

# Sexuality



Sex and sexuality are a part of being human and we all have the right to enjoy relationships. We should all have access to appropriate information that helps us make informed choices and decisions. Knowing how to broach the subject though can be hard for us all and it is hoped that this factsheet will give you some useful pointers on the subject.

## What is sexuality?

- Difference between males and females in the way they look and act
- How we view our bodies and relationships with each other
- How we grow and change over time
- How we reproduce

## A good starting point?

As parents we want our children to have appropriate information, that they can understand, so that they can make informed choices based on our own family values. A good starting point is to examine your own values so that you can share these with your child. You may find the chart below a helpful aid.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Gender</b></p> <p>What does it mean to be male/female? How are we different/alike? How are males/females supposed to act?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Appearance</b></p> <p>Do we have to be young to be attractive? What messages do we communicate in the way that we dress? How do these messages communicate our relationships with others?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Relationships</b></p> <p>What makes a relationship successful? How do relationships differ? (eg boy/girlfriend, spouse, child, colleague) How should people show affection? How do we resolve disagreements?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Family</b></p> <p>What constitutes a family? What rules do you have about family privacy?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sexual Communication</b></p> <p>What attitudes do your family have about talking about sex, physical affection, etc? Why do people often laugh about sexuality? What is sexual harassment?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Life Choices</b></p> <p>What do people think about teens and: sexual behaviour, abortion, contraception, choices in adulthood? (single, married, parenthood)</p>



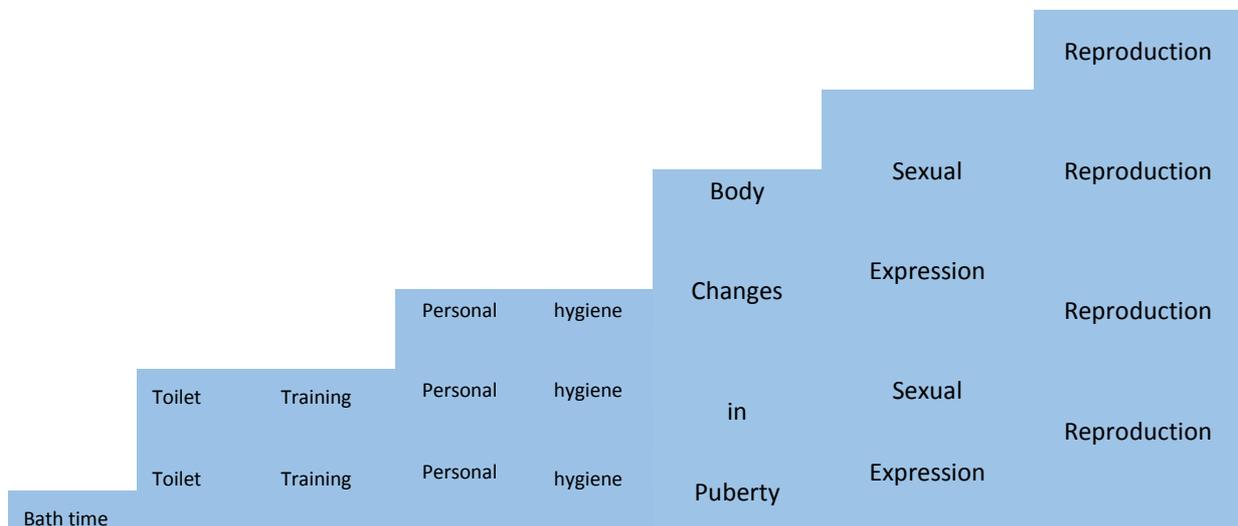
## Key concepts to cover

### Body parts

You do not have to wait until puberty to teach your child about their body, in fact, if you start early then you, and your child, will not feel embarrassed and you can build on their knowledge as they mature. Important points to remember are :

- All body parts have a name
- Teaching a child about ALL their body parts will encourage them to feel good about their body
- Try to use the correct words otherwise children will think it's all a bit dirty and shameful e.g. willy or penis rather than 'down there.'
- Teaching accurate vocabulary is the foundation to healthy attitudes
- Talking naturally to your child about their body communicates to them that you are approachable and at ease with the subject.

