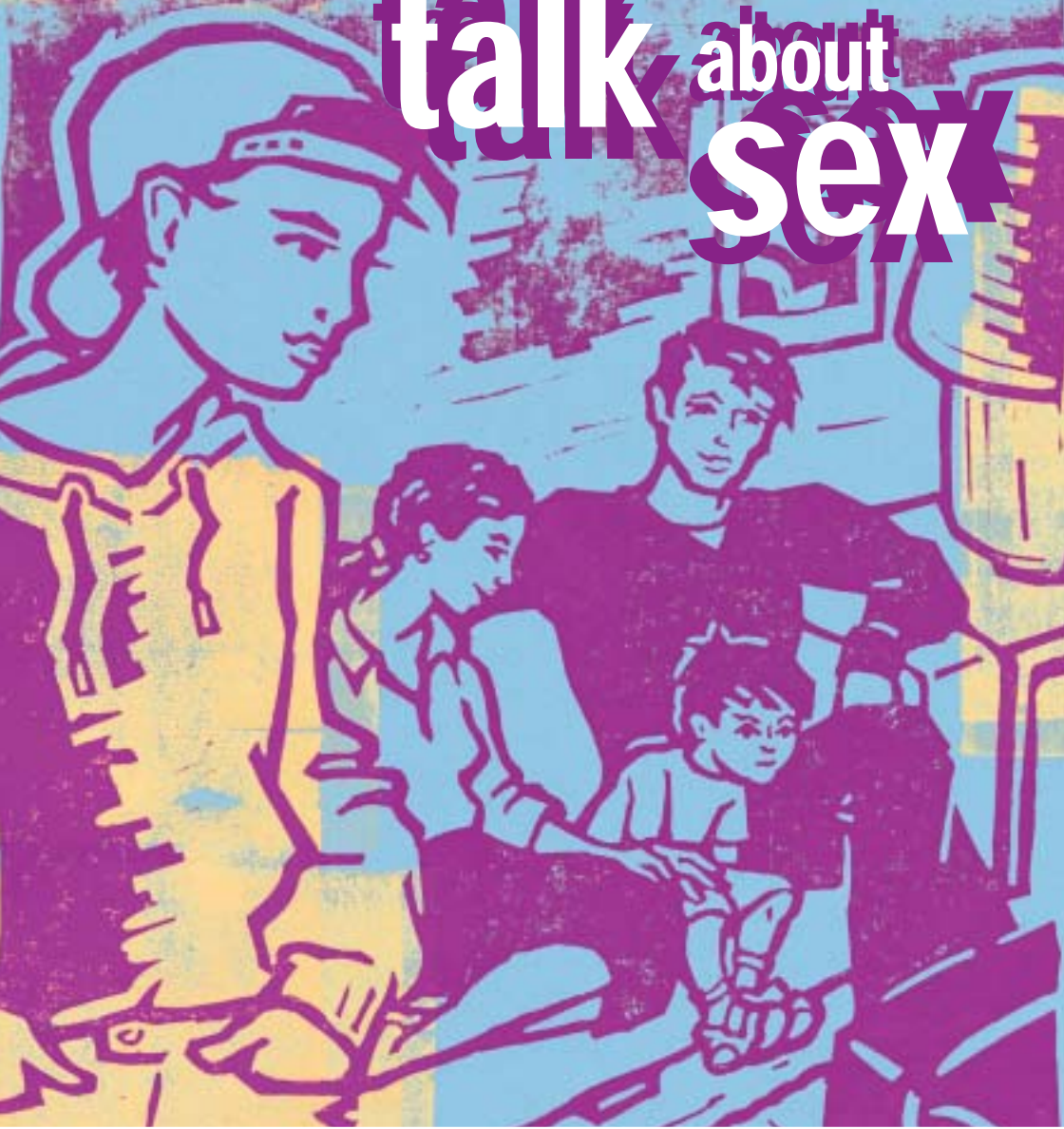


time to talk about sex



“timetotalk”

Parentline_{plus}

Children and young people are learning about sex and relationships from soaps, magazines, adverts, and their friends. They're getting confusing messages about sex – it can seem like everyone is doing it all the time.

Making time to talk shows you are there to support your children – sons and daughters – as they grow up. It helps young people to feel safer and less anxious about sex and relationships. What it does not mean is that you are encouraging your kids to have sex. All the facts show that if you talk openly about sex, young people delay having sex and are more likely to use contraception. They need and want their family to help them to sort out fact from fiction, to understand what is happening to their bodies, to talk about their feelings and their relationships. They want to hear your opinions and what you believe in.

When is the time?

