You are your children’s most important teacher. Talking with your children about sexual behaviors can help them make healthy decisions. It can also help them understand the impact of their actions.

The information in this booklet will give you tips and guidance on how to communicate with your children better. We hope it will also give you the confidence to talk with your children about HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health.

You will not always be with your children to provide guidance, so talking to them about these things is important so they are prepared for the challenges they may face.

Why talk to your children about sex?

Children are human beings and, therefore, sexual beings. It can be hard for parents to think about this, just as it’s hard for children to think of their parents as sexually active. People of all ages are curious about their bodies; this is healthy and normal.

While it may be uncomfortable to talk with your children about sexual behaviors, remember that they get messages about sex and other risky behaviors from others, like their friends and the media. Those messages are not always accurate or the ones you want your children to hear.

When you do the talking, you have the chance to share your values with your children and teach them why it is important to stay healthy and how they can do so. So, start early –
before your children become sexually active – and talk often.

Young people are less likely to take sexual risks if they have:

- Respect for their bodies
- Correct information about sex, reproductive health, and the effects of alcohol and drugs
- Self-worth and confidence
- Good communication skills
- The ability to think for themselves and not do what everybody else is doing
- An understanding that their actions can cause harm to themselves and others
- A connection to home, family, and other caring adults in their community, school, or religious institution

**Remember:**
Help your children deal with the challenges of growing-up by speaking about your own childhood experiences
Why you are your children’s best teacher?

Children want to learn about sex from their parents. As a parent or guardian, you can:

- Make sure you are providing your children with the information they need and that can be understood at their age. Remember, talking with a 13-year old is different than talking with a 17-year old.
- Make your children aware of the challenges they will face and teach them how to cope.
- Let them know it is OK to say “no” to their friends and adults who may be asking them to do something that may harm them.
- Teach your children to know when a situation may be harmful and how to deal with it.
- Remind children that just because everyone is doing ‘it’ and it may appear to be the ‘in thing’, it does not mean they have to do it as well.
How to build a stronger relationship with your children

Discussing sex with your children doesn’t mean you are encouraging them to have sex. When children have more information about sexuality, they can make healthier choices, like waiting to have sex or using a condom when they do decide to have sex.

As a parent you need to build a strong and trusting relationship with your children so that you can discuss difficult matters openly. Some of the ways you can build a better relationship with your children are by:

- Looking for changes in your children’s behavior. Speaking to your children about any changes you see
- Starting conversations about sexual behaviors with your children who may be curious but afraid to ask questions
- As your children grow older provide information to them

Remember:
The first time you talk with your children about sex may be the most uncomfortable – with practice it will get easier

- Explain to children how unhealthy choices can affect their future and the lives of others
- Share your values and morals
- Help your children build their confidence and work towards a healthy future.
that builds on information you have given them before

- Ask questions. Take an interest in who your children spend time with and what they are doing

Encouraging your children is a very important relationship building tool. No matter how old your children are, your praise will help them feel good about themselves. This lifts self-worth and confidence which help your children resist negative pressure and make healthy choices.

**Some things you can say to your children:**

- That’s the way
- You can do it
- Keep trying
- I have faith in you
- Well done

You can also encourage your children’s positive behavior by:

- Saying thank you for their help around the house
- Recognizing when your

- Praising your children for positive behavior or any good deed.

**Spending one-on-one time with each of your children** is also important to building trust and maintaining communication with your children. Find something you enjoy doing together.

**Some things you can do with your children:**

- Cooking
- Looking after animals
- Taking walks
- Reading
- Playing games
- Talking
Make the time to talk often with your children.

Some things you can talk about with your children:
- What they did that day and who with
- School/work life
- Their friends and peers
- Family issues
- Concerns they have

Children learn by example, so behave as you would like your children to behave. Act in ways which earn your children’s respect, such as:
- Drink in moderation or not at all
- Avoid drinking in front of children
- Do not send children to buy alcohol for you
- Be faithful to your spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend
- Do not give girls or boys money or gifts in exchange for sex
- Do not threaten people or display violent or abusive behavior

Remember: Through honest communication you can educate and help your children make safe choices.
How to be prepared to talk with your children

Often parents and guardians do not talk with their children about sex, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and AIDS, pregnancy and other risky behaviors such as alcohol or drug use. They may feel shy or uncomfortable. This might be because they think they don’t know enough or they worry that their children know more about sex than they do.

Learn more about STIs, HIV, AIDS, preventing unplanned pregnancy and alcohol and drug abuse to help you feel more confident when talking with your children. You can:

- Read the Basha Lesedi Project HIV&AIDS Fact Sheets titled “I Choose to Know”
- Talk with a community health worker
- Visit your local clinic or library
- Talk with the guidance and counseling teacher at your local school
- Get comfortable with the words needed to talk about sex e.g., penis

Try to speak to your children about the positive parts of sex, such as intimacy and mutual respect and not just the negatives, like STIs.

Young people should know that in a healthy relationship, based on loving feelings, sex is never pressured, forced or traded.

Remember:
Tell your children honestly how his or her behavior affects you. This will help your children see how his or her actions impact on your feelings.
How to communicate with your children

Positive and good communication can improve understanding between you and your children. It can help you guide your children and stop them from making the same mistakes as you.

Always make sure that you have enough time to talk with your children, and that you are open and honest.

How can you really listen to your children?
- Look at your children when talking with them
- Give your children time to speak without disturbing them
- Let your children know you were listening
- Do not get angry or upset if your children want to talk to you about sex, relationships, alcohol or drugs

Remember:
Thank your children for coming to speak to you
Make sure you understand what your children are asking. Think about why the question is being asked, but do not ask why they are asking. You can ask questions that will help you understand what your children want to know. Try asking:

- In what way?
- Then what happened?
- Who else was there?
- Where did it happen?
- How did you feel?
- What did others say or do?

How can you be consistent in what you say with your mouth and do with your body?

- Smile when you are saying encouraging words
- Look worried, but not angry, when your children tell you of a challenge or expresses sadness
Give responses according to the age and needs of your children. Give clear, short and simple answers. Do not preach and keep cool/stay calm, even when your children tell you something that upsets you.

**Remember:**
Respect your children’s opinions and do not make your children feel bad about what they are telling you.

**How can you stay calm when your child tells you something upsetting?**
- Take a deep breath before responding
- Focus on finding solutions (and not on who is to blame)
- Use “I” messages, for example: “I get very worried when I don’t know where you are”
- Avoid saying things such as: “You are so irresponsible. You never tell me where you are going”
- Check to make sure that your children understand your answers

If you do not know the answer it is OK to tell your children. You can find the information and have another discussion with your children.

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