

HOW TO ENCOURAGE HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT



Birth-2 years

- Teach correct anatomical names of the body such as penis and vagina
- Explain the basic differences between male and female anatomy
- Help children understand how to interact respectfully with peers the same age
- Provide simple answers to questions about the body and bodily functions
- Use opportunities like baths or dressing to talk about boundaries and genitals being private

2-5 years

- Provide basic information about reproduction (*i.e. babies grow in the uterus of a woman*)
- Encourage a basic understanding of privacy and when things are appropriate and inappropriate. Explain that if a grown up or child touches in an inappropriate way, the child must tell an adult.
- Explain the difference between wanted and unwanted touch (*i.e. a hug that's welcome and positive versus one that's unwelcome and uncomfortable*)
- Teach about boundaries, their bodies belonging to them and that they can say 'no' to unwanted touch. Model this by not forcing children to hug or kiss someone they don't want to.
- Model privacy by going to the bathroom and showering in private

5-8 years

- Encourage understanding of genders. Children who identify as transgender may experience confusion and need more adult support.
- Explain the basics of human reproduction, including the role of vaginal sex
- Talk about physical changes that will occur during puberty
- Explain that there are different sexual orientations such as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual
- Respect children's need for privacy and respect their choices for unwanted touches. Model this by not forcing them to hug or kiss someone they don't want to.

8-10 years

- Continue to provide information about changes to their bodies during puberty
- Talk about social and emotional aspects of puberty (*i.e. mood swings and comparing bodies with other peers*). Help children know these new emotions and needs are normal
- Help children understand difference between sexuality and body image in real life vs. what's shown on TV, magazines, etc.
- Support them in understanding their rights and responsibilities in friendships and relationships. Talk about and model healthy relationships.
- Identify appropriate sources for information about sex and sexuality

10-13 years

- Provide accurate information about sex and sexuality
- Identify appropriate sources for information on sex, sexuality and sexual health
- Continue to talk about body boundaries and unwanted touch throughout teen years
- Talk about healthy relationships including the effect of peer pressure on relationships

13-17 years

- Continue open communication about sex and sexuality
- Provide information on sexual health
- Offer to answer questions or talk about concerns about sex or sexuality
- Identify appropriate sources for information about sex, sexuality and sexual health
- Continue telling about healthy relationships including consensual sex