

# Guide to Age-Appropriate Sexual Health Information

Adapted information from Advocates for Youth “Growth and Development, What Parents Need to Know”  
by Barbara Huberman

Age	Sexual Development Most children will...	Families and Trusted Adults To help children develop a healthy sexuality, families and trusted adults can...	Sexuality Educators To help children develop a healthy sexuality, educators can...
<b>0-3 years</b>	<p>Be curious and explore their own body and others' bodies</p> <p>Experience an erection or vaginal lubrication</p> <p>Touch their genitals for pleasure</p> <p>Talk openly about their bodies</p> <p>Know the anatomical names for body parts – head, nose, stomach, penis, vulva, etc.</p>	<p>Model openness when discussing bodies so that children feel good about their bodies being natural and healthy.</p> <p>Teach about privacy. Contrast private and public behaviors. Help children identify which behaviors are ok in public and which are private – changing, using the restroom, touching one’s genitals, etc.</p> <p>Allow children to say “no” to touch they don’t want and respect their boundaries.</p> <p>Use the medical names for body parts, internal and external, and help children understand their basic functions.</p> <p>Identify that most males have penises and most females have vaginas/vulvas. Describe how all people are different and special.</p> <p>Describe pregnancy and birth in very simple terms.</p> <p>Touch – hold and hug – children to comfort them and communicate physical love.</p>	<p>Help students understand good touch and bad touch – everyone has the right to say who touches their bodies, people have personal boundaries, only certain people are allowed to touch them in certain places, etc.</p> <p>Identify different types of relationships and talk about what kind of boundaries relationships have – friends, teachers, family, romantic, etc.</p> <p>Model that there are not “girl” things and “boy” things, that we make choices based on what we like, not based on our gender.</p> <p>Use the medical names for body parts.</p> <p>Teach basic communication skills, “When you pushed me, I felt hurt.”</p>

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<b>4-5 years</b>	<p>Have an erection and vaginal lubrication.</p> <p>Touch their genitals for pleasure</p> <p>Be interested in their bodies, how babies are made, and their own birth story.</p> <p>Understand gender and want to categorize males and females.</p> <p>Recognize gender expectations.</p> <p>Have awareness of their bodies – how they work, how they are similar and different from others, etc.</p>	<p>Teach about privacy. Contrast private and public behaviors. Help children identify which behaviors are ok in public and which are private – changing, using the restroom, touching oneself, etc.</p> <p>Use the medical names for body parts, internal and external, and help children understand their basic functions.</p> <p>Have basic conversations about how a person with a uterus becomes pregnancy and has a baby.</p> <p>Model openness when talking about sexuality to keep open lines of communication. If you feel awkward and embarrassed, it's ok to say that so that you normalize that sometimes people feel awkward when discussing sexuality because it's a private topic, but that you want to talk about it.</p> <p>Help children think of other adults they could go to if they had questions about sexuality that they didn't want to ask you or you are not able to answer.</p>	<p>Teach students about their bodies, the medical and anatomical names for their body parts, and how bodies grow and develop.</p> <p>Describe that there are different kinds of people and families. Explain and model that all people deserve respect.</p> <p>Celebrate the uniqueness and strengths of each student.</p> <p>Identify different types of relationships and talk about what kind of boundaries relationships have – friends, teachers, family, romantic, etc.</p> <p>Model that there are not “girl” things and “boy” things, that we make choices based on what we like, not based on our gender.</p> <p>Train students to identify when situations or objects are risky – accepting things from strangers, needles and sharp objects, medicine they find, etc.</p> <p>Develop refusal and communication skills using role-plays of everyday scenarios students encounter.</p>

