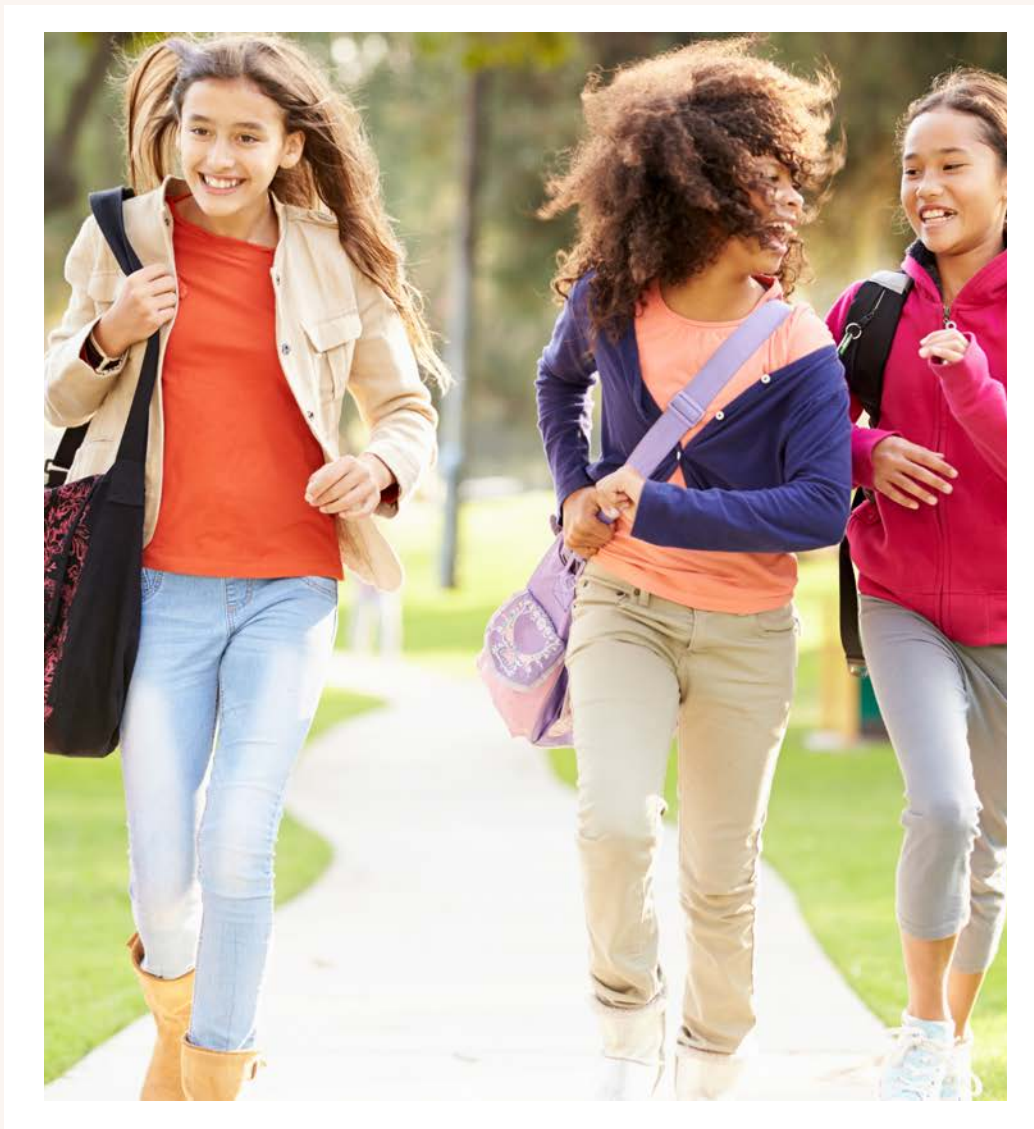


YOUR CHANGING BODY

THE POWER TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR PUBERTY

It's kind of a big deal!



THE BODY AGENCY 

www.thebodyagency.com

Before We Begin....



Language Matters: This guide is written for individuals who were assigned female at birth, identify as a girl, and uses she/her pronouns.

Your daughter is growing up, and it seems fast. Ideally, you have been talking to her for years about bodily changes, including but not limited to proper names of body parts, puberty, boundaries, and consent. If you haven't it's not too late. But you need to start laying the groundwork now to establish yourself as a good go-to person for information of all kinds in a safe and comfortable space where you can learn together.

