

Guidelines for Parents For Talking with Children or Teens about Sexuality

1. **BE HONEST.** When talking about sexuality, it is best to be honest---not just about the facts of life but about our feelings, attitudes, ignorance, and ambivalence. Children and teens can understand from this that learning about sexuality is a lifelong process. Adults are still learning too.
2. **USE TEACHABLE MOMENTS.** There are many opportunities each day to talk about sexuality. Sexual issues are raised by films, pop music, graffiti, magazines, T.V., etc. When a sexual issue is opened for us by one of these media, we can use the chance to ask an open-ended question, begin a discussion, or make a statement of information or value.
3. **MAKE A DISTINCTION BETWEEN FACTS AND OPINIONS.** It is important for us to clearly label what we are saying as either fact or opinion or belief. It is important to state our own belief or value because teens and children need to know they are important to us; but we also need to acknowledge that other people may have different values. There is very little consensus in this culture about many controversial issues in sexuality ---and the more controversial the issue, the more uncomfortable we are and the more likely we are to state our opinions as though they were fact. Talk about the range of values.
4. **DON'T HESITATE TO SET LIMITS.** It is important to know what your own bottom line is: identify for yourselves what you can accept; what you have difficulty accepting but can tolerate or work on; and what you absolutely cannot accept. Communicate these limits to the professionals with whom you work and with the rest of your family---foster care children as well as natural children. When working with teens, see if you can negotiate limits, encouraging communication, feedback, and flexibility. But once a limit is set, stick to it until it is re-negotiated.
5. **LEARN ALL YOU CAN ABOUT SEXUALITY.** We as adults are still learning and growing about sexuality. New information is being discovered all the time. We need to take the time to read, think, talk, and learn so we can be more effective with our children and teens but also for our growth and learning.
6. **TAKE SOME TIME FOR YOU.** Many of us haven't had the time to really think about our own sexual values and attitudes so when we try to communicate them, it's confusing. Take the time to think.