

RAISING HEALTHY KIDS®

Families
Talk About
Sexual Health

For Parents of Young Children

FAMILY HEALTH
PRODUCTIONS

Contents

About *Raising Healthy Kids:*

Families Talk About Sexual Health 1

Being Your Child's Primary Sexuality Educator . . 2

Setting Limits for Safety 3

Telling the Truth 4

Glossary 5

How Babies are Made 6

Teachable Moments 7

Self-Touch 8

Appropriate/Inappropriate Touch 9

Family Health Productions 10

Also From Family Health Productions 11

Acknowledgements 12

About *Raising Healthy Kids*[®]: *Families Talk About Sexual Health*

Communication begins at the moment of birth. How parents communicate with their children—verbally and non-verbally—determines a child’s sexual health: their ability to love and trust themselves and others and to develop healthy, respectful relationships.



An investment made early in a child’s life will pay off. Parents can raise sexually healthy children who make good choices in life. Parents and other caregivers who view and discuss *Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health* will learn information and skills that help them communicate more effectively with their children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeanne Blake". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jeanne Blake
President, Family Health Productions

Showing *Raising Healthy Kids*

Raising Healthy Kids can be viewed by groups of parents in the workplace or at a community event. It can also be viewed by parents in their homes, using this guide for discussion with their spouse, partner or friends.

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Being Your Child's Primary Sexuality Educator

▶ Introduction

You give your children verbal and non-verbal messages about sexuality every day. The tone of your voice as you respond to their questions; the look on your face as you comment to another adult; your reaction to something on television gives your child messages. You are your children's primary sexuality educator. Let's watch the first segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear about this important role in your child's life.

▶ Ask parents

- How did you learn about sexual intercourse?
- How old were you when you learned about sexual intercourse?
- How was sexuality discussed in your home?
- How do you want your child to learn differently?

▶ Remind parents

Without a conscious effort to change, parents usually repeat patterns established during their childhood. Take time to think about how you learned about sexuality and what messages and values you want to give your children.

Setting Limits for Safety

▶ Introduction

Children need limits to be safe. The key is keeping your child safe without limiting exploration. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents set limits with their children.

▶ Ask parents

- What limits did you set for your child today?
- What tone of voice do you try to use to convey a limit?
- How can you make sure your child understands why you set the limit?
- Are you consistent in the limits you set?
- Do you and your spouse or partner agree on when to set limits?
- How do the limits you set today help protect your child as he or she enters adolescence?

▶ Remind parents

Children test limits. If they learn to respect limits as children, they are more likely to be able to set and respect limits as adolescents or teens when the consequences can be even greater.

Telling the Truth

► Introduction

Being honest with your children tells them they're worthy of respect. Telling them the truth nurtures their self-esteem. When you name their body parts, for example, use the accurate names. Tell the truth. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some families handle this.

► Ask parents

- As a child, what names did you learn for your body parts?
- How do you feel when you say the words penis, testicles, vagina, and vulva aloud?
- What's the expression on your face when you say these words?
- Do you want your children to be comfortable saying these words?
- If your children use nicknames for their body parts, how can you encourage them to use the correct names?

► Remind parents

As Dr. Zuckerman says in the program, you may become more comfortable calling body parts by their accurate names if you practice saying them out loud. Watch yourself in the mirror. Does your expression suggest discomfort? As you repeat the words, does it become easier?

Glossary

Vulva The whole area of soft skin between a female's legs is called the vulva. The word vulva comes from the Latin word *volva*, which means covering. The vulva covers the clitoris, the opening to the vagina, the opening to the urethra, and the labia.

Labia The labia are two sets of soft folds of skin inside the vulva. They cover the inner parts of the vulva—the clitoris, the opening to the urethra, and the opening to the vagina. Labia is the Latin word for lips.

Clitoris The clitoris is a small mound of skin about the size of a pea. When the clitoris is touched and rubbed, a female's body feels good both outside and inside. It feels kind of tingly, kind of warm and nice.

Urethra The opening to the urethra is quite small. The urethra is not one of the female's sex organs. It is a tube through which urine—liquid waste—leaves the body.

Vagina The vagina is a passageway between the uterus—a sex organ inside the female body—and the outside of the female body. The opening to the vagina is bigger than the opening to the urethra.

Body fact: A baby travels through the vagina when it is ready to be born. The vagina is also the passageway through which a small amount of blood, other fluids, and tissue leave the uterus, about once a month. This small amount of normal bleeding is called menstruation or "having a period" and begins when a girl has reached puberty. The vagina is also the place where the penis fits during sexual intercourse.

Uterus The uterus is made of strong muscles and is hollow inside. It is about the size and shape of a small upside-down pear and is connected to both Fallopian tubes and the inside end of the vagina.

Body fact: The uterus is the place in which a developing baby, called a fetus, grows, is fed and is protected. A fetus grows in the uterus, which stretches as the fetus grows bigger, for about nine months until it is ready to be born. The uterus is sometimes called the womb.

Testicles The two testicles are soft and squishy and are covered and protected by the scrotum. Usually one testicle hangs lower than the other. Before puberty each testicle is about the size of a marble. During puberty, each testicle grows to about the size of a walnut or a very small ball.

Penis The penis is made of soft, spongy tissue and blood vessels. Urine—liquid waste—leaves a male's body through a small opening at the tip of his penis. The end of the penis is called the glans. When the penis is touched and rubbed, a male's body feels good both outside and inside—kind of tingly, kind of warm and nice.

Body fact: Generally, the penis is soft and hangs down over the scrotum. Sometimes, it becomes stiff and hard and larger and longer, and stands out from the body. This is called an erection.

