

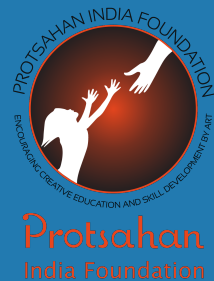


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How to talk to adolescents about sex & sexuality

**Authored By Protsahan India
Foundation**

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How to talk to adolescents about sex & sexuality

Just because you are talking to your adolescents about sex, wouldn't make them want to have sex! They will in fact understand consent better and know that they have a right to say "No". Don't let your shyness or prejudices stop them from learning the facts that will only protect and safeguard them.

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Protsahan's vision is that all girls living in situations of vulnerability, grow up empowered with access to education and healthcare in safe spaces, with greater freedom from all forms of abuse and violence; and those who experienced abuse or violence, benefit from greater access to healing, care, support, gender justice and other services needed to ensure physical, mental and social well-being.

The vision is achieved by using The HEART model which is a unique empathy-based model developed by Protsahan in 2010 of working with children and adolescents at-risk or who have experienced traumatic events. It strives to break the inter-generational cycle of violence and abuse against children and adolescents through Holistic healing (of abuse and trauma), Education, Art interventions for life skills training, Recovery and Technology.

www.protsahan.co.in

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“Conversations about sexuality, somewhere begin with compassionate conversations about gender.”

The inevitable talk of ‘the birds and the bees’ is one that a lot of parents find uncomfortable to speak to their children about. Ironically, it’s a topic that needs the most attention. It’s so easy to find complaining tweets and Facebook statuses that talk about how collectively as a country, we haven’t done enough to prepare our children to protect themselves. But what most educators and parents fail to recognize is that the conversations about sexuality, somewhere begin with compassionate conversations about gender.

In our experience of working at Protsahan, a child rights organization based in Delhi, we so often come across marginalized families who consider it better to have their girls married way before 18 than invest in their education or health, for that isn’t a priority for them, leave alone having a discussion on sex and sexuality with them. You might want to believe that the situation is any better in financially well-to-do families. It isn’t. In financially affluent or middle-class families, conversations around sexuality are looked down upon so much so that an adolescent child feels uncomfortable to open up to a parent and chooses to “not tell” about their experience of child sexual abuse and in some cases, continues to endure it. **If your child chooses to not share such conversations with you, but rather confides in a friend, then you as a parent, got to do**

better to create an environment for disclosures or answering questions about sexuality.

You cannot put it off for long and when the time does come, rather than squirming in your seat, it's essential to take on their questions with sensitivity and caution and pass the right knowledge based in factual depth to your child, rather than scary half-truths from the internet.

Sex, puberty and taboo topics in Indian households

What should kids call their private parts? How do you explain where babies come from? Should you give your child a heads-up about puberty? Rather than shoving a spoonful of food down your child's throat or distracting them, bringing up the subject whenever it is comfortable for them is important. Yes, there are many questions and no easy answers, but yet talking about sex, sexuality and puberty shouldn't be a taboo topic in any household.

If it is, it can hinder the development of healthy relationships, make kids susceptible to abuse and gives them false perceptions about their bodies and sex in general. Accept the fact that kids are going to ask you difficult questions and be prepared to answer them in a way that matches their understanding and intelligence quotient.

Helping kids understand one age group at a time



You may not talk to your toddler about sexuality right away. Information needs to be disclosed to them in a gradual age-appropriate way. Here is what kids can understand, age by age.

- * **Ages 4+:** Casually mention the appropriate words (that is vagina and penis) for private body parts. Explain how a baby is born by subtly outlining the details of reproduction. For instance, “Your mom has a uterus in her stomach. That is where you lived before you were born” is good enough.
- * **Ages 8+:** Generally, talk about how a baby is born. “Mommy and daddy made you”. If questions persist say, “a cell in daddy’s body called as a sperm, joined together

with a tiny cell inside mommy's body known as an egg.” State the honest response of how a baby is born. “When you were going to be born, the uterus pushed you out of mommy's vagina.” A basic understanding of intercourse without going too much into details. Explain about sex and relationships. How it is one of the ways people show their love for each other. Talk about respecting feelings.

