

Why is talking about relationships and sex with your child important?



Relationships and sex are always hot topics, which can make teenage boys and girls feel under pressure to have sex before they are ready. It can be hard to separate the facts from fiction.

A recent survey found that over a quarter of teenagers feel confused, worried and even scared about relationships and sex, and that most teenagers would appreciate more opportunities to talk to their parent or carer about it.

And that's great news! All the evidence suggests that talking openly to your sons and daughters makes them feel less under pressure to have sex which means they're more likely to wait until they feel ready to have a sexual relationship. Talking openly also gives young people more confidence to approach the subject with their boyfriends or girlfriends, and to practice safe sex when the time comes.

START EARLY It's never too early to start the conversation about relationships and sex. Helping young children understand their bodies, their feelings and the feelings of others are essential ingredients for open discussions.

If your child is aged 13-16

...their body will be developing and changing to become ready for sexual activity, which is why it is crucial that your child understands what is going on. Once your child is in secondary school, they'll be going through puberty and picking up misinformation and pressures from their peers and the world around them. Although they might think everyone is 'doing it,' most teenagers don't have sex until they are at least 16, and those that do are more likely to regret it, and are at greater risk of pregnancy and STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections). Providing accurate information about sex, relationships, pregnancy, sexuality and STI's is essential at this age, so that your son or daughter can keep themselves safe.

If your child is aged 6-12

...they are likely to be naturally interested in their own and other people's bodies, so it helps to be prepared for questions they may have. Puberty can start as early as eight for girls and they will need to know about periods and other body changes by this age; boys may also experience wet dreams or erections when they are very young, so it's important that they have all the information they need to understand what is happening.

It's Time to Talk

Finding the right words...



The easiest time to talk about sex and relationships is when you're doing everyday things: washing the car, driving somewhere, washing up, watching TV etc. It's more informal and less embarrassing than sitting down for a big 'talk'.

And here's a few ways to get things started:

- **Use** everyday media to approach the subject - TV, radio, magazines, the internet - you won't be short on options, and talking about how the issues affect other people can make it less embarrassing - celebrities can be a good common ground.
- **Ask** them what they think about waiting to have sex with someone they care about, and who they think should be responsible for contraception and safe sex.
- **Ask** them about what their friends have to say on the subject. It's a way of talking about their feelings and fears indirectly. Discussing your values with your teenagers will help them to form their own. Remember though, that trying to convince them of what's right and wrong may discourage them from being open. Try to keep the discussion light, encourage them to say what they think and reassure them that you trust them to make the right decisions.
- **Find** out what relationship and sex education is being taught in school so you can discuss what they thought of the lessons and what they learnt.
- **Ask** other parents and carers about how they answer difficult questions. Trust us, you're not going through this alone.

Once you get conversations going you just need to continue them as they get older. The thing to remember is that the more they understand, the more likely they are to make the right choices when the time comes.

For help and support in discussing relationships and sex, contact:

Leicestershire's Family Information Service (FIS)
Call: 0116 305 6545
or email: family@leics.gov.uk

It isn't true that talking about sex and relationships encourages teens to experiment - it just ensures they are informed and ready to make decisions for themselves!