

For Parents

Talking to Your Child About Sexual Health

FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN BIRTH – 12 YEARS

Be Proactive. Be Prepared.

This resource will help you get ready for the ongoing talks you'll have with your child about sexual health. If you and your child haven't talked about sexual health yet, it's never too late to start!



Sexual Health

What sexual health means and what it includes.



Askable Adult

What an Askable Adult is and how to become one.



Values & Beliefs

How to talk about your values and beliefs around sexual health.



Tips & Tricks

Tips and tricks for successful and ongoing talks and how to make them even better.



So... What IS Sexual Health?

As a parent, you teach your child about sexual health, not just sex. Sexual health includes things like hygiene, healthy relationships, sexuality and consent.

What is sexual health?

Sexual health includes your physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. Taking care of your sexual health is an important part of health and wellness.

Teaching sexual health means making sure your child has the knowledge, skills and ability to protect their health and the health of others, now and when they're older.

What about sexuality?

Sexuality is an important part of every human being. A person's sexuality includes everything from their biological sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, to pregnancy and reproduction. While sexuality can include all these, people may experience them differently. Sexuality is affected by many factors, some of which include biology, psychology, culture, and religion.

The Sexuality Wheel (see next page) shows how broad the concept of sexuality really is. Each part of the wheel represents one part of who we are. These parts are all connected and affected by each other. The boxes on the left side of the wheel show who we are by nature. The ones on the right show who we are taught or who we learn to be. The wheel moves freely and smoothly. When all parts of our self are healthy, our sexuality is healthy.



A collection of ideas that people see as important; a set of beliefs about how things are.

Who We Are by Nature

Who We Learn to Be

Personality

A combination of traits or characteristics that make up a person's unique character.

Gender Identity

A person's internal sense of identity as female, male, both or neither, regardless of their biological sex assigned at birth.

Gender Expression

How a person presents their gender. This can include appearance, name, pronoun and social behaviour.

Sexual Orientation

A person's emotional and sexual attraction to other people. It can be fluid and may or may not reflect sexual behaviours.

Biological Sex

The physical sex characteristics that categorize people as male or female at birth, including genitalia, body shape, hormones, chromosomes, etc.

Relationships

The way people are connected and how they act toward one another.

Sexual Activity

One way people experience or express their sexuality. Sexual activity includes kissing, sexual touching, and sexual intercourse (e.g. oral, anal, vaginal).

Communication

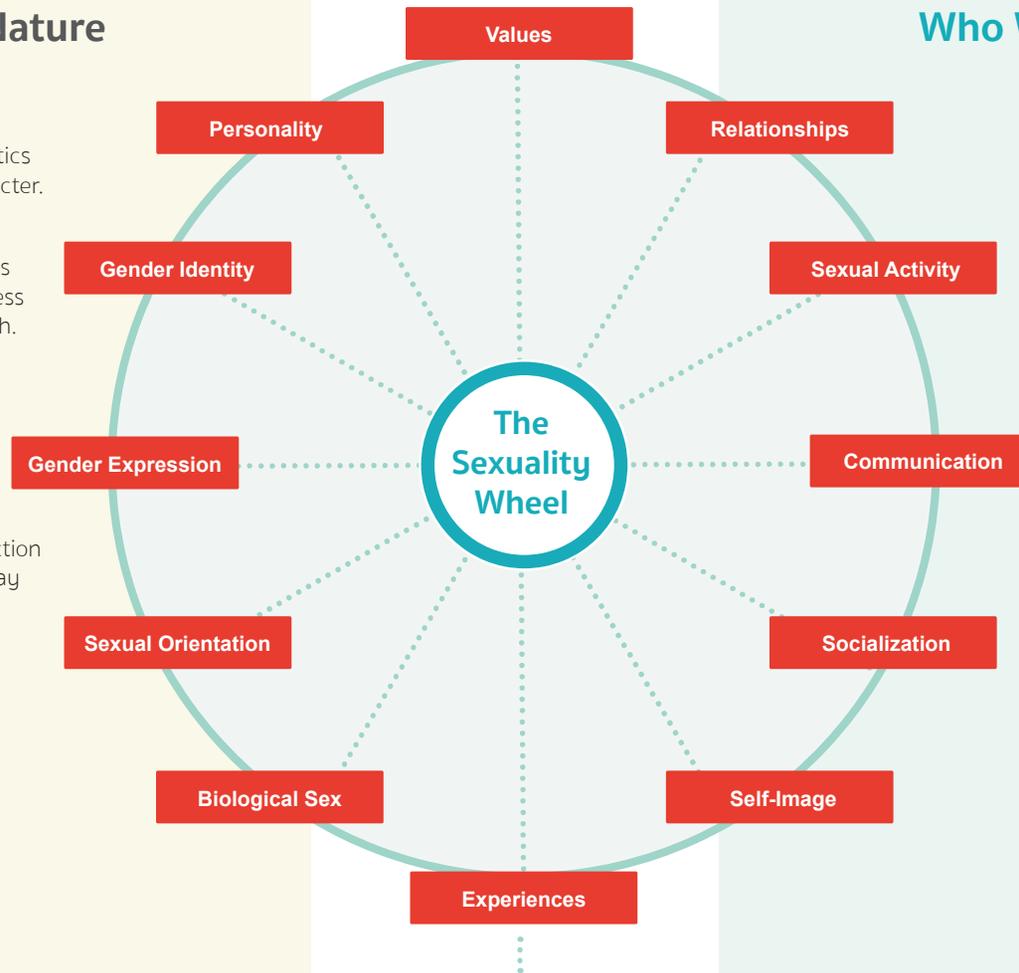
The way people connect and share information, goals, ideas and create understanding.

