



The Chat (How and When to Talk about Sex) Age Guide and Resources

PART ONE - Children aged two to 12

Agnes 2-3

Where they are at: Curious about their private parts and sometimes those of others.

What they need to know:

- The right words for private body parts, such as penis, vagina, vulva, scrotum, genitals, breasts etc. When we teach them the correct names, they have no overwhelming shyness about that part of their bodies. Using cutesy names for these but not for other parts of the body can cause confusion.
- They should understand that these parts are not bad or dirty, but are private. They should know that they are not to be touched by anyone but themselves, a doctor or nurse during a specific medical exam or a parent if necessary.
- Modesty, privacy of those parts of the body should be emphasised. Explain that they should not touch their private parts excessively or in public. Never scold them about this, rather speak gently so as not to cause them to feel shame about sexual things.

Age 3-5

Where they are: Magical thinkers. If they don't get accurate, factual information, they will make up a story to explain things.

What they need to know:

- Answer all questions honestly (no storks!).
- Where a baby comes from. But they won't understand all the details of reproduction so a simple "A seed from dad and an egg from mom came together inside mom's tummy which made a tiny baby. Mom has a uterus inside her tummy, where you lived until you were big enough to be born". Later they may ask how a baby is born. Stick with the literal response: "When you were ready to be born, the uterus pushed you out through Mommy's vagina." Some kids may ask more questions about how the seed got there, but most will be satisfied with that.
- Remind children that areas covered by swimming costumes are off-limits to other people as children can be quite curious at this age. Again, if you find them in the act of genital show-and-tell with a sibling or friend, never address this with shame. Just keep emphasizing that your child's body is private and precious and off-limits to other people. And that the same applies to their friends' bodies.

Age 6-9

Where they are at: Widely curious about the facts of life. Often questions like "Where do babies come from?" or "What is sex?" will come up. This age group presents the perfect window of opportunity to talk about sex, since kids are better able to understand concepts, but they are not old enough to be super-embarrassed. In general, let your child's natural curiosity guide you, although if they don't ask you may have to initiate.

What they need to know:

- The basics of sexual intercourse. Avoid euphemisms like sleeping together or making love. "Having sex" is the most clear-cut. "Sex is when a man puts his penis in a woman's vagina. It is only for adults." You can say, "God created male and female bodies to fit together like puzzle pieces. When the penis and the vagina fit together, sperm, like tadpoles, swim through the penis and up to the egg." Explain that sex is something special and that marriage is the best and safest place for it.
- They may ask additional questions like: how does the baby grow, how does it come out, is it painful, how does it get out such a small hole? How come so-and-so has a baby and she's not married? Give matter of fact answers. However deeply you delve into the complexities of adult life is dependent on

the age and readiness of your child and upon your life-situation. Without condemning others or justifying irresponsibility, we do need to teach them that sexual activity should not be taken lightly. God teaches us to have sex only in the marriage context not because he wants to be a killjoy but to maximize enjoyment and prevent painful consequences. Sex between one man and one woman who are married and committed to each other is the safest and most pleasurable place for sex.

- If they ask questions that shock you, don't scream and run for cover. Answer factually. You may be asked questions about oral sex or rape. If you think your children are ready for it, answer by giving the simple facts. If we have covered the basics well, these questions are much easier to answer. I think the important thing is that we address all questions calmly and without fear or shame, but with an understanding of consequences.
- Puberty happens earlier these days. It is very scary for girls if they are unprepared. Use teachable moments (like your tampons in the bathroom cupboard) to teach about menstruation.
- As we answer all these questions, we want to be accurate while always reinforcing the fact that sexuality is a beautiful, precious thing which, at the right time with the right person, is incredible. It is imperative that we avoid judgment, condemnation or fear. We are imparting knowledge while building self-esteem and self-worth.

Age 9-12

Where they're at: "Gross-me-outer". Sex is gross and you are disgusting for wanting to talk to me about sex. Many tweens are already convinced they know it all and may be using sexual lingo without really knowing what it means. Hormonal rollercoaster with lots going on in their bodies. They are starting to be exposed to the highly sexualized on-line world.

