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## **From Birth...**

When is the right time to begin talking to your child about sex? Right away! Yes, even a toddler can understand (and needs to understand) information about her bodily functions and genitals. Why? Because if she learns to be ashamed of her body or is confused about her body, this can present later in life as body image issues or shame surrounding her sexuality.

Here is how you can help your child embrace her body, her bodily functions and her anatomy:

- Tell her the correct names for her body parts, and use them every time. Don't use nicknames to refer to her genitals. This teaches her that her body is something to be hidden or masked. Correct terminology helps her to understand and embrace her body without reservations or shame.
- Celebrate her bodily functions and be positive about them, not negative. For example, when changing her diaper, don't say, "P-U! That stinks!" Instead, say, "What a healthy bowel movement!" You might feel a little silly at first, but this is because you likely learned from your own parents to be ashamed of your bowel movements—when really, it is just a part of life!
- Normalize self-stimulation. In other words, don't slap their hands away or scold them for exploring their genitals. This self-exploration and curiosity is normal and healthy, so don't shame your child regarding it.

## Ages 2 to 3

Now is the time that your child will begin asking questions about his body and the bodies of those around him. He will start to notice the differences between men and women, and he will begin to verbalize that confusion and seek answers from you. This can be a bit of shock for parents who never discussed such matters with their own parents or were quickly "hushed" if they did. Here's how you can give more educated and helpful guidance to your own child:

- Since your child feels comfortable exploring his body and genitals, he might be doing so out in public or at times in which it is inappropriate. To curb this, explain to him that while it feels good to touch the penis or the vulva, they their *private* parts and, hence, this touching should only occur in *private*.
- This would also be a good time to teach your children that their private parts are their own and that no one else should touch them, other than parents/caregivers who are helping to wash them or wipe them. Also, let them know that other people's private parts are off-limits too.
- Enforce the lessons of "good touch" and "bad touch" at this age. Good touching is wanted and feels okay; bad touching is when they don't want to be touched. Tell your child that if someone ever touches them in a way that they don't want to be touched, they should say, "Don't touch me that way," and that they can also tell you or a teacher.
- You can model this touching when they are playing with their siblings or friends. If one of the children is being too "hands-on," whether he is hugging, pushing or playing with the other kids too roughly, tell them, "Johnny, just tell Susie that you don't want to be touched that way." Then follow it up with, "Susie, when you hear someone say that, it means you have to stop."

## 2nd to 4th Grades

Around this time period, the child enters arguably the most difficult phase for a parent—the phase when she starts asking, "Where do babies come from?" or "I heard a kid at recess talking about an 'erection.' What is that?" Rather than become overwhelmed by these questions, try answering these large questions in stages. For example:

### **Where do babies come from?**

From a special place inside a woman's body called her uterus.

### **How does the baby get there?**

When a man and a woman love each other (insert your own values here, such as, when they are married, in college, are x years old, etc.), the man has sperm and the woman has an egg. The man's sperm fertilizes the woman's egg and a baby grows.

### **How do the sperm and egg get together?**

The sperm is made in the man's testes, which is inside his scrotum (insert male/female anatomy lesson here, if you haven't done so already), and the egg comes from the woman's ovaries.

The sperm and egg meet in her fallopian tube, and then the fertilized egg travels down the fallopian tube to the uterus. In the uterus, there is a nice, cushy layer of nutrients, and the fertilized egg starts to grow there.

### **How does the sperm get into the woman's body?**

When a man and a woman (insert values here, such as love each other, only want to be with each other, are married), the man puts his penis inside the woman's vagina (anatomy lesson has happened already) and the sperm comes out of his penis in a fluid called semen, and it goes into her vagina. The sperm goes up into her uterus to her fallopian tube, where it meets the egg.

