

PROMOTING HEALTHY SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT & SEXUALITY

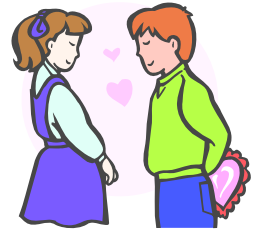


Bright Futures for FAMILIES



Healthy sexual development and sexuality is an important part of a child's overall healthy development. It involves much more than teaching your child about sex. It includes helping your child:

- Develop a healthy body image so your child is comfortable with who he or she is
- Develop healthy relationships with others
- Learn about his or her body and parts that are private
- Learn appropriate ways to show affection
- Learn when and where it is appropriate to display sexual behaviors
- Learn the difference between love and sex
- Learn how to make a responsible decision about being sexually active



Child and Family



Children and youth make better and more responsible decisions about their bodies when they have trusted adults to talk to, and strong connections with their families, friends and communities.

Ages and Stages

➤ **Infancy:** Healthy sexual development begins in infancy. When you respond to your baby's needs by smiling, hugging, rocking, feeding, and other physical and verbal cues, your baby knows he or she is safe and loved. This early relationship helps set the tone for how your baby will respond to other close relationships later in life.



➤ **Early Childhood:** Children begin to notice that boy and girl bodies are not the same. And, they may begin to touch themselves. This can be a good time to talk about private parts. Be sure to talk about when and where children should cover

certain body parts. Also, talk about the people and places where others may see their body. This might be at home, or at the doctor's office. Talk about people (parents, health providers) who may see their body, and those who should not, even if they ask.

➤ **Middle Childhood:** Children may begin to wonder about their bodies, how they work, where babies come from, and about sex. This may be a time to help your child understand differences in body types and the changes to expect as they grow. Young children with special health needs or disabilities may need more help understanding how their bodies will change and develop. Five to ten

year olds are also learning how to respond to other people's feelings. This is an important part of family relationships and friendships.

- **Adolescence:** Teens are developing more relationships outside of their families. Their circles of friends may include boys and girls. Your daughter or son may have a first 'crush.' Some

teens may be ready to for boy-girl relationships. Teens may also start to test limits and try risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and sex. Youth with special health needs may need additional supports to understand changing relationships, and the why and how to avoid risky behaviors.

What Can Families Do to Promote Healthy Sexual Development & Sexuality?

- Create a close physical bond with your baby. Hold her close for comfort when she cries. Respond to the faces and sounds she makes, and help calm her to sleep.
- Keep a close relationship with your children as they grow:
 - Talk with them
 - Listen to them
 - Laugh together
 - Let them know you love them
- Use the correct name for body parts.
- Teach your children about "private parts."
- Make sure your children understand that **NO ONE** touches their private parts except for trusted adults.
- Believe your children if they tell you someone touched them, or forced them to do something that made them uncomfortable.
- Answer your children's questions about sex honestly.
- Ask your teens about their friends and other relationships.
- Discuss the reasons to delay having sexual relations.
- Talk to your teen about sexually transmitted infections and birth control.
- Respect and understand your teen's choices about sexual identity.
- Children and youth with special health needs/disabilities have these same questions and feelings. Support your child. Help him learn how his disability may affect his sexual development and sexuality.



Resources

- Family Voices Bright Futures for Families – Additional resources and Bright Futures: Family Matters free e-newsletter - www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org
- Advocates for Youth: Rights, Respect and Responsibility for reproductive and sexual health information to support youth's healthy sexual development - www.advocatesforyouth.org/parents/index.htm
- American Academy of Pediatrics Healthy Children – How to Talk about Sex with Your Teen - www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/How-to-Talk-About-Sex-With-Your-Teen.aspx
- Children Now – Talking with Kids about Tough Issues - www.talkingwithkids.org
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network – Sexual Development and Behavior in Children: Information for Parents and Caregivers - www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/caring/sexualdevelopmentandbehavior.pdf
- Sexuality and Kids with Disabilities or Chronic Illnesses, a compendium of resources, many disability-specific, by the University of Michigan Health system - www.med.umich.edu/yourchild//topics/disabsex.htm
- Talk About Sex – Youth site of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), with information about staying healthy, gender identification, communication, relationships, sexual abuse, and more - www.seriouslysexuality.com/

Credits

The American Academy of Pediatrics is the home of Bright Futures. This material is adapted for families from Hagan JF, Shaw JS, Duncan PM, eds, 2008, *Bright Futures Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents*, 3rd Edition, Elk Grove, IL. See "Promoting Healthy Sexual Development and Sexuality," pgs 169 – 175. See also: <http://brightfutures.aap.org>

Bright Futures Themes - Promoting...

Family Support ♥ Child Development ♥ Mental Health ♥ Healthy Weight ♥ Healthy Food & Eating ♥ Physical Activity ♥ Oral Health ♥ **Healthy Sexual Development & Sexuality** ♥ Safety & Injury Prevention ♥ Community Relationships & Resources