

PERENNIAL PROBLEM:

What to do about Nurturing Human Development

CONTINUING PARENTING CONCERN:

Developing a Sense of Self in Parents and Children

RELATED CONCERN:

Sexuality Education in the Family

DESIRED RESULTS:

Students will understand the role of parents in children's sexuality education and how to increase communication between parents and children about sexuality.

LEARNER OUTCOMES: Students will:

1. Understand the broad meaning of sexuality.
2. Become aware of some of their own attitudes about sexuality.
3. Consider the desired results of parents being children's primary educators of sexuality.
4. Consider the parent's role in communicating the family values and attitudes to their children.
5. Understand that, when given information and support, parents have the ability to encourage positive attitudes and responsible sexual behaviors in their children from birth to adulthood.
6. Identify the negative and exploitive messages about sexuality in the media and society in general.

SUPPORTING CONCEPTS:

- A. Sexuality
- B. Family Centered Sexuality Education
- C. Sexual Exploitation and Responsibility

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Sexuality is a word that is often misunderstood and misused, sometimes resulting in significant problems for family life and/or parenthood educators and their programs. It is a word that seems to immediately command the attention of most people in our society. This is because sexuality means "sex" to many people and conjures up thoughts of physical acts and human anatomy. Defining sexuality in this manner implies that human beings are only sexual when they are engaged in some sexual act.

We are all sexual beings and sexuality is a comprehensive term that includes many factors that are an integral part of being human. Sexuality provides one aspect of our self and a way of relating to others in society. It gives us a range of emotions—joy, sadness, empathy, love. Our sexuality affects all of our experiences throughout our lifetime. When we understand our sexuality, we gain new insights into ourselves. Sexuality involves an integration of our bio-psycho-social growth and development and how it impacts on our relationships. We are sexual throughout the life cycle.

Several factors highlight the need for early parental involvement in children's sexuality education. Studies reveal growing rates of teen and preteen sexual activity, high levels of adolescent pregnancy, increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases, and ignorance about sexual issues. When sexuality education is defined in the broadest terms, however, it goes beyond these issues. Parents are involved in their children's sexuality education, either consciously or unconsciously, from the child's birth. The fact is that education about sexuality is not merely providing factual information; it is also conveying values, standards and attitudes. Parents teach just as much, if not more, by what they do as by what they say. There is no way a parent can avoid being the principal educator about sexuality of his or her child---whether the parent is open and candid about sex, or says nothing at all. Before their first day of school, children have learned from their parents, not only the specific information about sex, but also the attitudes their parents have demonstrated. "We do not talk about that," or "ask your mother," conveys that sex is special, different from all other subjects. Even when parents do not provide information and guidance concerning sexuality, their children are getting "sex education." There are many alternative sources of information—and misinformation—about sexuality including the child's friends and peers, newspapers and magazines, radio and television, popular music and the internet.

The belief that early sexual activity can be prevented if parents avoid discussing sexuality with children or providing them with accurate information is not supported in research literature. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. In general, young people who are able to discuss their feelings with their parents and have been given accurate information about sexuality tend to behave more responsibly, have the confidence to resist premature sexual experiences, and protect themselves from pregnancy when and if they become sexually active. When they enter into relationships, they tend to be more mature and less exploitive.

Young people today may be faced with decisions about expressing their sexuality earlier than previous generations, depending upon their cultural setting. Good decisions are based upon accurate information, self-awareness, and knowledge of one's own values. Parents who discuss sexuality with their children when they are young are helping them become responsible and effective decision makers.

Although children rarely list parents as their major source of sexual information, studies suggest that parents are trying to become more effective sexuality educators. When parents have been asked why they have difficulty with the tasks of sexuality education they have indicated that they lack sufficient knowledge about sexual issues and are, therefore, reluctant to discuss their children's sexual curiosity, or that they lack the communication skills necessary for discussing sensitive topics. There may be reasons other than what appears in research underlying a parent's inability to talk about sexuality. When parents did not talk to their children about sexuality, these people, when they become parents, often feel they are breaking family tradition and rules by doing so. In addition, they lacked a role model to learn from on how to effectively communicate regarding sexual issues with their own children. Furthermore, the subject matter may be considered sensitive and embarrassing, resulting in "not talk" rules around the topic.