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<b>6-8 years</b>	<p>Socialize with their own gender, sometimes exclusively.</p> <p>Recognize gender expectations.</p> <p>Notice that there are social stigmas around sexuality.</p> <p>Notice if parents and adults are uncomfortable answering their questions about sensitive subjects.</p> <p>Begin to understand sexuality beyond reproduction.</p> <p>Find additional sources for information about sex and sexuality – peers, media, other adults, etc.</p> <p>May engage in same-gender sexual exploration</p>	<p>Continue to begin open conversations with youth about sexuality. They may begin to be embarrassed or shy away from conversations, but now is the time to keep the lines of communication open.</p> <p>Help children think of other adults they could go to if they had questions about sexuality that they didn't want to ask you or you are not able to answer.</p> <p>Identify different types of relationships and talk about what kind of boundaries relationships have – friends, teachers, family, romantic, etc.</p> <p>Identify that there are different kinds of people and families in your acquaintance and model showing people respect.</p> <p>Recognize that some people have romantic relationships with people of the opposite gender and some people have relationships with the same gender.</p> <p>Model that there are not "girl" things and "boy" things, that we make choices based on what we like, not based on our gender.</p> <p>Introduce the basics of deeper sexuality topics – contraception, HIV/AIDS, relationships, marriage, abortion, etc.</p> <p>Help children anticipate the changes of puberty before they take place. Describe what children can expect – public hair, breast buds, underarm hair, etc.</p>	<p>Illustrate good hygiene.</p> <p>Teach students about their body parts, the medical and anatomical names for their body parts, and how bodies grow and develop.</p> <p>Describe that there are different kinds of people and families. Explain and model that all people deserve respect.</p> <p>Celebrate the uniqueness and strengths of each student.</p> <p>Teach about communicable and non-communicable diseases. Describe how communicable diseases are transferred, and how to prevent them – washing hands, not sharing food or utensils, etc.</p> <p>Train students to identify when situations or objects are risky – accepting things from strangers, needles and sharp objects, medicine they find, etc.</p> <p>Develop refusal skills using role-plays of everyday scenarios students encounter.</p> <p>Help students understand good touch and bad touch – everyone has the right to say who touches their bodies, people have personal boundaries, only certain people are allowed to touch them, etc.</p> <p>Identify different types of relationships and talk about what kind of boundaries relationships have – friends, teachers, family, romantic, etc.</p>

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<b>9-12 years</b>	<p>Begin to understand who they are separate from their family</p> <p>Experience their sexuality and make decisions about how to express it</p> <p>Become anxious about sexual changes and puberty</p> <p>Be worried about their sexual experiences and feelings – if they are normal and ok</p> <p>Experience embarrassment, uncertainty, or shyness about sexual topics or questions</p> <p>Seek out and value privacy</p> <p>Navigate through crushes, infatuations, and strong feelings of attraction</p> <p>Understand jokes with sexual content</p>	<p>Address, normalize, and affirm the physical and emotional changes or puberty – that they are normal and healthy. Help them through the hygiene responsibilities that come with puberty – menstruation, nocturnal emissions, deodorant, etc.</p> <p>Remain available for open conversation while allowing youth to have privacy</p> <p>Help young people understand puberty and the changes they are going through and that these changes, including menstruation and nocturnal emissions (ejaculation), are normal.</p> <p>Respect young people's privacy while encouraging open communication .</p> <p>Discuss the responsibilities of physical and emotional maturation. Help students reason through the decision-making process for being “ready” for new things. For example, “What are signs that you could look for that would tell you when you are ready for a relationship?”</p> <p>Model with your relationships and/or discuss ways to communicate intimacy and connection in a relationship outside of sex – gift giving, spending time together, cuddling, kissing, etc.</p> <p>Discuss your values and what healthy relationships and sexuality looks like to you.</p> <p>Talk about abstinence as normal and ok for all ages of people. Even adults choose to be abstinent at times in their lives.</p> <p>Be open to talking about contraception and barriers (condoms, dental dams, etc.)</p>	<p>Normalize the anatomical and emotional changes of puberty for all genders.</p> <p>Notice that the experience of puberty is more alike than different for all genders</p> <p>Discuss the hygiene changes that accompany puberty – deodorant, menstruation products, showering, etc.</p> <p>Develop refusal and communication skills using role-plays of everyday scenarios students encounter.</p> <p>Help students understand good touch and bad touch – everyone has the right to say who touches their bodies, people have personal boundaries, etc.</p> <p>Identify different types of relationships – friendship, family, romantic, etc.</p> <p>Describe how HIV and STIs are transmitted and help students understand what behaviors put them at risk.</p> <p>Define vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse, and their levels of risk.</p> <p>Develop personal plans for risk prevention for communicable diseases.</p>