## 5th to 6th Grades

If you have not done so already, it's time to do an anatomy lesson. Here, you can use drawings of the sexual anatomy of both girls and boys. This is also a good time to talk about how semen is made, ovulation, menstruation, tampons/pads, wet dreams ("nocturnal emissions" is the correct term). Don't forget to include the other changes that happen with adolescence, such as hair growth, deepening voice, sweat production, oily skin, growth of breasts and penis and sexual thoughts/feelings. Normalize all of this and let them know that these changes happen at different times for everyone, between ages 9 to 14 for girls and a little later for boys. Reassure them that they can come to you any time they want with questions or concerns as they start to go through this sometimes scary process.

### **Other topics to cover include:**

- Discuss masturbation and orgasm. When you talk about conception and pregnancy, don't forget to discuss nocturnal emissions and that girls sometimes have orgasms in their sleep as well. Explain what an orgasm is simply by saying that it's a really pleasurable feeling that comes from your penis or vulva being touched. To be more in-depth, say it's an intense contraction of the muscles in the area that feels like a beautiful release.
- Let your child know that as they get older, they might want to explore their genitals more and enjoy the sensations of touching more, and let them know that is normal and okay. Advise them that it is a good and safe way to release their sexual thoughts and feelings.
- Here is also where you begin talking about the mechanics of sex, such as how ejaculation occurs, etc. Base this information on their questions. If they ask you about what oral sex is, don't just tell them that it is when a man or a woman puts their mouth on another person's genitals—also ask them what they think about that, if they have heard anything about that at school or if they know someone who has done it or wants to do it. Always ask their thoughts and ideas and receive them with interest and openness, not judgment. You can still tell them about the risks and introduce sexually transmitted diseases.
- When you start talking to them about the mechanics of sex, remember that you are also talking to them about your hopes and dreams for their sex lives. For example, what you'd like for them their first time (to be with someone they love and trust, who is going to respect them and care about making them feel good, who loves them and whom they love in return, someone who is going to be with them the day after and not talk about them, someone who deserves the amazing gift that their body and sexuality is).

In 6th grade, you should also start talking about safer sex options, including birth control, but you should also inform them that abstinence is the only option that is 100 percent safe. You can show them the different options and even demonstrate by rolling a condom on a banana. Throughout this safer sex discussion, reinforce the idea that there is nothing they can't tell you, nothing they can say or do to cause you to stop loving them. Whatever the question might be, let your child say that nothing is off the table—and that if you don't personally know the answer to their question, you will find their answer for them and report back.

It is also important for parents to note that girls are starting puberty younger and younger these days. Many girls are now starting puberty as early as 9 years old, and this is when their hormones start kicking in big-time. It's best to have these discussions about anatomy and safer sex before this begins. And, remember, just because you are having these discussions with your children doesn't mean that you are giving them the green light to have sex. Information does not equal permission, and you can share this feedback with them. Start by saying, "I want you to have the information so that you aren't confused or misled by kids at school, but that doesn't mean I think it's okay for you to have sex right now. I want you to wait until (insert value here)."

#### *A Note About the Internet*

In this Internet era, it is also important to talk to them about how to use the Web safely and responsibly. Make sure their usage is supervised or at least be in the same room as them when they are surfing the Net. Be sure to keep the computer in a centralized location and explain to them the reality of online sexual predators.

## **7<sup>th</sup> to 9th Grades**

Hormones are flying right now! Your child is well into adolescence, and this includes having sexual thoughts and feelings. They likely have many peers who are stepping into the very adult world of sex, so now it is very important to continue reinforcing the lessons you have taught them in the past. You may be giving the same information and answering the same questions numerous times, but know that the information is being processed differently each time, depending on what stage of development your child is in. Hormones and personal experiences also play a role in how your child will accept and process this information.

Be sure to go back over birth control options, including discussion, demonstration and condom negotiation. For example, ask your child: "What if you are with someone (when you are married, dating, insert value here) and they don't want to use a condom? What if they tell you that it doesn't feel as good or that if you really loved them you wouldn't want to use a condom? Or that they are on birth control and condoms aren't necessary?" Troubleshoot the different situations that might occur and how they could respond.



