



Talking to your Kids about
Sex

Focus on the Family Australia's mission is to strengthen families and relationships. We achieve this in a variety of ways including radio, seminars, training and a variety of other resources via our website and digital platforms. We encourage, equip, empower and empathise to ensure your family thrives in every stage of life. For more information about Focus on the Family Australia go to www.families.org.au

We believe that it is never too early to talk to your kids about the 'BIG' issues at an age appropriate level before society does. Unfortunately, some parents do not know where to start or what to say.

Traditionally the topic of sexuality can be uncomfortable, awkward or simply scare you to death. However, children today are being exposed earlier and earlier to things, especially surrounding the issues of sexuality. Therefore, it is imperative that you as a parent take the lead, arm yourself with the right knowledge and take a proactive approach.

The following resource is not an exhaustive guide covering every single avenue of approach, but it will provide you with some helpful tips as you discuss sexuality with your children. Although every child and family is different, the guidelines included here are simply to provide you with some structure to follow as your child (and you) learn together.

Childhood is precious. It is essential that we protect, nurture and enjoy our children's innocence and sense of wonder. However, parents also need to prepare their children for adolescence and adulthood, including all the challenges that those life stages bring.

Waiting until a problem arises and having an “I’ll deal with it then” attitude is often too late. Parents often plan for their children in regards to education, health, even careers. Unfortunately, some parents do not have a plan on how they are going to educate and protect their child in the area of sexuality.

There are no guarantees that your child is going to turn out the exact way you picture them, but we are firm believers that parents who are informed, involved and intentional in their child’s lives are better preparing them to make wiser decisions and set them up for greater success.

****Please note that this resource uses heteronormative language.***

Basics

Age specific

An overview of what your children need to know & when. Including examples of how to explain some of their questions? It will also stress the importance of keeping their body safe and how their body works, especially when it comes to sexuality.

Puberty

An overview of what your children need to know & when. Including examples of how to explain some of their questions? It will also stress the importance of keeping their body safe and how their body works, especially when it comes to sexuality.

Sex

This chapter is for parents to understand that is important to not only talk about the physical aspects of sex but also how it effects individuals psychologically and spiritually.

Porn

and its impact

Parents need to be aware that it is not a matter of if your children will be exposed to porn but when? This chapter explores the harmful effects of porn on the developing brain and the desensitization of what is considered normal.

LGBTQIA

explanation

Sexuality is difficult enough to explain to children and this chapter provides some tips on how to discuss the complexities of sexual identities.

Basics

Toddlers - Prep (0-6 Years)

Children are so incredibly curious, and we should encourage that curiosity. This period is about helping your child recognise that they are a boy or a girl, why they are made exactly the way they are, and celebrate their uniqueness. Giving them plenty of healthy touch and contact and teaching them the difference between good and bad touch.

Playing With Their Privates

It is not uncommon for baby boys to have regular erections and both boys and girls to be touching or playing with their genitals during nappy changes or bath time. Girls will lift up their dresses and boys will put their hands down their pants.

Explain that any area that is covered by underwear or bathers is private, and that touching themselves in front of others or intentionally showing their privates or anyone else's is not appropriate.

It may sound better to have cutesy or made up names for genitals, but we recommend teaching the correct names for genitalia. eg. Penis, vagina.

Healthy Touch

Positive, loving touch from parents, or strong male/female role models in their lives, is crucial for emotional and physical development. Extended eye contact and warm touch while speaking in positive tones help build relationship and trust.

It is important for you to teach the differences between good and bad touch; with the only time's privates are ever to be touched are by themselves, parents during bath time and the doctor for health reasons.

The Curious Questions

When asked any question, use your child as a guide about how much information or detail to give. Gauge what they are after and present the truth at their level of understanding.

For example, if asked the classic, "Where did I come from?" Do not make up a fairy tale about storks or other fiction. We recommend something along the lines of, "Daddy planted a seed into Mummy, and that seed grew into a baby". Depending on their maturity and inquisitive nature, this may be sufficient.

However, we also encourage you to clarify the question before proceeding with an answer, as they may simply want to know what hospital they were born.

