

## Talking to Your Pre-Teen About Sex and Relationships

It's important to recognize that your pre-teen probably knows – or at least thinks they know - a lot more about sex than you might expect. They're learning about sex from their world of friends, movies, TV, videos, magazines, and the web.

Your child's school probably has some sex education in it's curriculum, but it's ultimately your responsibility to be involved in educating your pre-teen about issues of puberty, physical health and the moral aspects of sexual behaviour.

Your child needs your input and guidance to make appropriate decisions regarding their sexual behaviour. Whether they admit it or not, they are likely confused by what they have seen or heard -and the information they know might be incredibly inaccurate.

By talking to you pre-teen about sex you can have the most positive and powerful influence on their sexual maturity.

Here are some tips:

- **Relax!** It's okay to feel uncomfortable talking about sex with your pre-teen. Let your child know that you don't know everything but you are willing to find out for them.
- **Start Early!** Teaching your children about sex can start as early as toddler age. Naming body parts such as toes and fingers, parents can start their children's sex education by naming proper body parts, like penis and vulva. As your child grows, you can continue their education by adding more materials gradually. You can continue by teaching them about touch. Help them to know that they should talk to you if anyone touches a part of their body that is covered by a swimsuit.
- **Talk about body changes and body image!** Your pre-teen's body is undergoing dramatic physical changes. Make sure they have a solid grasp of physical and emotional changes that they can expect to experience as they pass through puberty.
- **Let them know that sex is normal!** Everything they have heard or seen on TV or in music and from their friends may have them thinking that sex is 'weird' or 'perverted'. Help them see that sexuality is not what is usually represented in the media. You need to listen carefully and dispel this misinformation.
- **Let them know your values!** Values are what you believe in. If you want your 'tween' to have your values about sexuality, then share your values with them. Although your child may not adopt these values as they mature, at least they'll be aware of them as they struggle to figure out what they feel and believe.

- **Talk about choices and consequences!** There are some heavy issues that come along with being sexually active – pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, the intensity and potential vulnerability that result from a decision to be sexually intimate with another person, the feelings about sex are important things that you need to discuss with your pre-teen. Help them to consider the consequences of their choices.
- **Listen to your ‘tween’ without judging them!** Accept that your pre-teen may see things differently. Share your opinions, values, and views in a non-threatening way. You can disagree without condemning or belittling your child. Your pre-teen won’t open up to you if they’re afraid of being put down or punished.

By developing open, honest and ongoing communication about responsibility, sex, and choice, parents can help their preteens learn about sex in a healthy and positive manner.

For more information call 1 800 265 7293 or visit [www.wdghu.org](http://www.wdghu.org) for downloads and links on this topic.

May is Sexual Abuse Prevention Month. This article is one of a series that addresses the issue of tween sexuality.

Contact the Violence Prevention Program at Family Transition Place for more information about SAPM activities or other violence prevention services. Phone 941- 4357 or 1-800 265-9178 or visit our website [www.familytransitionplace.ca](http://www.familytransitionplace.ca)