### *The Role of Media*

You might think that you and the media are at war with one another when it comes to influencing your child. However, rather than try to fight against the sexual messaging in the media, use it to your advantage by making it a teachable moment. For example, when a situation involving someone like Jamie Lynn Spears or Bristol Palin occurs, take that opportunity to ask your child: "What do you think about this situation? What do your friends think about it? Do you know anyone who is pregnant? How did the kids in school react to her?"

Another good way to utilize a teaching moment is while watching television or a movie together. If a sexual scene or reference occurs, don't just flinch and change the channel. Try to use it as a conversation starter with your child (either in the moment or later in the day, such as: "Remember when we were watching that movie and they started discussing oral sex? Did that make you uncomfortable? Is that something kids at your school talk about? Is it something they do?")

### *The Role of Self-Esteem*

Now is the also the age when you need to start instilling a healthy self-esteem and self-respect in your child. Yes, you might have already done so regarding their school work, their aptitude at sports, etc., but you also need to instill the idea that their sexuality is something to be proud of and treasured. Teach your children that their sexuality is a gift and a joy and that it is something that should not be tossed aside or used and abused by others. Let them know that sex feels great and can be amazing—but only under the right circumstances and with the right person. Tell them that if it is not the right time or person, it can be hurtful or saddening, rather than uplifting and enjoyable. Tell her that you want her first time, her every time, to be beautiful and amazing, a time when her body is respected and valued, not used and discarded.

### *A Note About Teenage Girls and Masturbation*

While self-stimulation is simple and straightforward for a young boy, girls don't have it so easy. They might not know how or where to stimulate themselves, and though this doesn't exactly leap into your mind as something you want your teenage daughter to know, it can help her to work through sexual thoughts and feelings without engaging in unsafe sex. You might want to have a candid talk with her about exploring or learning about her body or even offer her a simple clitoral vibrator. (Don't worry, it doesn't have to be a large toy or a toy that is actually inserted into the vagina.) Tell her that a lot of girls enjoy touching their vulvas and bringing themselves to orgasm, as this can help to remove the stigma or shame she might be feeling regarding it. Let her know that it is okay and, indeed, important for her to understand her own body and sexual response. Show her a picture of her genitals, and encourage her to look at her own genitals in a handheld mirror. Remind her that masturbation is a safe, natural way to relieve strong sexual feelings, safely and without risk of STDs or pregnancy.

### *Sexting and Other Sex and Tech Concerns*

Remind your teen of the house rules regarding the Internet. Discuss the dangers and risks associated with sexting (sending or receiving nude, seminude or explicit messages online), and let them know that once something is on the Internet, it is there forever. Advise them that employers and colleges can have access to this information in the future and that their classmates might also see these pictures or messages if they get passed around school (which they likely will). Let them know that their Facebook pages, cell phones, etc., are a privilege and that you can and will check up on their usage so they know to expect a surprise inspection at any time! If you find anything inappropriate, you can revoke their Internet and phone privileges.