Socialization

Learned behaviours that include customs, attitudes and values that are acceptable to a social group, community or culture.

Self-Image

How a person thinks about or sees themselves, including their personality, their appearance and their values.



What people have done, gone through, or been exposed to in their life. Personal experiences help form people's values.



Your Values & Beliefs

Before you start talking to your child about sexual health, you first need to think about and understand your values and your family's values before you can share them with, and model them for your child. Below are some questions to help you think about your values.

1

How do you model these values in your everyday life?

Honesty, Respect, Empathy, Responsibility, Accountability

2

Does your child know and understand how you feel about those values?

3

Does your child know how you expect them to act when they know and understand your values?



There are many teachable moments in daily life. You can watch the news or there may be something happening in your family or to a friend that might open up a teachable moment.

These could be current or life events related to bullying or cyberbullying, how relationships are shown on TV or in the movies, Internet safety, or even a friend or relative who is pregnant.



Your Values & Beliefs

Now it's time to think about how the values you've taught your child relate to sexuality and sexual health.



Have you talked about your values around sexuality as a family?

Could your child tell you what your family values are if you asked them?



Does your child know what your values are around:



Friendships

Do they know how you expect them to treat their friends?

How you expect their friends to treat them?

Do they know how you feel about them spending time at a friend's house when their parents aren't home?

Do they know how you feel about having sleepovers with friends?

TV Shows and Movies

Do they know how you feel about them watching certain TV shows and movies?

Boundaries

Do they know how you feel about hugging and kissing friends?

Do they know how you feel about respecting people's privacy and boundaries?

Do they know how you feel about other people respecting their privacy and boundaries?

Online Behaviour

Do they know how you feel about them using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.?

Do they know what you think is okay and not okay to say or do on social media?



Be an Askable Adult

Being an Askable Adult means that you're easy to talk to, that you listen, that you respect a person's right to privacy, and that you respect the right for a child or teen to feel the way they do.

An Askable Adult:

Knows themselves.

They understand their values and beliefs and communicate them clearly and respectfully.

Knows the basics.

They understand the facts about the human body—like puberty and reproduction—but they also understand what affects a person's sexuality, what a healthy relationship is and what consent means.

Answers questions.

They may have some answers, but not all. When they need to find more information, they know what information can be trusted, and they always give the child who asked an answer.



An Askable Adult teaches their child through words, by their own behaviour and by how they react to situations, questions and other people's behaviour.



Tips & Tricks

Your child sees you as a role model and a valuable and credible source of information. They want to get health information from you based on the loving and trusting relationship you have.

For these reasons, along with many others, it's important that you discuss sexual health with your child – this will help your child make healthy, informed decisions now and in the future. Here are some tips for starting or having conversations about sexual health, at any age:

1 It's never too late to start the conversation.

Don't try to cover everything at once, but also don't worry if you think you've said too much.

2 Keep the language simple and age-appropriate.

For example, when talking about where babies come from, a 3-year-old may be okay with, "Babies grow in a special place inside the mother's body called a uterus." However, a 6-year-old may have more questions about how the baby grows, and may want to know how it will come out.

3 Teach your child that their body belongs to them.

Teach them that they're allowed to tell people they don't want to be touched, hugged, tickled, etc. even if it's by a friend or relative.

4 Use proper terms for body parts and bodily functions.

It can be confusing to children to have cute names for some body parts and not others. This can also help to protect your child from abuse as they will have the words to talk about a touch or a feeling that's not okay.

5 Watch for teachable moments.

Talk about and help them understand issues as they come up on TV, in movies, ads, music, the news and in the community. This can also start a talk about your values and beliefs.

6 Find out what they already know.

Children in school will hear comments or words they don't understand. Ask your child what they can tell you about any sexual health topic. This is a great way to start a conversation, find out what they know, and give them the right information.



7 Talk about more than the “facts.”

Along with facts about the body and how it works, talk about feelings, relationships and how they affect other people..

8 Provide resources.

Have resources like books in your home where your child can get the right information. Make sure the resources are suitable for their age.

9 You don't have to know it all.

Be an active learner yourself. Your child will teach you just as much as you teach them.

10 Encourage your child to talk about what they think.

Talking openly can help your child understand your values and give you a better idea about the values they're learning.

11 Let them know what's socially appropriate and inappropriate.

As children get older, it's important that they learn and understand other people's standards may be different from theirs.

12 When your child asks you a question, do your best to answer it at the time.

If you don't know the answer, suggest that you find out together or tell them you'll find out and get back to them. Don't put it off, as they might think that it's not an okay topic or not important enough to talk about.

To learn more, visit teachingsexualhealth.ca