

Talking to Your Child about Relationships Education

A Guide for Parents and Carers

Promoting positive attitudes towards their health and wellbeing is an important part of a child's overall education. As part of the Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE), your child will be taught about relationships. This is done through a series of units about body parts, growing up, puberty, looking after your body, human reproduction, body image and different relationships and families – all taught at the appropriate stage, using a range of age appropriate resources. Good quality Relationships Education is taught in the context of important life skills and values. For example, respect, trust, love and responsibility support committed, loving relationships.

Why Is This Important?

Honest, open and factual education about relationships and growing up gives children the opportunity to learn accurate, truthful information in a safe and secure environment. As teachers and parents, we can address any misconceptions children may have gained about these topics from the media or their peers. Children are naturally curious about their bodies and other people. By answering any questions they ask and teaching them the correct scientific vocabulary, you can help them understand their bodies, their feelings and other people's feelings.

Discussing relationships and growing up with children won't encourage them to engage in sexual relationships sooner. Evidence shows that children whose parents talk about puberty, growing up and relationships openly and who receive Relationships Education at school, start having sex at a later stage and are more likely to use contraception.

Knowing What to Say and When

Gauging what information to give children and at what age to give it can be difficult. Generally, if a child is asking a question, they are ready to receive a truthful answer, so to an extent, you can be led by your child. All children are different, and some are particularly curious, but there are some general guidelines about what children are able to understand at various ages and how to discuss this topic with your child.

- Teaching children about diversity and that there are different families, different relationships and different lifestyles (including LGBT+) from a young age saves difficult questions or confusion when they are older. Children are not born prejudiced, so can easily learn to accept and celebrate differences.
- The scientific names for male and female sex parts ('penis', 'testicles', 'vagina' and 'vulva') can be introduced as soon as a child is naming other body parts.
- Teaching children to respect their own and others' bodies and the privacy and wishes of another person can begin at a very early age; these values are the pre-cursor to engaging in consensual loving relationships.
- A new baby arriving in the family can provide the perfect opportunity to answer questions your child may have or for you to bring the topic up with them.



- Picture books can be a superb way of opening up discussions that might otherwise seem unnatural or embarrassing. There are lots of excellent books available to buy or you could see what is available in the local library.
- It is important that children learn about the changes their body will go through before it happens. Generally, it is good for girls to learn about periods before they are 9 or 10 years of age and for boys to learn about the ways in which their bodies will change before about 11 or 12 years of age.
- Learning about body parts and changes that occur as we grow up does not have to be confined to the gender of the child learning or asking questions. For example, there is no reason why a boy cannot learn about periods and a girl cannot learn about erections.
- If your child asks a question at an inappropriate time, or you are caught off-guard and need time to prepare an answer, simply reply with, 'That's a good question, but I'll answer it a little later,' or, 'We can talk about that in the car, when it's just the two of us.' Make sure you do come back to the topic and that it isn't just forgotten about.

Frequently Asked Questions and Suggested Responses

'What's that thing?' (as asked by your daughter while you are changing your son's nappy)

That's called a penis. You don't have one – you have a vulva. It's how you tell the difference between a male and a female.

'Why is my penis getting hard?'

That happens sometimes but it's normal. It will go soft again soon.

'Why have you got hair down there?'

That's called pubic hair. Children don't grow hair there until they are older. Men and women grow hair under their arms and between their legs and men also grow hair on their faces.

'How do you make a baby?'

It takes a special seed, called a sperm, from a daddy and a seed called an egg, from a mummy.

'How do the sperm and the egg get together?'

The mummy and daddy have to be very close, so the sperm from the daddy's penis can go into the mummy's vagina to meet the egg. The egg will be looked after in the mummy's body and will grow into a baby.

'How does the baby get out of the mummy's tummy?'

Most babies come out through the mummy's vagina, which is a tube. It can stretch really wide to let the baby out when it is ready to be born.

'Why has _____ at my school got two mummies/daddies?'

All families are different and in _____'s family, the two mummies / daddies love each other the way your mummy and daddy love each other. So, they live together and both take care of _____.

'Why doesn't _____ look like his/her mummy/daddy?'

All families are different and some children are looked after by parents or carers who are not their biological parents. Some children are fostered or adopted, which means they have parents who love them, who did not give birth to them.

‘Why does _____ dress like a girl when he is a boy?’ ‘Why does _____ dress like a boy when she is a girl?’

Some people’s bodies don’t match how they feel inside. So, some people with a male body actually feel like a girl inside and some people with a female body actually feel like a boy inside. We are all different and it is important to let other people be who they want to be.

‘What does bisexual mean?’

Some people find men and women attractive. The gender of who they love is not important – they just love the person for who they are.

‘Why doesn’t _____ live with their mummy/daddy?’

Sometimes mummies and daddies fall out of love and decide they do not want to live together anymore. They still love _____ very much but they live apart and _____ sees them at different times.

‘Can people change their bodies from male to female/female to male?’

Some people, when they are older, choose to make changes to their bodies so their body matches the way they feel inside.

It is important that children feel they can ask questions and know that they will get an honest answer, without being judged. If a child feels that these topics are wrong or taboo, they will have no one to get the facts from and that is when the information they piece together for themselves can be incomplete, misleading or completely incorrect. Making the subjects of growing up, relationships, LGBT+ and reproduction a normal part of life promotes positive attitudes towards health, wellbeing and relationships.

