

How To Talk To Your Kids About Sex

Welcome to the special “members section” on How to Talk to Your Kids About Sex. As is the pattern with all of valuesparenting.com the general information is in the free site and additional details and specifics are here in the members section for parents who want “the whole nine yards.”

When it comes to How to Talk to Your Kids About Sex, the “details” are mostly in the form of actual dialogues to help you have the best possible talks with your children on this all important subject.

Phase I: Preliminary “As Needed” Talks with 3-8 Year Olds

Awe and Wonder in Nature

Appreciation and love for the miraculous creations of the earth have everything to do with the groundwork needed to have a successful first discussion with your child on the most amazing, powerful, miraculous thing in the world – the process of bringing a new child into it. Look for the opportunity to have frequent little discussions like the following:

DIALOGUE:

Wow, Tom. Come out here on the balcony and look at this amazing sunset!

Tom: I'm right in the middle of a computer game.

Guess what, Tommy! This big surprise that nature has provided outside right this very minute is more fantastic than anything you will ever see on a computer! I need a friend to enjoy it with. You're so good at noticing colors and beautiful things in nature. I want you to come and tell me what you see! That game will still be there a few minutes from now, but this sunset will happen only once. Let's go!

OR:

Hey, Jill. Do you notice anything different in our backyard?

Jill: No.

Well, the oak tree is just starting to turn slightly green and get little buds. It's gorgeous. When you go out today, see what else you can notice and tell me about it when I get home from work, okay?

Your enthusiasm and positive attitude will heighten your child's awareness. Take the opportunity to point out the beauties that you see in the colors, contrasts, shading, and textures as you experience nature with your children on walks, bike rides, campouts, and hikes. Your observations will make them think and will stimulate them to think of their pleasure as they observe nature. When your child is seven, you can turn your comments on nature into anticipation builders for the big talk, such as:

Jill, when we go out for our special talk on your eighth birthday, we're going to tell you about something that has to do with nature. But it's even more amazing than the beautiful things you always notice about the trees and rocks, plants and animals. Do you realize that everything in nature is absolutely unique? No two leaves are alike, even on the same tree. Every flower is different from any other flower. No two people are alike, either, and that's part of what we'll talk about when you're eight. Nature is truly awesome!

Modesty in Dress and Appearance

Modesty is sort of an old-fashioned word. It is not used much any more and belongs in the same category as chastity --something straight out of a Charlotte Bronte novel. It is not even in the vocabulary of a modern preadolescent anymore, right? Certainly, the part about the word not being in our preadolescent's vocabulary is true. And in our conversations with our young daughters, "What do you think about modesty?" is just not up there with, "Is your room clean?" and "Is your homework done?" Yet parents have to be concerned as their children walk out the door dressed in a way that leaves little to the imagination or with a new hole pierced somewhere in their bodies.

Once again, timing is crucial. The time to talk to your daughter about caring for her body, the implications and significance of what she wears, and treating her body with respect is not on the day she comes home with a new tattoo on her shoulder. Start with preschoolers, kindergarteners, and first graders. Having "modesty" conversations with young children can guide their thinking about what clothes they will choose and how they are going to deal with their bodies as they mature. Even if friends try and sometimes succeed in influencing your child's decisions about dress and conduct, your preliminary talks are the best anchor as your child sets goals and makes decisions concerning standards.

DIALOGUE:

Hillary, I can't believe how nice you look today. You are growing up! Before you know it, you'll be a teenager. Are you looking forward to that time?

Response.

What do you think it will be like to be a teenager?

Hillary: I don't know.

What kind of a teenager do you want to be?

Hillary [help and clues]: I want to be happy, do well in school, and so forth.

If you could be just like a teenager you know right now, who would it be?

Response. (Hope that your child chooses someone with admirable personality traits. She may also choose the opposite. In either case, probe the answer. Ask what she likes about this person. If she can't think of anyone, suggest a sister or a cousin or neighbor who you think she might admire and talk about what you both like about that person.)

There are so many exciting things about being a teenager, but there are a few dangers too that you should be thinking about a little bit. There are some pretty crazy teenagers in this world. Most of them are trying to make a statement about how they feel about the world. They show it in the way they dress and the way they act. Some kids, even when they're just a little older than you, wear things that are very strange, wouldn't you agree?