Building blocks : If we start talking naturally to our children about their bodies from when they are very young then we can **build** on this and naturally progress to more sensitive subjects as they mature.



An example of how we can build on our child's knowledge might be as follows:

1. In the bath talk about parts of the body
2. When/if toilet training talk about weeing/pooing and how it all works
3. Teach your child how to wash and groom all parts of their body
4. As your child reaches puberty talk about how their body will change
5. Talk to your child about what they are feeling
6. Give your child knowledge so that they can make informed choices

*My daughter is very good at picking up on other peoples' feelings, but does not always know how to respond appropriately.*

*I have found that talking to her about how I'm feeling helps her better understand her own emotions.*

## What they need to know:

### Girls:

- Growth spurts
- Breast development
- Body/pubescent hair growth
- Acne
- Perspiration
- Menstruation/Periods
- Masturbation
- Birth control
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's)

*Before my daughter started her periods I went out and bought a range of sanitary towels and we practiced opening them and fitting them so that she felt comfortable. She chose the brands that she most liked and carries an 'emergency' pack around with her including spare underwear and leggings.*

### Top tips for puberty for girls:

#### Menstruation or periods:

- Talk about menstruation before her periods start
- Use pictures to help explain the process
- Use a calendar to help keep track of the cycle
- Practice using sanitary wear before her periods start
- Think about what your daughter is wearing, e.g. colour, ease of changing
- Explain that having a period is a private thing but it isn't anything to feel embarrassed about
- Draw and/or use models to help explain to your daughter what's happening
- Having a period is normal and nothing to be scared of

#### Breasts:

- Usually an early sign of puberty
- Developing breasts can be tender
- Have fun choosing a first bra
- Discuss what breasts are for

#### Masturbation:

- The touching of genitals for pleasure is a normal behaviour that should be done in private (see section below on Public and Private)

#### Birth control:

- Accepting that your child wants a sex life is hard for any parent, but when our children have additional needs, this can be even harder
- Try to encourage your child to talk to you about the relationships they have with their friends and whether is someone you fancy
- Discuss your family values about sex
- Teach your daughter how to say no
- Be aware that certain medications can affect the reliability of the Pill
- Think about different forms of birth control that might suit your daughter for example a contraceptive implant lasts for up to three years and avoids having to remember to take a pill

*I was very unsure about what form of contraception, if any, would suit my daughter. I read up on the different options on the Ask Brook website : <http://www.brook.org.uk/index.php/contraception> and then asked the school for advice on broaching the subject with my daughter*

## **Boys:**

- Growth spurts
- Body/public hair growth
- Acne
- Perspiration
- Wet dreams
- Voice change
- Masturbation
- Birth control
- Sexually transmitted Infections (STI's)

*I have always tried to answer my son's questions as honestly as possible, using language and terminology that he will understand. I try very hard not to show any embarrassment, or amusement, that I might be feeling so that he'll feel comfortable to keep on asking me questions.*

## **Top tips to puberty for boys:**

### **Erections:**

- Discuss what an erection is and why they happen (pictures can help here)
- Erections are normal and happen to all males
- Erections are most common during puberty
- Erections are private (see section below on Public and Private) but aren't anything to feel embarrassed about

### **Masturbation:**

- The touching of genitals for pleasure is a normal behaviour that should be done in private (see section below on Public and Private)

### **Wet dreams:**

- Wet dreams are normal and they happen to some males, but not others Explain what wet dreams are and why they happen
- Help your son with personal hygiene, e.g. changing the bed clothes

### **Birth control :**

- Accepting that your child wants a sex life is hard for any parent, but when our children have additional needs, this can be even harder
- Try to encourage your child to talk to you about the relationships they have with their friends and whether there is someone they fancy
- Discuss your family values about sex
- Teach your son how to say no
- Show your son how condoms are used

