

RAISING HEALTHY KIDS®

Families
Talk About
Sexual Health

For Parents of Preadolescents
and Adolescents

FAMILY HEALTH
PRODUCTIONS

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About *Raising Healthy Kids*®: *Families Talk About Sexual Health*

Most parents admit it's challenging to talk with children about sex. Many were raised in homes where sexuality wasn't discussed. Others fear that talking about sex encourages sexual activity. This isn't so. Research shows that young people who talk openly with their parents about a range of subjects make safer choices.



As a medical reporter, I've written about sexual health for more than 20 years. While producing our program *In Our Own Words*®: *Teens and AIDS*, I was impressed by the young people we profiled. They talked with their parents with ease about sensitive subjects, including sex and death. They explained to me that their HIV diagnosis broke down barriers and forced them to talk. They said if they'd talked candidly years earlier, their lives may have been saved.

What I learned from these families led me to produce *Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health*. Parents and other caregivers who view and discuss the program can learn information and skills to help them communicate more effectively with their children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanne Blake". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jeanne Blake
President, Family Health Productions

Showing *Raising Healthy Kids*

Raising Healthy Kids can be viewed by groups of parents in the workplace or at a community event. It can also be viewed by parents in their homes, using this guide for discussion with their spouse, partner, or friends.

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abouthealth.com Family Health Productions Web Site

Read how families talk about the challenges young people face growing up. At abouthealth.com, young people and parents talk about topics ranging from bullying and sexual health to body image. Experts offer tips on family communication.

Being Your Young Person's Sexuality Educator

► Introduction

Children learn about sexuality every day from their friends, the media, and the world around them. They observe your interactions with other adults. They notice how comfortable you are with your own body. These verbal and non-verbal messages are part of your child's sexuality education. Let's watch the first segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear about a parent's role as their child's sexuality educator.

► Ask parents

- How was sexuality discussed in your home?
- What would you like to do differently as a parent?
- Were you given accurate names for your body parts?
- How old were you when you learned about sex?
- Who taught you about sex?
- Do you and your spouse or partner share the same values about how to talk with your child about sexuality?

► Remind parents

Young people want their parents to talk with them about sexuality. It may not always seem so, but they want to know what you think and believe. Young people say they're influenced by their parents' opinions.

Listening

▶ Introduction

Keeping communication with a child open is a big challenge. It requires commitment, patience, and a willingness to listen. As your child enters adolescence, he or she may test you by saying things just to get a reaction. If you react in a negative way, you can shut down communication. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear about the importance of listening to your child.

▶ Ask parents

- In the program, Barbara listened and kept her cool when her son admitted to watching pornographic films. What was Barbara's pay-off for staying calm?
- If your child said something you found upsetting, how would you react?
- What's the difference between talking *with* or *at* your child?
- Why is it important to ask children what *they* think?
- When talking with your child, how do you show you are really listening?
- How can you follow up with your child after a difficult discussion?

▶ Remind parents

You communicate with your child verbally and non-verbally. Remember to listen with your eyes *and* your ears.

Being Approachable

► Introduction

Honesty and respect help keep communication open. If you are non-judgmental, your child is more likely to trust you and ask you for guidance. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents try to keep communication open.

► Ask parents

Sexuality education is an ongoing process. It's important to be prepared for questions, even those you find embarrassing or difficult to answer. Consider what you'd say if your child asked any of these frequently asked questions.

- When is someone old enough to have sex?
- How old were you when you first had sex?
- How do you know if you're in love?
- Did you and Dad have sex before you got married?
- What does it mean to be gay?
- What's a condom?
- How does someone know if they're pregnant?

► Remind parents

If you don't know the answer to a question your child asks, you can say, "Let's find out together." You can search in a book or on the Internet. If your child's question makes you feel uncomfortable, you can say, "I need time to think about that. Let me get back to you." Make sure you follow up prepared to talk about the subject.

Talking About Sexual Intercourse

► Introduction

Many parents are embarrassed to talk with their children about sexual intercourse. Some worry that talking about sex will encourage their children to be sexually active. This isn't so. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents handle this issue.

► Ask parents

- Why is it important for children to learn about sexual intercourse from a parent or another trusted adult?
- What values do you want to give your young person about sexual intercourse?
- If your young person asked at what age it's O.K. to have sex, would you assume he or she was considering having sexual intercourse?
- If you learned that your young person's attitudes about sex are different from yours, how would you respond?

► Remind parents

Talking about sexual intercourse doesn't encourage sexual activity. Research from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that young people whose parents talk openly and skillfully with them about sexuality, including condoms, tend to delay sexual intercourse. And if they do have sex, they're more likely to use protection. It's important that you share your values with your children about sexual intercourse and what it means within a special, loving relationship.

Relationships

► Introduction

If you want your child to experience healthy, trusting, loving relationships as an adult, it's important that you are a good role model for those values. Children learn by observing. The media is a powerful influence on children and sometimes portrays irresponsible relationships. So it's important that you let your child know what you consider a respectful, responsible relationship. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents talk about healthy relationships.

