



SEX ED: Home-Schooling for Parents

SURE, YOU'D LOVE TO BELIEVE THAT YOUR KIDS WON'T FIND OUT WHAT SEX IS UNTIL THEIR WEDDING NIGHT, despite the fact that they were conceived in one of countless, sexually liberated marathons between you and their father. Yet, when it comes to your own children, you become positively Victorian in your attitudes toward sex. The question is: Can this parental primness hurt your kids? The answer is 'Yes'.

Sexually healthy children grow into sexually healthy adolescents and then sexually healthy adults. So while this column is usually about your adult sexual issues, this time I'm focusing on sex and your kids.

So how can you model healthy sexual attitudes and behaviour at home? First, start by modelling healthy affection, not just by cuddling your child, but by cuddling your spouse. This shows your child that touch and kissing between loving adults is fun and beautiful. Besides, you two should kiss more, anyway. Psychological research shows that even family nudity (walking from the shower nude; all of you jumping in the lake in the altogether) has no negative effects on children, and may in fact increase their comfort with their own bodies. Common sense should prevail here. Once children hit their tweens, they become more focused on their bodies and more easily embarrassed. At this point, the family might want to initiate bathrobes in public areas of the house, while allowing kids to know that Mom and Dad still march around nude in their own spaces.

Normalize and encourage your children's natural touch exploration of their own bodies and give fundamental information about sexual functioning so they do not learn (as I did) about sex from the elementary school expert pontificating inaccuracies on the playground. (I've sought out more reliable sources since!)

Q PRESCHOOL

I'm so embarrassed. My mother-in-law was recently in town, and during a family tea in the living room, my three-year-old put his hands down his pants and started touching himself. Normally I ignore this, because I don't want to make him ashamed, but my mother-in-law made a huge fuss, telling him to never touch himself and that it was dirty and wrong. I just continued pouring the tea, though my face matched the red napkins. What should I have done?

Dear Embarrassed,

That is not a fun scenario. And possibly not a fun mother-in-law. Although we can have empathy for the embarrassment that both of you, and many people, feel about all things sexual, don't pass this on to your son. Let your son know that touching his penis feels good and that this is okay. Then let him know that this type of touch is *private touch*, and that *private touch* is to be done alone in his room.

Children this age already understand the concept of privacy from their toilet training, and *private touch* is not a punitive concept. And while you're at it, let your husband know his *private touch* is okay, too (relieve the poor guy of the guilt his mom no doubt instilled in him).

Q SCHOOL AGE

I have a problem relaxing during sex. It is because of the kids. While my husband and I are making love, I am always trying to keep us super quiet, and I am listening for the kids. I walked in on my

parents 'doing it' when I was about eight years old, and it scared the heck out of me. I don't want to inflict that image on my own kids. Help! I'd like to relax in my own bed, not just on our yearly week vacation without the brood.

Dear Not Now,

Quick fix. First, talk to your children and explain that sometimes Dad and Mom want private time. Depending on the age of your children you can explain what that private time is for. Let them know that the bedroom door will be locked for private time, and that they can knock if it is important and you will come to them. Then, buy a CD player for the bedroom, put on some sexy music and focus on listening to that while you make love as a woman, not just a mommy.

Q TWEEN

My daughter is 12. Recently, her class was introduced to sex education with an abstinence component. I'm hearing her voice some views that I do not think are healthy, but I don't know what to say. Should I just let it work itself out? That's what my mother did and I finally figured it out.

Dear Eventually Figured It Out,

How long did it take for you to learn about female sexuality and orgasm and to develop boundaries about whom you invited to explore sexuality with you? How long for you to understand the importance of respect and willingness, pleasure and inhibitions? How long before

going from kissing, petting to sexual touching and then eventually, when you were completely ready both emotionally and physically, to safe, beautiful intercourse?

Don't leave this to chance. The only sex education my peers and I received was a film on menstruation and a dancing sperm and egg. No wonder it took so long to create healthy female sexuality for ourselves. Your daughter is learning about STDs and pregnancy prevention, not pleasure and respect and loving sensuality. Do you want her sexual messaging to be 'natural desire leads to pregnancy, disease and even death?' Besides, abstinence programs don't work. Talk to your daughter. It is one of the biggest gifts you can give her. 🌍

Passion Pointers

Talk to your kids about sex.

Be afraid, if you must, but feel the fear and do it anyway • Acknowledge that it can feel funny and embarrassing to talk about sex and bodies, and that is okay • Get your spouse involved.

He was involved at conception; he can darn well share this sex education stuff, too

• Keep it simple and lighthearted. Talk about one thing at a time and have several short conversations at different times so you don't overwhelm your child (or yourself).

• Pat yourself on the back. Your loving efforts are starting your children on a path to a healthier and satisfying sexual life, one grounded in love, communication and respect.