



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

# Top tips for talking about sex

from

## Talk soon. Talk often.

A guide for parents and carers talking to their kids 0-18 years about relationships and sex



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# Top 20 tips for talking about sex

## 01 **Talk soon**

Start talking about bodies from birth. Talk openly about respectful relationships and puberty early on. It's important to discuss topics before your child is going to experience them. Practise talking about sexual matters before your child reaches an age where they may be reluctant or embarrassed to discuss the topic.

## 02 **Talk often (listen too)**

You don't need to have a 'big conversation' every time. Cover the same subject lots of times, sharing information as it feels right to do so. A general pattern of openly chatting about sex and relationships will stick and create a feeling of closeness and comfort to talk about anything.

## 03 **Two way talk**

Gone are the days of the one-off 'birds and the bees' lecture. Good communication includes lots of conversations, questions, sharing ideas and experiences from when you were younger. Try not to lead with 'what not to do' as it may shut down future conversation. Try and support your child to think carefully and critically about what they need to stay safe. Let them know you can help with things such as finding a good doctor if they need advice on sexual health care such as contraception.

## 04 **It's not all about sex**

It's about bodies, babies, growing up, love, sexual expression, pleasure, feelings, treating each other with respect, consent, personal values, decisions, and relationships. Some topics may seem more uncomfortable to speak about than others – such as masturbation and pleasure. However, these are often the topics that teens want to learn about.

## 05 **Don't wait for your child to ask questions**

A child might never ask, but they still need to know. If they haven't said anything to you by the time they are aged 10 years, then shyness or embarrassment is likely to stop them from this point onwards. This is where they may turn to unreliable sources of information. Create conversations – use books, characters in TV shows, and stories from your own life.

## 06 **Answer questions honestly and simply**

Share what you know to a level of detail that feels right for you and your child. If you haven't given enough information, most children will ask more questions. It's ok to come back to a topic and discuss further.

## 07 **You don't have to have all the answers**

If you don't know how to respond to a question, it's ok to say so. Keep communication open with something like: 'that's a good question, I don't know, but let's find out together'.

## 08 **Use teachable moments**

It can be tricky to find the right time to bring up these conversations. Use media, television and movies, current news and events, songs, and family events to introduce topics and discuss values (e.g. an unplanned pregnancy on a TV show can be a good way to talk about the importance of contraception).

## 09 **Use the correct words**

Practise saying these words out loud: vulva, vagina, clitoris, penis, testes, scrotum, breasts, nipples. Get used to using the proper names for sexual body parts right from the start. That doesn't mean you can't use the words 'boobs' or 'willy', but it helps you and your child to be more matter of fact about these issues. These terms are what they will use when learning about protective behaviours, relationships, and sexuality education in school.

## 10 **Make reliable information available**

Leave books and resources around that have accurate information. Share reliable websites and video clips. Help your child to determine what information is real and what is fake online, including social media.

## 11 **Be a 'tellable' parent**

Show you're approachable by raising the topic, be unshockable (pretend if you have to), and listen. Some things might surprise you, but it's important to try and stay calm, and avoid showing judgment.

## 12 **Trusted network of adults**

Ask your child to think of other adults they might like to talk to about these topics with: aunts/uncles, grandparents, older siblings, coaches and mentors, health professionals, and teachers can be great sources of support.

## 13 **Make it less awkward**

Offer times to talk that don't require a formal sit-down. Start a conversation in the car or washing the dishes so that you can talk without eye contact (this also helps to give the chat a finite time so that it's not too 'heavy'). Send your teen a message with a link or post you'd like them to look at and offer them the chance to come to you with questions (don't tag them in posts that their friends can see too!).

## 14 **It's ok to laugh**

Sex and bodies can be funny for both you and your child. It's ok to laugh, to admit you're embarrassed (but determined) and to say: 'I don't have all the answers, but I do know where we can get reliable information from'.

## 15 **You're not alone**

There's lots of supportive services and websites that can help you and your child or teen. It may be helpful to do some reading and practise talking about it with a partner or a friend. It's ok to seek support from healthcare professionals, educators, or community resources. Check out <https://tsto.gdhr.wa.gov.au/resources/resources-content>

## 16 **Support your school's Relationships and Sexuality Education program**

Find out what's being taught at school and use this to continue conversations at home. RSE may only be delivered at school for a short period of time, but chatting at home can continue.

