

Talking to teens about sex: Advice for parents on when, how, what to say and why it's so important

April 29 2024, by Ayobami Precious Adekola



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The "birds and the bees." The "facts of life." Whatever you call it, [many](#)

[parents dread](#) discussing sex and sexuality with their teenagers. They may be embarrassed, or worried that they don't understand some concepts. In some countries, cultural norms may mean it's considered inappropriate for adults and adolescents to talk about sex.

However, these are conversations worth having. A large body of research [has shown](#) that teens who openly discuss sex and sexuality with their parents [reduce their risky sexual behavior](#), leading to improved reproductive health.

It's also important to remember that this [won't be a one-off discussion](#). Adolescents undergo constant development, facing new questions and challenges as they grow. Continuous dialogue allows parents to provide ongoing guidance, address emerging concerns, and reinforce values over time. It also fosters an atmosphere of trust and openness.

I'm a public health researcher who studies adolescent sexuality, sexual and [reproductive health](#). Based on [my research](#), as well as on frequent interactions with both teenagers and their parents, I've put together this guide to address parents' common questions and concerns. I hope this advice can help you to engage your teens in open, honest and helpful dialogues about sex and sexuality.

When should I start talking to my kids about sex and sexuality?

There is [no universally "right" age](#) to start discussing sex and sexuality with your children. However, I'd suggest that you can initiate discussions about body parts and puberty before your kids are 10. Conversations specifically about sex and sexuality can begin around age 10.

No matter your teens' age, it is important for parents to [create a safe space for these discussions](#) by letting your teens know they are not being judged, and that everything they say is confidential.

Family dynamics differ in every household. Sometimes teenagers trust or are more comfortable with one parent than the other. However, both parents should be on the same page to avoid giving contradictory messages to their teens. In a two-parent household, it is beneficial to have both parents involved in discussing sexuality education with their teen, but it is not necessary to always do it together. A combination of individual and joint conversations can be effective.

What sorts of topics fall under the umbrella of sex and sexuality?

Some of the important [topics](#) parents can discuss with their teenagers include

- how the reproductive system functions
- building healthy relationships—the importance of consent, communication, mutual understanding and boundaries
- the physical and emotional changes that occur during puberty
- how to maintain good sexual health practices and hygiene.

According to my religion or culture, it's not appropriate to discuss these topics with my children.

Many parents have [their own misconceptions and biases about sex](#), often rooted in religious or cultural beliefs. But the reality is that [avoiding discussions](#) about sex [does not stop teenagers](#) from engaging in [sexual activities](#) or seeking information from other sources. Studies [have shown](#) that "parent-child communication is strongly associated with a child's

safer sex practices, including condom use and delayed sexual debut."

Face your own biases and sexual prejudices head on when talking to your teens. For instance, don't shy away from talking about [the spectrum of LGBTQ+](#) identities. Focus on the importance of respecting, accepting and accommodating different sexual orientations and gender identities.

I don't understand some of the concepts my teen is asking about!

You're not alone. Most parents are not experts on these topics. The important thing is to [listen actively](#)—tune in to their thoughts and feelings as they talk—without judgment, and with empathy. Try to be [thoughtful, factual and compassionate](#) when answering their questions. Don't be dismissive.

You also don't need to have all the answers immediately to hand. It is OK to ask your teenagers to give you some time to research the topic. You might suggest researching it together, or asking them to do some research and talk to you about what they find out.

Another practical and effective way to deal with your teen's questions and concerns is to connect them with [available community resources](#). These could be school counselors or community health care providers, such as doctors and nurses, who can offer age-appropriate information and confidential medical care. Look for local community organizations and [support groups](#) that can provide sexuality education, peer support and safe spaces. Parents' recommendations and referrals will boost young people's trust in these care services, encouraging them to use the resources and services.

My teenager says they belong to the LGBTQ+

community. I'm not sure how to support them

First and foremost, it is wonderful that your teenager felt comfortable enough to share this with you, and it is great that you are willing to learn and be supportive. Here are [some steps](#) you can take to support [your teenager](#) who has come out to you as LGBTQ+:

- Acknowledge and validate by letting your teen know that you love them and accept them for who they are.
- Listen with an open mind, without judgment. This is a time for them to express themselves freely. Ask open questions to show your interest and better understand their experience.
- Ask your teen what kind of support they need from you. Maybe it is just knowing you are there for them, or perhaps they would like you to connect them with LGBTQ+ resources or support groups.
- Be patient with your teen and allow him the space to explore his feelings at his own pace, because coming to terms with one's sexual orientation or gender identity can be a journey.
- Challenge your assumptions and biases. Reflect on your own beliefs and be open to adjusting them if necessary.
- Be an ally by showing your support not only within the family, but also in public.
- Seek support If you are feeling overwhelmed or unsure about how to support your teenager, seek guidance from LGBTQ+ organizations, therapists, or support groups for parents of LGBTQ+ youth.

An investment in teens' future

Providing [accurate information](#), fostering open communication, and offering support equips your teen to navigate sex and relationships

responsibly. When parents talk about sex and [sexuality](#) with their teenagers, it is an investment in their future health and well-being. By approaching it with sensitivity, honesty, and empathy, you can build a strong foundation for open communication and empower your teens to make informed decisions.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Talking to teens about sex: Advice for parents on when, how, what to say and why it's so important (2024, April 29) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-04-teens-sex-advice-parents-important.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.