Primary Aged (7-10 Years)

Let your child's natural curiosity guide your responses to questions and actions. 'The Talk' should not just be a once-off awkward discussion between yourself and your child. It should be an ongoing, regular dialogue, not just responding to questions, but also teaching, guiding and asking questions.

Teachable Moments

Use life to stimulate conversation. Life provides opportunities to open lines of communication and see what your child thinks or knows, as well as for you to seed plant concepts. For example watching a kissing scene on a TV show, a nature show observing animals mating, seeing a tampon box in the supermarket or even if they see you naked. Talk about the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships when you see them on TV.

As appropriate, the concept of menstruation should begin around this age with your daughter. Constantly remind them of the importance of privacy for themselves and others.

Answer questions at an age-appropriate level

It is important for you and your partner to discuss how you plan to answer questions or inform your children on certain topics. This will help to ensure that your child is not given two different responses to the same question, which would result only in confusion.

Use your child as a guide about how much information or detail to give. Gauge what they are after and present the truth at their level of understanding.

For example, if you get the question, "What's sex?" Do not freak out or get nervous. We recommend a simple, "Do you remember me saying when you were younger that Daddy placed a seed in Mummy and it grew to be a baby. Well, sex is something a Mum and Dad do together to show how much they love each other and Daddy's penis goes into Mummy's vagina. It's ideally when you're married, and it is a very special time." That may be enough information. Thank them for asking and let them know they can ask more questions anytime.

You can ask questions too!

Don't just wait for your kids to ask questions because they might never ask them!

Ask questions like; "Where did you learn that?" "Why do you want to know that?" "How do you think it works?"

Your child might be getting information from elsewhere and as a result, don't believe they need to come to you or think that certain topics are taboo. Stay on top of teaching your child and provide opportunities to listen to what they are thinking.

The Takeaway

Take advantage of life moments to start a conversation with your child. Aim to inform and teach at their level, in collaboration with your partner to help build trust between you and your child.

Helpful Tips

Continue to reinforce the importance and value of your child's body. Let them know that they are unique and wonderfully made and that they should take care to protect themselves and their privacy.

Work hard to be the first point of contact when it comes to questioning things that they see or hear especially in regards to sex, porn, LGBTQIA, masturbation and more.

Talk with your partner on being proactive in regards to what you want and when your child needs to know or learn.

Late Primary/Early Secondary (11-12 Years)

You have now entered the period of dramatic physical, psychological and hormonal change. This can be incredibly daunting. By setting your goal of protection and education, you can take heart in knowing that you are not alone and you can use this guide to assist you and your partner.

Puberty Problems

***More information on puberty is available in this resource**

Assure your child that all the physical changes that they're going through at this point are completely natural and normal and that everyone goes through them, just at different paces.

When approached with breast budding, wet dreams, pubic hair or the like, be honest and transparent about what is happening in their bodies as they are growing.

Celebrate any physical developments you notice. You can use phrases like, *"Growing up means that there is a lot of uncertainty, and not everyone has the right answers. I'm always here, and we can get the right answers together."* This will help open conversations and reduce shame and distrust.

The Porn Monster

***More information of the Impact of Pornography is available in this resource**

This is the age when your child is most likely to view pornography for the first time.

As much as you want to control what they are viewing, you can't protect them 100% of the time. Even if they have not been exposed at this point, it is a perfect time to start a conversation about porn. Your main goal is protection, and in order to protect them, you need to inform and support them to avoid the dangers of porn.

Teaching and Asking Questions

When asking questions, it is not to shame or embarrass your child, or give them an inquisition; it is to learn what they think they know or have been exposed to. Some examples of these questions include, *"What do you know about porn?" "Have you seen any videos or pictures on the computer that made you feel yucky, weird or excited?" "Can you tell me what you've seen?"*

You do not always have to ask questions out of thin air; use life as a prompter. When you see a couple in bed on the TV, use these moments to talk about healthy sexuality. How it is a beautiful, joyous thing, to be enjoyed privately and ideally when they are married.

The Takeaway

Your goal should be to inform, educate and protect your child. Celebrate the small wins and changes, and stay informed so you can answer any questions and bring up any topic when life brings you an opportunity.

