



Talking to your child about boys
and girls, growing up and changing
Helpful hints for parents and carers



At what age is my child ready for this?

- Probably now!
- Different levels of detail can be given on most subjects – this will depend on your child's age and what you feel is appropriate.

How and when should I approach talking to my child?

- Some topics might arise when watching something on television, out shopping or on a family day out – usually there are lots of everyday situations when children ask questions or when you can begin conversations.
- Share and read books (stories and information books) or leaflets with your child which have interesting, age-appropriate information in them.
- Try having conversations when you are doing different things together, even household chores such as washing up. This means you can chat whilst avoiding eye contact, this can help some people if they feel embarrassed or nervous.
- If your child asks a question try to give an answer.
- You might want to talk to them before, during or after their sex and relationship education lessons.
- Avoid waiting and then having the 'big' one off talk.

How will I know what to say?

- Ask your child about what they think – listen to their ideas, thoughts and feelings.
- Talk about what is important to you and your family.
- Read some children's information books yourself – they can help you to find the words that you and your child can feel comfortable with.
- Be led by your child – some children are curious and want to know more and others won't ask anything but make sure you tell them about the things you think they really need to know.
- Think about what your child needs to know at the different stages of their growth and development – it is a good idea to provide information a bit before they will need it.
- Find out what your child is learning in sex and relationship education at school this year.





Why is this important?

- Children pick up information about these things every day from television, adverts, friends and playground gossip – but what they are learning might not be accurate or useful.
- Knowing they can talk to you builds trust and means children will continue to come to you with any worries or questions they have as they grow up.
- Having an understanding of how we grow and change, relationships and how bodies work can help children to look after themselves and stay healthy.
- Lots of things that people giggle about, joke about or say are naughty or dirty are really an ordinary, healthy and natural part of growing up or being an adult.

Responding to your children's questions

Top tips for parents and carers

- Accept that children will have and will ask questions.
- Try not be surprised, laugh or be angry.
- Assume it is a genuine question.
- Avoid changing the subject or saying, "I will tell you when you are older".
- Check your child's understanding before answering, ask them what they think first.
- Tell the truth, rather than giving made up stories.
- Clear, short answers are fine. You do not need to give lots of information. If children are still unclear they will usually ask another question.
- If you don't know the answer or how to answer to something, it is fine to say you don't know, but try to find out and answer the question later – "That's a good question but I need to think about how best to answer it, I'll come back to you later." (Make sure you do!)
- Have an answer prepared in case your child asks you a question in an inappropriate environment, for example, "That's a good question, let's talk about it later."

Most of the time, children are happy with short, simple, truthful answers.

Think about the amount of detail you would like to give - this is likely to depend on where you are (the situation you find yourself in when the child asks the question) and the child's age and stage of development. See overleaf for some examples...





Here are some questions with some ideas for answers....

How are babies made?

A starting point

- Babies are made from an egg from a woman and a seed from a man.

More information

- The seed (sperm) from a man's body joins up with (fertilises) an egg (ovum) from the woman's body. A baby develops and grows in the woman's womb.

Detailed information

- Babies are made when a man and woman have sexual intercourse.
- The man places his penis inside a woman's vagina. After a while the penis releases sperm (ejaculates). The sperm travel up to the woman's womb. If there is an egg there ready, the sperm and the egg join together (fertilises). If the egg settles in the lining of the womb a baby develops.
- Although lots of sperm are released (in a sticky white liquid, called semen) it only takes one sperm to make a baby.
- Sometimes babies are made by a doctor joining a sperm (from a man) and an egg (from a woman) in a petri-dish so they fertilise. The fertilised egg is put into the woman's womb. If the egg attaches to the lining of the womb it develops into a baby. This method is called in-vitro fertilisation or IVF (it means in-glass fertilisation).

Why does my body have to change?

A starting point

- Everybody grows and changes. Baby humans grow into children and then adults, just like baby animals grow into adult animals and seedlings grow into bigger plants.

More information

- It is part of growing up and is a natural part of life / the human life cycle. The time when bodies change from a child to an adult body is known as puberty.
- During puberty the body begins to prepare for becoming an adult. This is important as the body must change so that adults can have babies in the future.

Detailed information

- When bodies change it can feel exciting or sometimes a bit scary or worrying. It is important to remember that the changes will be gradual and over time and that everybody changes at different times and at different rates.