Scrotum The scrotum is the soft sac of wrinkly skin that covers, holds, and protects the two testicles.

Anus The anus is a small opening through which feces—solid waste—leaves the female/male body.¹

¹Excerpts from the book *It's Perfectly Normal*. Text © 1994 Robie H. Harris, Illustrated by Michael Emberley. Reproduced by permission of the publisher Candlewick Press, Cambridge, MA (800) 253-6476.

How Babies are Made

► Introduction

Most children want to know where babies come from and will eventually ask. It's important to prepare for this important moment so that you can answer your child's questions honestly and comfortably. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents talk about how babies are made.

► Ask parents

- As a child, what were you told about how babies are made?
- How have you explained to your child how babies are made?
- How would you now describe how babies are made?
- What will you say if your child asks about adoption?

Practice explaining reproduction to your child. Here's one suggested way:

Where do babies come from?

"Where do you think babies come from? (Briefly discuss the child's beliefs.) Babies grow in a special place inside their mothers' bodies. This place is warm and cozy and made just to hold the baby. This special place is called the uterus."

How does the baby get into the uterus?

"The baby starts from a tiny little egg. (Draw a dot with a pencil to show how small.) The egg is already in the woman's body. The woman needs help from a man to make a baby. The man has something special, called sperm, in his body. It has to join with the egg inside the woman's body. When the sperm joins the egg, the baby starts to grow."

How does the sperm join with the egg?

"Good question. The sperm has to leave the man's body and get inside the woman's body. The sperm leaves the man's body through an opening at the end of his penis. The sperm gets into the woman's body through an opening between her legs. This opening is called the vagina. So, the man puts his penis into the woman's vagina and the sperm goes from his body into her body, where it can meet the egg. Now you tell me how the sperm joins with the egg."²

Teachable Moments

▶ Introduction

An ideal way to teach a child, to share information and values, is through a teachable moment. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents take advantage of opportunities to talk with their children about important topics.

▶ Ask parents

- Recall a recent teachable moment. Explain how you took advantage of it.
- If your child asks you a question you can't answer, how might you find the answer together?
- If your child asked a question you didn't feel you handled well, how could you bring up the subject with your child again?

▶ Remind parents

Children want to know what their parents think and what they consider important. When you find a teachable moment, take the time to share information and your values.

Self-Touch

► Introduction

As children explore their bodies, it's natural for them to touch their genitals. Even infants touch their genitals. It's no different than touching any other part of their body. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents talk about this subject.

► Ask parents

- In the program, Gloria told how she answered her daughter's question about masturbation. What do you think of her response?
- If your child asked you about masturbation, what would you say?
- What would you say to your child if you saw her touching herself?
- What would you do if your child's kindergarten teacher told you your child was rubbing his or her genitals during nap time?
- How does your religious upbringing influence how you feel about self-touch?

► Remind parents

Most children touch themselves. When you talk about self-touch, be careful to not shame your children. Shamed children often remember the experience for a lifetime. Children who are sexually healthy don't feel shame about their bodies. If you believe that discussing masturbation is against your religious beliefs, it may help you to talk about this issue with your pastor or rabbi.

Appropriate/Inappropriate Touch

► Introduction

Children need to learn to take care of their bodies—to eat nutritious foods, to exercise, and to get enough sleep. When children take care of their bodies, they feel responsible for them. It also helps them set limits. They can decide who touches their bodies. Let's watch the next segment of *Raising Healthy Kids* to hear how some parents teach their children this important lesson.

► Ask parents

- What would you say to your child if he resists hugging or kissing an adult friend or relative?
- When is the last time you felt uncomfortable receiving a hug or a kiss?
- Name three ways other than a hug that children can show affection to friends or relatives.
- What have you told your children to do if someone tries to touch them inappropriately?

► Remind parents

It may be difficult to explain to an adult that your child doesn't want to give them a hug. A gentle explanation can help. "We're helping Johnny learn that it's his right to decide who touches his body. If he doesn't want to give you a hug, please don't take it personally. He will another time. Can he just give you a high-five or just say hello? Thanks for understanding." Helping children feel responsible for their bodies will help protect them for a lifetime.

Family Health Productions

Family Health Productions produces programs, guides, training materials, and abouthealth.com to help families talk about the challenges young people face growing up.

Jeanne Blake is the producer of *Raising Healthy Kids* and the president of Family Health Productions. She is a television medical reporter and an affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions at Harvard Medical School. Blake speaks to parents at corporations, at health care organizations, and at schools, and consults nationally on family communication. She is also the president of Blake Works, Inc. and the author of the *Words Can Work*[™] series of books for parents.

Also From Family Health Productions

***Alcohol: True Stories* hosted by Matt Damon**

Four young people tell how alcohol affected their lives. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers 

In Our Own Words®: Teens and AIDS

Five young people tell about being infected with HIV as teens through unprotected sexual intercourse. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people.

20 minutes. Available in Spanish.

Recommended for grades 6 & up 

The Power of Girls: Inside and Out®

Five girls talk about the challenges they faced growing up and how supportive relationships with friends, family, and community helped. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 6 & up, parents and other caregivers 

Boys on Bullying

Five boys tell how bullying affected their lives and how support from family, peers and the community made the difference. Includes guide for leading discussions with young people or parents. 20 minutes.

Recommended for grades 5 & up, parents and other caregivers 

Raising Healthy Kids®: Families Talk About Sexual Health

Gives parents information and skills for talking with kids about sexual health. Includes discussion guide.

Program #2 *For parents of preadolescents and adolescents* Addresses sharing values, keeping communication open, postponing sexual intercourse, avoiding absolutes, building strong relationships, and more. 20 minutes.

Recommended for parents and other caregivers 

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