

A Framework to Help Parents Talk with Their Kids about... Sexual Behavior: Choices and Risks Ages 12-14



When parents initiate a discussion or an opportunity arises to talk, here are some helpful steps for healthy and meaningful conversations. These steps do not always occur in this order and you may jump around to different steps during different parts of the conversation.

1. **Begin by really listening.** As a parent it is important to learn more about what the child wants and needs. This could be information, support, strategies, values or combinations of all these.
 - a. Son starts by asking, "Can I ask a dumb question?" and Dad replies, "You can ask whatever you want" and then "Why do you ask?" to find out what his son really wants to know (the question behind the question).
2. **Answer what the child is asking.** It is important to give the child the information that they want to know.
 - a. Son has heard guys at school bragging about having sex with a lot of girls. He wants to find out how his parents feel about that and how he would fit in at school if he didn't act like or agree with the guys.
 - b. Son also asks, "What do you mean by personal values?" He wants to know how to frame this situation in his own family's values as it relates to the bigger picture of high school.
3. **Assess readiness for more.** After giving them the information they want, are they comfortable and ready to hear more about this topic and/or related topics? Ask questions.
 - a. Mom asks, "Do people ever try to pressure you around sex?" to try to find out if they are feeling this pressure that other kids their age may be feeling. This will lead the discussion in a new area.
4. **Share your values.** Kids want to know how you feel about these topics and how they relate to the world around them.
 - a. Dad says, "Virgins are people who have not found the right combination of a solid relationship, being ready for all the possible consequences of sex and a match to their personal values to have sex just yet. I call that smart!" This helps both the daughter and son relate to their experiences at school.
 - b. Mom says, "Your dad and I believe that people who are sexually active need to be informed, safe, and respectful. We also think the teen years are best spent doing all the things you can't do as an adult rather than dealing with pregnancy or an STD."
5. **Invite your child to share his/her feelings, thoughts, and concerns.** Acknowledging the importance of your child's role in the conversation and helping him/her to express themselves is very important on this topic or others that are raised in the discussion.
 - a. Mom and Dad check in with their son and daughter with open-ended questions and supportive statements like "I'd like to think you can tell us anything. Give us a try" to get their kids to open up and share. After discussing pressure and being a virgin Dad asks, "What do you think?" to see what the son or daughter is getting out of the conversation.
6. **What does my child want and/or need from me?** This could be more information, support/strategies, and/or space.
 - a. The son seemed to want validation and support from his parents about not thinking it is cool to have sex with lots of girls. Son says, "I don't like that this kid thinks having sex with lots of girls is something cool."
 - b. The daughter seems to want her family's support in discussing this topic with them, comfort with her decision to discuss sexual talk and pressures at school and confirmation she is making the right decision for her.

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7. **What do I want from them?** The most important thing is for your child to be comfortable in order to come back for more conversations and to understand what was discussed.
 - a. By having this family discussion in which both kids knew their parents wanted them to ask questions, this sets the stage for further discussions on these types of subjects. This also allows the kids to feel comfortable bringing up these topics in a family setting which enables both parents and both kids to be important in these conversations.
8. **Frequently check back in.** Double check your child's understanding and keep the conversation going.
 - a. The parents can bring this situation back up to see what this guy at school is up to and how their son is involved and/or if there are still some taunts to the girl about being a virgin and how to handle that situation.