This guide is intended to help you develop an ongoing, judgment-free dialogue with your child early on so you can talk to them about any topic, any time. It is written for parents, guardians, or primary caregivers of girls who are starting puberty or will start soon (generally between 8 and 14 years old), with an average age around 12. It covers important basics about how and when to talk to your daughter, along with topics you may want to cover.

The Body Agency is also developing health and wellness guides to help parents of boys and parents of older adolescents who are embarking on self-exploration or are becoming sexually active that will be released soon. Stay tuned!



Why do you need this guide?

Girls' bodies develop at different ages and speeds, as does their maturity and ability to discuss sensitive topics and digest information. This guide was designed to help you create open communication with your daughter about issues she will encounter as she grows and matures. It can feel awkward and embarrassing for everyone at first but, by providing a comfortable space for an ongoing, truthful dialogue (not just one talk) with your daughter, you can help them get past the rumors, half-truths, and guesswork that often form the basis of their sexual knowledge. And, most importantly, you can help them normalize a healthy attitude about their bodies, its amazing functions, their own sexuality, and, eventually, romantic and sexual engagement with a partner.

Doesn't she learn about these things in school?

The world your daughter is growing up in is very different than the one you experienced as a teenager: it is hypersexualized. Clothing for young girls has become skimpier and more mature. Highly sexual images are common on the screen, and social media has fundamentally changed the way children interact. Meanwhile, the age at when girls first experience intercourse has not changed much, and many girls are sexually experimenting at younger ages. Around age 12 or 13 girls are undergoing great physical and hormonal change in this hypersexualized and airbrushed world. It's not surprising that many girls develop low self-confidence or self-esteem, both of which are risk factors for negative physical and societal consequences in the future. Against this backdrop, it's even more important for girls to have a close, comfortable, and connected relationship with a parent (usually, but not always, her mother) or another trusted female adult.

It's not always easy. Between ages 9 and 12 girls have a greater need for independence, so you may find them less willing to listen to you as they get older. When this happens they often start to gravitate more towards peers where they may seek information that may or may not be accurate. If you wait too long to talk to your daughter not only are they less likely to listen but you may also find they have done their own research from less credible, or possibly unintended, sources. If they search the internet for an innocent health question such as, "why do my breasts hurt" it may turn up more adult sites that they are not prepared for. Taking the time to talk with them now can help lay the groundwork for healthy communication moving forward (read on to learn more).

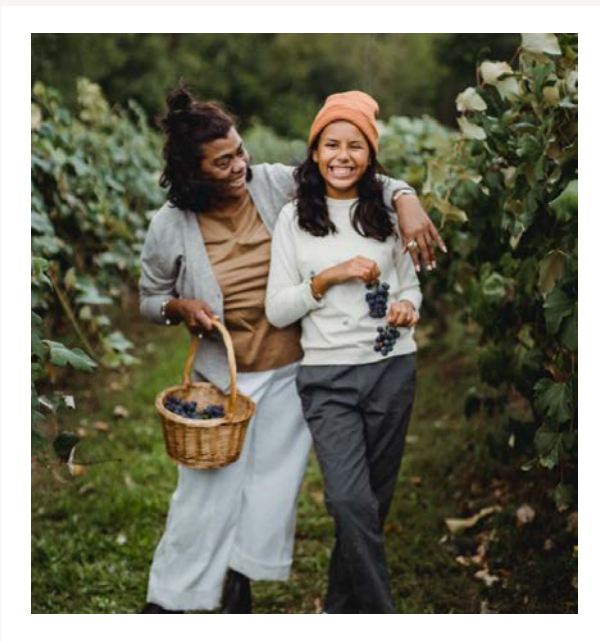
This process of pulling away can be painful for parents, but it's important to try to keep all communication open throughout this difficult process. When you accept your daughter for who she is as she develops sexually it helps her mature within the family, instead of breaking away or keeping secrets from you that could be harmful to her physical or mental well-being.

If you want your kids to be able to talk to you and learn from you (instead of just their peers, social media, or even porn), read on!

“Awkward?!” Many parents were not raised in families that spoke openly about puberty or sex, and consequently find it difficult to talk about these topics with anyone – much less their kids. Just do your best! Your daughter will pick up on any discomfort, perpetuating the outdated notion that these topics should be taboo. This is particularly important for girls as female bodies and their functions are often perceived as dirty or shameful, when this absolutely should not be the case.

When should I start talking to my daughter? Is she in puberty? Is she ready?

It's never too soon to start open, honest communication with your daughter. But what you share at different ages will depend on where they are in their physical and emotional development. Puberty officially starts in girls when her brain starts to release the gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH), generally around her 8th birthday.



