

It's not the world you grew up in

Just as you once did, your kids are making decisions about sex . . . but they're doing it in a very different world. Today, HIV/AIDS and other STDs make sex more dangerous, with long-term health and other consequences. At the same time, your kids, especially girls, have so many more opportunities and pregnancy and STDs can reduce their options.

"I may not have waited until I was married, but it was a different world, and there are things that you have to worry about that I didn't have to."

"To have numerous sexual partners is much more dangerous, not just pregnancy-wise, but lifetime health-wise."

"Kids are also growing up faster, with a constant barrage of messages about sex in their TV programs, computer games, music, and movies."

"It seems like they are just learning so much more, so much earlier now, and I don't think that we can afford, as parents, to wait until we think they are having it [sex] to talk to them about it."

For more information

For tips on how to talk with your kids about abstinence and other sexual decision making issues, order a free Talk 2 Me kit by calling the Virginia Department of Health at

(804) 864-7808 or visiting www.vdh.virginia.gov.

The kit includes a card game, a resource guide, and a guide for parents on how to use the kit to discuss sexual decision making with their children.



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What Other Parents Are Saying

Talking to your kids

Finding the right time—and way—to talk to your kids can be difficult. In preparation, think about your values and what you'd like to share or impart to your kids, so that you are relaxed and prepared when the time to talk presents itself. Here are a few suggestions that may make talking with your kids easier:

★ When you are watching TV or a movie, or listening to music with your kids, and there are references to sex, ask them about it afterwards. Some questions to ask might include:

● What did you think about X (the scene, character, situation)?

● Do you have questions about what you watched/heard?

★ If a family friend or relative is pregnant, talk with your child about it. Ask how he or she feels about the pregnancy.

★ Realize that, just as it's hard for you to talk about these subjects, it's also hard for your kids to ask. When they do, be supportive. Even if you're uncomfortable, let them know that you're glad that they asked and that you'd be open to talking more if they have questions in the future.

★ Find out what schools teach about sex for each grade level and at what time of year. Talk with your child before and after the material is covered in school. In doing so, you will be aware and prepared to answer their questions in the context of what they know.

★ Regardless of their age, answer your kids' questions about sex by giving accurate and age-appropriate information. The younger they begin talking with you about these issues, the easier and more natural it will be for them to ask you questions when they get older.

Talking about sex isn't easy

If you find talking about sex with your kids uncomfortable, you aren't alone—lots of parents feel this way. You may not know what to say or how to answer their questions.

Here's what other parents are saying:

“When I was growing up, sex wasn't talked about in our house at all.”

“When he came home from school [after a sex education class], I was floored. I couldn't believe some of the questions that came out of his mouth, I mean, he wanted to know specifics, and he was like, “ ‘Well, they didn't tell us this in school!’ ”

“That's a very hard question when a kid says, ‘Did you have sex before you were married?’”

Your kids care about what you think

Talking to your kids about abstinence and sex isn't always easy . . . but it is important. Kids today are making decisions about sex at much younger ages, and studies show that those who talk openly with their parents about sex are more likely to delay sexual activity. So, don't put it off . . . there are so many reasons to talk to them.

Your kids want to know what you think, and you can help them make the right decisions . . . the decisions that will affect them for years to come. Like you, other parents are grappling with these same decisions.

“My 10-year-old is my oldest. I haven't been through puberty before with any other child, and it's pretty scary so far. I'm trying to figure out what do I tell her when, you know? I know she's had the sex ed. class at school, and I've been trying to pull out from her what they talked about in there, so we've got a starting point.”

“We all like to know that you're not in it alone. It's nice to know there are other people . . . out there, too.”

“I think people want support in that conversation, so that they are not embarrassed and send the wrong signals.”