There is no right or wrong time to start talking about sex and relationships but it is easier if it is a gradual process. It often starts when your child is small, answering their questions, and continues until they have grown up. Making your discussions a part of everyday family life, not just a one-off talk, will help you get used to talking to them openly.

// I think she is too young to talk about sex but she asks me questions when she sees stuff on TV //

Younger children

It can be difficult but try to introduce the subject well before puberty so it doesn't become awkward later. Use language that children will understand depending on their age – words they are familiar with. As they grow older they may ask you what

some words mean. Try to explain the words and stay open minded even if you don't like the words they've used. You can explain why you don't like those words.

Growing up

Babies and young children notice how people behave towards each other. As they get older they are curious about how bodies work and how they are different from other people's. At puberty children may be more uncomfortable about admitting what they don't know. That is often why they rely on friends and the media to fill in the gaps and this can be very misleading for them. As children grow up they may not always want to talk to you; they need privacy and they need to start making their own decisions. But they do need to know you will offer support and advice when they need it.

// If he has started having sex, I want to know he is taking care of himself //



Tips for talking

- ✔ Start early by encouraging your children to ask questions and answer them simply. Keep the conversation going as they get older
- ✔ If your child asks an awkward question in public, you can tell them it's an interesting question and you'll talk about it when you get home – and do, otherwise they'll think there is something 'wrong' about asking
- ✔ Ask your child what they think about different situations so you can find out how much they know already. You can then give answers and advice that they can understand
- ✔ Use everyday media to start conversations – soaps, adverts, TV programmes, magazines – then you can talk about other people which is sometimes easier to start with
- ✔ Talk about the importance of considering the feelings of others in relationships, and not just the biology
- ✔ Ask them what they think about waiting to have sex with someone they care about, and who will share the responsibility for contraception and safer sex
- ✔ Find out when sex and relationships are being taught at school, so you can ask your child what they thought of the lessons to open up a conversation
- ✔ Talk when you are doing everyday things together so it feels more natural – washing up, walking somewhere, ironing – so it's a normal part of family life
- ✔ If unsure of the words to use, or how to start talking, get hold of books, leaflets and find websites for you both to look at and talk about together
- ✔ Talk to other parents about how they answer difficult questions and discuss difficult issues

Teenagers, sex and sexuality

As they get older you may find your children's attitudes and values shock and upset you. This might be part of their need to become independent; it might also be helpful to check out your own attitudes, and what is important to you. Show them you are open minded so that they can talk

to you about their sexuality and you can help them find additional and appropriate support if they want it. Talk to someone you trust to sort out your feelings and thoughts so that you can still be there for your child. Call Parentline Plus free on 0808 800 2222 to talk in confidence.

// It was a surprise when my son started asking me questions about my own sex life – he just wanted to know what was ok //



Finding out more

It's difficult to know all the answers to the many questions that can come up, or even know where to start to find good information. Here are a few useful organisations and websites that might help:

Parents

Parentline Plus

A national charity offering: help and information for anyone caring for a child; parenting courses; an information helpline, leaflets and a website.

Free helpline 0808 800 2222
Free textphone service
0800 783 6783 (for people with speech and hearing impairment)
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

FFLAG (Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays),
PO Box 84, Exeter EX4 4AN

Supports parents and their gay, lesbian and bisexual sons and daughters. Has networks of local parents' groups and contacts.

Tel 01454 852 418
www.fflag.org.uk

Sex Education Forum

8 Wakley Street,
London EC1V 7QE

Offers materials and information on sex education.

Tel 020 7843 6052

www.e-parents.org

Information and advice for parents.

Parents, children & young people

Brook

421 Highgate Studios,
53-79 Highgate Road,
London NW5 1TL

Information and counselling for young people on sexual health. Publications for young people and parents.

Helpline 0800 0185 023
(Mon, Tues, Thurs 9am-5pm,
Weds, Fri 9am-4pm)
Publications 01865 719 410
www.brook.org.uk

fpa

(Family Planning Assoc)
2-12 Pentonville Road,
London N1 9FP

Information and advice on all sexual health matters for adults and young people, including puberty and sexual development.

Helpline 0845 310 1334
(Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm)
Publications 01865 719418/413
www.fpa.org.uk

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Tel 020 7837 7324

Children & young people

Sexwise

If you're under 18 and want advice on sex, relationships or contraception call Sexwise on 0800 28 29 30. Calls are free and confidential. Or you can visit us the website at www.ruthinking.co.uk

www.thesite.org.uk

Information for young people on sex and relationships, health, careers and more.

Parentline_{plus}

Parentline Plus, 520 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, Kentish Town, London NW5 1TL.

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