Talking to Children about Sexuality...Let the Conversation Begin

Sexuality Education begins at home and parents are key educators in their child’s life. Conversations regarding sexuality are often postponed or delayed because of not knowing where to begin or what to say. Parents can inform themselves on the topic of sexuality, but of even greater importance is that they are viewed as being “approachable”.

To prepare for these all important conversations, parents should be comfortable with their own thoughts, morals, religious and cultural beliefs about sexuality and be prepared to share them with their child. There are numerous everyday opportunities to have these discussions and to explore values and beliefs that will affect sexual health decision making.

In order to form healthy sexual relationships, children need the following: accurate information, skills in communication and decision-making, a clear set of values and a strong sense of self-worth.

Parents can help their teenagers in the following ways:

1. **Start talking about this topic early.** Parents have a unique opportunity to talk with their teen before they become misinformed through friends or media messages. Questions such as, “How do you feel”, are good conversation starters.

2. **Inform yourself.** Parents can benefit from continuing education on teen health issues. There are many great websites specially geared to support parents on this topic.

3. **Answer questions honestly and accurately.** Together you can seek out information you don’t know. Don’t expect to have all the answers.

4. **Admit if you have discomfort with the topic.** Acknowledge the discomfort and explain it to your teen.

5. **Listen to your teen intently.** Your teen may share more with you this way.

6. **Be relaxed and non-judgmental.** This will lead to mutual trust and respect and your teen will share with you more freely.

7. **Communicate your values.** Teens will want and need moral guidance from their parents.

8. **Discuss the consequences.** The range of consequences includes such things as pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, but try to balance this with positives such as, “Sex is a positive life force, when the time is right”.

9. **Use “teachable” daily moments.** Everyday opportunities present themselves while driving or watching television during which you can talk to your teen regarding sensitive issues.

10. **Encourage healthy choices.** Encouraging the postponement of sexual activity is a healthy choice. We know that most teens are not sexually active, in spite of the myths that “everyone is doing it”. Discuss with your children how to say, “no”, and how they can stick to their beliefs and values so that if they encounter a situation under pressure, they know what to do and what to say.

11. **Discuss “safer sex” choices.** If and when they are ready for this adult activity, you will have discussed the use of latex condoms for disease prevention and some reliable form of birth control.

12. **Remember you are their guide and resource in this important aspect of their life.** Do not tell you teen what to do, rather, encourage conversation, be supportive and listen.

Empower your teen with accurate sexual health information. Be supportive and guide them to make responsible decisions about sexuality. Trust your instincts and begin the conversation.

For more information, please call the Sexual Health Program at 306-655-4642. For additional information you may also visit: https://kidshealth.org/