

Reasons Parents Fail to Talk with their Children about Sex

Parents and those enacting in a parental role are the best teachers in student's lives. The more openly parents talk to their children about the facts regarding human sexuality, the healthier kids can be in their attitudes and behaviors. Teens consistently say their relationships and sexual decisions are most influenced by their parents.¹ Lacking role models, these conversations can be challenging. Whether or not we have had healthy conversations about human sexuality modeled for us, it is important to have discussions with our children. Here are a few common reasons parents fail to have dialogue with their children, along with some truths to encourage these important conversations.

- 1) We are busy people. We don't think about the need to discuss this topic or we feel our children are receiving adequate information from other sources.**

Reality: We need to take time to explain the values we live by to our children so they understand how these values are in their best interest. As a parent and role model we must create an environment that reflects a healthy lifestyle and protects the whole child for his/her present and future. As a result we can help our children avoid unhealthy physical, emotional, intellectual, social and ethical consequences that can occur from engaging in sexual activity before marriage. We can also prepare them to enjoy a healthy expression of mature sexuality within marriage should he/she decide to marry one day.

- 2) Failure to realize the effect our culture has on our children.**

If our children stand by us at the checkout line of local grocery stores, watch movies and have access to social media, they are most likely receiving some unhealthy messaging regarding their body. We need to articulate our own family's values to give our children a filter for evaluating everything they see and hear. Culture and their peers will be strong influencers in molding their understanding.

¹ Power to Decide (formerly The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy). (2016). *Survey Says: Parent Power*. Washington, DC: Author.

3) Parents may hold “excess baggage” – misconceptions, unhealthy attitudes, misinformation and/or guilt from past experiences that may keep us from talking freely with our kids.

Common misconceptions include:

- a. The standard of sexual abstinence until marriage can't be expected by someone who may not have met that standard herself/himself.
 - i. Parents do not owe the details of past choices (should choices have been made which are uncomfortable explaining) to our children... nor do we owe those details to anyone else. As we say in the IDFM program, “Our past choices do not define us or our future.”
 - ii. When asking our children to make healthy choices, many parents have found it helpful to say “because of my past choices that made my life more difficult, I am passionate about you not repeating certain behaviors which would make your life more difficult/painful.” That's it; no details necessary. Some consequences may be physical, but many are not. Should one of your own consequences be an unplanned pregnancy, what a beautiful opportunity to discuss how some un-intended consequences may result in a beautiful child. Although perhaps not planned, always a gift.
 - iii. Discussing our past choices (but without details), as parents, with our children, in a wonderful relationship opportunity to allow our children to gain confidence in us. This may increase the possibility of him/her sharing his/her painful choices with us, as we all make choices that, in hind-site, we wish we hadn't.
- b. Students are incapable of understanding it is in their best interest to save sexual activity until marriage.
- c. Sex education is best handled with one “big talk” as a child approaches puberty.
- d. Being open and informative with our children will “put ideas into their heads.”
- e. Those parts of the body capable of sexual arousal should not be discussed.
- f. Parents with girls have more to worry about than parents with boys.
- g. If kids look mature, they probably are mature.

If parents fail to guide their children through important conversations about his/her sexuality because of their own misconceptions, unhealthy attitudes, misinformation and/or guilt from past experiences, we may be relinquishing this important honor to social media.

Let us be encouraged by knowing our children want to hear from us. For guidance regarding having conversations with your child about sexuality see *"Communicating about Sexuality with Your Child."*