

Credits

Eastern Health would like to thank Peel Public Health for its permission to adapt the resource *Talking to your Child About Sexuality, Ages 9-12*.



Acknowledgements

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OVERVIEW

This booklet for parents explains...

- * The meaning of sexuality.
- * The parent's role in providing knowledge and guidance about sexual health.
- * How to discuss sexuality with children.
- * The Four Point Plan. This plan is designed to help guide parents when their child has questions about sexuality.
- * The stages of sexual development and what to expect.
- * Where to find more information.

This information is meant to serve as a guideline only. Each child develops and asks questions at their own pace.

Choose the information that best fits you and the values of your family.



Website Resources for PARENTS

URaParent website

Browse this website to learn about child development, and how as a parent (or caregiver) you can best meet the needs of your child.

www.easternhealth.ca/URaParent

Take Care Down There Sexual Health website

www.easternhealth.ca/tcdt

Planned Parenthood NL Sexual Health Centre

Services include pregnancy testing, physician clinics, and education.

Phone 579-1009 or toll-free 1-877-NO MYTHS (1-877-666-9847)

www.nlsexualhealthcentre.org

AIDS Committee of NL Tommy Sexton Centre, St. John's

Phone 579-8656 or toll free 1-800-563-1575

www.acnl.net



Website Resources for PARENTS

Gender Creative Kids

Is a national website that provides resources for supporting and affirming gender creative kids within their families, schools and communities.

www.gendercreativekids.ca

Region of PEEL Sexual Health

A sexual health website with links for parents and youth

www.peelsexualhealth.ca

Changes in Me

An educational resource designed for teachers and parents of children in grades 4 to 6