What they need to know:

- Changes which will happen during puberty: pimples, periods, hair growth, breast budding. Also be ready to discuss sex-related topics your child sees in the news.
- By 12 kids are formulating their own values, so check in every so often to provide a better context for the information your child's getting. Don't assume your kids will absorb your family's beliefs and values through the air.
- This is a good time to talk about consequences, responsibility and future behaviours (how to break up with someone, what to do if someone likes you and you don't like them, what is ok with a boyfriend). But avoid overkill or you'll be tuned out. At this age the car is a great place to have conversations (actually at any age) because sometimes kids feel more comfortable to talk about stuff if they don't have to make eye contact. Also for parents!
- Ongoing dialogue regarding technology is important. Equip your tween to be a safe, responsible technology user. Remember most social media has an age restriction of 13.
- Pornography must be spoken about. In South Africa the average age of exposure to porn is 11. Talk about porn in general terms, avoiding explicit descriptions. Tell them to come to you immediately if they see it, so that you can help them process it.

(This age guide was adapted from an article entitled *Age-by-age Guide to Talking to Kids about Sex* which was published on www.todaysparent.com)

PART TWO - Tweens and Teens

Teens need to know:

1. **Who they are** - strong in their identity as children of God and their sexuality as part of that identity
2. **To choose courage over self-preservation** - The path which requires courage is usually the right one. It is when we choose what we know is right, no matter the cost, when we look ahead to our future rather than being caught up in a moment, driven not by fear or intimidation but by love, knowing we are created for great things.
3. **The difference between love and lust** - Love leads to long-lasting healthy relationships. Lust leads to hell on earth. - addiction, inability to be truly intimate, shame, death of relationships, disease... Know the difference and act in love - towards yourself, towards your neighbor and towards God. He is Love.
4. **Shame is a liar and a killer** - You are not a product of your actions and mistakes or of what has been done to you. "Our sexuality can be made beautiful again by giving it to God, receiving his grace and allowing him to set us free." Bevere The Story of marriage.
5. **That is nothing you won't talk about** and nothing that will change your love for them. Here are some topics you should cover in your ongoing conversations:
 - Masturbation
 - Different kinds of sex
 - Attraction, respect and self-control
 - Gender and sexual orientation
 - Dating
 - Technology (sexting, porn, online relationships, social media)
 - Drugs and alcohol
 - Abstinence
 - Consent and safe sex

SOME PRACTICALS

1. **Start early** Cover the basics well
2. **Deal with your stuff.** Creating a safe space. Your fears and hurts will hamper your ability to talk openly and lovingly about sex. Your discomfort could cause them to feel shame around sex. Get help if you need it.
3. **Push past the discomfort.** The eye-rolling and the long silences. Even if it feels awkward, it is so worth it.
4. **Connection and unconditional love.** Be a safe space for them to process what they are hearing and seeing. What you can say to your child is very dependent on the strength of your relationship. It is not just about information, it is about being on a journey with them, loving, guiding, modelling and teaching.
5. **Secure** but not judgmental. Teaching your children to stand firm in their convictions but to be loving and respectful of all people. Just as Jesus did.
6. **Vision not fear.** Sex is beautiful and worth waiting for. It is also complex, powerful and something you are meant to figure out with someone you love and trust over the duration of your lifetime. Talk about sex in the big picture and paint it as a healthy and beautiful part of humanity.
7. **Intentionality and repetition.** Make time, initiate conversations and look for opportunities. These are on-going evolving conversations.
8. **Listen and discuss** don't lecture. Remind them that your role is to keep them safe and help them make good choices through guidance and boundaries.
9. **Use the media** to create teachable moments. It is easier to talk about someone else! You can explore issues like attraction, gender, dating, break-ups, pregnancy, teen sex and a whole lot more through songs, series, newspaper headlines.
10. **Choose your legacy.** Your sexual history may not be a pretty one. With Jesus you get to build a new legacy for your children.

Sources & Resources

- Birds, Bees and Destinies by Christy Herselman

- God's Design for Sex Series (Navpress)
- Where do Babies Come From: Girls age 7 - 9 by Ruth Hummel (part of the Learning about Sex series)
- Bringing Up Girls and Bringing Up Boys by James Dobson
- Purity: The New Moral Revolution by Chris Vallaton
- The Truth About Sex by Kay Arthur
- The Story of Marriage by John and Lisa Bevere
- Jesus on Objectification and Oppression (Podcast by John Marc Comer of Bridgetown Church, Portland)
- Lovology by John Marc Comer
- www.thechat.co.za
- www.focusonthefamily.com
- www.fightthenewdrug.org
- www.moralrevolution.com
- www.parenting.com
- Issue Paper: No 30. Sexual Offences: Pornography and Children.