parents of teenage girls addresses this disconnect. It offers us more effective ways to deal with our daughters' sexuality, including the use of humor to diffuse situations rather than threats or pretending it's not an issue. Ms. Resh has spent years working with teenage girls, helping to guide their growth when their parents were not able to acknowledge the sexual milestones they had reached. Whether you agree with Ms. Resh's perspective or not, this book is helpful because it frames the sexuality of teenage girls in ways that actually make sense.

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From the "Guide To Getting It On"  
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