Response.

You have been given a very special body. It does amazing things for you, and you need to take good care of it. Sometimes kids forget how important it is to use their body wisely and take good care of it. They see things on TV and in movies that makes them think that the most important thing in the world is to look beautiful or grown-up. They start thinking that a good way to get a boyfriend is to wear clothes that are short and tight and show off their bodies. They think that the only way people are going to think that they're cool is if they have great looking bodies. Many of them think they are fat, even when they aren't a bit fat, and they start doing crazy things to their bodies to make themselves look like they think others want them to look. That's kind of sad, isn't it?

Response.

Hillary, because I love you so much, I don't want you to have to worry about some of the hard things in life that happen if you don't take care of your body. Some girls think that the way to look beautiful is to wear very short skirts and tight-fitting clothes, and that they would look even more beautiful if they pierced

their navel or nose or other parts of their bodies and wore rings in them. Some think a tattoo would make them more beautiful. Others think that wearing lots of makeup will make them appear cool or help get them lots of dates. How about you? Do you think you'd want to have friends who like the *outside* of you -- what you wear or how you look -- or do you think you'd like to have friends who like the *inside* of you . . . your personality?

Hillary: I'd want them to like the real me -- who I am inside.

Me too! Our bodies *are* an important part of us, but we don't need to show them off. We need to take good care of them. You need to feed your body good food because a strong body is one of life's most priceless possessions. If you take care of it properly, you'll be able to use your body to do the things you really want to do. It is useful for everything from walking through the halls at school to participating in sports. So how important is it to take really good care of our bodies?

Hillary: Really important.

Let's compare your body to a car for a minute because a good car can get you where you want to go and help you have fun, just like a good body. What's the coolest kind of a car? What car would you like if you could have whichever one you wanted?

Response. (Hillary may name a specific car, or she may say something as simple as "a fast new red one." Assume she says, "a Porsche.")

Okay, now let's say you just put a lot of stickers on that Porsche and decorated it and parked it in front of the house and bragged about it all the time and showed off in it by driving way too fast. Would this be good?

Hillary [help and clues]: No, it would look worse if I did too many things to it. It's dangerous to drive too fast, and if I just showed it off all the time, people would just think of me as my car instead of knowing me for myself.

Right. Exactly. Now what if you had that same car but you just took really good care of it, kept it clean, changed the oil, parked it in the garage (where no one would see it but it would be really safe), and never bragged about it or showed it off. Would that be better?

Response.

Hillary, how is your body like that beautiful car?

Hillary [help and clues]: It's better to take care of it and keep it clean than to show it off and try to decorate it or change it too much. It's good to keep clothes on it so others don't see it too much and so they won't think of my body but my real self.

Respecting and Protecting Our Bodies

As parents, we should look for a good balance between telling our pre-eight children too much about sex and their bodies and telling them too little. We want them to know enough to appreciate and respect their physical capacities and to protect themselves from any kind of sexual harm, yet we don't want to worry or frighten them in any way or to create any kind of negative attitude.

During their early elementary school years and before the "big talk," parents should look for opportunities to help children both respect and protect their bodies . . . all in the positive context of appreciating and caring for their marvelous physical gifts. Sexual dangers should be brought up very carefully and with much emphasis on the fact that a very small percentage of people would ever hurt a child and that the vast majority of adults would help and protect a child.

DIALOGUE:

Adam, your body is one of the most amazing possessions you have. Aren't the things that it can do incredible? What are some of the things your body can do?"

Adam: Eat, run, swim, play the piano, jump.

Good, Adam. The thing you want to remember is that our bodies are miracles. They can do so many things. Every part of our bodies and everything our bodies can do is a gift that we should be thankful for! What are some parts of your body that you're thankful for?

Adam: Eyes, ears, mouth, legs.

There are some parts of our bodies that we call private parts because they are so special that we keep them private rather than showing them to everyone. What are some of your private parts?

Adam [help, clues]: penis, bottom, testicles.

Good, and what private parts do girls have?

Adam [help, clues]: Breasts, vagina.