Educational programs in schools and in the community can help young people, who will eventually become parents, gain the background they need to discuss factual information about sexuality. Depending on the programs, children can be helped to identify their own attitudes and values related to sexuality and develop strategies for communicating these values to their own children in the future. Such programs may be an important approach to reducing sexually related problems experienced by pre-adolescent and adolescent children. These programs need to go beyond a traditional "sex education" approach where the subject matter is often confined to what has been termed the "plumbing" aspects of the human reproductive

process. In these circumstances, little attention is given to the underlying issues of human sexuality as a characteristic of the whole person.

For many parents, a major concern is moral conduct. Morality refers to standards incorporated into a person's own value system. When sexuality education is family centered, parents will be able to discuss morals and behavior as they relate to the family values. It is the best way for parents to pass on their personal values to their children.

What constitutes sexuality education in the early childhood years? Building feelings of self-worth is an important part of sexuality education. When a baby is loved, cuddled and talked to, a sense of security and self-worth is nurtured. Children develop feelings about their body parts long before verbal communication can take place. Parents are thrilled when the young child explores various parts of his or her body and he or she can name the body part. Parents are less comfortable, however, when the child touches the genital area and they may distract the child with a toy or quickly put on a diaper. From such parental reactions, the child may feel that the genital area is bad, not to be touched, and different from the rest of the body. Since babies get comfort and pleasure from fondling their genitals, they become confused about themselves and their genital areas.

Bath time offers an opportunity to show that all parts of the body are important and all need to be kept clean. The baby can begin to learn the names of various parts of the body, including the penis and vagina, and parents can practice saying the words out loud.

During the early childhood years, parents teach children about all aspects of life by example and attitudes. As children see parents interact with each other, they learn a definition of love that will be incorporated into their own lives and relationships. The roles of males and females are defined for young children by observing their parents. As children ask questions, parents need to learn to talk honestly, even though it may be difficult.

The most important part of dealing with the sexuality of children is to create an atmosphere in which children are comfortable asking questions of their parents and in which they feel good about themselves. Providing children with information matched to their level of cognitive development is the most effective way to talk about sexuality with children.

When a young child asks, "Where did I come from?" it is important for the parent to clarify what the child is really asking. Not answering questions truthfully will only confuse the child later on. Questions from a young child should be answered simply and honestly in a matter-of-fact manner.

Some suggestions for parents on how to handle questions about sexuality are:

1. Parents need to talk with each other about the sexuality message they want to give to their child or children.
2. Try to anticipate sexual questions and behaviors and plan and practice their responses.
3. They should answer questions as they arise. Replies such as "not now" and "you don't need to know that," teach children that it is not okay to ask. They might delay a discussion with, "this isn't a good time now" and suggest they talk later; however, it is important to follow through.
4. If parents are embarrassed, they should admit that. A comment like, "this is hard for me to talk about, but I'm willing to try" is wonderful and the child will appreciate the honesty.
5. Answer the questions simply and honestly and leave the door open for further discussion.
6. Parents should initiate sexuality discussions. They might ask, "Have you ever wondered about how you were born?" There are excellent age appropriate children's books that can be used.

7. Use every day events as “teachable moments” for passing along family messages about sexuality.

A compelling reason for children and young people to be knowledgeable about sexuality is that they are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation without such knowledge. One of the best approaches to protecting children and youth against sexual abuse and exploitation is to help them protect themselves. To do this they need awareness, knowledge and skills.

The media has a strong influence on attitudes and knowledge about sexuality. Television has brought sexual messages into the home. Commercials often convey strong sexual messages, visually as well as verbally.

By the time children have reached the teenage years, they have most of the “facts.” They need their parent’s help with questions about values, relationships, love and sexuality. Sexual responsibility is a lot more than pregnancy prevention and disease. Teenagers need to understand that it also includes feeling good about themselves and confident in the choices they make. Responsible decisions respect personal values and goals and promote self-esteem, not guilt. It is also important for children to know that becoming involved with someone sexually involves commitment and mutual consent, and that mature relationships are based on caring, closeness, intimacy, and tenderness.

