

Rev. Dr. Debra Haffner Notes on Talking to your Toddler through Twelve-Year-Old Children in Regards to Sex- May 6, 12pm at the Teton County Library

Parents continue to want to do a better job teaching and talking about sexuality. How do you give your values to your kids? Kids know how to get information. They will get information from friends, the internet, books. Only you can give your family values- they can't get that from anywhere else.

The Big Talk

8 out of 10 parents think sex education is their job, but truth is we fall really short. The big talk is always super uncomfortable and actually doesn't really work. A lot of bad advice exists out there and a big part of a parents' job is to correct the misinformation. It is not a good idea to wait for your child to come to you with their questions, just like you would not wait to teach your children about crossing the street, or how to handle fire safely. We want to be proactive in our teaching of topics of sexuality. As #metoo has proven, there have been many people hurt by the lack of education around healthy sexuality and healthy boundaries. Introduce early, but slowly. Look for teachable moments- everyday moments. Examples include passing a pregnant lady, bath time, the news, front pages of magazines, #metoo discussions on the radio. Talking about body parts with toddlers is a great start to sexual education.

Talking to your children is a 3 part process when you are asked or using a teachable moment:

- 1- Find out what they already know about the subject
- 2- Give correct information, or correct misinformation
- 3- Share your values about the subject

Step #1 is very important for a couple reasons. First, it gets your kid talking and sharing and you listening which is essential. Second, you want to be sure you know where the kid is coming from before diving into a topic and in this way you can meet them where they are. Here as an example of this dialogue...

You overhear your seven-year-old mention 'Oral Sex' to a kid in the car...

Step One

Parent: "I heard you mention oral sex to Johnny. What do you know about that?"

Kid: "Oh, that is when you have sex on the phone"

Step Two

Parent: "Oral sex is actually when people use their mouths for pleasure on different body parts, the vulva or the Penis"

Kid: "that is disgusting"

Step Three

Parent: "Our family values are that oral sex (insert your family values here)"

(And then be prepared for the kid to ask you "do you and dad do that ?!" What will you say?)

Kids understand the difference between thoughts/feelings, and behaviors. (For example: Anger vs. Hitting; Feeling attracted vs. Having Sex) What do parents do when you get in a situation you're not prepared for (TV Shows, hard questions). Think ahead and have an idea/plan for what your values are, what values you want to convey. Practice how are you going to handle certain questions. You could practice with a spouse or friend. You introducing concepts to your kids allows you to impart your values around these difficult topics. "Private" is a very important concept! Privacy around shut doors (kid's or adult's) is an opportunity to show respect by knocking and asking to enter. It's okay to be uncomfortable. It's okay to make a mistake. You can come back later if you didn't answer something well. Choice and consent concepts can also be taught at a very young age. For example,

don't insist kids give hugs if they don't want to. Let different generation family members know ahead of time the concepts you are conveying to your child. Their body is theirs and they don't have to touch others or be touched by others if they don't want to. (Some exceptions apply - seeing a Dr. etc.)

Electronics

Internet pornography- the average first exposure age is 11-12.

School aged children should be monitored. Common Sense Media is a great resource. Kids say Facebook is for old people. Kids tend to use social media apps such as snapchat, twitter, Instagram. Children under 12 do not belong on social media apps or messaging apps. Children do not need smartphones. It is still possible to buy flip phones! Try to reduce exposure, even for homework use. Don't 'spy' on your children, instead have systems in place that allows you to monitor their use any time.

Schools and Sex Ed

Research shows that abstinence-only curriculum offers a 6-18-month onset delay, and kids will substitute other behaviors (for example, oral sex) and do not use contraception. Remember when talking to children, include positives about healthy sexual behavior, not just the negatives.

Audience member asked about clothing choices: How to address modesty and appropriate clothes without using shaming language. Haffner reminded about knowing and sharing your personal values when discussing clothes. Parents get to control what kids are wearing, especially if they are the ones purchasing the clothes.

Rev. Dr. Deb Haffner Notes on Talking to your Middle School through High School Children in Regards to Sex- May 6, 6pm at the Teton County Library

Every generation thinks parenting is hard, from the time of Socrates to the present. During Middle and High School, adolescents are de-satellitizing meaning they are separating from their parents and forming their own values and identities. The good news is that current data suggests that teenagers are behaving more responsibly than 21 years ago. Since 1991, teens have used less alcohol, drugs, less likely to have had intercourse (about 50% HS students have), the teen pregnancy and abortion rate is also lower than in 1991 and the greatest condom use across the ages comes from age 15-24 age young men.

Parents who are invested and engaged with their kids cultivate less risky behavior. That being said, only 4 in 10 adolescents say their sex education comes from their parents. It is important to talk *with* rather than *at* your kids and to share your personal/family values. If you want them to abstain, be specific about what you want them to abstain from and for how long. Think about why you want them to abstain. Is there some discomfort around our adolescents becoming sexual? Define mature sexual behaviors and have them ask themselves how they might know they were ready for sex.

A general guideline for moral, ethical sexual relationships: CUHMP

C - Consent (enthusiastic agreement) - Don't create a sex life around one person being enthusiastic and one not. Use words like 'I'm ready for..., are you? I'd like to....., I'd love to....."

U - Un-exploitive - People have a lot of bad reasons for having sex (for example, revenge sex). Do not use people and let sex be pleasurable.

H - Honesty - What does your relationship mean? What are you doing together? People often lie to have sex.

M - Mutually Pleasurable - Good sex happens when partners are interested in pleasing their partner as much as themselves. You need time, shared values and good communication skills to have good sex.

P - Protected - To prevent spread of STI and pregnancy. We often think our kids know more than they really do because of the language they use, but they may not be as sophisticated/knowledgeable as we think.

Communication Points for the Talking about Sex

Listen to your children! Teens want to be heard and trusted. Use teachable moments, keep it short, and use tv, YouTube, music, etc., to ask, "What are you seeing?" "What values are being expressed?" "What roles are being played?" (75% of prime time tv and music has sexual content)

3 Parts:

1 - Identify something in your environment to use as a teachable moment (magazine cover, radio topic, song lyrics). Find out what your kids know. "What does that mean?" "What do you think about this?"

2 - Listen and correct misinformation, say "Tell me more."

3 - Give them your family values "In our family, we think...."

Supervise and monitor your kids ----chaperone parties and don't allow them to be left alone at home over the weekend. Teen proof your house for alcohol and prescription drugs. Most RX drug use comes from leftover pills found in parents medicine cabinets. Have conversations in advance about consequences for infractions/breaking house rules.

Technology issues:

Check their phone/laptop browsing histories; Monitor their phone usage and take it away if they abuse it; Have rules about their technology/phone use; Advise them that EVERYTHING they post is permanent they should never post anything they would not want their grandmother to see; Never meet anyone alone that they have only met online; No dating apps; Have them talk to their parents if they receive any disturbing messages or pictures. It is important to educate yourself and know more than your kids about technology. Check your own screen usage. What are you modeling with phone and laptop use at home?