You know, Adam, it's amazing how many names these private parts have. And the things we do with these private parts also have a lot of names. Some of the names are just cute words that families sometimes use. (Discuss words you use for bodily parts and bodily functions.) You're old enough now, Adam, to know and use the real words for all these things, the correct words that we've been using in this talk we're having. Why do you think it's a good idea to use the correct words?

Adam [clues and help]: The right words show respect for our bodies.

Right. You know, Adam, lots of kids (and grownups too) don't understand how important their bodies are, so they don't take very good care of them. What's the problem with that?

Adam: They're more likely to get sick or hurt and they won't have as much joy from their bodies.

Also, some kids don't appreciate how cool their bodies are. They like to say disgusting things about the functions of the body. For some reason they think it's really funny to make jokes about private parts of the body or urinating or having bowel movements (use whatever words you and your child feel comfortable with), and they use words that sound kind of gross and almost make you think that there's something weird about some parts of your body or some of the things your body does. Have you heard any words that sounded rude or crude to you?

Response, discussion.

Adam, when you hear a word that you think has to do with our private parts, always tell me so we can talk about what it means, okay?

Adam: Okay.

A lot of kids use the wrong words because they don't know the right words. Since we know the right words, we'll use them. If we want, we can still use our family words for our private parts and for what they do, but let's not use the gross words, okay?

Adam: Okay.

Now here's something else you're getting old enough to know, Adam. Some of our private parts can do other things besides helping us go to the bathroom -- amazing, awesome things that help us have babies! And guess what? When you turn eight we're going to have a really special, really grown-up talk about this

and you will be amazed at what a fantastic thing grownups can do with their private parts.

If Adam says, "Why can't you tell me now?" indicate that you want it to be a special surprise for his eighth birthday.

Now Adam, we don't let people who aren't in our family see or touch our private parts because they are so special. You understand that, right?

Adam: Right.

In our family Adam, when someone hugs you or kisses you or holds your hand, how does it feel?

Adam: Good.

It sure does! That's called good touching. How about when your friend pats you on the back or puts his arm around you and says "good job" after you kicked a goal in soccer -- does that feel good?

Adam: Yes.

Sure it does. When friends or family or people we love hug us or pat us or put their arm around us, that is good touching. Now let me ask you, is there such a thing as bad touching?

Adam: If someone tried to touch your private parts?

Right. That would be a bad touch. What other kind of touch might not feel good?

Adam: If a stranger puts his arm around you or patted you.

Exactly, Adam. These are bad touches. If anyone ever tries to touch you in a bad way, what should you do?

Adam [help, clues]: Yell PLEASE DON'T TOUCH ME! really loudly, and then come to me right away and tell me about it.

Good, Adam. You'll have thousands of good touches from family and friends and people who love you, and you'll probably never have a bad touch. But if you ever do, you know what to do, right?

A Fable (Bedtime Story) to Prepare Your Child for “The Big Talk”

The Marriage Roses

Adapted by Marvin Payne from an episode of “Alexander’s Amazing Adventures” by Marvin Payne, Steven Kapp Perry, and Roger and Melanie Hoffman

Once upon a time, there was a little boy named Alexander and a little girl named Elinor who were good friends. But they didn’t play together every day, because they lived in two very different places. Alexander lived on a street a lot like yours and mine, in a town that looked a lot like where you and I live. But Elinor lived in an old and magical place called Inland, a place like we can only find in well-worn storybooks. In Inland, boys wore pointy hats with feathers stuck in them, and girls wore brightly colored dresses all the time. But both boys and girls wore tall boots and warm capes, because the mountains and forests of Inland were full of adventures.

Elinor never came to where you and I and Alexander live, but every now and then, when the wind was blowing just the right song, and the clouds for a moment slipped into just the right shape, and the light sparkled through the dust in the air with just the right color, Alexander would look around and find himself suddenly standing in Inland! And before too many minutes passed, Elinor would come from behind a tree, or over a hill, or just walk up behind him and say, pretty loudly, “Hi. I’ve been waiting for you.”

“Elinor? Hey, where am I? And what’s this in my hand?”

“Punch, silly. It’s what we drink at weddings.”

