



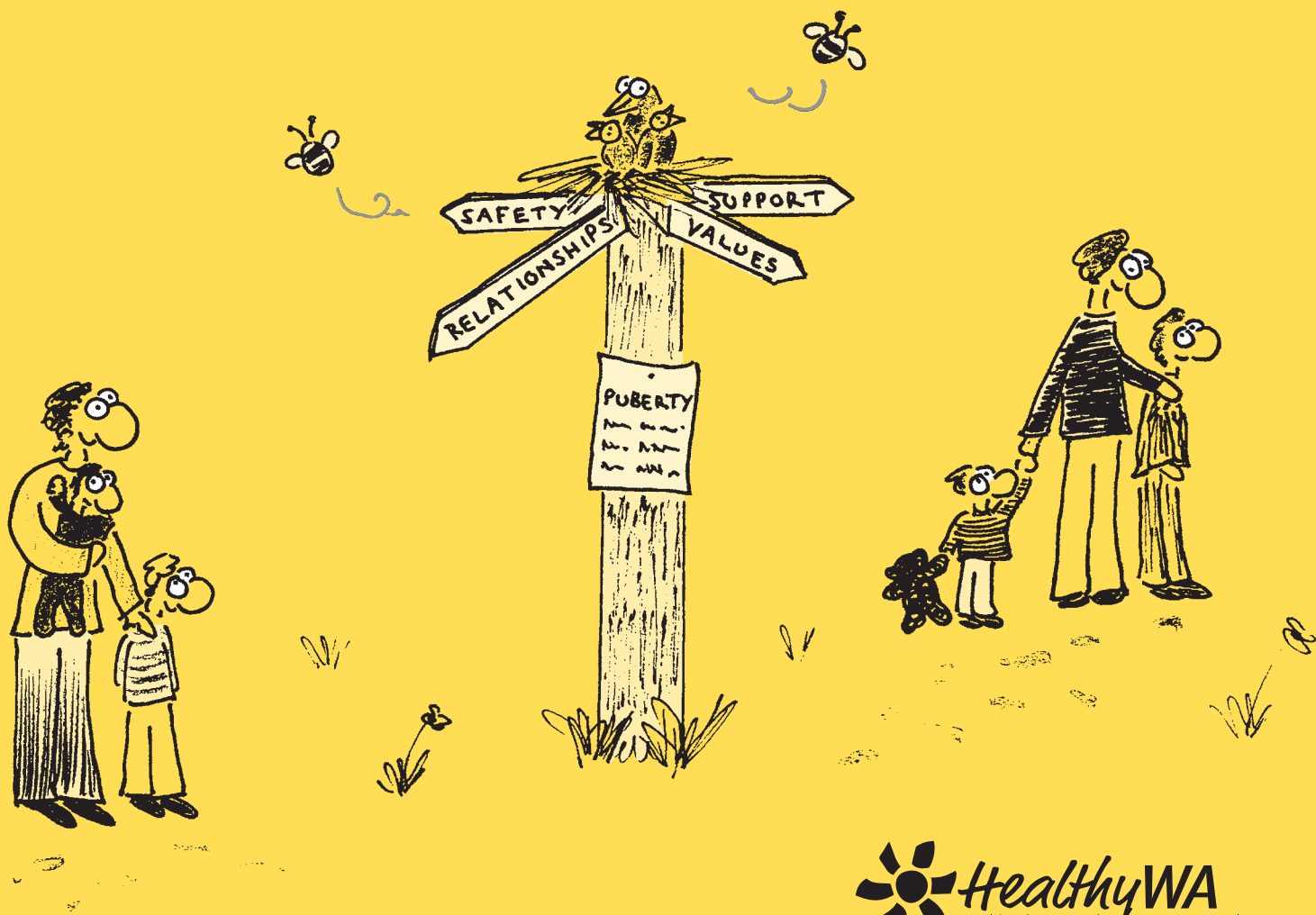
Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

# Top tips for talking about sex

from

# Talk soon. Talk often.

A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex



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# Top 20 tips for talking about sex

01

## Talk soon.

Start talking about bodies from birth. Talk about puberty and respectful relationships. Discuss topics long before your child is going to experience them. Practise talking about sexual matters before your children reach an age when they are reluctant to discuss the topic.

06

## Answer questions honestly and simply.

Just a little bit of information is OK because you can always come back to it (and you should). If you haven't given enough information, most kids will ask more questions.

02

## Talk often (listen too).

Cover the same subject lots of times – little and often. A general pattern of openly 'chatting' about sex and relationships will stick and create a feeling of closeness and comfort to talk about anything.

07

## You don't have to have all the answers.

If you don't know how to respond to a question, it's OK to say so. Keep communication open with something like, "That's a good question. I don't know how to answer it. We can find out together."

03

## Two way talk.

Gone are the days of the one-off 'birds and the bees' lecture. Good communication is lots of conversations, sharing ideas, experiences and questions.

08

## Use teachable moments.

Use media, movies, news events, songs and family events to introduce topics and discuss values (e.g. an unplanned pregnancy on a TV show can be a good way to talk about the importance of contraception).

04

## It's not all about sex.

It's about bodies, babies, growing up, love, sexual expression, feelings, treating each other with respect, personal values, decisions and relationships.

