

7 Suggestions for Talking to Children About Sex

I'll never forget the first "sex talk" I had with our oldest son. "The talk" occurred at my office at the company we owned at the time. It was after hours, when no one was in the office but him and me. It was a very scary moment—for me and him—but I'm glad I did it then.

He had already started to make comments and ask questions that indicated he needed an education. He was about 10 at the time. (I understand that sounds young to some, but it may be old now for others.)

I recognized that helping my children live pure and healthy sexual lives would be a challenge in a culture that is often defined by sex. I wanted to be the primary influencer in their development as adults because I knew no one had a stronger desire for them to make wise choices than me.

I began with a few principles that helped me to continue to have open and honest dialogue with my boys, even in their teenage years and adulthood.

Here are seven suggestions for having the sex talk with your child:

1. Start early. The key here is that you want to be the primary and first source of information for your child. The old saying is true: "If you don't tell them, someone else will." You want to make sure they are getting the correct information about sex. With the oldest, it happened when he was about 10 years of age, but with the youngest it was at about 8 years. It will depend on their surroundings at school, the dialogues they are having with you and others, and their maturity level at the time.

2. Share in stages. A 4-year-old needs to know that there are boys and there are girls and they are each different, but that's about it at that age. Share information based on the child's interest, maturity and ability to understand. I don't believe one talk will be enough for most children. Make sure children feel freedom to discuss anything with you as they have concerns or questions.

3. Answer questions. If your child is willing to ask a question, it is because they want an answer. Many parents make the mistake of telling children they don't need to know something yet. There are no bad questions. Again, they will search for an answer, and the wrong ones are the easiest to find.

4. Teach according to truth, not culture. The fact is that today's culture is mostly wrong about the issue of sex. Culture has tried to redefine what sex is and the purposes and values of sex. Sex is not to be seen as dirty, cheap or easy. Don't be afraid to teach your children to be different from everyone else in culture. Help them understand the healthy role sex can play in building a strong marriage. Help them also understand that in the right context, sex is a wonderful gift from God. (It's OK for them to look forward to something ... even sex!)

5. Deal with the emotional as well as physical. Our children should understand the emotional aspect of sex and the damage that can be caused by sexual activity as much as they should understand the physical aspects. The emotional pain caused by early sexual experiences is usually the most damaging aspect later in life.

6. Teach grace along with truth. The fact is, teenagers (even children) will make mistakes. They'll go too far. They'll wish they hadn't. They'll regret. Probably just like you do at times. Make sure they know they can come to you if necessary. To protect my influence and an open dialogue, I tried to be

careful not to only share truth. I wanted to keep the door open for future conversations, rather than send my boys underground to avoid my wrath.

7. Get help. There are plenty of resources on teaching children the biblical perspective on sex. Don't be afraid to ask for help. This is another great reason to have a mentoring couple in your life!

My two boys called it "the talk." We even began to label it with parts. I think by high school we were on at least "The Talk, Part 31," because they kept having questions as they matured. I don't believe my boys would be as open to talking about such a difficult subject regularly and honestly if I had not established that freedom and practice at an early age.

Are you delaying the discussion because of fear? They will talk about it somewhere ... go first!

What was your experience with this delicate parenting responsibility, either as a child or an adult? Did your parents give you "the talk"?

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