

Parent Update on *Sexuality Communication in Families that Keeps Kids Healthy*

Studies show that children who have frequent and open conversations about sexuality with their parents are more likely to make informed, healthy, and responsible decisions about relationships. Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts' recent "Let's Be Honest" presentation by Ana Maria Ramos offered Brookline parents and caregivers information and advice for creating an environment of trust and comfort in talking about relationships and sexuality at home. By providing parents with useful skills, information, and resources, this lively and refreshingly direct program helped empower parents to feel competent and successful as their children's primary sexuality educators.

Key Takeaways

- It can be difficult and embarrassing to talk about sex with kids, but kids are curious and **positive communication helps establish values**, enabling young people to make healthier, better-informed decisions. (Keep in mind - Talking about sex does NOT encourage experimentation.)
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 - o 87% of US teens say it would be easier to postpone sex if they could talk about it.
 - o Parents are the largest influence on kids' decisions.
 - o More open and honest communication = most likely for kids to come to you rather than friends, internet, social media, etc.
- **Sexuality** – the way in which we express ourselves and experience the world. It begins the day we are born and is with us until the day we die, involving:
 - o Sexual behavior
 - o Sex assigned at birth (male, female, intersex)
 - o Sexual Orientation
 - o Gender Expression
 - o Relationships or how we relate to others
 - o Femininity / masculinity
 - o Gender Identity ([The Gender Unicorn graphic](#) can be helpful)
 - o Self-esteem
 - o Religion
 - o Culture
- **Teachable moments** – Take advantage of small and frequent opportunities to spark conversations (car, reflecting on TV, movies, etc.) for communicating about sexuality and values

while also sharing facts. You can also say, "You may not want to talk about this now, but this is important to me, so please let me know when you're ready to talk about it. Keep in mind:

- o By age 10, most kids have been exposed to some level of porn, so it's very important to integrate talk about values and consent (see [FRIES graphic](#)) when talking about sexuality. Legal age of consent in MA is 16.
- o Talk about assault (it happens in our community, it can happen to anyone, substances slipped in drinks, etc.) to prompt awareness but without scaring. You can talk about "what if" situations and conversations in third person can be effective ("I heard about someone...What are your friends experiencing...")
- o Pediatricians can be allies for imparting and reinforcing important information.

• **Helpful Script Outline for tough questions:**

- o Validate/Affirm – "That's a very interesting question/statement. What do you know/think?"
- o Share a Fact – "My understanding is..."
- o Share a Feeling – "I feel that..."
- o Share your values – "In our family, the important thing is..."

• **Examples of dealing with tough questions:**

• What is puberty?

- o VALIDATION = I'm so glad you asked.
- o FACT = Every person goes through puberty between the ages of 8-15. It is a time when your body grows and changes into an adult body.
- o FEELING = I love that you came to me to talk about this.
- o VALUE = It's important to me that we can talk about all the changes you go through and that you feel comfortable telling me your worries.

• What is masturbation?

- o VALIDATION = I had the same question when I was your age.
- o FACT = Masturbation is when a person touches themselves in private, usually on their genitals, in a way that feels good and pleasurable.
- o FEELING = I feel like you might understand it better as you get older.
- o VALUE = I want you to always trust me and come to me when you have questions like these.

• How old were you when you first had sex?

- o VALIDATION = Thank you for coming to me to talk about this. Are you trying to figure out when is the right time to have sex?
- o FACT = Many people wait until they feel ready to have sex. This can happen at different times for different people. A lot of people like to wait until they meet someone, they have a deep connection with.
- o FEELING = I feel uncomfortable talking about my personal sex life, but I like that you come to me to ask these questions. Thank you for trusting me.
- o VALUE = I don't want you to rush into it. When you're ready and old enough, it's important to always use protection.

• How do two men have sex?

- o VALIDATION = I had that question at your age too. What do you think?
- o FACT = People have sex in different ways, it's usually whatever feels good and pleasurable for them. Many people believe that one of the sexual activities that two men can do is have anal sex which involves a penis and the anus.
- o FEELING = I love that you come to me with these questions.
- o VALUE = What matters is that love is love and anyone can be with anyone, as long as they love each other.

- **Remember:**

- o It's okay to feel embarrassed and laugh. It's also okay to not have all the answers.
- o Be gentle with yourself, learn together, and be honest about what you know and your values.
- o Be an askable adult - open the lines of communication.
- o Take advantage of teachable moments to start important conversations with your kids.

- **Recommended Resources**

- www.pplm.org - Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts
- www.amaze.org - Amazing sex ed videos for kids
- www.kids-ask.org - Tool for answering tough questions

For questions on teaching about sexuality to their kids: anamaria.ramos@pplm.org