Helpful tips

Reinforce privacy boundaries and ensure that your child knows the family rules regarding internet access and social media. Not only what the rules are, but also why they are in place.

We would encourage you to install physical boundaries and rules such as computer filters and restricting internet access in their bedrooms.

However, you need to help them develop internal boundaries. Teach them that if they see something pop up on to the screen they can turn it off and let you know.

Work hard to be the first point of contact when it comes to questioning things that they see or hear (especially in regards to sex, porn, LGBTQIA, masturbation and more).

Early Secondary (13-15 Years)

Your teens are going through incredible life changes in this period, the most significant changes in their lives so far. With all this uncertainty, young teens are often prone to pressures to fit in. Work hard to be a constant in their lives, and be available to answer any questions. You do not have to be an expert, but you do need to be authentic. If you do not know an answer, let them know that you will endeavour to find out the correct answer and get back to them.

Fitting In

Understand that changing schools or friendship groups can be a very unsettling and unstable situation for your child.

Make sure your teen knows that what they see in today's sex-saturated media is not an accurate representation of what is actually going on; the majority of people in this age group are not as sexually active as they might think.

Reinforce the fact that their identity is not dictated by what society or their friends are telling them, and teach them that there are always consequences of decisions they make.

Sex Education

*More information of the Impact of Sex is available in this resource

Sex education is growing and changing rapidly in our classrooms. The main concepts remain the same and focus on the basics of consent, protection, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. You cannot, however, rely on your child's school to teach them everything.

Intentionally work hard to associate the concept of sex with feelings, emotions, relationship and intimacy, not just disease prevention and preventing unwanted pregnancy. Present abstinence as a viable option; abstaining not just for physical health, but also emotional and spiritual health.

Dating and Relationships

Communicate with your partner about what rules you wish to set in regards to your child dating, make sure that you come to a decision that you both agree on (even if it is a compromise), and make sure that your child knows what the rules are, and why they are set. We would also encourage you to include your child in this process. The more they are involved, the more likely they will own them.

Although, there are no hard and fast rules, encourage them to delay any 'serious' relationships until the end of their secondary education. Reinforce that abstinence is a viable option, regardless of what the media or their friends might be saying. Pressuring anyone into sex or a physical step that they are not ready for is a big red flag and must be taken as a sign to end the relationship.

The Takeaway

Your goal in this season is to ensure that you teach your teen to treat themselves with dignity, respect and value, and expect to be treated with dignity, respect and value. Always emphasise that it is OK to say "NO!"

Helpful tips

Keep constant communication with your child about how they are feeling and thinking. Do not present judgement or criticism; respond in a patient manner and be available as much as possible.

Reinforce privacy boundaries and ensure that your child knows the family rules regarding Internet access and social media. Not only what the rules are, but also why they are in place.

Puberty

Your child is going to undergo an enormous amount of changes that they have no control over and it can be a very frightening time, full of questions and uncertainty. Therefore, it is imperative for you to be well informed and comfortable with speaking to your child about this significant life stage. The way in which you approach this can determine the ongoing healthy dialogue you will have with them now and especially as they enter the teenage years and beyond.

Using simple, accurate language and correct terminology is very important. One definition that you can use with your child is, *"Puberty is when your body internally & externally starts to change from being a child to becoming an adult"*.

How early do you start talking about puberty?

This is going to be different for all families. However, we believe that it is never too early to talk to your kids about the BIG issues at an age-appropriate level before society does. We recommend that you should start the dialogue when they ask questions or as they turn 10. Awaiting to have the conversation until they are teens is too late. Go at a pace so they can process the information and avoid trying to download all the information at once, in fact, it can be shared over a couple of years.

When children hear this information for the first time they can often feel a variety of emotions; shocked, embarrassed, disgusted, shy, excited, curious, confused or surprised to name a few. Having said that, the more you have discussed sex and sexuality in the earlier years will ensure these conversations will be well received and less uncomfortable. The following information is provided in point form to cover many of the issues you will need to discuss with your child.

When does puberty occur?

- Anywhere between 8-17 years.
- Most around 10-14 years.
- When they start, does not make one more mature or better than another.

**Please note that if puberty has not commenced by the age of 16-18 seek medical advice.*

What happens to both girls and boys during puberty?

