

Ready...or Not!!!

A Family Guide for Conversations about Puberty

Families with preteens/teens often find the opportunities to talk less and less available at the very times they actually need them more and more.

Parents are the most valuable source of information for their children as they grow through adolescence.

Whether your preteen and teenage children say so or not, they really do want to hear from you.

Ready or not...here they come!

- ✓ Be ready to offer information for now and for later
- ✓ Provide the balance they need
- ✓ Enhance their "knowledge" with your "understanding"
- ✓ Offer family perspectives whenever possible
- ✓ Be their trusted resource - take them seriously - don't tease and tell

Turn "the talks" into conversations- what exactly should we say - when, where, and how much?

- ✓ Think of the typical timely topics
- ✓ Have conversations with "consideration" of:
 - their age
 - their developmental stage
 - their life experiences
- ✓ Keep a positive perspective - this is about their personal GROWTH (not just about their safety and prevention)
- ✓ Stay up to date on the facts
 - Changing relationships
 - Changing bodies
 - Risks such as STD's, teen sexual behavior, teen pregnancy
 - Current school, community, national, teen, and media issues
- ✓ Give them the INFORMATION
 - check to see what they already know, and tell them clearly what you want to say (practice first)
 - ✓ in a way they can UNDERSTAND
 - use a story so they can see it in their life, and help them "feel" the information by relating it personally to something they are interested in or to someone they know
 - ✓ and include a MEANINGFUL message
 - give them a way to apply it later on in more difficult (or more positive) situations - help them see and believe in the "bigger picture" of what this could mean - now and in the future

Don't forget family messages as a way to add values to your conversations.

- ✓ Help them sort through the gray areas
- ✓ Don't assume - tell them what you want them to know in a way they can really understand
- ✓ Make sure you understand the values yourself

- ✓ Always be aware that they see what you're saying

As you're beginning conversations...try some of these hopefully helpful hints.

- ✓ Don't let "the good" go unsaid
- ✓ Remember it's about "interest" - not "arousal"
- ✓ Watch out for "reaction" vs "response"
- ✓ Tell them if you're embarrassed - it can set the stage for their questions in the future
- ✓ Pick good times and places - in the car, during another activity, with a cue that it's coming
- ✓ Keep it short, but be ready to say it again, and again, and again
- ✓ Turn the facts into useable information
- ✓ Teach them when to know how to say "no" - especially with adults who disappoint them and you
- ✓ Use the media - help them understand the difference between entertainment and reality

She didn't look happy.

Do you think he could trust her?

If that ever happened to me, I would really feel bad.

If she were your friend, what would you tell her to do?

I think it should be special.

He acted like he just didn't care.

She was honest. That's important when you love someone.

You could tell they really cared about each other.

- ✓ Ask their opinions and LISTEN
- ✓ Try various styles - make it fun, interesting, comfortable, sincere
- ✓ Practice, practice, practice

Take advantage of opportunities to:

Create a moment

Every year on their birthday, tell them the story about the day they were born.

Get out pictures of yourself as a teen or your old school yearbook.

Talk about a book or article in the news that you've read...and what new things you learned.

Expand a moment

Use the media - talk about the movie or TV show you've just seen...discuss your embarrassment, concern, enjoyment...but be sure to compare the difference between "entertainment" and "reality".

Ask them their opinion about a character's situation (or a friend's), and listen to their suggestions about alternatives to different problems.

Turn a moment around

If they have an extreme perspective in a difficult situation, stay calm. If you get too emotional, they won't hear what you're saying, and you won't hear their point of view. Listen as they "talk it out" and describe for themselves what is acceptable and what pushes beyond their personal limits.

Give them someone else to count on when you can't be there yourself.

- ✓ Choose another trusted adult for your child - now and in the future