TEACHER PREPARATION:

In preparation for this unit and depending upon the policy in your school and/or district, you may want to send a letter to all parents or guardians of your students. The letter would inform them of the unit topic and goals for the students. Parents could be invited to visit a class if they wish. Parents may also request that their student not participate in this unit.

Keep in mind that when discussing sexuality education with teenagers in a high school classroom there needs to be an awareness and sensitivity to the variety of experiences they bring to the classroom. Discussing ideal parent-child interactions related to sexuality might be difficult for them given their own experiences. Recognize that some students may have been sexually abused as children, many within the home. Some young women have had experiences that lead them to believe they are only valued for their ability to please men. In addition, young men may feel they are only valued if they have sexual prowess.

Planning for unit:

1. Think about how sexuality education was handled in your family. What messages do you remember receiving about your own sexuality and relationships with the opposite sex? Were you able to ask questions related to sexuality in your family and how were they answered? Did family members follow traditional gender roles?
2. Reflect on all the messages the students in your class are getting related to sexuality: from the media, from other classes where sexuality education may deal primarily with reproduction and contraception, and from peers. If time permits, go through some magazines that your students may be reading and become familiar with how sexuality is used to promote products to teenagers. Listen to the lyrics of music your students may be listening to and become aware of the sexual messages, either explicit or implicit in these lyrics.
3. Reflect on your own attitudes and values to sexuality.

DIRECTED ACTIVITIES:

Supporting Concept A: Sexuality

1. **“Why is it so Difficult to Talk About Sex?”** In order to accomplish the goals for this unit, students need to feel free to talk about their feelings and be able to share freely in the classroom. This is not easy for many people to do. By looking at some common roadblocks to such communication and developing some ground rules for the class that demonstrate respect for all participants, students may be more willing to discuss these issues.

Divide the class into small groups of 3 to 4 each and have them select a recorder. You may want students to work in groups of the same gender. Ask each group to generate and write on newsprint or butcher paper a list of reasons why it is difficult for people to talk about sex and sexuality. Ask them to think of how people learn to avoid talking about sexual issues. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for this task. Reconvene class and ask recorders to review their lists for the rest of the class. After the first recorder, ask each subsequent recorder to comment only on those reasons not previously shared. (*Awareness of Context*)

Lead a class discussion using the following questions:

- What are some social messages that discourage children from talking and asking questions about sex?
- What are some family messages?
- What type of role models do we see in families that demonstrate that it is not appropriate to discuss sexual issues?
- How might some religious teachings discourage these discussions?
- What messages do we get from television, books, the internet, and other media that discourage honest discussions about sexuality?

Ask the class the following question: “What agreements can we make with each other to get past these barriers to communication?” Refer to “Ground Rules” (SM-1) for some examples. Add others to list as students brainstorm ideas.

The list of “Hints for Overcoming Barriers” (SM-2), made into a transparency or poster, could be used as a reminder to the class each day there is a discussion of sensitive issues.

2. **“Sexuality vs. Sex”:** To help students understand the broad concept of sexuality as opposed to the term sex, provide small groups of students with newsprint and have them list whatever comes to mind when they think of sexuality. You may want to have groups of the same gender work together. Provide a limited amount of time for this activity and then reconvene the entire class. Have students post their group’s list.

Lead a class discussion on a definition of sexuality based upon the terms they listed on their newsprint.

- Are the ideas primarily concerned with sexual intercourse, exploitation, anatomy, and reproduction?
- Are there terms that equate sexuality with self esteem, relationships, healthy bodies, loving, and affection?
- Have students think about how their beliefs are related to masculinity, femininity, and feelings about self. Add other terms to the lists as the class discusses the group’s responses.

Using the definition of sexuality found on TM-1, take each phrase and talk about how it is

related to sexuality, e.g., “how we feel about ourselves.” Compare the different ways groups within society define sexuality. What are the reasons each group may have a different definition?

- 3. Reflections:** To help students remember and reflect on early sexuality education, ask them to respond to the question on “Reflections” (SM-3). This will be an activity they will keep for themselves so they can feel comfortable responding to each question.

Ask the class how reflecting on their own sexuality education will influence how they might eventually be their own child’s primary sexuality educator.

(Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Actions, Awareness of Context)

Supporting Concept B: Family Centered Sexuality Education

- 4. “Communicating about Sexuality”:** Ask students to brainstorm what skills and attitudes they think are necessary for both parents, children, and adults to talk about when dealing with issues of sexuality. Emphasize that parents don’t have to be “experts” to share their values and ideas with their children. They, as well as children, can have some confusion and admit to a lack of knowledge. Communicating honestly will be beneficial.

Some skills and attitudes which might be included on this list would be the ability to:

- Build an atmosphere of trust between individuals.
- Listen to each other.
- Empathize with others.
- Identify and communicate values.
- Communicate emotions.
- Accept differences in opinion.
- Solve problems and negotiate conflicts.
- Understand the difference between verbal and non-verbal messages and deliver a consistent message between the two.
- Set sexual limits for themselves.

Divide the class into small groups and have them reflect on what they think children and young adults want to know about sexuality. Ask students to develop lists of information for different age groups. The lists should be divided into groups starting with ages 0-5, 6-9, 10-13, 14-16.

- What do children need to know for their own safety?
- How can children be saved embarrassment in different situations?
- How can children feel comfortable with their changing bodies?

Allow sufficient time for this activity so students can discuss topics thoroughly. If they lack information on some topics, encourage them to add them to their lists anyway since they will be able to do research on these topics when they carry out the “Role Rehearsal” activity.

Have the groups share their lists with the entire class and attempt to consolidate the information into a class list for each age group. Allow time for students to discuss their disagreements about what should occur at each age and help them identify the reasons for this difference of opinion.

Help students become aware of societal influences on what children and young people should know about sexuality. What is the role of the political climate in what is taught;

religious beliefs, views of men and women, fear (of early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, etc.)? What role do the media play? How might attitudes change with a crisis such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic?

Questions for discussion:

- At what point in a child's life can parents cooperatively develop some guidelines with their child?
- How do parents communicate their guidelines or expectations to children, especially when there are so many mixed messages in society?
- Is there a point in a child's life where parents and children might agree to disagree? What can be the effect of that on family relationships?
- As a teenager, what guidelines and expectations related to sexual behavior would you want for yourself and your peers?

Record the guidelines on an overhead or newsprint. Some examples of responsible behavior could be to:

- ✓ Promote the dignity, equality, and worth of each person.
- ✓ Act with purpose, rather than impulse.
- ✓ Avoid exploitation or manipulations of others.
- ✓ Avoid exploitation of yourself.
- ✓ Take precautions against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease.
- ✓ Choose abstinence.

(Desired Results, Alternative Approaches, Consequences of Actions)

5. **"Role Rehearsal"**: Using the case studies, "Family Centered Sexuality Education" (SM-4), have students work in small groups to represent a family unit. Using role rehearsal (a way to practice handling themselves in a similar situation), the students are to provide a child or young adult with information about sexuality. Remind students that each family will have different goals and values for their children based on their personal or religious beliefs. These beliefs should be respected as they prepare for their demonstration. Differences in attitudes and behaviors do not imply that there is a right or wrong answer.

Students will need to:

- a) Determine what information they feel is appropriate for each age.
- b) Research any information they are not sure of.
- c) Be prepared to demonstrate how they would handle this situation in the family they are portraying.

Be prepared to have material for the students to use to research their age group or have students do research online. The following website has age-related resources in both English and Spanish:

<http://www.noplacelikehome.org>

The home page has links to other resources. A good selection of children's books for different ages would be helpful. The "Summary of Sexuality Development Events in the Young Child," (SM-5) "Communicating with Children about Sex", (SM-6) and "Affirmations", (SM- 7) should be reproduced for students to use. Allow sufficient class time for students to do the research.

Conclude the activity with the following questions:

- Do you think the child got the information he or she needed and wanted?
- How could parents feel more comfortable in the situation?
- Was the information accurate?
- Was it helpful to the child or teenager?
- Are there people who would disagree with the approach demonstrated? What groups of people? Which approach?
- What other ways could the situation be handled?
- What would be the outcomes if different methods were used?