*I try to be as open about sex and relationships with my children as I can be—and have made sure that they both understand that they don't need to kiss, cuddle or have sex with someone if they don't feel ready. I remind them that no-one else has the right to touch them if they don't want them too. Saying no can be scary and intimidating though— so I have practiced (with each of my children— but separately) saying No. I get them to model my voice, body language and encourage them to use eye contact to re-enforce the message. It felt silly at first—but they now feel confident that they can say no if they don't want to do something.*

## Being aware of feelings

So far we have only talked about the physical aspects of sexuality, but obviously feelings are equally important. As your son/daughter's hormones kick in emotions can be intensified and it can be hard for them to explain what they're feeling and why.

### **Top tips for coping with feelings:**

- Help your son/daughter to identify what they are feeling by creating a Personal Feelings book including pictures and photos. For example, I feel excited when I am going to see my best friend, When I am excited, I talk loudly,
- When I am excited my body moves around more and I can't sit still
- Create a list with your son/daughter of ways they might cope with their emotions for example if your son/ daughter becomes over excited take pictures of what they do to help them calm down. This might be going for a stroll outside, listening to a favourite piece of music or going on the iPad
- Encourage your son/daughter to say how they are feeling at different times of the day

## Private and Public

Knowing the difference between what can be said and done in public and private places is another part of growing up. For children and young people with additional needs this can, for various reasons, be a hard concept to understand. This may be because our children need more support with personal care or because interpreting social cues can be tricky.

*When I was teaching my daughter about public and private places and what kind of behaviour is appropriate in both/ each I made lots of picture cards with different places on them e.g. in the classroom and lots of actions e.g. kissing. I would get her to pick a place card and an action card and we would discuss whether the action was ok for that place e.g. is it ok to kiss your boyfriend in a classroom.*

### **Top tips for teaching the difference between public and private:**

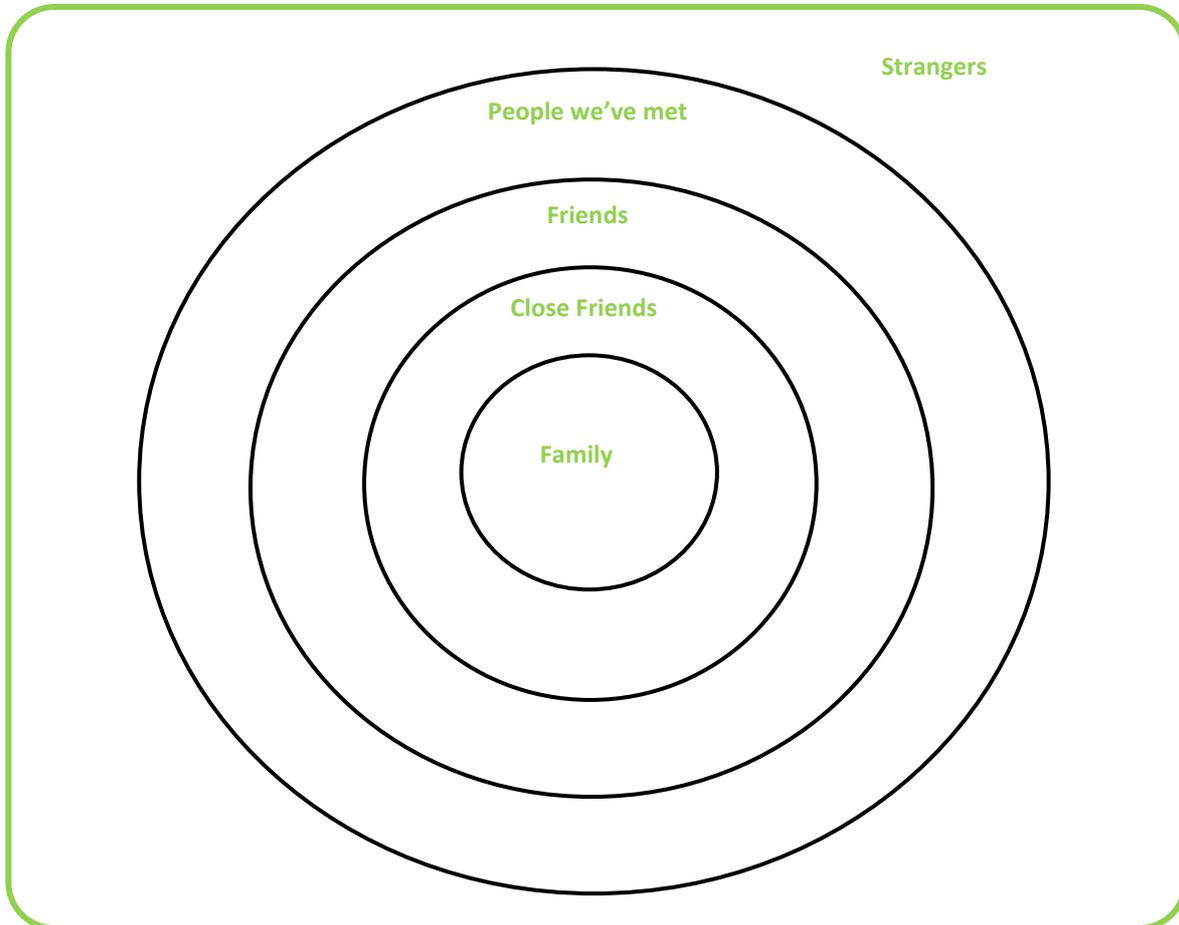
- Start early and follow the rules that you would teach your other children for example, shutting the door when using the toilet, even if you're in there assisting them
- Start teaching the concept before your child starts school e.g. public is where you are with other people and private is when you are alone
- Private areas include your body, certain behaviours, topics of conversation and some places

