

## Talking to Children about Sex When and How?

Most parents *want* to tell their children about sex but many admit that they are not doing a very good job. Research shows that the parents who are talking with their children about sex are waiting until their children are older—this may be too late. Sex is a topic that parents may like to avoid or put off. Many parents feel uncomfortable talking about it to their children. Experts agree that when talking to your children about sex—the *earlier, the better*.

### The Parent's Role:

- Let your child know he or she can come to you for information
- Be willing to repeat information until he or she understands
- Keep your answers simple
- Realize that it is okay to say, "I don't know"—just remember to address the question later when you find the answer
- Begin talking to your child about sex early—don't wait for them to ask
- Discuss sex at an appropriate level of understanding for your child
- Treat the topic of sex matter-of-factly
- Label body parts with their correct names
- Respect your child's privacy and teach him or her to respect others' privacy
- Answer questions about sex directly and honestly
- Express your own values
- Relax and remain calm

Children begin to learn about sexuality from birth when we cuddle, hug, kiss, and hold them. Some researchers believe that loving touch helps set the stage for adult relationships. *You* are your child's first teacher—discussing sex should begin early and continue throughout the years.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that before children reach their early teens, they should know:

- The names and functions of male and female sex organs
- What happens during puberty and understand that those changes mark that she or he is moving into young womanhood and manhood
- The nature and purpose of the menstrual cycle (even if your child is a male)
- What sexual intercourse is and how females become pregnant

### Books for Parents to Read

*From Diapers to Dating: A Parent's Guide to Raising Healthy Children* by Debra W. Haffner

*How Can We Talk About That?* By Jane DiVita Woody

*Raising a Child Responsibly in a Sexually Permissive World* by Sol and Judith Gordan

### Sources:

Stark, P. (1990). *Sex is more than a plumbing lesson: A parent's guide to sexuality education*.

Dallas: Preston Hollow Enterprises, Inc.

Pike, L. B. (2001). Sexuality and your child. *MU Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia*. Retrieved from <http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6002.htm> on June 12, 2003.

Discussing sex and sexuality with children. (2000). *Center for Effective Parenting*. Retrieved from [http://www.ach.uams.edu/whatscurrent/discussing\\_sex\\_and\\_sexuality\\_wit.htm](http://www.ach.uams.edu/whatscurrent/discussing_sex_and_sexuality_wit.htm) on June 12, 2003.

Discussing birds and bees: Start when your kids are very young. (2001). *Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research*. Retrieved from <http://mayoclinic.com> on June 12, 2003.