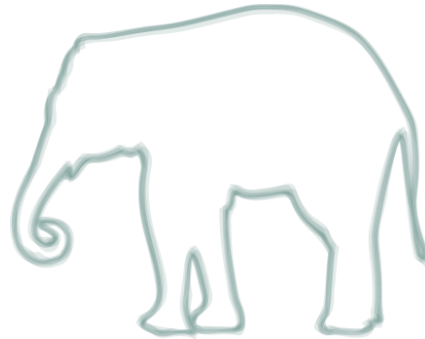


TALKING ABOUT THE *elephant in the living room*



A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS
CONCERNED ABOUT CHILDREN'S SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

**KEEP ALL KIDS SAFE.
BE VIGILANT.
TALK AND LISTEN.**

This newsletter is written for parents and other caregivers, such as grandparents, foster parents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and others who are taking care of children of all ages. We write this series of newsletters to share support, to let you know you are not alone, and to give hope. It is produced by caregivers of children and adolescents who have had problematic or illegal sexual behavior. Although we may not know your story, we have experienced and understand the impact of children's problematic sexual behaviors on caregivers, youth, the family, and others.

For this inaugural issue, we want to focus on keeping all kids safe by *preventing* problematic sexual behavior through parenting, staying vigilant, and maintaining open communication. We share some of our thoughts with you and hope it is helpful.

- Sincerely,

The Parent Partnership Board



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DON'T BE AFRAID TO TALK ABOUT "IT," THAT IS "SEX"

We encourage caregivers to start talking about bodies, sex, and topics about relationships with their child. Communicate. Though it will be difficult, start a conversation. You can do it!



"I am a grandmother and telling my teenage grandson, 'Okay, we're going to talk about sex now.' You know, that's like the last thing he wanted to do and I wasn't really thrilled with it either [laughs]. My grandson had a grandparent or someone that was not the parent, which makes it harder."

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NATURAL OPPORTUNITIES TO OPEN THE CONVERSATION

It can be difficult as a caregiver to talk about sensitive topics. Most parents are not going to just say, "Okay, now we're going to talk about sex and we're going to talk about safe sex." Look for usable examples in real life. Use your child's favorite music, for example. When lyrics of a song are about sex, let it open the door to a conversation about the subject.



"Kids are bombarded today. Social media, TV, school, I mean all day long, every day, the television, the radio, their music. I mean everything that's in their life has some sexual connotation to it. Almost constantly."

"Well, yeah, the song is saying this and that; What do you think about it? Does it sound appropriate?"

Incorporate the discussion into their world. Music, TV, commercials, video games, social media, or out-in-public things happen; we can all see it. Use these times to open the door for communication. We may miss TV shows that were more innocent, but now sex is in kids' faces.

AVOID LECTURING WHEN TALKING ABOUT SEX, INTIMACY, AND OTHER IMPORTANT TOPICS WITH YOUR CHILD

It may be more helpful to have many short conversations with your child where you can start the conversation about bodies, behaviors, sex, and related concerns. Help them think about it in a way that matches your values. Be careful not to go on and on. Kids tend to tune us out when we go on and hear “blah, blah, blah” in their minds.”

Be brave and start the conversation. You and your child may see something together on TV and you can ask open-ended questions in a non-judgmental way; “*What do you think about what you saw?*”, and “*What would be appropriate at your age?*” Help your child think through what’s appropriate at their age.

HELP YOUR CHILD BE ABLE TO THINK THROUGH DIFFICULT AND AWKWARD SITUATIONS.

Take opportunities to check in on how they think they would handle situations about relationships, intimacy, and sexual situations.

“When you start driving and you take a girl or boy out, what’s going to be appropriate for you? Should you drive and hold her hand?”

It may sound silly, but it’s opening a door for the conversation.

“So, after you go to the movie are you going to go park somewhere? What’s going to happen and what are you going to do? Think through this.”



