

7 Things Sex Educators Wish You'd Teach Your Kids Sooner Rather Than Later

The "sex talk" should be an ongoing conversation – and it definitely doesn't have to be awkward.
08/15/2018 by [Brittany Wong](#) of Huffington Post

Sure, [sex educators](#) are good at breaking down complicated, potentially awkward facts about sex into lessons school-aged kids can understand, but they can't be responsible for *everything*.

Even if your kids are lucky enough to be in a school district that offers a relatively comprehensive program (count your blessings; some states focus solely on abstinence-only lessons or offer [no sex ed at all](#)), you're still responsible for educating them, too.

With that in mind, we recently asked sex educators to [share the big conversations](#) they wish parents would have with their kids sooner rather than later. See what they had to say below.

1. It's good to talk about sex, gender identities and sexual orientations.

"When you have conversations about sexuality when [children] are young — say, 5, before they're exposed to sex on the internet or in pop culture — it normalizes the topic. If you're worried about the conversations being awkward, you have an advantage if you start early; younger kids are much more tolerant of adults who fumble through some of the topics than preteens, and talking to kids when they are young is good training for [ongoing conversations.] Be sure to use language that includes all gender identities and sexual orientations. Every couple months, revisit the topic by asking what they remember or understand about sexuality, because retention is low for young kids, and it's so important for them to have accurate information." — [Cindy Pierce](#), a sex educator and author of [Sexploitation: Helping Kids Develop Healthy Sexuality in a Porn-Driven World](#)

2. No one is entitled to your body, even if it's just a hug.

"Consent, consent, consent. I can't say this enough. We have to teach children that they are in charge of and responsible for their bodies and to respect that in others. Now, that doesn't mean that we ask children's permission before changing diapers or taking them to the doctor, but we can show them the respect of talking through what we're doing or why it's important to make sure their body is clean and healthy. Later, it means letting a child decide whether or not they want to be hugged, tickled or even high-fived. It also means helping children process when someone else tells *them* no to a hug, and take responsibility for their feelings about it. Nobody is entitled to our body ... and we are not entitled to someone else's!" — [Lydia Bowers](#), an early childhood sexual health consultant based in Ohio

3. These are the correct names for your body parts.

"I would say the most important thing is for young kids to know the correct names for their genitals and other body parts. This is important because it normalizes genitals and doesn't contribute to taboo or stigma in the way that using euphemistic language can. It's also important because it's very difficult for kids who don't have the correct language to report sexual abuse if it happens to them, so language is an important safety tool, too." — [Louise Bouchier](#), a sex educator in New Zealand and Australia

4. Don't use porn as a model for real sex.

"The truth is, porn is the most common sexuality educator for young kids, and it's so easy to access. If you want your kids to have accurate information about healthy sex, it's important to engage in a conversation about porn at around 9 years old. It's very common for kids' first exposure to sexuality to be a friend introducing them to porn or them finding it on their own, intentionally or by mistake. The porn industry effectively appeals to curious kids who know how to spell and use a search engine. The big problem is that porn that's easily accessible often skews expectations of how bodies look and respond. If you find out your kid has seen porn, don't overreact. Acknowledge that curiosity is normal, but let them know that porn is not real sex and is intended for adults. If we don't take our role seriously as the primary sexuality educator, the internet will fill in the gaps." — *Pierce*

5. There's more to sex than just the physical act.

"The best and maybe daunting part about having these conversations about expectations is that really good sex ed covers a lot of area over time, because sexuality is so vast and our experiences with it shift over our lifetimes. Take your pick on where you want to start: gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, sexual activity, body image and self-esteem, communication and boundaries, healthy friendships and relationships, sexual violence and harassment, anatomy and hygiene, contraception, bodily autonomy, pregnancy, pleasure. Start the conversation whenever you can — it's *never* too late. And it doesn't always have to be about the 'heavy' stuff: It can be in response to something they saw on TV, a wedding in the family, opinions on what a celebrity was wearing, a topic in the news." — [Wazina Zondon](#), a sex educator and the creator of "*Coming Out Muslim: Radical Acts of Love*"

6. It's OK to have questions about sex, and asking them is always welcome.

"Contrary to popular opinion, teens actually do want to talk to parents about these things. And [studies have shown](#) that when they do, they're less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors. Continue to answer their questions as they get older, even if you're unsure and the answer is, 'I'm not sure ... why don't we find out?' In spite of sex education, sometimes we run into misinformation from friends, media, or educators (mine told me that pads and tampons aren't necessary at night because menstruation is just a gravity thing — seriously). As a parent and caregiver, make sure you're a safe, shame-free space for children. These conversations can seem scary, but it's important that we take a deep breath. When a child asks a question you're caught off guard by, it always helps to ask them some variation of, 'What do you think about that?' This lets you know what their knowledge base is, to start from, and gives you a moment to calm the panic." — *Bowers*

7. Something may be gross or weird to you, but not to someone else.

"In the classroom, one of the most common remarks I hear from any age group regardless of topic (from body image to hygiene to contraception and everything in between), is 'Ewww, that's gross!' My reply is simple: *Don't yuck something someone else likes*. This may sound seemingly uncomplex, but it helps students to understand that how others live their life and what they choose may not be right for everyone, but it's their unique decision: sex before marriage, same-gender partnership, removing (or not removing) body hair, one's gender expression — you get the idea. It might not be your taste, but it's OK if someone else likes it. This message helps young people begin to understand what their boundaries are. And if and when they are in a position that doesn't feel comfortable to them, they'll know they don't have to partake in it, nor is it up to them to impede someone else's sexual self-expression." — *Zondon*

Responses have been edited for style and clarity.