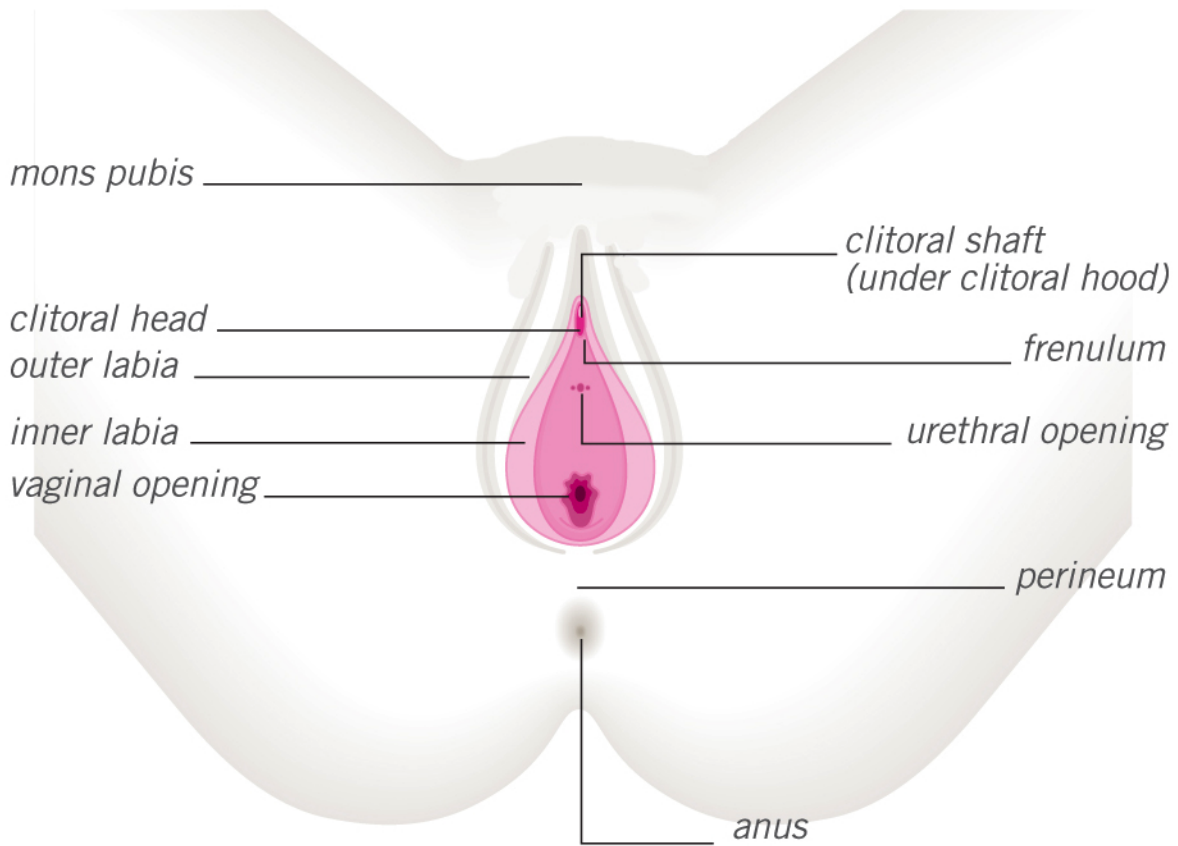
## 9th to 12th Grades

The mantra to remember during this time is reinforce, reinforce, reinforce! Be open to questions and concerns, and answer them as fully and nonjudgmentally as possible. Revisit the safer sex, birth control and condom negotiation subjects. Continue instilling the importance of behaving appropriately online and via cell phones (nude photos could mean arrest for child pornography, no dream college, etc.). Discuss and get their opinions on current events like rainbow parties (parties in which every girl wears a different color lipstick and the guy with the most colors on his penis at the end of the night wins) and jelly bracelets (different colors represent different sexual acts the girl is willing to do), and use the media for teachable moments.

Always ask your child what he thinks and what his friends/classmates are doing, and share your own values in a nonjudgmental way. Last but not least, remind them that sexual pleasure goes both ways. Sex isn't about taking, using or hurting—it's about giving and receiving pleasure, in a physically and emotionally safe manner. Make sure your daughter knows that when she is old enough to be sexual she should be receiving pleasure and not just giving it. Make sure your son knows he should be giving pleasure and not just taking it. Let them know that respect is the key to a happy, fulfilling sex life, even for old married folks like Mom and Dad!