- Grow taller
- Bones grow bigger & heavier
- Face changes shape
- The body sweats more and may smell
- May get pimples
- Hair grows under armpits and around the genitals
- Internal and external sex organs grow
- Mood swings

What other changes occur in BOYS during puberty?

- Voice gets deeper
- May get more hair on arms, legs and chest
- Penis and testicles grow
- Scrotum changes
- Sexual thoughts and feelings begin
- Boys make lots of testosterone (sex hormone)
- Get more muscles
- Create sperm and may have “wet dreams”

What is a “wet dream”?

If a boy wakes up and finds a wet, sticky spot on his pyjamas, it is as a result of semen being ejaculated while they are sleeping. This is called a “wet dream”. It should be noted that some boys have wet dreams, some do not. If it occurs, just tell them to take the sheets and pyjamas off and put a load on in the washing machine.

Penis size

Many young men (even older men) worry about size, shape and any unusual changes of their penis.

Inform your son that the testicles grow first so it may look like the penis is shrinking and it can take a while for their penis to grow. They may vary how they curve or stick out, but most penises tend to look more alike in size when erect than when they are soft. A simple explanation is to say; *“The penis is like a nose, ear or hand. They come in all sizes, shapes, and colours”.*

What other changes occur in GIRLS during puberty?

- The hair on legs and arms grow darker
- Breasts and nipples get larger
- Hips get wider and curvier
- Voice can change
- Sexual thoughts and feelings begin
- Girls make lots of oestrogen (sex hormone)
- Create ovum (egg) monthly
- Have periods - bleed every month

What is menstruation or a period?

It is imperative to have this conversation well before they enter high school. A girl's first period could occur as young as 10 and sometimes earlier.

Girls are born with thousands of eggs, called ova. As puberty commences, hormones tell the ovaries to release an ovum (one egg) At the same time the uterus starts to grow a thick lining of blood vessels to protect and feed the egg, for it to combine with sperm to form a fertilized egg that creates a baby.

If an egg is not fertilized (that is, does not meet with a sperm) the lining is not needed. It breaks up and sheds blood from the uterus out from the vagina.

If a woman is not pregnant, this cycle will repeat itself approx. every month. Initially there may not be any pattern or regularity. Eventually, most periods last from 3-7 days every 28 days. The amount of blood lost during a period is usually a few teaspoons to half a cup. The bleeding is painless similar to a nosebleed, but some get cramps around the lower stomach. They may not be aware until it shows on their underwear or toilet tissue and no one will know unless you tell them.

What do I do when a period happens?

Sanitary pads or tampons are used to absorb the blood. Pads have a sticky back to stay in your underpants. A tampon is a small plug that is inserted into the vagina. Some girls may think that they cannot participate in activities such as swimming, bike riding, or physical education classes. Reassure your daughter that she can still take part in normal activities while having her period when suitably prepared.

Having a period at school and having an accident is probably every girl's nightmare. Provide your daughter with a few sanitary pads to keep in her bag and possibly a spare pair of underpants just in case. Explain that the initial bleeding is often light, which will allow her time to get to the bathroom or nurse's office in time.

What is PMS?

Stands for Pre-menstrual Syndrome and it can occur a few days before a period commences. Some girls may feel 'weepy', headaches, feel bloated, become irritable and a variety of other symptoms. It occurs because of the imbalance of hormones before and during a period. Some girls may also notice changes in secretions coming from their vagina.

Breast development

Some girls can become quite anxious about their breast development. Genes determine the shape and size of a girl's breasts. Budding is a term given to when breasts start to develop. Most start with a bump, some swelling and slight discomfort. You should emphasise that developing breasts are often asymmetrical and grow at different speeds. Should your daughter's breasts develop earlier than her peers, self-consciousness and embarrassment often follows. Reassure them and suggest loose fitting clothes or a training bra when appropriate.

If the pain is prolonged, lumps that do not disappear, or if you have any concerns regarding your daughter's breast development, please consult medical advice.

What is Masturbation?

If a boy or girl touches or rubs their genitals, it can result in an orgasm or climax. This is called masturbation. It should be noted that many people masturbate at some stage, but there are some that do not.