Some ways of helping your child to understand are:

- ❖ Use modelling (i.e. practice what you preach)
- ❖ Explain why we act differently according to where we are
- ❖ Use photos/pictures to help explain, allow your child some privacy
- ❖ Use games/make it fun (for example, while watching television, looking at magazines, out and about,
- ❖ Use concrete examples for example periods and erections are private
- Be prepared to be persistent-this isn't something that can/will be learnt overnight—keep checking that your son/daughter has understood before moving on to the next step.
- A girl's private parts are her breasts, vagina and bottom
- A boy's private parts are his penis, scrotum and bottom
- Ensure that your son/daughter has their own private space where they know they will not be disturbed

## Relationships

Forming relationships is an essential part of life and gives us huge pleasure. Sometimes it can be harder for young people to form friendships and they may need a little support to know the boundaries. We all have relationships with a lot of different people, and it can be useful for your son and daughter to learn how these relationships differ. Try thinking of all the people your son/daughter know and where they might fit on the following diagram. This circles method can be a great way to help your son or daughter decide how to interact with different people. You might say it is OK to hug the people in the centre circle, but we don't hug people we've just met or the head teacher for example. This could lead onto discussions about more appropriate ways to interact with the people in their life.



Supporting your child to develop their own identity will also help them to see where they fit in to society as a whole and make them feel more confident individuals. Although it can be hard to let go it will help your son/daughter in the long run if you give them **responsibility** and let them take **risks**. Encouraging your son/daughter to have a role at home and school will raise self-esteem and increase their confidence. Likewise, as they grow up, being allowed to take risks will help them become self-assured adults. Start when your child is young with simple household chores and slowly build on that.