When GnRH travels to the pituitary gland (a small gland under the brain that produces hormones that control other glands throughout the body) two more puberty hormones are released— the luteinizing hormone [LH] and follicle-stimulating hormone [FSH]. These hormones go to the ovaries and will start to trigger production of the hormone estrogen, along with the maturation and eventual release of eggs.

Around the same time, girls' adrenal glands will start to produce adrenal androgens that stimulate the growth of pubic and underarm hair.

GIRLS AND BOYS GO THROUGH FIVE STAGES OF PUBERTY marked by visible changes in sexual maturity. These are sometimes called the “Tanner” stages and understanding them can help you know what to expect as you guide your daughter through this process.

STAGE ONE

In this stage girls don't show any visible signs of puberty. However, toward the end, the brain starts to send signals to the body to prepare for changes. This typically happens sometime after a girls' 8th birthday.

STAGE TWO

Characterized by the beginning of physical development, usually between ages 9 and 11 (although Black girls, and girls with a higher body mass, often start about a year before White girls). In stage 2, breast buds start to form under the nipple and a little pubic hair starts to grow on the vulva.

STAGE THREE

Typically begins in girls after age 12. Physical changes become more obvious. It starts with a growth spurt and continues as hips and thighs swell. Breast buds continue to get bigger and pubic hair gets thicker and curlier. Girls may start to notice vaginal discharge. Girls in stage 3 also begin to grow armpit hair and may start to have acne on their faces and backs.

STAGE FOUR

During this stage, which generally starts around age 13, girls' breasts become fuller, pubic hair gets thicker, and their growth spurt somewhat slows down . This stage is also when most girls get their first period.

STAGE FIVE

Your daughter reaches physical maturity, growing perhaps an inch or two beyond her height at the time of her first period. Her breasts will reach adult size, pubic hair fills out, reproductive organs and genitals are fully developed, as is her shape (hips, thighs, and butt).

This guide is aimed primarily at parents of girls in stages 1 through 4. The Body Agency also has a guide for parents of older girls (forthcoming). Enter your email address here to get it when it is released. If you are a parent, guardian, or confidante of a girl who is going through any of the above stages this is the guide for you!

It's important to note that puberty hormones also result in emotional changes described below that you will likely notice. This may also require support and attention.

WHAT TO DISCUSS DURING YOUR TALKS

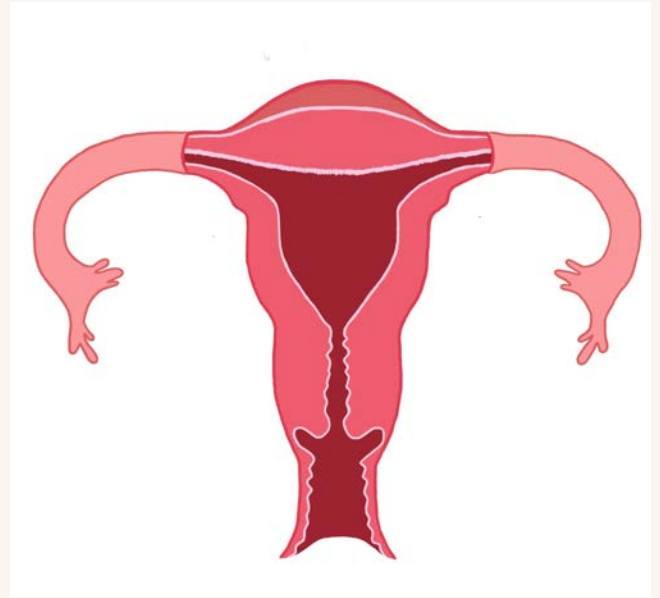
- Once you've set the groundwork for honest talks with your daughter, what topics should you cover as she approaches puberty and moves through its early stages? It's not enough anymore just to teach your daughter about her body, how it works, and how it will change, although those are critical first steps. It's equally important, in today's digital world, to make sure she is emotionally prepared.



Does she have the tools to build and maintain self-esteem and self-respect, set and keep boundaries, and understand consent? Obviously, as your daughter grows and develops the topics you need to cover will change. Here are some topics you may want to cover.

