

## Let's Talk About Sex!

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Let's face it – teaching kids and teens about sex is hard no matter what. Its awkward, and complicated, and hard to know how much to teach when. While there's no great clear rules, here's a top 5 tips for teaching kids and teens with ASD about sex:

1. Be knowledgeable and comfortable – if you are the person teaching, you need to be comfortable. Know your facts (even if you have to google some terminology first!). And be comfortable with proper terminology – if you can't say proper labels and words without feeling embarrassed and giggly, then you may not be the right person to teach. Its ok to feel awkward about it, as long as you don't show it! Be aware of how slang and terminology changes as kids become teenagers and try to generalize to some of those terms over time.
2. Be direct! People with ASD often have a hard time understanding language that is abstract or indirect. Give short, clear direct descriptions and answers to questions. Don't use analogies to explain things, unless you are very certain it is something your child will understand and find relatable.
3. Separate fact from values – this is tough but important. There are details to learning about sex and sexuality that are simple scientific fact. Based on the level of understanding of your child or teen it may be very appropriate to teach values that surround sex and relationships that are reflective of your family, culture, or religion. Teach the scientific facts, and then teach them in the framework of how it fits into your values.

4. Use teaching strategies that are familiar – Use the same strategies that work to teach your child other skills – if you know they learn well with lots of visual support, then use that here too. If they learn well from Social Stories, you can certainly teach about sex in Social Stories.
5. Be prepared to revisit this – Often learning requires repetition. Think about the other types of language, self care, and academic skills your child has learned, and how much repetition some of those skills may have required. This is no different.

There is no time that is too early or too late to start teaching children and teens about their own body, personal independence, and self-care. While some of these skills will be taught in the classroom, many will not be. And for people with ASD, the detail, repetition, or teaching strategies required may not be sufficient – it is important to make sure that they are being provided with ample learning opportunities throughout life!

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