*My son had a tendency to share too much information with people he had just met e.g. he would give them his phone number straightaway. We've talked a lot about privacy and who needs to know what about us. It has taken some time—and a few slip ups—but he now knows what should be private and what can be shared*

## **Staying Safe**

Making sure your son/daughter is safe is at the forefront of every parent's mind and this is especially the case when there is the possibility of our son/daughter forming a relationship. Helping your child to be aware of all the above will count for a lot but you may also wish to discuss the following:

### **Good and bad touch**

Good touch is touch that we enjoy getting and might include handshakes, pat on the back, high five, hugs, kisses. Bad touch is when someone hurts us, for example, kicks or punches, and may bruise or damage our body. It can also include sexual abuse which is when someone touches our private parts for no good reason or talks to us about sexual things we don't want to talk about.

The **NSPCC** have just produced the PANTS guides, in association with **MENCAP**, which discusses ways of staying safe from abuse. PANTS stands for:

**P**rivates are private

**A**lways remember your body belongs to you

**N**o means No

**T**alk about secrets that upset you

**S**peak up, someone can help you

For more information and a copy of the guide see : <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/underwear-rule/>

The organisation **Speaking Up** have produced an easy to read guide called Safeguarding Young People on the different kinds of abuse that can happen to young people and how they should report it. To buy a copy see : <http://www.friendlyresource.org.uk/>

### **Sexual Expression**

Sexuality is experienced and expressed in a number of ways including thoughts, fantasies, desires, attitudes, values and behaviour. It can be very hard for a young person to understand the strong feelings and desires they might have for another person and to control these emotions. If you have encouraged your son/daughter to be aware of their feelings, for example, angry, happy, sad, from an early age then expressing their sexual desires and needs may be easier. Using pictures, books and film can be helpful as well as liaising with your son/daughter's school/college so that you can complement their Sex and Relationships Education. (See resource list below for further information).

### **The future**

Whether your son/daughter will ever get married or have children is hard to contemplate when they are still young, but nothing is impossible. Regardless of their disability, many people do end up in happy relationships and have their own families.

If you have access to the Internet, then you may find the following short films inspirational:

<http://mylife.mencap.org.uk/landing.asp?id=39&type=video>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Disability/Pages/help-for-disabled-parents.aspx#video>

## Where to go for further advice

### Ask Brook :

Telephone	No longer available	Website	<a href="https://www.brook.org.uk/">https://www.brook.org.uk/</a>
Text service	07537 402 024 9am-3pm	Webchat	<a href="https://www.brook.org.uk/our-services/category/ask-brook">https://www.brook.org.uk/our-services/category/ask-brook</a>

**Family Planning Association** : offers a good selection of resources aimed at people with learning disabilities :  
<http://www.fpa.org.uk/shop/12/product-list>

Telephone	No longer available	Website	<a href="http://www.fpa.org.uk/">http://www.fpa.org.uk/</a>
-----------	---------------------	---------	---

**Beyond Words** : Beyond Words produces books, eBooks and other resources for people who find it easier to understand pictures than words. See : <http://www.booksbeyondwords.co.uk/> for a full lists of their titles.

**Leonard Cheshire In Touch** : A training resource to support those working with young disabled people around their sexual health and wellbeing. Five powerful drama pieces with suggestions for guided discussion, linked activities and further work. To download the pack go to : <http://www.leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/In-Touch-training-resource-1-Sept-2010.pdf>

**British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BLID)** : produce a range of easy to read literature on friendships, relationships and sex. For a full list of publications please see : <http://www.bild.org.uk/easy-read/easy-read-information/friendships-and-relationships/>

## Jargon Buster

**Modelling:** Teaching by example and practicing what you preach

**Relationship circles:** helps to map relationships in our public and private lives

**Staying Safe:** teaching our children how to say 'no' and not be exploited

### Disclaimer

The information contained in this website is for general information purposes only. The information is provided by Southampton SENDIASS and while we endeavour to keep the information up to date and correct, we make no representations or warranties of any kind, express or implied, about the completeness, accuracy, reliability, suitability or availability with respect to the website or the information, products, services, or related graphics contained on the website for any purpose. Any reliance you place on such information is therefore strictly at your own risk. We have no control over the nature, content and availability of links to other websites. The inclusion of any links does not necessarily imply a recommendation or endorse the views expressed within them

