

A Framework to Help Parents Talk with Their Kids about... Puberty Ages 9-11



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. Invite your child to a conversation with you.

- a. The banter the father and son have about using deodorant invites the child in to the conversation that the Dad has been meaning to have for a while.
- b. Dad says to his son that “now that I think about it, I don’t know that you and I have had a chance to talk about what puberty is.” This lets his son know that Dad may not be comfortable with the topic but wants to have this conversation.

2. Assess your child’s readiness: If the child’s discomfort is high, make the conversation brief and positive to build comfort and trust for further conversations.

- a. Son: “I don’t know, I mean it’s kinda...awkward.” Dad admits it can be awkward but asks son for some time to discuss it. Son agrees and Dad keeps the conversation brief to build for future discussions about puberty and a talk about sex that the child will know is coming in the future.
- b. Dad asks about the other “Talk” but his son says not right now but later.

3. Share facts and values with your child.

- a. Dad shares puberty facts: glands, pimples, hair growth, voice changes.
- b. Dad describes to his son that puberty changes happen to both girls and boys and is a normal part of growing up.

4. Invite your child to share his/her feelings, thoughts, and/or concerns.

- a. Dad asks, “What do you mean it’s okay?” when his son says it was okay they hadn’t talked yet. His son describes the conversation as awkward, which Dad acknowledges.
- b. Dad asks about whether it is time to have the other “Talk” implying a conversation about sex but his son says not right now.
- c. Dad might have been even more direct and asked, “Son, have any questions been running around in your head about this stuff lately?”

5. What does my child want and/or need from me? This could mean things like more information, support with what they are thinking/feeling, strategies to help them deal with a situation, and/or space to think things through.

- a. Son asks: “But why do I need deodorant just because I am going through...” which shows he would like the facts about how his body will be changing and Dad explains a few things.
- b. The son does not want to have the other “Talk” about sex yet with his dad so that can come later.
 - i. Dad asks “Does it need to be that talk?” and Son replies, “no, not yet” so dad invites him to come back when he is ready but gives him space until then.
- c. Son says, “Okay, Okay! I get it” after Dad explains some of the puberty changes. He has heard enough at this time. Dad backs off and reiterates his commitment to future discussions.

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6. **What do I want from my child(ren)?** The most important thing is for your child to be comfortable to come back for more conversations and to understand what was discussed.
 - a. Dad says, "Just promise me you will ask me when you do have questions." Son agrees. Dad ends the conversation with affection and a bit of humor to keep his son comfortable and willing to come back for future conversations.
7. **Check back in with your child frequently to double check their understanding and keep the conversation going.**
 - a. Dad at the end of the talk asks to make sure his son is comfortable. The idea that his son knows there is another talk that will be coming may help encourage discussion on puberty and sexuality as the topics come up or the son has questions.