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<b>13-17 years</b>	<p>Experience themselves as sexual beings and experiment with expressing that part of themselves.</p> <p>Understand their own sexual orientation.</p> <p>Understand different options of sexual expression and the risks involved in each option.</p> <p>Be able to make decisions on their sexuality based on their understanding of risk.</p> <p>Identify healthy and unhealthy relationships and know what they want in a relationship.</p> <p>Begin to weigh the merits and risks of different types of romantic relationships to make healthy decisions for their own relationships.</p> <p>Recognize the role media play in propagating views about sex</p>	<p>Share your family and religious values around sex and sexuality.</p> <p>Acknowledge that sex is pleasurable and talk about your values about when it is good and appropriate.</p> <p>Describe the wide variety of ways that people express love and intimacy.</p> <p>Talk about the factors that influence decisions about sex – age, consent, drugs and alcohol, love and other relationship factors, contraception, barriers such as condoms, etc.</p> <p>Help teens identify what factors will help them know when they are ready to engage in sexual activity.</p> <p>Weigh the risks and rewards of sexual intimacy openly.</p> <p>Model that you trust your teen to make healthy decisions.</p> <p>Discuss contraception and barrier options and remain available for later conversations should their needs change.</p> <p>Discuss what options are available for teens if unprotected intercourse or pregnancy occurs.</p> <p>Make plans for how teens can exit situations in which they are uncomfortable or feel pressured to do something they don't want.</p> <p>Use inclusive in your conversations about relationships so that your children feel comfortable sharing their sexual orientation or gender identity.</p> <p>Describe the variety of life options that people have – some people marry while some people prefer to remain single, some people have children or adopt while some people prefer to be childless.</p>	<p>Reinforce that abstinence is the safest and most effective methods for preventing STI/HIV transmission and pregnancy.</p> <p>Compare and contrast the cost, efficacy, and availability of contraception and barrier options.</p> <p>Describe how HIV and STIs are transmitted and help students understand what behaviors put them at risk.</p> <p><b>Identify sexual activities on a risk continuum.</b></p> <p>Develop personal plans for risk prevention for STIs, HIV, and pregnancy.</p> <p>Share regional or national statistics on teen sexual activity, birth and STI rates – reinforcing that most teens are not sexually active.</p> <p>Lead conversations that examine gender roles, societal expectations, and media messages about identity and sexuality.</p> <p>Practice refusal and communication skills using role-plays of everyday scenarios students encounter.</p> <p>Discuss setting and respecting physical boundaries.</p> <p>Teach affirmative consent – only a sober and enthusiastic “yes” means yes.</p> <p>Examine the influence of drugs and alcohol on sexual decisions.</p> <p>Describe all of the options are available for teens if unprotected intercourse or pregnancy occurs.</p> <p>Make students aware of the community resources that are available in cases of sexual violence.</p>

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<b>18 + years</b>	<p>Have romantic relationships that are emotional and/or sexual</p> <p>Become grounded and confident in their sexual orientation</p> <p>Become more self-aware as well as aware of the needs of others and how they affect others</p> <p>Experience more intense sexuality</p> <p>Have sexual and emotional relationship goals</p>	<p>Remain available and open but allow them to separate as adults</p> <p>Be honest of the pleasures, rewards, risks, and responsibility of sexuality and adulthood.</p> <p>Recognize their strengths and goals.</p> <p>Facilitate their access to sexual and reproductive health care.</p>	<p>Be honest of the pleasures, rewards, risks, and responsibility of sexuality and adulthood.</p> <p>Help youth understand a more nuanced view of sexuality and decision-making – what are the factors that come into play with decisions around sex and relationships?</p> <p>Have conversations about adult sexual and reproductive health needs and where services can be found.</p> <p>Make students aware of the community resources that are available in cases of sexual violence.</p> <p>Compare and contrast the cost, efficacy, and availability of contraception and barrier options.</p> <p>Describe how HIV and STIs are transmitted and help students understand what behaviors put them at risk.</p>

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