## 17 **Teach them about contraception and condoms**

Different cultures and religions have different beliefs that shape the use of contraception. Share your family values about sexual behaviour, but it's helpful to share factual information on how to best protect themselves and their friends, should the need arise.

## 18 **Show them how to access services**

Concerns about confidentiality can stop young people accessing services. Show them how to get their own Medicare card (at 15 years old). Explain that their My Health Record becomes confidential to them at 14 years old. Show them how to use local and online services.

## 19 **Be inclusive, respect diversity**

Remember that about 42.5% of young people identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or another term other than heterosexual<sup>1</sup>. 7.5% identify as transgender or non-binary<sup>1</sup>. 1.7% are estimated to be intersex<sup>2</sup>.

## 20 **It's never too late to start**

Children and teens will learn about sex with or without you. It's better to get information from a trusted adult rather than online or from friends. It doesn't hurt to say: 'I wish we chatted about this a long time ago, but there's something I really want you to know'.

*We haven't made it an issue. So it's just information, and it's there to be asked, and my attitude is, I'll tell you, to the best of my knowledge. If not, I'll find out for you and then we can work through it.*

*– Parent of girl 6 and boy 8*

<sup>1</sup> Kauer S, Power J, Fisher C, & Bourne A. The 7th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2021, Western Australia report. ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 135 Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University; 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Population figures [Internet]. InterAction for Health and Human Rights; 2025. Retrieved from <https://interaction.org.au/by-the-resource/population-figures/>

# 10 reasons for talking about sexuality (soon)

## 01 Many children want to know

Many younger children are curious about how babies grow, and how they 'started'. Talking to them openly and honestly shows that they can come to you with their questions.

## 02 It sets the stage for later conversations

Give children (and yourself) practise being comfortable talking about sexual matters before they're older and reluctant to discuss the topic. Showing them that you're willing to help them find the answers to their 'tricky' questions when they're younger will encourage them to seek help from you when they're older.

## 03 It helps children cope better with puberty

Kids worry 'Am I normal?' and 'When will it happen?'. Learning what to expect and how to manage it helps children to become independent and confident. Puberty is tough for those who are the first (and last) to develop. Some girls experience breast swelling at age 8 years and some boys have late growth spurts. Explaining that there's a wide range of 'normal' when it comes to how our bodies (and minds) change and develop throughout our life can be reassuring.

## 04 It ensures boys get included in sexuality education within the family

Boys often miss out on sexuality education within the family. Mums tend to provide more discussion on this topic but may know less than dads about boys' development. Boys are often left to learn about sex and sexuality via the internet.

## 05 It shows your kid you 'have their back'

Tell your kids it's not ok for relatives or others to make observations about their breast development, weight gain, skinniness, or any other commentary on their bodies. This is a good way of showing your kids they have the right to have their bodies respected.

## 06 It helps young people make healthier choices

Research shows that children whose parents talk with them about sexuality and who receive good sexuality education at school are more likely to start sex later, have sex when they are ready, have consensual sex, are less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy, and less likely to get an STI.

## 07 It can help protect them from sexual abuse

Keeping discussions about sex and bodies a secret can help sexual abusers keep their crimes secret. Open discussions at home gives children permission to talk with you about sex and sexual body parts, which makes them feel safe to ask questions and let you know if they're worried about something. Regular reminders that their body is their own and that no-one can touch them without their consent helps protect them in both their early and later years.

## 08 It can make life easier for kids who are not traditional 'boy' types or 'girl' types

There is more than one kind of boy and one kind of girl, but kids can suffer if they don't follow the expected norms. Children who are transgender or intersex, or kids in LGBTQIA+ families can find themselves excluded too. If we start early to question rigid gender stereotypes we can prevent a lot of misery and help to broaden everyone's options, ultimately contributing to kids' wellbeing and sense of belonging.

## 09 It allows you to share your family values

Having open discussions offers lots of opportunity to share your values and beliefs. Using examples from social media and TV allows you to discuss topics hypothetically. Offer suggestions for how you would hope your child to respond in that situation.

## 10 It shows them that it's ok to talk

The research tells us that children may not come to you if they have a question – they are waiting for you to raise the topic first. They may be embarrassed to reveal that they're interested or, in the case of older teens, worried that you will assume they are sexually active. Show them it's ok to talk by taking the lead and starting conversations.