

For Parents

Talking with Your Child About Sexual Health

FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN FROM 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

How to talk about your values around sexual health.



Tips for Talking

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 is personal, psychological, relational, cultural, physical and emotional well-being related to a person's sexuality. Taking care of your sexual health is as vital as other parts of your health and wellness. Sexual health can include healthy relationships, reproductive health, sexuality, consent, puberty and hygiene. It's good for kids to also learn about sexual health and healthy sexuality, not just sex.

What about sexuality?

Sexuality is a central part of every human. A person's sexuality includes their sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. It also includes their pregnancy and reproduction choices and experiences. A person can express their sexuality in many ways, including through their:

thoughts	values
fantasies	behaviours
desires	practices
beliefs	roles
attitudes	relationships

While sexuality can include all of these, a person may not always express all of them. Many things can affect sexuality. These include things you might expect like biology, psychology, society, religion or culture. Sexuality is also influenced by economic, ethical, political, and legal factors.

The Sexuality Wheel (see next page) shows how broad sexuality is. Each part of the wheel shows one part of who we are and that these parts are all connected and influenced by each other. The boxes on the left side of the wheel show who we are, while the ones on the right show who we are taught or 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 assumptions 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, fluid among genders or no gender regardless of their sex.

Gender Expression

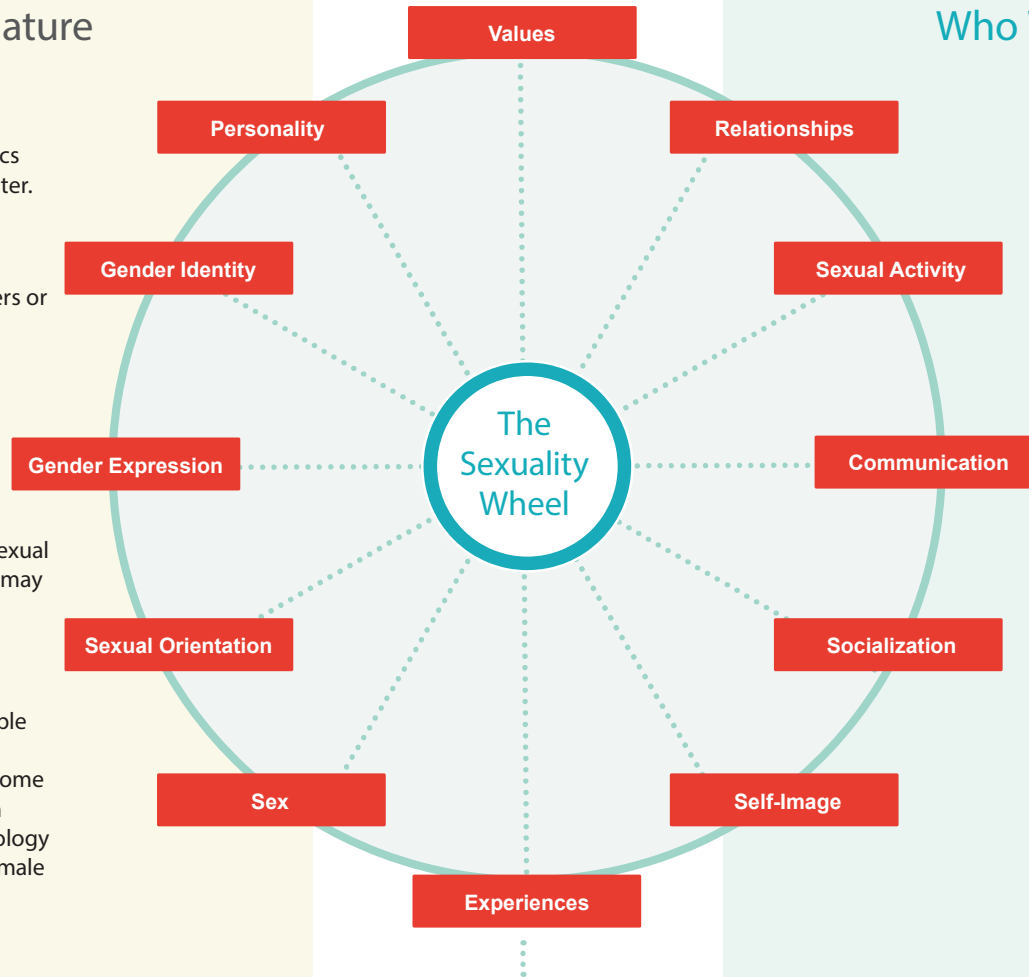
How a person presents their gender. This can include appearance, name, pronoun and social behaviour.

Sexual Orientation

A person's emotional, physical and/or sexual attraction to others. It can change and may or may not be the same as their sexual behaviour.

Sex

Categories (male, female) to which people are typically assigned at birth based on physical characteristics (e.g., genitals). Some people may be assigned intersex, when their reproductive, sexual or genetic biology doesn't fit the traditional definitions of male or female.



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

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.



Your Values

Before you start talking with your child about sexual health, reflect on the values you and your family hold. Can you explain what you believe and why? Once you're clear, you can share those values 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

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
- Boundaries
- TV Shows and Movies
- Online Behaviour

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, TickTok, 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 for Talking

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. Listen and ask open questions instead of doing all the talking.

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