09

## Use the correct words.

Practise saying these words out loud: vulva, vagina, clitoris, penis, testes, scrotum, breasts, nipples. Get used to using the proper names for sexual body parts right from the start. That doesn't mean you can't use the words 'boobs' or 'willy', but it helps you and your child to be more matter of fact about these issues.

05

## Don't wait for your child to ask questions.

They might never ask, and they still need to know. If they haven't said anything to you by the time they are 10, then shyness or embarrassment is likely to stop them from this point onwards. Create conversations – use books, characters in TV shows, stories from your own life.

10

## Make reliable information available.

Leave books around that have accurate information. Share reliable websites and video clips. Help your child to determine what information is real and what is fake on social media.

**11****Be a 'tellable' parent.**

Show you are approachable by raising the topic, be unshockable (pretend if you have to), and listen.

**12****Trusted network of adults.**

Ask your child to think of other adults they might like to talk to about these topics: aunts/uncles, grandparents and older siblings can be great sources of support.

**13****Make it less awkward.**

Offer times to talk that don't require a formal sit-down. Start a conversation in the car or washing the dishes so that you can talk without eye contact (this also helps to give the chat a finite time so that it is not too 'heavy'). Send your teen a message with a link or post you'd like them to look at and offer them the chance to come to you with questions (don't tag them in posts that their friends can see too!).

**14****It's OK to laugh!**

Sex and bodies can be funny for both you and your child. It's OK to laugh, to admit you are embarrassed (but determined) and to say, "I don't have all the answers, but I do know where we can get reliable information."

*We haven't made it an issue. So it's just information, and it's there to be asked, and my attitude is, I'll tell you, to the best of my knowledge. If not, I'll find out for you and then we can work through it.*

*– Parent of girl 6 and boy 8*

**15****You are not alone.**

There are lots of supportive services and websites at the back of this book that can help you and your child.

**16****Support your school's Relationships and Sexuality program.**

Find out what your child is learning about at school and use this to continue conversations at home.

**17****Teach them about contraception and condoms.**

Share your family values about sexual behaviour but make sure they have factual information on how to best protect themselves should the need arise.

**18****Show them how to access services.**

Concerns about confidentiality can stop young people accessing services. Show them how to get their own Medicare card (at 15 years old). Explain that their My Health Record becomes confidential to them at 14 years old. Show them how to use local and online services.

**19****Be inclusive, respect diversity.**

Remember that about 5–20% of people are same-sex attracted, about 4% are gender diverse and 1.7% intersex.

**20****It's never too late to start.**

Children will learn about sex with or without you. It's better to get information from a trusted adult rather than online or from friends. It doesn't hurt to say, "I wish we chatted about this a long time ago, but here is something I really want you to know..."

# 10 reasons for talking about sexuality (soon)

01

## Many children want to know

Many younger children are curious about how babies grow, and how they 'started'. Talking to them openly and honestly shows that they can come to you with their questions.

02

## It sets the stage for later conversations

Give children (and yourself) practice being comfortable talking about sexual matters before they are older and reluctant to discuss the topic. Showing them that you are willing to help them find the answers to their 'tricky' questions when they are younger will encourage them to seek help from you when they are older.

03

## It helps children cope better with puberty

Kids worry 'Am I normal?' and 'When will it happen?'. Learning what to expect and how to manage it helps children to become independent and confident. Puberty is tough for those who are the first (and last) to develop. Some girls experience breast swelling at age 8 and some boys have late growth spurts. Explaining that there is a wide range of 'normal' when it comes to how our bodies (and minds) change and develop throughout our life can be reassuring.

04

## It ensures boys get included in sexuality education within the family

Boys often miss out on sexuality education within the family. Mums tend to provide more discussion on this topic but may know less than dads about boys' development. Boys are often left to learn about sex and sexuality via the internet.

05

## It shows your kid you 'have their back'

Tell your kids it's not OK for relatives or others to make observations about their breast development, weight gain, skinniness or any other commentary on their bodies. This is a good way of showing your kids they have the right to have their bodies respected.

06

## It helps young people make healthier choices

Research shows that children whose parents talk with them about sexuality and who receive good sexuality education at school are more likely to: start sex later; have sex when they are ready; have consensual sex; are less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy; and less likely to get an STI.

07

## It can help protect them from sexual abuse

Keeping discussions about sex and bodies a secret can help sexual abusers keep their crimes secret. Open discussion at home gives children permission to talk with you about sex and sexual body parts which makes them feel safe to ask questions and let you know if they are worried about something. Regular reminders that their body is their own and that no-one can touch them without their consent helps protect them in both their early and later years.

08

## It can make life easier for kids who are not traditional 'boy' types or 'girl' types

There is more than one kind of boy and one kind of girl, but kids can suffer if they don't follow the expected norms. Children who are transgender or intersex, or kids in LGBTI families can find themselves excluded too. If we start early to question rigid gender stereotypes we can prevent a lot of misery and help to broaden everyone's options, ultimately contributing to kids' wellbeing and sense of belonging.

09

## It allows you to share your family values

Having open discussions offers lots of opportunity to share your values and beliefs. Using examples from social media and TV allows you to discuss topics hypothetically. Offer suggestions for how you would hope your child to respond in that situation.

10

## It shows them that it's OK to talk

The research tells us that children may not come to you if they have a question – they are waiting for you to raise the topic first. They may be embarrassed to reveal that they are interested or, in the case of older teens, worried that you will assume they are sexually active. Show them it's ok to talk by taking the lead and starting conversations.