They should not be shamed, teased or made to feel guilty if they do. However, it is a good idea to discuss not to make masturbation a habit or significant part of their life, especially using sexual images via the computer to become stimulated.

*More information of the Impact of Pornography is available in this resource

The Takeaway

Although these discussions can be uncomfortable, you need to 'dig deep'. It is far better for you, that has a vested interest in your child's health and well-being, that will provide accurate information rather than your child searching the internet or asking their friends who do not have any life experience.

Helpful tips

Starting early and setting a tone that nothing is off limits helps build trust.

These conversations also build a firm foundation for ongoing conversations as they enter the teens and help build long-term healthy relationships with your kids.

Sex - and its impact

We have all been taught at some period in our lives that the main consequences of sex are pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. But until recently, not a lot of research had been done on the short and long-term psychological impacts that our sexual relationships can have.

Although the median age of first sexual experience has remained relatively consistent from the 60's to today, the rates of casual sexual relationships have increased significantly, namely due to the growing ease and convenience that technology provides in finding a potential sexual partner.

A study of university students in the U.S.A completed over 2011 and 2012 (Vasilenko, Lefkowitz and Maggs, 2012) aimed to analyse the short-term psychological effects that sex had on both males and females. This study concluded that those who participated in casual sexual relationships were more likely to display anxious or depressive tendencies, and the greater the number of casual hook-ups, the greater the likelihood of these tendencies. This really shows us that although there are positive physical and psychological sensations in the immediate, there are a number of negative consequences that we generally don't think about, or would even be aware of.

We generally do not associate sex with depression or anxiety, and as we, on the whole, don't see the link, we focus on the immediate positive sensations and experiences. These positive sensations that young people have can cancel out any negative feelings about a single sexual experience, and reinforce risky sexual behaviour – seeking out the next sexual experience.

Beyond the physical and the psychological, the link between sex and spirituality is an incredibly strong one, and crucial to be aware of. Although less quantifiable with facts and figures, the spiritual connections made through sex are even more powerful than the physical and psychological. When you have sex with someone your spirits are joined in that activity, and they stay that way, even long after the initial moment is over. This join between two people is commonly referred to as a 'soul tie'.

When it comes to a spiritual connection, there is so much more than just memories attached to that person. You could be sitting, years later, reading a book and then all of a sudden these memories can recur, and your heart starts racing. You could be kissing your new partner, close your eyes, and feel like your old partner is kissing you. You could be looking through social media and have the desperate urge to see how they are going, even if you feel like you have moved on and have zero emotional connection to them whatsoever. Spiritual connections can manifest themselves differently, but unless broken off, they will always be there.

There are so many considerations to be made prior to having sex, as the implications of sexual relationships are greater and much more diverse than most people realise or expect. Sex is not bad; sex is a beautiful thing and is an absolutely incredible experience for ideally married couples.

When you are speaking with your child about sex, you need to emphasise that it is more than just physical and they need to be fully aware that intimacy is not something to treat casually. As the above information indicates, there are a few other things to consider for not only themselves personally but for their future relationships.

Porn - and its impact

Physical Impact

Our brains are made up of about 100 billion special nerves called neurons that carry electrical signals back and forth between parts of the brain and out to the rest of the body. Our brains respond to regular stimulus; it is why the term “practice makes perfect” exists. The more you practice any activity, the stronger and more permanent the pathway becomes. With enough repetition and practice, the neuronal pathway gets so strong you do not even have to think about it. What we know as ‘muscle-memory’ stems from the brain and these neural pathways.

The ideal conditions for forming the strongest neuronal pathways are when you are in a “flow” state. We have all been in this state before - having a conversation with friends, reading a great book, playing a video game etc. Being so focused on the activity that you lose track of time and everything around you disappears.

Now imagine a person sitting in front of a screen looking at porn; so absorbed in hunting for the perfect masturbatory material that nothing else really matters at that moment. Little does that person realise that every thumbnail, image and video watched is reinforcing the neuronal pathways in their brain, overwriting existing, healthy pathways. The development and strengthening of these pathways through pornography has been proven even to overpower the brain's natural ability to have real sex with a partner. These pornographic pathways allow for images to be seared so deeply into the mind that they can be remembered for extremely long periods of time, potentially a lifetime!