www.changesinme.ca

Kids Health

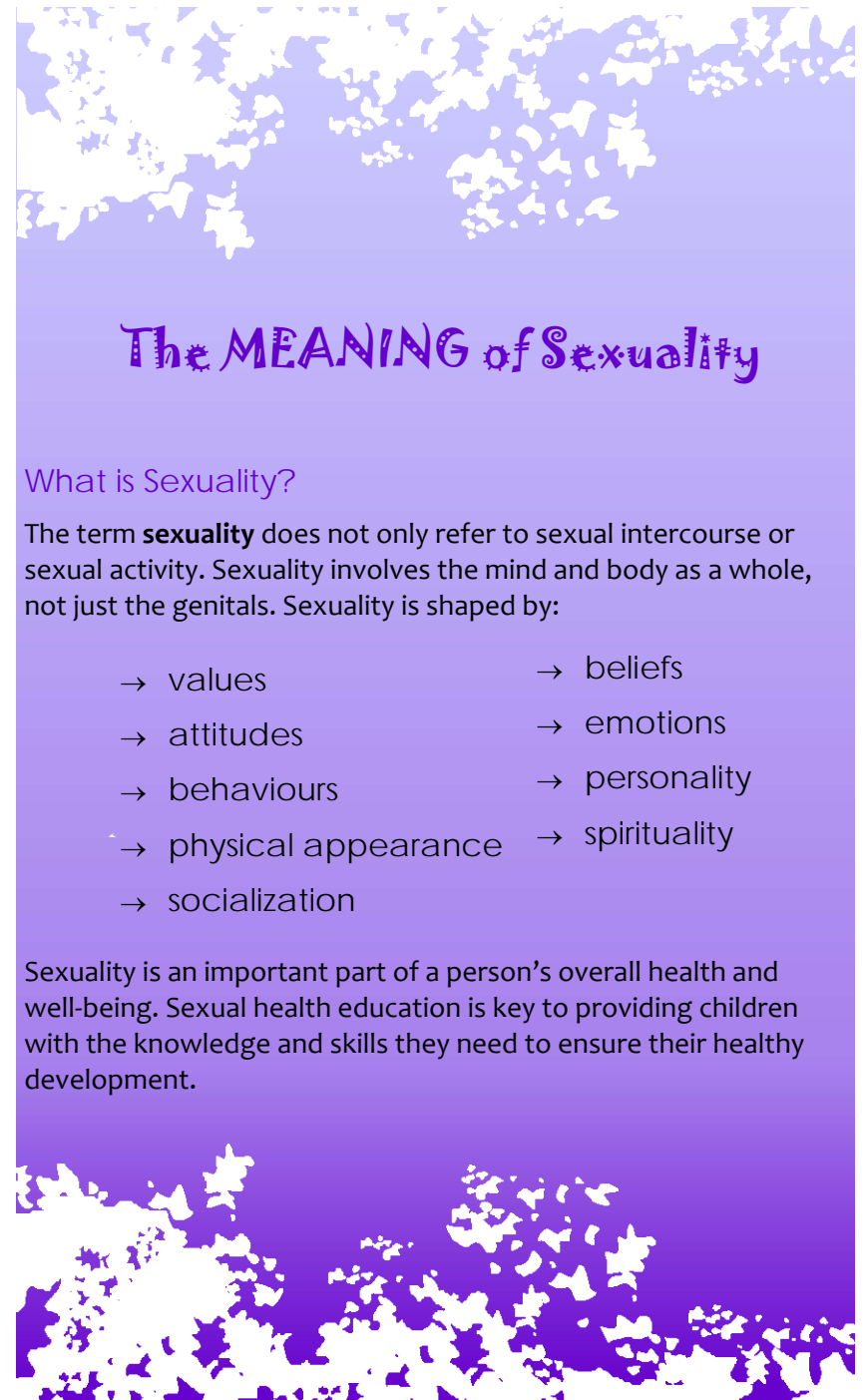
www.kidshealth.org/parent/growth

Articles on communication with your child, puberty and surviving adolescence

Healthy Living A to Z pages

These pages cover more than 100 health topics from active living to birth control, bullying to healthy eating, child development to second-hand smoke and much more!

www.easternhealth.ca/yourhealth



The MEANING of Sexuality

What is Sexuality?

The term **sexuality** does not only refer to sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Sexuality involves the mind and body as a whole, not just the genitals. Sexuality is shaped by:

- values
- attitudes
- behaviours
- physical appearance
- socialization
- beliefs
- emotions
- personality
- spirituality

Sexuality is an important part of a person's overall health and well-being. Sexual health education is key to providing children with the knowledge and skills they need to ensure their healthy development.

What is your ROLE?

Parents want to provide the knowledge and guidance their child needs to become a responsible and secure adult.

Some parents may be uncomfortable talking about sexuality with their child because:

- Parents may be hesitant to talk about reproductive body parts and functions, especially if the topic was not discussed when they were growing up.
- Parents may wonder if talking about sexuality and reproduction will encourage their child to experiment.

In fact, young people whose parents discuss all aspects of sexuality with them tend to delay becoming sexually active, when compared with children whose parents do not discuss the issue.

- Parents may not be sure what their child already knows or needs to know.

These factors may cause some parents to remain silent on the subject of sexuality. However, by doing so, you may actually be sending an unspoken message to your child. Not speaking openly about sexuality may be sending the message that it is a forbidden topic.

The reality is that you are continually teaching your child many things about sexuality and have been since the day your child was born.

Children learn from the way they are touched by others, the way they feel about their own bodies, and what their family believes is okay and not okay to do. Children quickly pick up on the words that family members use (and don't use) to refer to body parts, gender and other terminology used when referring to sexual health.

Children also learn a great deal from sources outside the family, such as the media, the Internet, other relationships, friends, and their own life experiences.

Website Resources for PARENTS

These resources are provided for information only and do not imply an endorsement of views, products or services.

Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (SOGC)

Information about puberty, talking about sex with your child, Sexually Transmitted Infections and contraception.

www.sexualityandu.ca

Teaching Sexual Health

A sexual health website with sections for parents and students of all grade levels.

www.teachingsexualhealth.ca

PFLAG Canada

This national organization was founded by parents to support understanding and acceptance of their non-heterosexual children.

www.pflagcanada.ca

Parents of Gender Creative Kids NL

Is a peer support group in St. John's for parents of transgender, gender diverse, and gender-questioning children and youth. We meet monthly in a community room in St. John's. We are also connected to a confidential national on-line peer support group, for those who are not able to travel to St. John's.

parentsoftranskids@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/parentsgendercreativekidsnl

RESOURCES

Newfoundland and Labrador

Information on sexual health is available from your local community health offices.

Eastern Health:

St. John's: 709-752-4907

Email: hpresourcecenter.stjohns@easternhealth.ca

Holyrood: 709-229-1578

Email: hpresourcecenter.rural@easternhealth.ca

Central Health: 709-651-6489

Western Health: 709-637-5000 Ext.5492

Labrador Grenfell Health: 709-897-2331

Ways to help your CHILD grow up SEXUALLY HEALTHY

Parents hope their children will make positive choices, based on the values that their family shares. You can help your child make these decisions, since you are an extremely important influence in your child's life. To do so, it's important to talk about your family values and beliefs when discussing sexuality.

You should start by asking yourself:

- Does my child actually know what I believe?
- Have I honestly discussed our family's values about sexuality?

You may want to have a family discussion to talk about some of these issues. A few suggestions include:

- Choose a quiet time when no one is feeling rushed.
- Treat each other with respect.
- Really listen to each family member.
- Be honest.
- Share the reasons for your beliefs and personal values.
- Respect your child's need for privacy. Show that you are interested without demanding intimate details. Children need to know that you trust and respect them.
- Help your child express their feelings.



Ways to help your CHILD

grow up SEXUALLY HEALTHY continued

- Encourage your child to feel good about themselves and their bodies. If your child reports discomfort with their bodies, check in with them and listen openly as a way of exploring.
- Be patient and prepared to hear the information your child is willing to share.
- Discuss the components of a healthy relationship.
- Help your child build communication and assertiveness skills to resist peer pressure.
- Help your child learn how to make decisions about relationships and sex. Emphasize that their decisions may have consequences.
- Communicate your family values on sexuality.
- Help your child develop a personal value system, but recognize that it may be different from your own.
- Counteract the distorted view about sexual relationships that are sometimes shown in the media.



SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

What to Expect

Teens, age 13 to 18:

- Complete the changes associated with puberty. On average, males develop about two years later than females.

If your child is distressed about the changes associated with puberty, it is a good idea to talk to a health care provider who is knowledgeable about children's gender diversity.

- Place great value on independence.
- Become more aware of physical appearance.
- Experience increased sexual feelings.
- May be more influenced by peer groups. Peer acceptance continues to be very important.
- May become interested in or develop romantic relationships.
- May desire physical closeness with a partner.
- May face peer pressure to be sexually active whether or not they feel ready.
- May favour romantic relationships over close friendships.
- May make choices which could lead to pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections.
- May have an emerging sense of gender identity, which may differ from the gender identity that was assigned to them at birth.

For more information about how to talk to teenagers about sexuality, see **Talking to Your Teenager about Sexuality and Sexual Health**. Available by request from your local community health office or visit www.easternhealth.ca

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

What to Expect

Preteens, age 9 to 12:

- May begin to experience the changes associated with puberty.
- May become more modest and want privacy.
- May experience increased sexual feelings and fantasies.
- May develop crushes on friends, teens, teachers and celebrities among others.
- Romantic feelings may be directed towards people of any gender.
- May masturbate to orgasm.
- May have to make decisions about sex and drug use.
- As puberty begins, preteens may become more strongly aware of their own gender identity, especially if their gender identity is different from the one on their birth certificate.