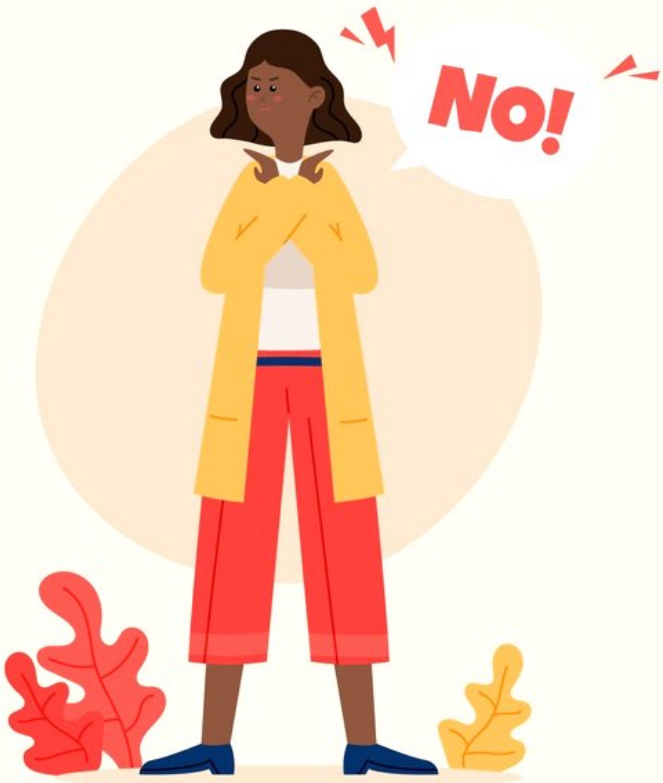


- * **Ages 10+:** You can state the importance of sex. Also, talk about rape and how when someone forces another individual to have sex is wrong. The changes that take place during puberty and sex are associated topics that your child hears on the news or from peers. Television today is a space of much fake news and filth. Allow the adolescent or the child to learn through facts with you, their primary caregiver. Adolescents are coming up with their own value systems at this age. Make certain you offer improved contextual information for the information your child is getting. At no point scare the child.
- * **Ages 15+:** Discuss newspaper articles on sex and sexuality. Engage them in an intelligent conversation. Talk in more detail about contraception and how use of power for sex is absolutely wrong. Talk to them about **POCSO** (Protection of Children Against Sexual Offences) legislation.

Important pointers for parents and educators to keep in mind:

- * Just because you are talking to your children about sex, wouldn't make them want to have sex! **Research shows that teenagers from families who have sensitively discussed sexuality, are seen to wait until they're physically, mentally and emotionally ready to have it for the first time, and use contraceptives.** They

understand consent better and know that they have a right to say “No”.



- * Don't avoid questions from children just because “you feel awkward” about them. A child at 4-5 years of age doesn't necessarily have sexual connotations, they perhaps are simply innocently curious. Address questions well, don't dodge.
- * Never shame the child, if they have questions that you think are “not apt for their age”. In this age of internet

and information overdose, your child might be absorbing a lot of information from a million sources hidden from you.

- * Avoid divulging too much information or else you are going to be tuned out. Older children may not admit that they don't know things. So if your adolescents say they know everything about sex, ask them what they know and then fill in the gaps.
- * Sexuality conversations done right make the children only more sensible and sensitive. For example, when a mother teaches a boy about periods, next time a girl stains her skirt with period blood in a class at school, he will not join the others to laugh or mock at her, but could in fact, ask others to stop the bullying behavior and make a fellow classmate feel normal and comfortable.
- * Call a breast, a breast. Call a vagina, a vagina. Call a



penis, a penis. Naming it with shameful words, like, 'chi-

chi', 'shame-shame' only proliferates the taboos and inculcates in the child a tradition of shame.

- * Raise period positive girls and boys. Raise gender sensitive girls and boys. **Raise children in an environment where they aren't ridiculed for being curious.**



More Books that help initiate the conversation

1. Just for boys/Just for Girls: A Book about Growing Up
2. 21 Things Every Teen Should Know
3. My Little Body Book: Keeping Ourselves Safe
4. Why India Should Go All the Way: Sex Ed Book for Children
5. The Yellow Book: A Parent's Guide to Sexuality Education
6. Let's Talk About Where Babies Come From: Robie Harris

The choices and decisions your children make in their adult life have a lot to do with how they perceive things when they are young. Rather than worrying about their contorted definitions, it is essential to answer all their questions encouragingly. **More than anything, give them the assurance that they have no safer place to turn to other than you.**

