

- **Use Teachable Moments.** The pregnancies or births of relatives and friends are events that can help your child understand. Even the pregnancies and births of farm animals or pets can help explain the process.

Sexual intercourse

This is the topic that many parents are the most uncomfortable with, but don't avoid it. Your child may ask, 'How does the baby get in there in the first place?'. Again, respond simply and truthfully:



- **Use Their Questions as a Guide for How Much Detail to Provide** - if they want more information, give it to them.
- **Use Visuals to Help Explain Anatomy.** Use age-appropriate picture books on sex and read them together.

Results of Starting Sexuality Education at an Early Age:

- **Children who have a clear understanding of sexual issues are more likely to behave responsibly with sex when they are older.**
- **Children who know the names of body parts and about private areas of the body are less likely to be sexually abused.**
- **If you shy away from the subject whenever your child mentions it, they will stop asking you questions, and then won't seek your advice when they are older and really need you.**

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Where to get Help

- Sexual Health Centres
- Public Health offices
- Bookshops
- Libraries
- Family, Parent, or Women's Resource/Support Centres

SEX EDUCATION AND YOUR PRESCHOOLER

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Promoting Sexual Health Throughout the

Ideally, talking to your child about sex and sexuality is an ongoing process that begins when they are very young. Don't think of sex education as a single lecture given when a child reaches puberty. By the age of four, most children are curious about certain sexual issues and they need clear, honest and brief answers.



Telling a child about sex will not make them sexually precocious. **Research indicates that children who have a clear understanding of sexual issues are more likely to behave responsibly.** If you talk to your preschooler about sexuality, it paves the way for open communication as they get older.

Normal sexual development:

Don't be horrified if your preschooler starts taking an interest in sexual issues - it is perfectly normal. Typical behaviours can include:

- Masturbation
- Curiosity about the physical characteristics of the opposite sex
- Wondering where babies come from

Preparing yourself

You may feel embarrassed, uncomfortable or hesitant when talking to your child about sex:

- **Find Information, Help and Support.** If you can't think of what to say, or are unsure about what to tell your child, read up on the topic. You could refer to age-appropriate sex education materials such as books,

movies, or pamphlets to help you.

- **Be consistent.** Discuss your child's sex education with your partner and decide on an approach.
- **Be calm.** Your child will pick up on your attitudes by your behaviours. If you cringe or change the subject whenever they mention a sexual issue, they will think that it's wrong to discuss such things.
- **Use Proper Terms.** Get used to using the proper names for body parts like penis, testicles, vagina, and vulva. Using slang terms your child may think that private parts are 'bad' because you don't use the real words.
- **Admit if you don't know the answers or need time to think.** A phrase such as, 'That a good question; let's talk about that later' gives you time to think about what you're going to say.

Masturbation

Masturbation in young children is a normal part of human sexual development and includes just feeling the genitals (not for the purpose of orgasm).

- Reassure yourself that masturbation is not a sign of sexual deviancy.
- Focus on the setting, rather than the activity. For example, if your child masturbates in public, tell them that what they're doing is OK but that it's something to do in private, just like going to the toilet or picking your nose.
- If it is part of your religion or belief that masturbation is wrong, then explain that to the child, but do not tell them incorrect consequences, like they will go blind, as this simply isn't true.



Curiosity and Undressing

- **Be calm.** Don't react in anger if you find your child 'playing doctor'. Distract the children with another activity.
- **Use "Teachable Moments"** (an event used to open discussion on a certain subject) When your child is no longer with their friend, talk about how girls' and boys' bodies are different from each other.
- **Talk about Unwanted Sexual Touching.** Remind them that in addition to no one touching their private parts (except for medical reasons) they are also not supposed to expose their private parts, or touch other people's private parts. Teach them to tell a trusted adult immediately if anyone tries to touch or expose their private parts to them.

Where Babies Come From

Children are always asking about how the world works, and this includes how babies are made.



- **Be casual.** Treat questions about reproduction like you would any other request for information. Be calm, honest and factual.
- **Keep your answers simple.** Don't go into a detailed explanation of human reproduction. For example, if your child asks for the first time where babies come from, say something like 'a baby grows in its mummy's tummy'.
- **A good rule is if they asked more questions, they needed more details.** If your child is happy with your answer they will likely wander off and play. When your child is ready to hear a more detailed explanation, they will ask again, so your next explanation might go like this "When the baby is big enough, it comes out through the mummy's vagina, which is very stretchy".