What parents can do:

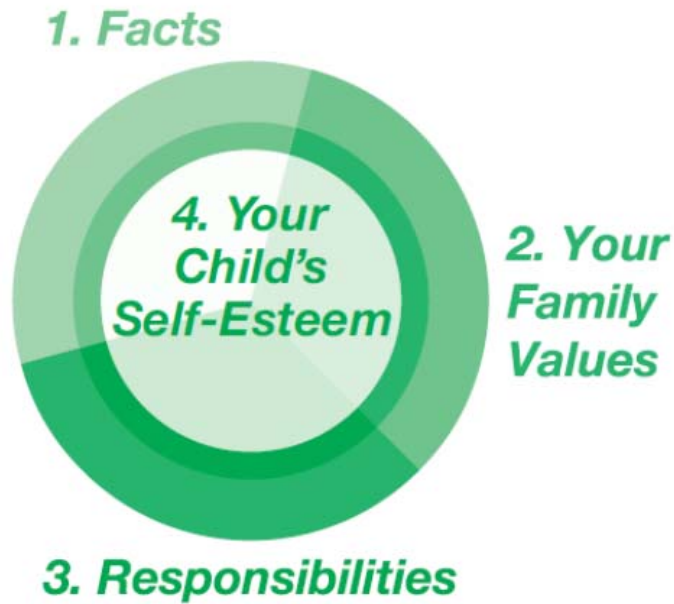
- Start talking about puberty-type issues by age 8-9 years. It can be reassuring for children to learn when their family members started noticing changes in themselves. Telling your children when you went through puberty can give them a clue about when it will start for them.
- Talk about how you felt, and how you managed periods or wet dreams.
- Tell your children any funny stories you can remember about this time in your life.

Tips for discussing SEXUALITY

with your child

- Accept the role of sex educator. Most young people want their parents to provide them with information about sex and sexuality but aren't sure how to start the conversation.
- Answer questions directly, honestly, and without judgement. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and tell them you'll find out and get back to them. Then do it!
- Become knowledgeable about sex and sexuality, but don't think you have to be an expert! Often you and your child can find the answers together.
- Take advantage of those moments that arise when you can share your views. For example, you can do this when watching TV, reading the newspaper or a magazine, or while listening to the radio.
- Accept that it may be awkward and embarrassing to talk to your child about sex and sexuality – and then do it anyway.
- Communicate your values honestly and expect them to be challenged. Children want to be independent and have their own identities.
- Along with facts, talk about feelings, relationships, and how other people can be affected.
- Recognize that you may not understand what your child is experiencing. This may be particularly important if your child has a different sexual orientation than you do. Talk with other parents, teachers or health care providers.
- Ensure there are resources in your home where your child can get accurate information. If children have access to age appropriate books, they will probably read them even if they won't talk to you. If you recommend books, videos or websites to your child, make sure you preview them first to ensure they are appropriate.
- Make sure your child knows where they can access credible information and/or medical help if needed. See the Resources section at the end of this booklet.
- Accept that you can't control all of your child's actions. Promote their ability to take responsibility for their actions.

The FOUR POINT Plan



This plan can help you respond to questions your child might have about sexuality. When answering questions, try to use the following four points:

1. Facts

- Give truthful information.
- Find out the facts together if you need more information.

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

What to Expect

- Have a basic sexual orientation and gender identity. **Sexual orientation** (who you are attracted to) and gender identity (who you know yourself to be) are two different things.
- Have definite ideas about male and female roles. May or may not feel comfortable fitting into these roles.
- Want to be like their peers; for example boys might feel pressured to choose the type of toys and activities that other boys choose.
- If your son or daughter feels they do not fit in because they are developing at a different rate or do not share common 'boy' or 'girl' interests, you can support them by reminding them that there are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl or to express themselves as a boy or girl.
- It is normal and healthy for many children to resist gender stereotypes. It is important as a parent to help children feel good about who they are. Focusing on the qualities of being a good person and seeing examples of different types of people, can also be helpful.
- Most children who do not share common 'boy' or 'girl' interests still identify with the gender on their birth certificate. However, if your child tells you that they are not the gender that you thought they were, it is important to listen.

What is Sexual Orientation?

Parents have no control over the sexual orientation of their children (who their children grow up to be attracted to). However, they do have an important role in helping their children develop a healthy attitude towards sexuality, no matter what their orientation. (A small number of people are "asexual" and do not experience sexual attraction to others.)