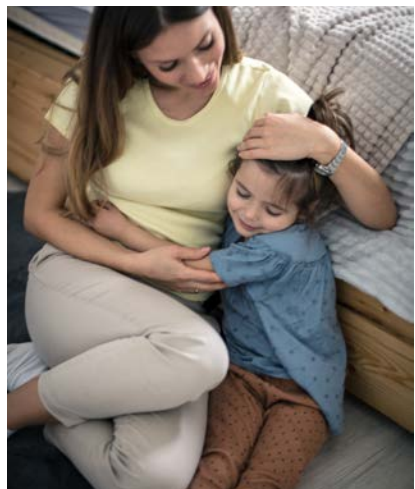
THE BEAUTIFUL FEMALE FORM

- You may want to start by reviewing the female body, including the proper names for body parts and where they are. Look at a detailed picture of the female anatomy together and walk her through the internal and external parts, including the functions of each. You can also give her a hand mirror so she can see her own parts when the time is right.



- She may have learned some of this information in school or from books but doing this together gives her the opportunity to ask questions and for you to introduce future topics in a matter-of-fact way. It also allows you to introduce topics that likely were not covered in school sexual education classes, such as female pleasure. You could ask “Do you know the clitoris has no purpose other than to feel good?” This kind of honest conversation helps normalize sensitive and embarrassing topics and can create a dialogue about what she needs to know and what you want her to know.

For instance, your values about nudity or sex. Of course there is a critical difference between honesty and oversharing (there’s no need to tell a 5-year-old every detail). Additional information can come out over time in later talks as she matures.



HEALTHY DIET

Advice for tweens is basically the same as it is for humans of all ages: try to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet (“eat the rainbow”), starting with a good breakfast. However, children of this age should be sure to get enough protein, since they are building muscle, and calcium to grow strong bones. Additionally, iron and vitamins A, B, C, D, E, and K are particularly important for girls at this stage of development.

It's helpful to keep junk food and sugary drinks to a minimum while allowing room for treats in moderation to help prevent binging. Ensuring she has access to healthy snacks can also help keep her feeling good when she's on-the-go. Go to www.choosemyplate.gov to learn with her about making healthy eating choices. In general, girls this age do not need dietary supplements unless her healthcare provider recommends them. Alcohol, cigarettes (including e-cigarettes for vaping), and marijuana (in states that have legalized it) is illegal for minors in the U.S.



“While some teens misuse drugs and alcohol to “help them feel more relaxed,” this can backfire. Being intoxicated can put a person at greater risk of an unwanted sexual encounter or other undesirable situations.

CONSISTENT EXERCISE

One of the best gifts you can give your daughter is to find ways that keep her body moving in a way that she enjoys. An active lifestyle can help her stay healthy throughout adulthood! If she is not a big fan of exercise, know that any movement throughout the day can add up. However, because eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia can also manifest (particularly in girls) at a young age, it may be helpful to set healthy fitness goals, rather than aspire to reach a set weight, clothing size, or look that may not work for her body type. There is no one “normal” or universally “attractive” body shape or size despite what the media may portray— and the earlier she understands this all the better.

SLEEP

While many tweens are notably different and more mature than younger children their sleep needs are still similar. Between ages 5 and 12 most children still need 10 or 11 hours of sleep a night (most get around 9.5 hours). Sleep is important not just for



relaxation and happiness but also for core health and growth. Teaching your daughter good sleep hygiene will serve her well. This includes tactics such as trying to keep a regular bedtime schedule with daily exercise, keeping electronics (especially smartphones) outside the bedroom, and turning off all screens an hour before bedtime. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children under age 12 avoid caffeine and teens 12 to 18 limit their intake to no more than 100 mg per day (about what they would get in two caffeinated sodas). Be aware that even small amounts of caffeine can create dependence.

SPECIFIC TOPICS FOR DIFFERENT PHYSICAL STAGES

- By the time she is in first grade you will want to be more specific about the many ways the female body is truly amazing. You will also want to keep a close eye on her body development and growth. Once she has started to develop breast buds you know puberty has begun, and you will want to have more frequent chats about the specific changes her body will go through as she grows, and what she can expect. Here are some additional things you may want to discuss with her as she goes through the different Tanner Stages of development:



STAGE 1:

Buy or check out some books about puberty and read them with your daughter while she is still in Stage 1, before her body has started to develop. One excellent choice is *The Care & Keeping of YOU: The Body Book for Younger Girls* followed later (in Stage 2 or 3) by *The Care & Keeping of YOU 2: The Body Book for Older Girls*. Girls followed later (in Stage 2 or 3) by *The Care & Keeping of YOU 2: The Body Book for Older Girls*.



STAGE 2:

When your daughter enters the second stage of puberty there aren't a lot of physical changes that require action, but your preparations should be underway. She may want to start wearing clothing to suit her changing body such as a bralette, even if she doesn't really need one for support.