“Am I at a wedding? Who’s getting married?”

“My cousin Elaine and her handsome sweetheart, Edgar.”

Just then they heard the noise of three big drums booming, and a whole bunch of little pipes tweetling up a slow marching tune that made Alexander feel hushed and happy and a little bit frightened all at the same time. Elinor whispered, “They’re starting the march to the garden.”

Now Alexander watched as the marriage march progressed toward the garden. Elaine and Edgar looked splendid, but Alexander was a little puzzled, because nobody had ever told him about how Inlanders get married. So as he watched, Elinor tried to explain as best she could how in Inland the bride and groom lead a long march to their own marriage garden. Alexander could see the

little parade heading toward some stone walls down in the meadow, and he wondered what magical things might happen inside those walls. Elinor told him that the bride and groom would go inside, just the two of them, and plant two rose seeds, one from her parents' garden and one from his parents' garden. There had to be two seeds, because these weren't going to be ordinary roses. They were marriage roses, the most beautiful and magical flowers of all.

In Inland, the new husband and wife spend some time together every day taking care of what they have planted in their own secret garden. Soon, two tender green shoots peek up through the earth, and as they grow up toward the sunshine they curl and twine around each other. They grow like one stem, but twice as tall and strong. After a good long time, one rose blooms. As long as the husband and wife weed and water and enjoy it and treat it tenderly, the bloom lasts, and the sweetness deepens.

And the color keeps on changing! When the husband and wife are laughing, the rose glows yellow. When they hope for something good to happen, it trembles orange, like an ember about to burst into flame. When they cry together, it darkens to purple and blue, and when they are happy it pulses ruby red.

And there's even more magic! When it hears the music of the man and the woman singing together, the rose changes from gold to silver and back again, over and over, faster and faster until it shimmers white, flashing out every color in the song, like sunlight on water.

Just then somebody screamed as Elaine fainted and fell flat on the grass. Edgar swept her up into his arms, and Alexander and Elinor hurried along behind as he carried her quickly home to her cottage, with Alexander and Elinor hurrying along behind. As he laid her down on the pillow, he slipped off of her head a circle of roses she had been wearing, like a crown. The whole room was heavy with the smell of dying roses, gifts from Edgar to Elaine. Roses hung from the door posts and windowsills, and leaned out of huge vases on the table and by Elaine's bed. Suddenly she sneezed loudly, like a little explosion, and moaned.

Elinor whispered to Alexander, "Something's funny here."

"Funny? That didn't sound to me like laughing."

"No, I mean, all these roses look like marriage roses."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Well, you would never cut a marriage rose from its garden and take it somewhere else."

“Elinor, I think we should stop talking about flowers and try to find a cure for Elaine.” He grabbed her hand and pulled her out the door and ran with her off through the woods.

“Where are we going?”

“Look! Through the trees! A medicine wagon!”

In Inland, horses pull medicine wagons from village to village, and the medicine men stop for a while near each village and sell not only cures for bellyaches and blisters and bald heads, but also bonnets and buttons and butterfly nets. It looked like this one was selling flowers.

“Don’t push! Don’t shove! Get your marriage roses! Plenty for everybody!”

Elinor couldn’t believe her ears! Selling marriage roses? She’d never heard of such a thing! The medicine-man rattled on, “All the marriage roses you’ll ever want, without the bother of finding a husband or wife and fussing around for years in some damp garden!”

Alexander didn’t like the look of the medicine man. He was a little too tall, a little too thin; his moustache was a little too pointy, and his hair just a little too shiny. He stood on the back of his wagon, surrounded by bundles of roses, and shouted answers down to the people crowding below, each one holding out a fistful of coins.

“What? You want one like the first one you bought? Sorry, they’re all different. Don’t you know variety is the spice of life? You sir -- back again, I see. What can I do for you?”

The young customer burst out with “ahh-choo!” and Elinor saw that it was Edgar!

“I’ll take, ahh-choo, a dozen yellow ones.”

“Edgar! What are you doing here?”

“Buying roses for Elaine. She’s awfully sick, and these cheer her up.”

Elinor looked at the roses. “But they’re fading already!” and Alexander said, “She had a roomful of them, why does she need more?”