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

What to Expect

6- 8 years

- By the age of 6, most children will show an interest in how babies are made and may ask how the egg and the sperm get together.

Keep the language simple, accurate and age appropriate.

Examples

Making Babies:

To make a baby you need sperm (seed), which usually comes from a man's body, to join with a tiny ovum (egg), which usually comes from a woman's body. The sperm goes from the penis into the vagina and sometimes (not all the time) an egg connects with one sperm and that might develop into a baby.

Pregnancy:

The egg that has joined with the sperm travels into a place called a uterus where it settles in to grow. It will go on growing for about nine months- this is called pregnancy.

Conception:

- These are the ways a sperm and egg can join:
- Sex between a man and a woman, or any two people who have a penis and a vagina.
- With the help of a doctor, sometimes the egg and the sperm can be mixed up together and put inside the uterus.

- May begin to show early signs of puberty such as body development, menstruation and nocturnal emissions (wet dreams).

The FOUR POINT Plan

2. Values

- Share what you believe in and what is important to you.
- Practise what you believe in and be a positive role model.

3. Responsibility

- Let children know what you expect of them.
- Allow your child to think and talk about how they feel.
- Help your child understand and accept the consequences of their decisions and actions.

4. Self-Esteem

- Help your child feel good about themselves.
- Treat your child with respect, and they will learn to respect themselves and others.
- Encourage your child to follow through with their own decisions even when their friends disagree.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Language is a powerful tool to help build healthy self-esteem.

Adapted from Lipton, Matthew, Weber, Susan J., (1990) SEXUALITY EDUCATION AT HOME: THE CARING PARENTS GUIDE, The Pacific Coast Centre of Sexology, British Columbia

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

What to Expect

Birth – 2 years

- Sexuality for a baby is not like adult sexuality. Getting love and affection is the start of learning to expect and have loving relationships. They learn about the world through touch.
- It's normal for babies to explore their bodies- they learn quickly that touching their genitals feels good.
- Help them name the parts of their body (“this is your nose... your knee... your penis... your vagina... your foot, etc.). Using the right words for genitals helps avoid confusion and helps prepare parents and children to use these words when children are older.

A very small number of babies are “intersex”: their genitals are different from what we expect a male or female body to look like. It may be simply a physical difference or it may be connected to some medical problems. Intersex children will develop their own gender identity and will begin to express this (e.g. “I am a boy.”, “I am a girl.”, “I’m a boy and a girl.” or “I’m not a boy or a girl.”) at the same age as other children.

3-5 years

- Start to develop **gender identity** (child knows “I am a boy” or “I am a girl”). A very small number of children identify as a gender different from what it says on their birth certificates. This is normal and healthy. The most important thing parents can do is to listen to what children say about who they are.
- May begin to ask questions about bodies and where babies come from.

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

What to Expect

- A simple accurate explanation like “babies grow in a special place inside the mother called the uterus” is usually enough.
- Are curious about body parts especially other peoples naked bodies because genitals are usually covered.
- Find adult bathroom activities very interesting. Excellent time to learn about the parts of the body and what they do.
- Many children will touch their genitals for comfort or pleasure.
- If children are touching their genitals in a public places you can tell them that it is something to do at home in private.

What is Gender Identity?

Gender identity is not about sexuality. Gender identity is our own personal, profound sense of who we are. Around the world, most people identify as girls or boys, women or men, but some people identify as both, or somewhere in between. Just like personality, gender identity is simply part of what makes each child different and special. Parents have no control over their children’s gender identity. However, they have an important role in helping their child feel good about themselves, no matter how they identify.

Most children identify as the gender on their birth certificate. However, a small number of children do not. Sometimes we call these children “transgender.” Differences in gender identity are normal and healthy, but may concern parents. *If you are concerned about your child’s gender identity, it might help to talk to other parents of gender diverse children. You could also contact a health care provider who is knowledgeable about children’s gender diversity.*

