
Health & Sexuality

“What do I do? My child wants to know about sex?”

All parents anticipate the moment their child will ask questions such as “Where did I come from?” and “How are babies made?” Most parents struggle to provide an age-appropriate answer, balancing the knowledge a child needs with the overwhelming information that is appropriate at a later time.

Children with unique needs are often not as active in seeking information regarding sexuality (Hingsburger). In this situation, the parents often become the watchdog, waiting and anticipating when a child is ready to learn. Once a parent feels that their child is ready to learn about health and sexuality, the true challenge presents. Depending on your child’s unique needs, you may need to incorporate various strategies, supports and schedules to allow concrete and effective learning.

Teaching Tips:

Teach early. Both typically developing children and children with unique needs require early introduction to health and sexuality in order to have time to absorb and organize the information.

Teach little lessons. Children do not need to know everything during the first conversation. Teach small, manageable lessons over time. Learning should be natural and follow the lead of the child (Walker-Hirsch). Their body language and exchanges will indicate when they have enough information for that day.

Teach what is comfortable to start. Diving directly into the birds and bees may not be ideal. Start with teaching about good nutrition, exercise and hygiene. Move into the more complex topics once you and your child feel comfortable.

Start teaching today. Many parents wait until their child approaches them before beginning this important dialogue. By that time many children have also learned from television, friends and siblings (Saltz & Cravath). To ensure your child has accurate information, open the conversation so children feel comfortable asking questions and seeking information.

It is never too early. Toddlers and young children are capable of learning their body parts, and should be aware of what is public and private. Regardless of your child’s age, the time to start is today.

Next Steps:

We encourage you to attend the eXL Health and Sexuality Family Workshop. Topics will include explaining intercourse, managing masturbation, dating and stocking. The workshop will also teach parents tips and techniques to help incorporate teaching into the lives of their unique children.

References:

The Facts of Life...And More: Sexuality and Intimacy for People with Intellectual for Young People with Intellectual Disabilities; Edited by Leslie Walker, Hirsch.

Just Say No! Understanding And Reducing the Risk of Sexual Victimization of People with Developmental Disabilities; Dave Hingsburger.

Changing You: A Guide to Body Changes and Sexuality; Gail Saltz & Lynne Avril Cravath.