Meet your kid where they are and try to see things from their perspective. Take time to discuss it all. For example, they may be starting a job and you say, “*Well, okay, you know you’re going to be working at this restaurant and there may be drugs and there may be girls. How do you think you would handle that?*”

When children make poor decisions, help them think through next steps. You don’t have to drone on about the poor choice. They made a choice and it was a bad choice, but they need to know that you’re going to help them every single time no matter how you feel. Teach them how to face the consequences of their actions and how to make changes for the better.

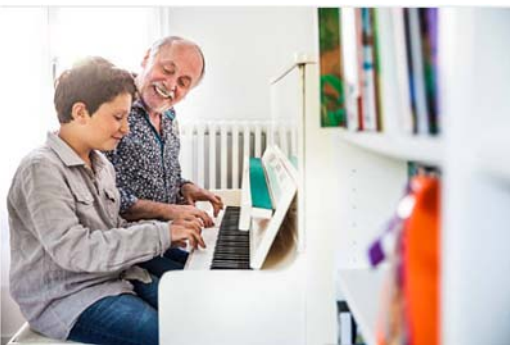
“I really respect you for not getting into that, for resisting that, for realizing that’s what you want. That just makes me very happy.”

LET YOUR CHILD KNOW THEY CAN COME TO YOU WITH QUESTIONS RATHER THAN GOING TO THE INTERNET OR FRIENDS

Create times that encourage communication, such as going out to eat just one-on-one. Ask them about a variety of topics of interest to them and integrate questions about relationships. The way you use openers to conversations is important, because it models and demonstrates that it is okay to discuss sex. For example, *"I'm here to listen and talk about anything, including sex."* Stay calm and attentive when they ask tough questions so they feel comfortable coming back to you when they have more questions in the future.



SHOW THEM YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THEM, EVEN IF YOU DON'T NECESSARILY LIKE THE SAME THINGS



Let your child know you're interested in them and what they're doing. It's one of the most important things to do with them. Sit down with your kids, even if for just 10 minutes, and watch them play video games, or whatever. Ten minutes to them is forever, so if you give them that time and ask, *"So what are you doing there? Why are you...?"*



Then you're showing interest into whatever they're doing and they're going to pause and think, "Wait a minute, you're making time for me." Be genuine and don't overreact to what they say as it could shut them down. Try to be positive about their interests and the reasons they have for it.

IT IS BEST TO START THESE ACTIVITIES WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG, RATHER THAN WHEN THEY ARE ALREADY A TEENAGER

IT IS OKAY IF YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS

Your child may ask or say something and you may not be sure how to respond.

"One of the good things that I've done with the boys is if they've had a question and I'm not ready to answer it, I'm like, 'You know what, let me think about that and I'll get back with you.' And then you can always go for a walk or something and go, 'Ahhhhhhh!' [laughs] You know, go curl up in a corner in the fetal position. But that way you come back with also good answers."

YOU HAVE TO GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO GIVE AN APPROPRIATE ANSWER. YOU DON'T WANT TO SAY SOMETHING THAT YOU'RE GOING TO REGRET.

Don't hesitate to get advice from others and trusted sources to help understand your child's perspective and to know how to respond to their questions.

"I will go talk to my husband about my grandson. and say, 'Yeah, it was a long time ago, but, you know, tell me what your adolescent brain would have been thinking at that time. Tell me, help me think from a boy's perspective.'"

SHARE YOUR VALUES AND BELIEFS IN A WAY YOUR CHILDREN CAN REALLY HEAR

When you're having these conversations or using conversation openers with your children, how do you incorporate your values? What you might be thinking is "I don't need to say what I want them to do because that can shut them down." How do you convey your hopes and values so that they get that information? Be an example because they're very observant. Model the behavior you want them to demonstrate. Ask questions to help them think about what you're sharing with them and to help them take other's perspectives to help understand it all better.

THESE VALUES ARE IMPORTANT WHEREVER YOU ARE.



