

For Parents

Talking to Your Teen About Sexual Health

FOR PARENTS OF TEENS 13 – 18 YEARS

Be Proactive. Be Prepared.

This resource will help you get ready for the ongoing talks you'll have with your teen about sexual health. If you and your teen 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 teen 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

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.

Who We Learn to Be

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

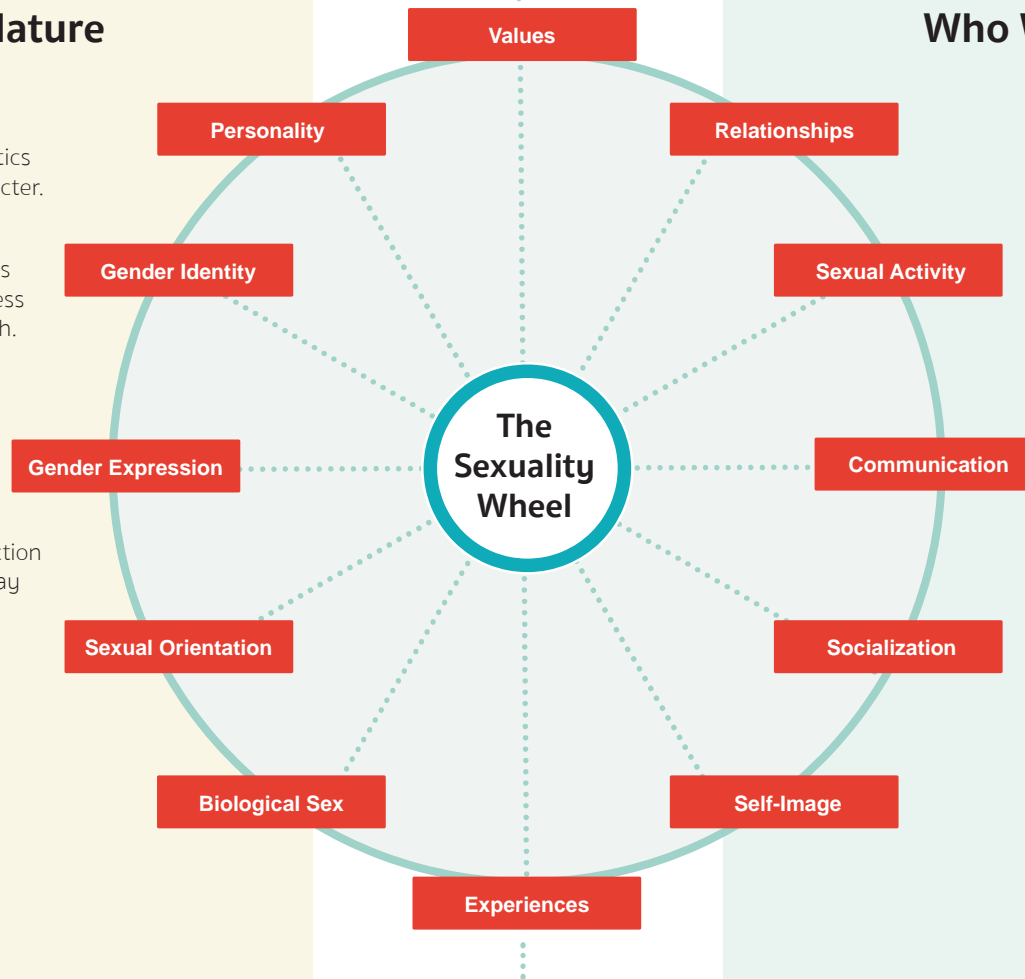
The way people connect and share information, goals, ideas and create understanding.

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 teen 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 teen. 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 teen know and understand how you feel about those values?

3

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



There are many teachable moments in daily life. The news or something that's happening in your family or to a friend may start a teachable moment with your teen.

These could be current or life events related to consent and sexual assault, bullying and cyberbullying, Internet safety or even a friend or relative who's pregnant.



Your Values & Beliefs

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



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

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



Does your teen know what your values are around:

*Relationships
Sexual Activity
Consent*

Relationships

*Do they know how you feel about them dating?
Holding hands? Kissing?
Spending time alone with someone they are interested in?*

Sexual Activity

*Do they know how you feel about them being intimate with someone?
Using different kinds of birth control?
Taking part in sexual activity when alcohol or drugs might be involved?*

Consent

*Do they know how you feel about how important getting and giving consent is?
Consenting to hugging or holding hands?
Consenting to kissing or making out?
Consenting to sexual intercourse?*



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 teen 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

As your child enters the teen years, they start to turn to their friends for answers and information. Being an Askable Adult helps your child to know that they can come to you whenever they have questions.

Teens have lots of questions that they may not ask. Talking about sexual health with your teen may be tricky. They've likely started puberty, with all of its changes—including mood swings—and are pushing to be independent. This is a huge time of transition for any teen. They're becoming a young adult who'll soon be responsible for their own decisions and behaviour. It may not seem like it at times, but your teen does care about what you say and do.

Here are a few tips for talking with your teen:

1 Watch for teachable moments.

Talk about and help them understand issues as they come up on TV, in movies, ads, music, social media, the news, in the community and in your social circle. This can also give you an opening to talk about your values and beliefs.

2 Provide resources.

Have resources like books in your home where your teen can get the right information. For reliable resources and community agencies, see the **Resources page on our website**.

3 You don't have to know it all.

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

4 Encourage your teen to talk about what they think.

An open exchange of ideas can help clarify the values you each hold.

5 When your teen 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.

6 Demonstrate responsible, health-conscious decisions and behaviour.

Show your teen what healthy relationships and lifestyle choices look like by living them yourself.



7 Play the what-if game.

Ask them a situational question like, “What if you/your partner/your friend got pregnant?” or “What if your friends asked you to do something you weren’t comfortable with?” Do your best not to judge their response, but do talk about the possible consequences of their choices and actions.

8 Speak to them as a mature person.

Use correct terms to show that you respect their age and knowledge. Respect their views and their feelings.

9 Recognize that you can’t control all of your teen’s actions.

Assure your teen that there may be times you don’t approve of their actions but you’ll always support them and will always love them unconditionally.

To learn more, visit teachingsexualhealth.ca