(Desired Results, Consequences of Actions, Alternative Approaches, Awareness of Context)

Supporting Concept C: Sexual Exploitation and Responsibility

6. **“Media Messages”:** The media has a strong influence on children’s attitudes and knowledge about sexuality. Sexual exploitation occurs in very subtle forms, such as in popular music, advertising, humor, and entertainment. When students understand that exploitation is using someone for one’s own advantage without regard for the other person, students are better able to protect themselves. A young child whose self-image is supported by his or her parents and who has been taught about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors may be less vulnerable to exploitation. Learning about sexuality and skills for thwarting sexual abuse go hand-in-hand. The benefit of learning about both is the promotion of self-esteem. High self-esteem enhances that ability to show responsibility for sexual behavior.

Give students about a week to complete “Media Messages” assignment (SM-8).

Ask students to identify forms of sexual exploitation in society (advertising, lyrics from popular music, etc.)

- Who is “exploited”?
- How are they exploited?
- Would you attempt to screen music your child listened to?
- Would you attempt to screen the books/media your child watched?
- Why or why not?

During the follow-up discussion for “Media Messages,” ask students to list adjectives which describe how boys and men are depicted on these shows and advertisements. Do the same for girls and women.

After the class has discussed their observations, have the students use their pictures, cartoons, and articles to prepare a display that demonstrates the consequences of stereotyping and exploitation. *(Awareness of Context, Consequences of Action)*

7. **“Reflections”:** To close this unit, have students respond in writing to the following questions:

- a) What does the term “sexuality” mean to you?
- b) What are the desired results for children and parents when the family is the primary educator on sexuality?
- c) How will our discussion and activities in this unit affect your own parenting on these issues?

(Consequences of Action, Desired Results)

RESOURCES:

Berstein, Ann C. (1996). *Flight of the Stork: What Children Think (and When) About Sex and FamilyBuilding*. Perspective Press.

Brown, Laurie Krasoy (2000). *What's the Big Secret?: Talking About Sex with Boys and Girls*. Little, Brown and Company.

Gordon, Sol. (2001). *How Can You Tell if You're Really in Love?* Adams Media Corporation.

Gordon, Sol & Judith Gordon (1999) *Raising a Child Responsibly in a Sexually Permissive World*. Adams Media Corporation.

Harris, Robie (1996). *It's Perfectly Normal: Growing Up, Changing Bodies, Sex and Sexual Health*. Candlewick Press.

Harris, Robie (2002). *It's So Amazing: A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies & Families*. Candlewick Press.

Madaras, Lynda & Area Madaras (2000). *My Body, My Self for Boys: What's Happening to My Body?* Newmarket Press.

Madaras, Lynda & Area Madaras (2000). *My Body, My Self for Girls: What's Happening to My Body?* Newmarket Press.

Roffman, Deborah (2002). *But How'd I Get in There in the First Place?: Talking to Your Young Child about Sex*. Perseus Press.

Roffman, Deborah (2001). *Sex and Sensibility: The Thinking Parent's Guide to Talking Sense about Sex*. Perseus Press.

Videos:

In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS (1995). Family Health Productions, Inc., Boston, MA.

The Power of Girls: Inside and Out (2003). Family Health Productions, Inc., Boston, MA.

Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health (1997). Family Health Productions, Inc., Boston, MA.

Talking About Sex: A Guide for Families (1996). Planned Parenthood Federation of America, New York, NY.

GROUND RULES

1. Everyone has the right to pass on the activities or on answering questions they do not wish to answer. The teacher may also choose not to answer a question.
2. All points of view are worthy of being discussed. There will be no “put downs” of other’s views and values.
3. No question is “dumb.”
4. When possible, correct terminology will be used. When a student does not know the correct terminology, the known term can be used and the teacher or other students will supply the correct terminology.
5. There will be no talking about classmates’ comments outside of class.
6. If a student has a complaint about the class, he or she will go directly to the teacher.
7. It is all right for the class members and the teacher to blush, feel embarrassed, or not know the answers to all the questions.

HINTS FOR OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Ask for more information.

*"I don't understand the meaning of that word.
Would you please explain further?"*

Restate what you think you heard.

"Are you saying that you mean.....?"

Explain what you think happened.

"I feel that you cut me off in mid-sentence."

Tell your feelings.

"I get angry when I am put down for my opinions."

Try to stay calm.

Attacking another person does not help you get your point across.