"I usually ask him, 'Put yourself in the other person's place. You know, how would that feel to you?' and 'If that was said to you or if that happened, what would you feel? What would you be thinking?' And sometimes he has to think about that. You know, actually thinking, 'Well, well, if I were kind of being sexually aggressive with this person or something that would scare me if somebody was, you know, does she feel comfortable?' You know, so yeah, I think it opens some communication with them, too."

TALK WITH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

It is important for you as caregivers to be the one to talk with your child(ren) about friendships, relationships, puberty, intimacy, and sex. Talking with them about sex will not make them “do it.” Having those conversations helps your children have the knowledge they need to make better decisions and develop healthy relationships. The alternative is that your children learn about these things from other children, from the internet, and from others, who may not provide the messages you want them to have.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO MONITOR, SUPERVISE, AND BE THE PARENT

Hang out with your kids when they're on the Internet. Have the computer, iPad, or whatever, in the living room or on the kitchen table when you're cooking dinner. Or, have them play their music for you. You might not really want to listen to it, but it's important for you to know what they're into. You could even go to the concerts they go to. Parents sometimes think that the kids are going to get mad at them or think that you're interfering in their life, but asking and being involved lets your kids know that you care about them and want to know what's going on with them.

BE OPEN ABOUT THE REASONS FOR SUPERVISING THEM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR SAFETY



“I would honestly rather most kids get the correct information than get the information from the TV or the Internet or wherever. And in the end, they're going to make their own decision and we know this. But at least if I have my input in it, or another source that's valued, I believe they're going to make better decisions. Because if they want to do it, they're going to do it.”



“We had put Custodial [computer security software] on his computer, not just because it was required, but because we told him, ‘We know how easy it is to go to the wrong website. I mean something innocent that he might be researching at school led to getting into sites that have bad stuff. And it's like, ‘Oh, how did I get here?’ And then it won't leave you alone! It's like they get your address or something, it's creepy. And so we just wanted him to know if that happens, or something happens that he questions, he can come talk to us. We're not going to judge him, we're not going to get mad at him. We are going to discuss it with him and talk to him. Also, I shut off my internet at 9 o'clock at night because he was staying up all night on that stupid thing.”

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD ABOUT WHAT IS LEGAL AND ILLEGAL

It is common for youth who have had illegal sexual behaviors to say they knew that their sexual behavior was not a good thing to do, but they had no idea how serious it was and what the legal ramifications were. Caregivers, regardless of the age of their child, commonly say, "This wasn't on my radar to even be talking to my kids about." It is important to have these conversations with your kids, particularly around puberty (which is at different ages) and when they are curious. You can usually tell when your child starts getting curious because they look at things differently. Talk to them about making choices and relationships, and also the potential serious consequences that can occur when making the wrong decisions with their sexual behavior.

WHAT'S COMING NEXT

- What to expect out of treatment
- Finding answers
- Interacting with child welfare and juvenile justice personnel
- Supervision tips
- Common reactions from caregivers

For more information on sex education, communication with children, and Internet safety, go to NCSBY.com for resources on healthy sexuality (<http://www.ncsby.org/resources#elem-1>) and ideas for books on sex education and sex education resources (<http://www.ncsby.org/resources#elem-2>).

"In Oklahoma it's not legal to have any type of sexual interaction until you're 16. That's just the law and I don't want to see you get in trouble for something like that."

Become familiar with your state's laws surrounding the sexual behavior of youth. Criminal charges, punishments, and other factors may differ by state and jurisdiction. Your knowledge on this subject may prevent substantial consequences for your family. The website, www.ageofconsent.net, offers some information on state laws and punishments.

In summary, communication with your loved ones is crucial although not always easy. These conversations aid in prevention, increase knowledge, and enhance relationships.

We look forward to sharing information on additional topics in the future newsletters.

- Sincerely,

The Parent Partnership Board



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