► Ask parents

- In the program, Felix emphasizes the importance of being a positive role model for young people. How do you model healthy, positive relationships for your child?
- What role models did you have as a child?
- How did they influence you in a positive way?
- How did they influence you in a negative way?
- Does your young person feel valued, respected, and accepted by you for who he or she is?
- What messages do you give your child about people who are gay?

► Remind parents

In a healthy relationship both people are considered equal, are respected, and are encouraged to express themselves. Children who feel respected are more likely to treat others with respect.

Sharing Your Values

▶ Introduction

As young people enter adolescence, they begin to take risks. This is a natural part of becoming an independent, healthy, young adult. Let your children know what you believe and why; what you hope for and expect from them. It's important to share what influences your values — your peer group, your family, your faith. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents share their values.

▶ Ask parents

- In the program, Barbara says her daughter asked how she'd know she was ready to have sexual intercourse. Barbara told her that perhaps she would be ready when she could tell someone she respects about her choice. What do you think of the way Barbara handled this question?
- Gloria says she encourages her daughters to save sex for marriage. She admits she didn't wait. Do you think parents who admit they had sex before marriage can expect their children to wait?
- When do you think sexual intercourse is appropriate in a relationship?
- How do you convey your values to your young person?
- How can you be certain your child really understands what you believe and why you hold those beliefs?

▶ Remind parents

If your young person makes a decision you disagree with, try to not be judgmental or critical. That can shut down communication.

Avoiding Absolutes

▶ Introduction

Life would be easier if our children obeyed us all the time. But many young people do the opposite of what their parents say, just to prove their independence. That's one reason to avoid absolutes. If you want your child to abstain from sexual intercourse, explain why. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents handle this.

▶ Ask parents

- In the program, Kim says young people need skills to say no. Is willpower enough to help young people say no?
- How do you feel when someone orders you to do something without explaining the reasons why?
- Describe a time you felt pressure to do something you didn't want to do and found it difficult to say no.
- Do you believe that your young person respects you so much that he or she will do everything you suggest?

▶ Remind parents

When talking with children about reasons to postpone sexual intercourse, include positive reasons as well. If you talk openly, you can encourage your child to choose a course of action that is best for him or her in the long run. It's also important to help your child come up with the words to handle various situations.

Mixed Messages?

► Introduction

Parents often worry that if they talk about sex, contraception, or condoms, they are giving their children permission to have sex. That's not so.

Millions of teens are having sex. This proves young people are not waiting for permission. They're acting on tremendous internal and external pressures to be sexually active. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how parents handle what some people call mixed messages.

► Ask parents

- In the program, Pam talked about her son tossing a box of condoms into the shopping cart. How would you react in a similar situation?
- If you gave your son or daughter condoms, what did you say when you did so?
- What would you say if your young person asked for information about where to go for family planning services?
- Do you think discussions with your child about contraception will encourage sexual activity?
- If you hope your child will wait until marriage to have sex, how do you think you can best influence his or her decision?
- How would you react if your daughter told you she wanted to go on the pill?
- How effective do you think condoms are in preventing disease and pregnancy?

► Remind parents

According to public health experts, latex condoms, used consistently and correctly, are highly effective in preventing the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

As children get older, they will make their own decisions. It's a parent's responsibility to help their child avoid negative consequences.

Respecting Their Independence

► Introduction

As children grow up, parents have less control over their behavior. Young people learn to drive, they get jobs, choose colleges and careers and seek the advice of other adults. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents prepare their children for this time in their lives.

► Ask parents

- In the program, Ray says that there are two things you can give your kids: roots and wings. How can a parent give their young person "wings"?
- Do you believe that you have control over all the choices your child makes?
- How do you encourage your young person to participate in family decisions?
- How do you convey to young people that you trust them to care about themselves and to make good decisions?

► Remind parents

As children grow up, they need to establish independence; to learn to make responsible decisions; to develop a sense of who they are; and to understand what they value. You can help them learn to take care of themselves and make good decisions.

Family Health Productions

Family Health Productions produces programs, guides, training materials, and abouthealth.com to help families talk about the challenges young people face growing up.

Jeanne Blake is the producer of *Raising Healthy Kids* and the president of Family Health Productions. She is a television medical reporter and an affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School. Blake speaks to parents at corporations, at healthcare organizations and at schools, and consults nationally on family communication. She is also the president of Blake Works, Inc. and the author of the *Words Can Work™* series of books.

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Also From Family Health Productions

***Alcohol: True Stories* hosted by Matt Damon**

Four young people tell how alcohol affected their lives. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers 

In Our Own Words®: Teens and AIDS

Five young people tell about being infected with HIV as teens through unprotected sexual intercourse. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people. 20 minutes.

Available in Spanish.

Recommended for grades 6 & up 

The Power of Girls: Inside and Out®

Five girls talk about the challenges they faced growing up and how supportive relationships with friends, family, and community helped. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 6 & up, parents and other caregivers 

Boys on Bullying

Five boys tell how bullying affected their lives and how support from family, peers and the community made the difference. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers 

To place an order or to ask about other resources contact:

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