



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of fourth-grade students

Starting Early: Sexuality Education for Preteens

During the preteen years, children define and refine their values, beliefs and knowledge about sexuality. Your factual information and open discussion will help your child develop healthy and responsible sexual attitudes. This involves more than just one talk. It's an ongoing process of sharing information

Preteens often confront life with a newspaper reporter's approach. They want to know about everything: who, what, when, where, why and how. These questions are opportunities for you to pass your values and beliefs, as well as accurate information, to your child. If you don't talk to them, the child will continue to seek information from any source available. The information from magazines, movies, music, online, jokes, bathroom walls and friends is rarely the picture parents want their children to have about sexuality and values.

Research indicates that parents still are more influential in conveying values and beliefs than media and peers if parents are indeed doing the job. Checking out from the library or purchasing a few good resources and attending a class on becoming an adult are great places to begin.

Understanding Your Preadolescent's Concerns

Eight- to 12-year-olds are:

- Concerned about their bodies: How they work and how they compare with their friends' bodies
- Busy with social development: This is a time of becoming increasingly independent from parents and more sensitive to peers. Children are concerned with how they fit in with their friends and what their peers think of them.
- Becoming aware of and interested in the opposite or same sex
- Concerned with "Am I normal?" The wide range of physical development among peers accelerates this concern.
- Developing interest in the importance of physical appearance and personal grooming
- Interested in sexual anatomy, sexual vocabulary and sexual behavior



Your factual information and open discussion will help your child develop healthy and responsible sexual attitudes.

Stress Less Activity



Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Too much of a good thing is still too much. Clothing choices are easier when winter weight and outgrown clothes are packed up or given away. Spend 15 minutes going through your child's closet and drawers with them. Destress dressing!

How Can Parents Help?

Parents may find that talking with preteens about sexuality is embarrassing or uncomfortable. Sexuality can be a difficult topic for many parents, but most parents want to communicate about sexuality. **Here are some suggestions to help you talk with your child:**

- Being uncomfortable is OK. You can reduce this by practicing. Discuss sexuality with your partner or friends.
- Being knowledgeable reduces discomfort. Read a reliable book about sexuality and reproduction. If your child asks a question and you don't know the answer, look it up together.
- Use television as a springboard for discussions with your child. Discussing issues involving television characters may be easier for both of you.
- Listen to your child's question. Then respond, "I'm glad you asked. What do you think?" This opens the door for discussion. You will discover what your child already knows, and you can correct any inaccurate information.
- Don't always wait for your child to ask. Look for ways to initiate a discussion or invite a question.
- Be prepared to discuss a topic more than once. As children develop, they will want to check out information with their parents.
- Encourage your child to come to you for information. Be a good listener and communicator.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I'm just learning to be comfortable talking about this. My parents never talked to me about these important subjects."
- Read a current book with your child that introduces the topic of sexuality. Take time to discuss questions or share conversation.
- Clearly communicate your parental values and expectations regarding sexuality to your child. Help your child understand how to apply these values.
- Teach your child limits regarding sexuality, especially concerning behavior that may be inappropriate or abusive, including online behavior.
- Help your child develop a healthy body image and personal esteem.



What Does Your Preadolescent Need to Know?

- Preteens need knowledge of what to expect during puberty. They need information about how their bodies develop and the timing of these changes.
- They need reassurance that they are normal and that young people develop at different times and rates.
- Young adolescents need to know about reproduction. They are intensely interested in how pregnancy occurs, the birth process, twins and many other related topics.
- They need to know about major changes they will experience: menstruation and nocturnal emissions (wet dreams). Preteens need positive, detailed explanations of what to expect during menstruation and how menstruation relates to pregnancy. They need reassurance that bodily change and processes related to sexual maturation are normal.

Children need to know they are valued and can come to you for information and to talk about concerns and feelings.

When you communicate about sexuality, you are teaching them that:

- Accurate information is important.
- Every person is valued.
- Sexual behavior entails responsibility, consideration and decision-making.
- Communication is important.
- You will help them find answers.



Go here for more information on this and other topics.

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