

WHAT MESSAGES SHOULD I SHARE?

We all have experiences to share. Some topics might include:

- ✓ Relationships – talk about friendships, love, romantic relationships and responsible sex.
- ✓ Values, decision-making and communication – say why your values are important for you. Give examples of how they work well for you.
- ✓ Growing up – talk about puberty, explain body changes, reproduction, emotional changes and what is safe and what is not as they grow.
- ✓ Good health practices – HIV, pregnancy and other diseases can be prevented,. Share what you know or go together to find out from your local health facility.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY

It is common for parents to feel uncomfortable when talking to their child about sex. Admitting that can be a good way to start the conversation, for example, by saying, “It’s totally normal that this feels uncomfortable, but I love you and care about you so we need to talk about important things like this.”

Throughout the conversation, remember to listen to your child. This shows that you are interested in what they have to say and will help them be more open.

- ✓ Try starting with “What have you heard about (whatever you want to talk about)?”, “What do you think about ...?” or “Can you tell me what you already know about ...?”
- ✓ Share your own experiences, fears and concerns from when you were their age.
- ✓ Be encouraging, ask “Is there anything else you would like to know?”
- ✓ Be sure. Ask, “Does that answer your question?”
- ✓ Do not guess – find answers to tough questions together from your local school or clinic.
- ✓ Supporting comprehensive sexuality education and youth friendly services in schools and communities can help you keep your children safe.

Parents make a difference!



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United Nations
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Talking to your Child About Sexual and Reproductive Health



Adolescence is marked not only by physical changes, but also important behavioural and emotional ones. Young people need information about the changes in their bodies and about sexuality to help them make informed decisions.

Parents and guardians need to start these conversations.

Comprehensive sexuality education means providing children and young people with age-appropriate information, care and support on good sexual and reproductive health and development. It includes topics on: relationships; values, attitudes and skills; culture, society and human rights; human development; sexual behaviour; sexual and reproductive health.

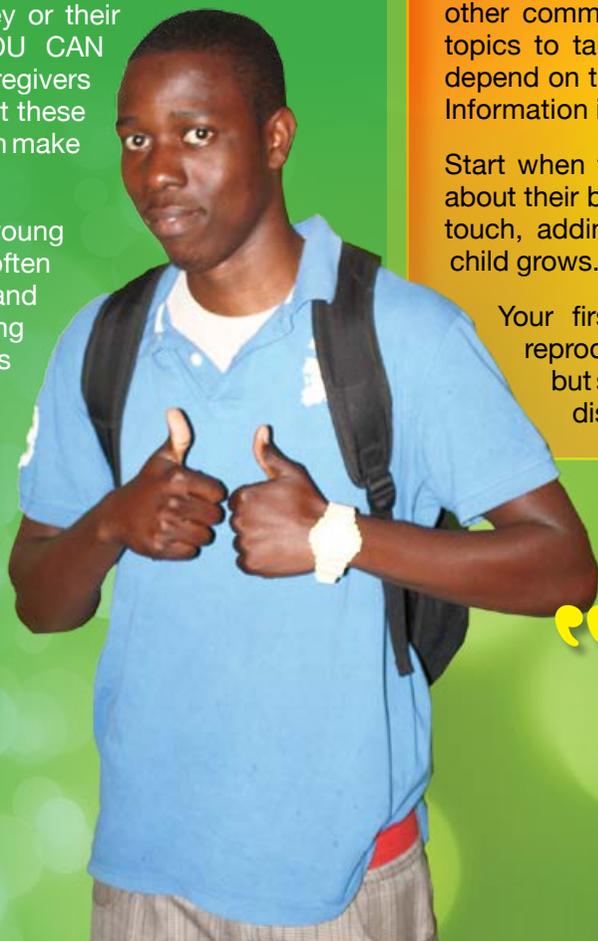
WHY TALK?

Across eastern and southern Africa 52 young people become infected with HIV; of these new HIV infections, 60% are in young women. This highlights the need to ensure that young women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as young men.

Less than 40% of young people have adequate knowledge on preventing HIV. Lack of knowledge contributes to high rates of unintended pregnancy, sexual abuse, and to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

It is clear that young people do not have the information or support to prevent them getting HIV, sexually transmitted infections or pregnant before they or their bodies are ready. **YOU CAN HELP!** Parents and caregivers who can be open about these issues with their children make a difference!

The information young people receive is often surrounded by taboos and misinformation. Getting involved as parents helps ensure the right information is shared at the right time in the right way as a young person grows up; make open, honest, give-and-take conversations about sexuality a normal part of family life.



There are proven benefits to talking to young people about sex and sexuality. It helps to:

- ✓ Delay their first sexual encounter.
- ✓ Encourage having safer sex, including use of condoms and contraceptives, if they are sexually active.
- ✓ Reduce their sexual risk-taking by having fewer partners and less frequent sex.

WHEN TO TALK?

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools or through health service providers and other community groups can help you on what topics to talk about at what age. This will also depend on the individual child and their situation. Information is never too early!

Start when they are very young by telling them about their body parts and about good touch/bad touch, adding more detailed information as the child grows.

Your first talk about sex and sexual and reproductive health should not be a 'one off' but should be a continuation of an ongoing discussion.

“ *teenagers who have discussed these issues with their parents are more likely to make safer, smarter decisions about sex...* ”

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

If there are youth friendly services in your community, the staff there can help you discuss these things with your children. You can go there together, or seek their advice.

Some top tips for talking to your children are:

- ✓ Watching a TV programme that shows a young person at risk and/or making good or bad choices.
- ✓ Reading a newspaper article together about unplanned pregnancy, HIV or STI.
- ✓ Find a quiet, private place at home where you will not be interrupted, or when relaxing and doing something enjoyable together, such as cooking, walking or playing a game.
- ✓ Taking advantage of moments like these makes conversations about sex and sexuality easier and more natural!
- ✓ Talking about your own childhood and including stories about things that happened then are also useful starters.