“Sexuality is the quality of being either male or female. It means many things: how we feel about ourselves, what roles we play in society, and reproduction. It does not mean just how we behave sexually. It is the total of our physical, emotional, and spiritual responses.”

REFLECTIONS

1. What were the messages you received regarding touching your body as a young child? How were these messages given?
2. Were you taught the correct names for your genitals or did your parents make up names for them?
3. Remember how you felt when you first noticed physical changes in your body. Do you recall reactions or comments from family members at the time?
4. How was and is affection demonstrated in your family?
5. How did you learn about your own reproductive anatomy, about sexual intercourse, and birth control options? What age were you? Do you think the timing was appropriate? How did you feel about, a) the things you were learning, b) the way you were learning?
6. How do you think your parents learned about sexuality? You may want to ask your parents. What effect do you think this has had on their communicating with you about sexuality?

CASE STUDIES

FAMILY CENTERED SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Directions: *Work in small groups to prepare a "role rehearsal" which will simulate what might happen in a family if these situations were to occur. Role rehearsal is actually preparing and practicing what you would say in a similar situation. Use the resources available to do research and prepare your presentation. Your task is to determine what information is appropriate for the age of the child and then to demonstrate how the family values would be discussed with the child.*

Age 0 to 5:

1. You have guests visiting in your home and you find your son, age 4, in the bathroom with your guest's 5-year-old daughter. Your son is obviously interested in the physical differences between himself and your 5-year-old guest.
2. You find your 5-year-old daughter, two of her friends who are also 5-years-old, and a 5-year-old neighborhood boy playing "doctor." The boy is partially dressed and the other children are examining him like a doctor would do in a physical exam.
3. Your 3 ½-year-old child asks a guest in your home, who is obviously pregnant, "Why are you so fat?" When you say she has a baby in her uterus your child says, "How did the baby get in there?"

Age 6-9:

1. Your 6-year-old daughter, who has always been comfortable with her nudity, has suddenly asked that the bathroom door remain closed while she is using the toilet or taking a bath.
2. You observe your 6-year-old son fondling his genitals while he is watching television.
3. Your 8-year-old twins, a boy and a girl, come running into the house and say, "Mrs. Jones (a neighbor) is going to have a baby! How did the baby get into her stomach?"

Age 10-13:

1. Your 10-year-old daughter is beginning to show signs of breast development. She appears to be embarrassed and is always wearing bulking sweatshirts to cover her body.

2. Your 11-year-old son's voice is beginning to change and it gets hoarse and crackles.
3. You find a copy of "Playboy" magazine in your 12-year-old son's room.
4. Your 12-year-old daughter asks you (her mother) what kind of birth control you use and how it works.

Age 14-16:

1. You and your husband or wife come home from a movie early to find your 15-year-old son watching television with his girlfriend. They have all the lights off and are cuddling on the couch.
2. Your 16-year-old daughter says she has an appointment with your family doctor and she wants to get birth control pills.
3. Your 16-year-old son is dating a girl whose father is a single parent. He frequently goes away for a weekend with his girlfriend, leaving his daughter alone. Your son spends most of the weekend with his girlfriend, coming home late at night or early in the morning.
4. Your 15-year-old daughter has been dating her boyfriend, a senior, for a year. She is an excellent student and has plans for college. She comes to you and says she just had a pregnancy test which is positive.
5. Your 16-year-old daughter, a junior in high school, has been dating a boy who is a senior. You have observed tension between them recently and you attempt to discuss it with her. She says her boyfriend is pressuring her to become sexually involved and she doesn't want to. He tells her everyone is doing it and if she won't, then he will start dating someone else. She says that remaining a virgin is very important to her but that she is very fond of her boyfriend and is afraid of losing him.
6. Your son, a senior in high school, seems to have lost interest in going to some of the parties at his friend's homes. When questioned about his lack of interest in social activities, he finally admits that he is being pressured to be sexually involved with a girl "to prove he is a man" and he is not interested.