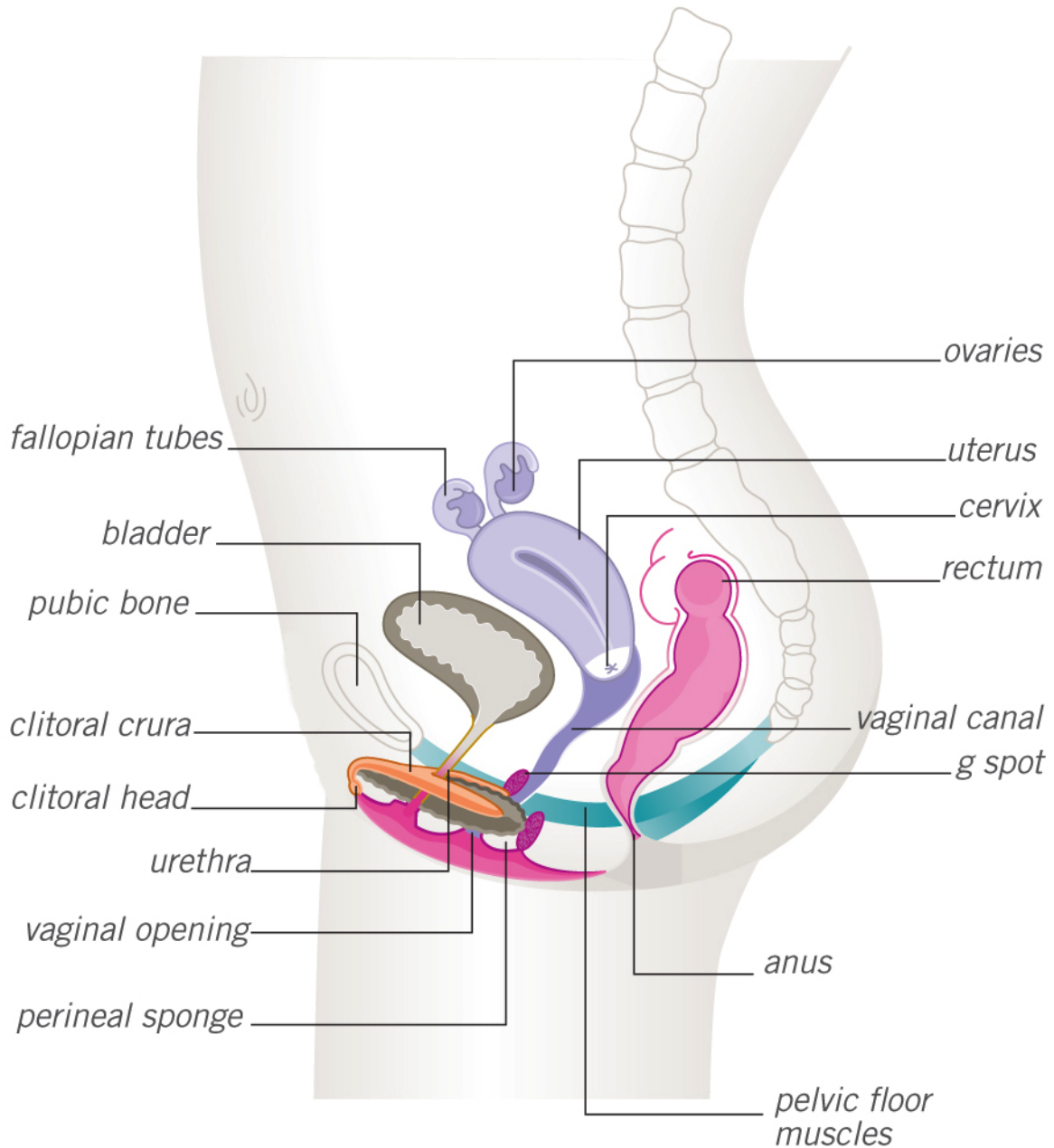
# External female anatomy

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# Internal female anatomy

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# Male sexual anatomy