Beyond neuronal pathways, porn triggers chemical reactions that are indistinguishable from drug-induced reactions. Research shows that of all the forms of online entertainment (gambling, gaming, social networking etc.), porn has the strongest tendency to be addictive. Upon completing a healthy activity – working out, eating tasty food, enjoying a kiss – the brain's reward centre gives you a chemical rush that incentivises the repetition of these behaviours; ultimately hardwired to motivate us to do activities that would improve our health and chances of survival.

When addictive substances are used, they send the brain a “false signal”, and the reward centre goes ahead and activates the dopamine release. We naturally crave this release more and more, and soon the natural behaviours do not give us the release we want. So we move from our natural behaviours to our addictive tendencies; motivating us to pursue more of whatever will release more dopamine. The easiest access “drug” to trick the brain, is porn.

Regular porn users who are used to certain material will need to change something to keep getting that same high false signal. This could be watching content more and more regularly to keep those dopamine levels as high as possible, or slowly turn their attention to more and more extreme porn in order to reach the same levels as the first time they consumed porn. Many users find themes of aggression, violence, incest and more creeping into their porn habits, fantasies, and unfortunately into their own sex lives. Those who would have originally considered such themes as despicable and shocking suddenly need them to achieve their release. It is a form of desensitisation.

Domestic & Sexual Violence

While not all porn contains abuse, the traditional pornographic power dynamic of male dominating the submissive and obedient female leads to the mental image that men are supposed to dominate women and that verbal and physical aggression towards women is acceptable. Further studies have shown that exposure to porn (both violent and nonviolent) increases aggressive behaviour; with an overarching conclusion that “individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression”.

Many viewers can believe that they are not personally affected by the subliminal (or not so subliminal) messages shown in porn, but studies show otherwise. The vast majority stating that watching porn makes users more likely to support violence against women, have the belief that women secretly enjoy being raped and are more likely to be sexually aggressive in real life. This does not just impact male viewers; female viewers of pornography are given the message that some element of abuse is just another part of sexual relationships and that it is pleasurable if you just give in to it.

Porn is reinforcing the idea that humiliation and abuse are normal in sexual relationships, rewiring brains and expectations of what should occur during sex. Not all porn watchers are abusers and rapists, but porn is laying the dangerous psychological foundation in all users minds, and it is very difficult to know what it is doing to your mindset until it may be too late.

In 2014, the Assistant Commissioner for the NSW Police, Mark Murdoch, came out and said that porn use is the “fastest growing part of the problem of domestic violence” and that “easy access to pornography has caused sexual assaults by young men to double in the past five years”. There is an undeniable clear and consistent link between pornography and violence, be it verbal, physical or sexual.

Sexual Exploitation

Although demand for sex trafficking is not wholly fuelled by pornography, it is impossible to deny the links between the two.

The vast majority of those people saved from a life of sexual exploitation and trafficking have stated that they were forced to have sex in front of a camera, and had porn clips made of them through their ordeal. Traffickers force their victims to produce pornography as a form of control. Although some victims are physically free and can potentially walk away from their life of sexual exploitation and start a new life, sexually explicit films and images will follow them forever. The traffickers know this and use it as a method of blackmail, letting the victims know that now they are on the Internet they can never escape what they have done.

Furthermore, those who are addicted to pornography are the most likely to seek out sexual encounters with trafficked people due to the loss of satisfaction of simply watching sex. Traffickers and sex customers also use porn to illustrate the sexual acts and situations expected of them.

Helpful Resources

Fight the New Drug is a well recognized organisation that uses science, facts and personal accounts to raise awareness to the harmful effects of porn.

www.fightthenewdrug.org

Truth about Porn aims to equip the public with up-to-date research surrounding the harmful effects of pornography.

www.truthaboutporn.org

LGBTQIA - explanation

Explaining the LGBTQIA Community

The LGBTQIA community is made up of individuals who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual or questioning their gender/sexuality. Before we jump into this topic, we should define each of these individual identifiers as it is often easy to lump them all in together, when instead they are quite unique.