SUMMARY OF SEXUALITY DEVELOPMENT EVENTS IN THE YOUNG CHILD

BIRTH TO ONE YEAR:

- Experiencing genital response to stimulation
- Exploring and discovering their bodies, genitals
- Learning a self-concept from interaction with parents

ONE TO TWO YEARS:

- Continuing to explore themselves
- Recognizing gender identity with significant persons
- Learning a label for their own gender
- Learning and using terminology for genitals and genital function
- Acquiring sense of right and wrong

TWO TO THREE YEARS:

- Awareness of genital differences between genders
- Confirming gender identity
- Imitating parental model

THREE TO FIVE:

- Beginning to act out or involve sexual knowledge in play sequences
- Experimenting, through play, with different gender associated roles
- Manipulating genitals frequently, often to relieve stress and tension as well as for pleasure and comfort
- Increasing attachment to the opposite sex parent

FIVE TO EIGHT:

- Interacting more with environment
- Peer influence becoming more significant
- Engaging in more real-task activities with less fantasy play
- Experiencing a higher level of modesty, acknowledging privacy more, and showing a greater sensitivity to sexual issues
- Forming strong attachments to peers of the same gender, feeling ambivalent toward opposite gender and their interests
- Developing social competencies becomes significant

COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT SEX: GENERAL TIPS

1. **Answer questions as they come up.** Don't put them off – your child may not ask again.
2. **Listen carefully to all questions.** Make sure you understand what is being asked, and respond directly and honestly.
3. **Anticipate your child's questions, then practice your responses ahead of time.** Become familiar with typical sexual questions and behaviors that occur at various ages. This will reduce the chance of being "caught off guard."
4. **If you're feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable, say so.** Acknowledging your own discomfort allows your children to acknowledge theirs.
5. **Use specific and correct terminology.** Of course, parents and children need a common vocabulary. If your child knows the slang terms, be sure to translate. Then encourage the use of proper terms.
6. **Initiate the conversation.** Use "teachable moments" – everyday, naturally occurring events. Books, news articles, and TV shows can be wonderful discussion starters.
7. **Be clear about your values.** This doesn't mean "be judgmental." Children want and need to hear the family's values around sexual issues. They also need to know that their opinions and feelings are respected.
8. **Be concerned about telling "too little, too late" rather than "too much, too soon."** Provided in an open, honest, and loving manner, information need not cause fear, nor does it encourage experimentation. **Remember: your children are hearing about sex everywhere else. They deserve to hear it from you.**
9. **Establish an environment where children feel free to ask questions.** Let them know that you honor their right to be informed about sexuality.

(Planned Parenthood Association of Lane County)

AFFIRMATIONS

Children need to hear positive messages about themselves in order to form good self-esteem, self-image, and sexuality attitudes. Receiving positive messages is important at all ages and understanding levels. Messages are related not only verbally, but also through attitudes, body language, and emotions. Below are some verbal affirmations to pass on to children, starting at birth and continuing through the rest of their lives.

BIRTH TO 6 MONTHS:

Continuing
through

I love you.
You have the right to be here.
I'm glad you were born.
Your needs are important; I will take care of you.
I'm glad you're a girl (or boy).
You are special just the way you are.
I like to hold you.
I'm glad you are part of our family.

6 MONTHS TO 18 MONTHS:

Continuing
through

I like you just the way you are.
You have a beautiful body.
You can feel good about your body.
You are a boy (or girl); I'm happy you are.
You are an individual.

18 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS:

Continuing
through

I'm glad you're growing up.
You can be separate from me.
Your body is good.
Your body is unique.
I'm glad **you** are **you**.
I'm not afraid of your anger.
Your feelings are OK.

3 YEARS TO 6 YEARS:

You can think what you feel.
You can be "grown-up" and still be cuddled.
You don't have to act mad or sad to get taken care of.
You can **tell me** when you don't want to be touched.

MEDIA MESSAGES

Collect samples of observations of media messages that our society sends children and young adults.

- As you watch television shows, observe and note the following:

Show Title	Role of females	Role of males	Relationship between males and females.
<p>What message about sexuality do the shows give viewers?</p>			

2. Watch commercials on television and fill in the table below.

Commercial (Product)	Role of females	Role of males	Why use this product?	Exploitation observed
<p>What messages are the commercials giving to viewers?</p>				

3. Clip some pictures, ads, title of articles, or cartoons from newspapers and magazines that send sexual messages to the reader. Bring them to class. These will be used to develop some collages or posters to summarize some of the ideas discussed in class.