

Message for Parents about Sexuality

Definition of Sexuality: Everything you are as a male or female, including your feelings, attitudes, values, relationships and ideals.

- You are the primary educators of your children. You are the ones who should communicate to them specific values about sexuality. Tell them what you believe and what you want for them. It's your right as well as your responsibility.
- Your children learn about sexuality every day of their lives. They learn from their friends, TV, movies, music, from you and from society in general.
- Don't wait for your children to ask questions about sexuality - initiate conversations. Use everyday occurrences (watching TV, diapering a baby) to begin conversations about sexuality.
- You can be effective sexuality educators, even though that role may seem difficult or uncomfortable at first.
- You don't have to be an expert or completely at ease with the topic of sexuality to do a good job of educating your children.
- Communication with your children about sexuality is both verbal and nonverbal. Your children are aware of what you do and don't say, your reactions and your behavior. Try to make sure that your actions are consistent with the values you hope to teach your children.
- Although it's best to start talking to your children about sexuality when they are very young, it's never too late to start.
- If your children ask questions, don't worry about whether they are too young to know the answers. Children understand what they are ready to understand. However, answer at your child's level of understanding and ask for feedback to determine what he or she has understood. Remember, every question is an opportunity to discuss values, information and feelings.
- Listen attentively to your children. Let them know that you care about their feelings and respect their ideas - even if you don't agree with them.
- Use your sense of humor when talking about sexuality. Most conversations need not be serious. Children often complain that their parents are too long-winded and too serious.
- Have a variety of books, pamphlets, and other resources available around the house - some that you can give to your children, some they can pick up to read, and some you would find helpful in answering your own questions.
- It is always good to touch and hug your children to show love, regardless of how old they are.
- Remember, education about sexuality is a life-long process, not something that will be accomplished in one conversation.

Adapted from "When Sex is the Subject" by Pamela M. Wilson, MSW, ETR Associates, 1991.