

Sexual Health and Relationships

Talking with your young person about sex can be really hard, even if they are open and start the conversation themselves rather than you starting it; even if you are totally supportive of your young person's sexuality and their partner choices. However there is a world of helpful and unhelpful information out there so be ready to support your young person through the challenging world of puberty, sexuality and relationships- all hot topics for adolescents.

Top Tips

Sex and the Law

It's important to know what the law says about sex and young people. This will help you to support your young person to make safe choices that they are happy with.

- 1) The age young person can have sex is called 'the age of consent'. In the UK it is 16 years old. This means that according to the law, only those who are aged 16 or over are able to freely agree to any sexual activity, in full understanding of the consequences of having sex. This applies if young people want to have sex with someone of the opposite sex, or the same sex.
- 2) Consent is when a person freely gives their permission or agrees to something, after having carefully thought about whether or not they want to do it. This decision should have been made without that person being: pressured or bullied, encouraged to use drugs or alcohol to influence their decision, or manipulated or made to feel stupid. In the UK the law says that both people must give their consent before any physical closeness or sexual activity
- 3) Online activity- 'Indecent Images': No one has defined 'indecent' but basically if it's naked, a topless girl, contains genitals or sex acts, including masturbation, then it will be indecent. It is illegal to take, possess or share 'indecent images' of anyone under 18 even if you're the person in the picture.

Starting a Conversation

- Be relaxed and try an informal setting/ approach
- Sexuality is a broad topic; be curious and willing to listen to what they're saying
- There are a couple of ways to start the conversation. You can ask a general, theoretical question: "Do you think sex is different for men and women?"
- You can reference a current movie or song: e.g., "In that song "I kissed a girl" she says she had a drink in her hand and she lost her inhibitions and that's why she kissed her. Like, what does that mean about whether she likes girls sober?"
- Or you can talk about friends/peers/ reports in the news/ media
- Making up your own starter or introduction to the topic, that directly fits you and your young person's style is probably the most natural way to start talking with your young person. Young people tend to be very creative and open: you can do this.
- Respect your young person's privacy; let them know you are there if they want to share or discuss things more with you
- Acknowledge if you don't know the answer, but be willing to support your young person in finding out accurate information
- If your young person is willing, discuss issues of consent and contraception/ safe sex

A quick checklist for young people to consider before entering into a sexual relationship:

1. I am able to express my wants, needs and limits. I can and do trust my partner to respect them. My partner can do the same, and can trust me to respect their limits and boundaries.
2. Sex of any kind is optional for us both: it isn't and doesn't feel like a requirement. I have a good handle on what consent to sex is and also what non-consent is.
3. I have or can get several condoms and dams- whichever I need for the specific sexual activities I want to engage in and the level of risk myself and my partner are prepared to manage, whatever the outcome -- and both I and my partner know how and when to use them. We're both willing to do so without argument.

More resources for you and your young person

Young people under the age of 16 can still access advice, contraception and more from NHS sexual health PLUS they offer advice to parents. For more info: www.letstalkaboutit.nhs.uk

Youth Friendly Websites:

www.brook.org.uk/

www.scarleteen.com/

<http://sexetc.org/>

www.thinkuknow.co.uk/14_plus/

Book:

S.E.X. is the popular, in-depth, progressive and inclusive teen and young adult sexuality and relationships guide by Scarleteen founder Heather Corinna (2007 & 2016, DaCapo Press/Perseus Books)

Free Condoms:

'Get It On' scheme

For young people:

Is someone being weird online? Are you being sexually abused? Do you feel under pressure to have sex? You can contact CEOP for help: www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre

If a young person discloses they are being sexually abused:

- Call 999
- Childline: 08001111
- Brook: 0808 802 1234