“They die quickly. Ah, ah, ah, ahh-choo!!! I’d better hurry back with these!” And Edgar ran off toward Elaine’s bedside, scattering sickly rose petals behind

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him. Almost as soon as the petals touched the ground, they withered like little bits of dusty paper.

Something about that sneeze made Alexander very suspicious, and he slipped off quietly toward the medicine wagon. Elinor felt as though the sky were suddenly flat and grey and empty of birds. She slowly walked a few steps down the path that Edgar had taken. Lying off to the side was a rose that had slipped out of the bundle. Elinor picked it up and took a big, deep sniff.

Alexander, all this time, was tiptoeing around behind the medicine wagon, trying to peek inside. “Whatcha lookin’ for?” said a great big wheezy voice. Alexander spun around. Nobody was there! “Broof! Ka-ka-broof!” It sounded to Alexander as though an enormous horse had sneezed – which is exactly what had happened! Alexander had forgotten that certain animals in Inland could talk, and here was the medicine man’s horse talking to Alexander! “Well, I, uh . . .” mumbled Alexander. The horse just said, “Hope it’s not roses. Ka-broof!” He sneezed again. “The medicine-man has so many he just feeds the extras t’ me, instead of lettin’ me munch on good green grass. I think there must be somethin’ wrong with ‘em, ‘cause I’m getting sick eatin’ em.”

“Where does he get them all?” asked Alexander.

“Oh, he’s planted a big farm o’ stolen marriage roses. People buy ‘em cause they don’t want t’ grow their own. Course they got t’ buy lots of ‘em ‘cause they die quick.”

An idea was flaming up like a candle inside Alexander’s head. Right then he heard a loud sneeze from off in the woods. He ripped up a big thistle out of the ground and held it out for the horse to eat. “Here, and thanks!” The horse blew his lips out in a big smile and said, “Oh no! Thank you!” But Alexander was already running away as fast as he could toward his sneezing friend.

“Ah-choo!!!” Elinor shook all over, and the rose in her hand quivered at the sound.

Alexander came running from behind the noisy crowd and shouted, “Elinor! Drop that rose!”

“Ah-choo!!! Why?”

“It’s poison!”

“Ah-choo!!! Poison?”

Alexander grabbed it away and threw it as far as he could.

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Elinor yelled, "And Edgar's taking Elaine even more of them!"

Fairly flying through the woods after Edgar, Alexander had barely enough breath to gasp out his story to Elinor.

"Talking ... to the horse ... medicine man wasn't looking. ... Roses are marriage roses ... stolen and planted on a big farm. ... Sell lots of them because they die so quickly. ... Feeds them to the horse, even.... That's why he talked to me. ... Tired of eating poison roses ... wants grass instead. ... People think they can have marriage roses for a few coins. ... Don't want to grow just one that will last. ... Don't know they're poison when they're cut away . . . from their ... roots."

Soon they were crashing through the cottage door. Edgar jumped up from Elaine's bedside. "Please! Quiet! Someone's sick in here!" Alexander and Elinor began scooping the flowers up in huge armfuls and throwing them outside.

"Elinor, what are you doing with her beautiful roses?"

"Edgar, these are poison!"

"What do you mean?"

"When you cut marriage roses from their roots, they're poison!"

"But she loves them!"

And a weak little cry came from the bed. "Yes, I love them!"

"You'll like the living ones more!" And Elinor threw a stack of dead stems to Alexander at the door, and he tossed them far into the yard. "Living roses won't hurt you! Wouldn't you let these go, if it meant getting well and having the real thing?"

Edgar reached for Elaine's pale hand, and they looked deep into each other's eyes before they answered with one voice: "Of course. That's what we've always wanted!" And Edgar saw in her eyes the tall walls and cool shadows of a secret garden, and she saw in his the beautiful thorny arm of wood that would someday raise one perfect blossom high against the sun.

And they were still looking into each other's eyes when Alexander, still at the door, heard the wind blow, looked up and saw the clouds move, and perceived a certain light through the dust in the air. He quickly looked back inside the cottage. For just an instant he thought he saw everybody smiling at

him, as though he had done something really quite wonderful! But then they disappeared, and he was home.