

Talking About RSE – A GUIDE FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OR CARERS

Talking about sex, relationships and sexual health with your child can be daunting. However, it is important to ensure they have a good understanding of their bodies, health and relationships.

This advice is to support family members and carers to prepare for, and have these important conversations.

1. Understand that ALL young people have the right to explore their sexuality.

There is no 'normal' when it comes to sexuality. Every young person will become sexually aware at different ages, and that is fine. It's important to talk about things positively so your child can build a positive self-identity and experience fulfilling relationships. Everyone deserves to understand and express their sexuality and their identity. Remember, sexuality and relationships aren't all about the act of sex, it is about the variety of relationships a person will hold over their lifetime.

2. Keep calm

It can be nerve wracking to talk about sex and/or relationships with your child, especially if it's the first time. You don't have to (and can't!) know everything. But you can do your research. Make sure what you're saying is factually accurate, and if you don't know the answer to a question then just be honest.

Here are some things you should remember:

- It's important that your child is aware you are not judging them (even if you are nervous or embarrassed). Try to ensure that you are speaking to them in a calm, quiet and safe environment in which they can freely ask questions.
- Stop if you think they are not processing the information as they can easily feel overwhelmed. It is better to do this over a few discussions to give them time to think and come back with more questions.
- When conversations about sex or bodies are shut down it reinforces the idea that it is something to be ashamed of, or not to be discussed. Try to remain open and honest. If it is an inappropriate time or place to be talking about things, thank them for the question and plan to talk with them about it later on, or move to somewhere more appropriate to have the discussion.
- If a question takes you by surprise, you can thank them for asking you and tell them you are going to find out more information and arrange to have a chat with them later on.

3. There is no such thing as ‘the’ talk

Relationships are a complex thing, and impossible to sum up in a single conversation, so don't feel under pressure to try. 'The talk' shouldn't be a one-time only event, it should be a continuous discussion over time. Lots of small conversations will make more of an impact than one big one, and will provide greater opportunity to discuss things in a way that is most responsive to the needs of the person you are talking to. Many young people will be curious about things, like why their body is changing or how they can talk to someone they are attracted to. These are natural opportunities to open up conversations and discuss things honestly. Another good way of starting a conversation is to use storylines from TV such as reality TV or soaps, as this can make it relevant to them without being too personal.

4. Respect children and young people's right to privacy

Helping your child understand the difference between public and private spaces is an important part of discussing sex and relationships. Being clear about where it is appropriate or inappropriate to have particular conversations or do particular things can help reinforce this concept.

To do this you could:

- Try to have conversations in calm, quiet and safe environments in which your child is comfortable and able to ask questions.
- Discuss what privacy means, and why it is important.
- Lead by example, having conversations and undertaking intimate tasks in private locations.
- Ensure that your child has their own space and that this is respected, for example, by knocking on their bedroom door before entering.
- Stay calm if things happen in the 'wrong' location and be clear about why it is not appropriate. Remember not to shut conversations down without arranging a more appropriate time or place to talk (see point 2.)

5. Emphasise consent

Consent can be taught early on. For example, by respecting the rights of your child to say no to any physical touch (such as not forcing them to sit on the knee/ kiss/ hug friends or relations if they don't want to). It's important from an early age to model and teach respecting other people's boundaries and also be clear that your child is allowed to say what their boundaries are, and know that they'll be listened to.

When it comes to sex itself, it's important to emphasise that sexual activity should only take place when everyone has actively given enthusiastic permission, and that everyone has the right to say 'no'.

6. Use the correct words for body parts!

It's important for children and young people to know the correct names for body parts. Knowing the correct words, such as 'penis' or 'vagina' helps them to understand their own anatomy and that of others.

7. Be LGBT+ inclusive

You can explain that all families are different, and not everyone has a mum and a dad – some have two mums or two dads. It's best not to assume the gender of the person your child has a crush on, and you should acknowledge that asexuality may also be a possibility for some.

If your child is LGBT+, or thinks they might be, it is important to speak openly with them about their feelings, without judgement. Be supportive - remember that being LGBT+ is not a choice and how people respond to it will be an important part of how happy and comfortable your child will feel with themselves.

8. Talk about healthy relationships

Everyone deserves to be treated with respect by their friends and partners and shouldn't feel scared, controlled or pressured by people. Talk with your child about what the qualities of healthy friendships and relationships are, and what they can do if they are not being treated with respect. All relationships and sexual experiences should make us feel positive.

9. When do I start the conversations?

For all children it can be hard to know when to start the conversation about sex. If they are asking questions about it, then they are interested and ready to know the answers.

Be sure to use accessible language at the level that your child understands, but make sure you're not shying away from the facts. Calling it a 'special dance', for example, is probably just going to confuse them.

10. Am I doing it right?

There is no one right way to talk to your child about sex and relationships. Some things will work and some things won't. It's important to remember that what works for others might not work for you. Don't be discouraged or upset if a particular method doesn't work, have a break and try again.

Further Support:

If you would like further information to help have these conversations, you can find lots of useful advice on the Brook's Charity Website:

<https://www.brook.org.uk/>

or on the Outspoken Sex Ed website (a community interest company, set up to get parents talking openly about sex, love, pleasure and relationships):

<https://www.outspokeneducation.com/>