



# Our Whole Lives

LIFESPAN SEXUALITY EDUCATION

## Under Your Wing: Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education Video Series for Parents and Caregivers of Young People Ages 9-12

### Introduction

#### Key Messages for Parents and Caregivers:

- **Be the trusted source.** You are your children's primary educators about sexuality and values.
- **Talk early and often.** Talking about sexuality with your young person happens over time – it's not just one conversation.
- **Foster safety.** Focus on creating spaces where children feel comfortable talking about things that may feel awkward or uncomfortable for them, where they will feel supported, valued, and heard no matter what they say or ask.
- **Share your values.** Kids want to know what you think – be clear about your family's values while also providing accurate information.
- **Model healthy behaviors.** Young people learn much more from what they observe – your modeling of healthy relationship behaviors and comfort discussing topics related to sexuality will go a long way in helping your young person feel empowered in their own sexuality.
- **Remain calm and neutral.** Try to remain neutral in your reactions to questions or comments related to sexuality. Big, emotional reactions may cause your child to hesitate to ask you more questions in the future.
- **Focus on facts.** Answer questions with facts and information, and if you don't know, say that you will find out and get back to them later.

- **Use teachable moments.** Capitalize on unplanned opportunities to talk about something, such as a lyric in a song, a scene in a show, or something someone else said to talk about sexuality, values, relationships, and personal beliefs.
- **Acknowledge changes and feelings.** Puberty brings new emotions, body changes, and attractions - help them understand that these changes are a healthy part of growing up.
- **Validate, validate, validate!** Remind your child they are loved, valued, and can always come to you with questions. This might sound like, "I'm glad you ask that question!" or "It sounds like you are worried about that. I was worried about that at your age also."

### General Tips on answering children's questions:

Kids are naturally curious, and when they ask questions about sexuality, it's a sign that they trust you and feel safe. By answering with openness and care, you can strengthen that trust and keep the conversation going. Here are a few tips to help make those talks easier and more comfortable for both of you.

### Tips for Talking with Your Child About Sexuality

- Reflect their concern or interest.
- Keep your answers clear and brief.
- Appreciate their curiosity and questions.
- Reassure them that they are loved.
- Listen actively.
- Remind them they can come to you with anything.

Young people's questions often fall into one of five categories. Identifying the type of question being asked will help you to provide an appropriate response.

- Information Seeking questions – these questions arise from curiosity or a need for clarification. Respond with facts - if you don't know the information, be honest and let them know you will find out the answer.
- Am I Normal questions – these questions focus on concerns about the body, changes that are happening. Respond with validation and information.
- Permission Seeking questions – these questions are about wanting permission for something, such as an activity, belief, and/or thought. Give a developmentally appropriate response that includes your thoughts and beliefs, and practices in your own family. Emphasize the importance of making informed choices.

- Shock questions – these questions intend to ‘shock’ or even disturb. Respond neutrally, without appearing upset or taken aback, with facts. You can reword the question and appreciate their curiosity.
- Personal Belief questions – these questions show a desire to know what you believe about a topic. As parents and caregivers, you can share your own belief and also encourage your child to reflect on and express their own personal beliefs.

### **Question examples:**

- Your 10-year-old asks, “What’s a ho?” This question may be an Information Seeking question or a Shock question, or both! First, see if you can determine whether they just want to know what it is, or if they are testing boundaries.

*Possible response:* “Thanks for asking. Where did you hear that word?” [Allow for their response.] “The word ‘ho’ is a slang term that is often used to put someone down and is associated with a girl or woman who is sexually active or has sex with many people. I don’t think anyone should be teased or insulted because of sexual behavior. How can you stand up for someone who is called names?”

- Your 11-year-old daughter says that her friend got her period at school. She asks if she is going to get her period soon. This is likely an Am I Normal question. Respond with validation that people get their period at different times.

*Possible response:* “There’s no way to know exactly when it will happen for the first time. When it does happen, you can come and get me or another grown-up that you trust. If I’m not around, who would you ask for help?” [Allow for their response.] “I know it can be tough not knowing when or where it’s going to happen. We can put some supplies together, so you’re prepared when it does.”

- Your child asks you, “How old were you when you had sex for the first time?” This is likely a Personal Belief or a Shock question. Determine what they are really asking. Are they curious? Are they trying to gauge what age is appropriate? Are they testing your willingness to share something private? Validate their critical thinking about the topic and focus on the importance of strong decision-making skills when it comes to sex.

*Possible response:* “That’s an important and very personal question. Each person needs to decide for themselves when they feel ready to have sex for the first time. Why are you interested in my own experience?” [Allow for their response.] “I try to base my own decisions on respect - respect for myself, respect for the other person, and respect for the world around me.” Decide for yourself how much you’d like to share with your child, which may depend on your own values, your child’s age and developmental stage, or other factors. You may respond with one of these options:

- “Talking about my own first time having sex is very personal and I’d like to keep that private.” You may add something like, “What you decide to do will be based on your life and your circumstances, which are different from mine. I want you to be confident in making your own decisions about something this important.”
- “I first had sex because ... [loving relationship, commitment, emotionally ready, responsible use of contraception, etc.]. I hope when you first have sex, it’s as meaningful as when I did. Do you have other questions?”
- “I first had sex when I was ... because ... That was not a wise choice for many reasons, and I wouldn’t want for you to go through that, so I hope you make a different choice.”

### General Resources for Parents of children ages 9-12:

- Options for Sexual Health, “[Becoming an Askable Adult](#)” (Vancouver, BC: Options for Sexual Health, n.d.)
- Be an Askable Parent (American Sexual Health Association)  
[ashasexualhealth.org/parents](http://ashasexualhealth.org/parents)
- Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators (Unitarian Universalist Association)  
<https://www.uua.org/lifespan/curricula/sexuality-educators>
- Parents and Caregivers as Sexuality Educators (United Church of Christ)  
[https://www.uccresources.com/products/parents-and-caregivers-as-sexuality-educators-pdf-download?\\_pos=2&\\_sid=0cca68b9f&\\_ss=r](https://www.uccresources.com/products/parents-and-caregivers-as-sexuality-educators-pdf-download?_pos=2&_sid=0cca68b9f&_ss=r)
- Families are Talking (SIECUS)  
<https://siecus.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Families-Newsletter2-Teens-Talk-about-Sex-TV-and-Real-Life.pdf>
- Amaze.org  
<https://amaze.org/>
- 12 General Talking Tips (Amaze.org)  
<https://amaze.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/12-General-Tips.pdf>
- Tools for Parents (Planned Parenthood)  
[plannedparenthood.org/parents](http://plannedparenthood.org/parents)
- Talk is Power Workbook (Responsible Sex Education Institute)  
<https://responsiblesexedite.org/product/talk-is-power-workbook/>

- Talk With Your Kids  
<https://www.talkwithyourkids.org/>
- Sexual Behaviors in Childhood Guide (see page 3 for ages 9-12)  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-8vA0fVmusHsZ0Zp87Qor3OEYmsQIJT/view>
- Birds&Bees&Kids  
<https://birdsandbeesandkids.com/>