- Gay/Lesbian - people who identify as gay or lesbian are classified as homosexuals; they solely have sexual attraction for people of the same sex.
- Bisexual - people who identify as bisexual do so as they have sexual attraction for people of both sexes.
- Queer - this is a broad term that is inclusive of a wide variety of non-heterosexual individuals. It does not have a single defining factor; it is a term used to give space to those who are unsure of their sexual identity, or who do not wish to place themselves in a defined category. Furthermore, those who identify themselves under a certain umbrella can also categorise themselves as queer; it is not an identity of itself.
- Transgender - people who identify as transgender have undergone medical treatment to become a member of the opposite sex, or view themselves as members of the opposite sex. This is as a result of what has been termed gender dysphoria. That is, the distress or dissatisfaction a person experiences as a result of the gender they were biologically born with.
- Intersex - people who are intersex are those who are born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the traditional definitions of male or female. They are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female or male.
- Asexual - An asexual person is simply someone who does not experience sexual attraction.

Early Secondary (13-15 Years)

As with any major topic, it is important that you and your partner both agree on what you both believe, even if you do not agree on your personal views, it is important to agree on how to communicate these views to your children. Make sure that you can back up your opinion as much as possible, with facts and other stories you feel are important. Kids, by nature, are pursuant in the search for truth, and when your views might be polar opposite or simply different to what they are reading online or hearing in the schoolyard, they will need concrete reasoning why this is so.

There has been an incredible transition in Western culture in regards to sexual identity over the past two decades, from a low level of acceptance of non-traditional identities in the early nineties to a full-blown celebration, promotion and ultimate normalisation of homosexuality, bisexuality and other identifiable categories today. This rapid change of viewpoint leads to a world of uncertainty, where questioning or contrary opinions are not met with civilised debate but are rather challenged with threats, judgement and bullying.

How do we communicate this complex issue with our kids?

We start by ensuring that our children know that all people, regardless of their religion, skin colour, background, gender, education level, or sexual identity, are just that 'people'. We should respect and love all people no matter what, even if they are different to us. This idea should extend so much further than just sexual identity, but we should train our children to identify when someone is being bullied or being treated poorly because they are seen as different, and give them the tools to be able to stand up and say that it is wrong.

We should teach our children to respect and love all people, but further than that, we should also be teaching our children that there are different kinds of love, even if we use the same word. We can love eating junk food, we can love playing basketball, we can love our pet dog, we can love our best friend, we can love our parents, we can love our girlfriend/boyfriend, we can love our husband/wife, and we can love God. Although we have used the same words, all these examples of love indicate different types and levels of emotion, and we have to educate our child on what these differences are.

If you were asked, “What does it mean to be gay?” You can use language something like this, “All people are born male or female, but some people feel, in their heart or mind, that their gender identity does not match their birth gender. However, just because that occurs does not mean it is automatic or true and feelings like this can change.”

Education goes beyond merely saying this kind of information, never forget that your children are always watching you and absorbing everything like a sponge. They are watching how you treat people - the language and words you use to describe people, what you say behind their backs, everything – so give them something worth observing.

We trust you have found this resource helpful. Our aim was to give you greater confidence and age-appropriate language in how to talk about this important topic to your child.

Focus on the Family Australia is a donor-supported organisation and rely on the generosity of individuals, families and businesses to continue to make these resources available for free. If you would like to strengthen more Australian families and relationships, please go to www.families.org.au/donate and make your tax-deductible contribution.

For more helpful resources, advice, podcasts or sign up for a weekly family and relationship e-newsletter. Please go to www.families.org.au

Extra Resources

Talking to your Kids about Alcohol and Drugs

If you've found this guide helpful you will find the same with the first part of our Talking to Your Kids Series: Alcohol and Drugs. A comprehensive guide on the dangers and consequences of alcohol & drugs and its effect on teenagers.

www.families.org.au/ttyk/alcoholdrugs

Talking to your Kids: Flash cards

It's hard to know the right words to say sometimes as parents. We've created a set of 6 flash cards focusing on some of the big issues that affect children and teenagers today: Sex, Technology, Identity, Alcohol & Drugs, Grief & Trauma and Pornography. The cards provide age appropriate advice that is shaped by your family values.

www.families.org.au/parenting-toolbox



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