- Make sure she knows that breasts often grow unevenly, so it's perfectly normal for one side to be bigger than the other. Also, breast tenderness or itchiness are common and not something she should be concerned about. Similarly, some nipples go in (inverted) while others stick out – again, both are perfectly normal. When you talk it's helpful to use the proper terminology. Like describing the areola as the circular, darker-colored area around the nipple that can range in color from pink to dark brown. Many girls have longer hairs sprinkled around the areola that can be removed if they bother her, but be aware that the skin is very sensitive so talk to your daughter about options before she takes any action. It won't be necessary during this stage but it's something to keep in mind down the road.
- In this stage, pubic hair starts to appear around the vulva. If you have not yet prepared her for physical changes of puberty now is the time!
- In addition to minor physical changes, she may start to experience increased moodiness or varying levels of energy on different days.



STAGE 3:

By the time a girl enters the third stage of puberty she will experience lots of physical changes. And while it may not seem like she wants or needs your support, this is a great time to stay involved. This stage often happens around age 12. You can:

- Take her to get fitted for a few comfortable bras if she wants or needs them. If she would rather not wear a traditional bra there are many styles she can try that look less bra-like but can have some support and coverage, such as sport tops and tanks.
- Talk to her about body hair if you haven't already done so. If she is bothered by it, teach her different ways it can be removed safely and comfortably— shaving, waxing, threading, depilatory creams, or more permanent hair removal through lasers when appropriate (although this can be expensive).
- Show her how to care for her skin to prevent acne with a gentle facial cleanser. And treat any acne with over-the-counter (OTC) medicated creams or patches, while staying hydrated inside and out. Whenever possible, she should keep her hands off her face (touch can transfer bacteria to the face) and she should avoid picking at pimples, no matter how tempted she is (trust us, the momentary satisfaction is replaced by regret when the blemish takes longer to heal and may leave a scar). Hormones, lifestyle, and genetics can also impact how much girls are impacted by acne. If your daughter has bad acne that does not respond to OTC face washes, pimple patches, or acne creams it may be time to see your healthcare provider to review other options. For more about this, see the [Body Agency's Period Guide](#).



- Make sure she has a good sunscreen free of carcinogenic benzenes she can use every day. You will want to find one that is hypoallergenic, meaning it is free of irritating ingredients. If her skin is oily you may want to find one that is oil-free or non-comedogenic (meaning it's not likely to clog her pores).
- You should also make sure she has chapstick with sun protection factor (SPF) and sunglasses with UVA/UVB protection to protect her lips and eyes from the sun while she is out and about.
- Shop together for nice-smelling body wash and anti-perspirant, if she chooses to use it. At this age the sweat glands in the groin, armpits, and breast area become more active, resulting in a more pungent sweat.
- Her hair will get oilier, so she will likely need to shampoo more often. You can introduce her to dry shampoo, which can save precious time before school so she can get more sleep.
- Help her understand vaginal discharge here since she will likely start to get some discharge in the months before she gets her first period. Don't let this be a surprise to her, and make sure she knows the basics: that it's normal and healthy! It's really just her vagina's way of cleaning itself. She should change her underwear daily but other than that no special hygiene is needed. Products to "clean" the vagina are not necessary and in fact can result in irritation.
- Keep an eye on her clothing and shoes to be sure they continue to fit her rapidly growing body. She will experience her fastest growth during this stage.
- Read more about emotional health and well-being below since, in addition to all these physical changes, your daughter is also likely experiencing lots of emotional changes associated with hormones and other developmental factors.



STAGE 4:

If you thought there were a lot of changes in stage 3, buckle up for stage 4.

- By this stage most girls need some sort of support for their breasts, particularly if they are active. Not all girls want or need bras but those who do would benefit from a bra fitting. There are lots of great sporty options that provide good support if she is not interested in a more traditional bra style.
- Girls get their first period in this stage. To learn more about how to prepare your daughter for her period, explore different menstrual products that deal with cramps, acne, period headaches, and much more. Check out The Body Agency's Period Guide.

EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Girls' bodies aren't the only thing that develops as hormones start to circulate – their brains do too. Hormone levels are constantly shifting and can result in big mood swings. Don't take it personally! Instead, help your daughter learn how to deal with big feelings.

It is critically important that you keep your eyes and ears open for mood disorders in your daughter, as mental health conditions can begin to emerge in adolescence where, in fact, they are relatively common. While anxiety and depression occur in both boys and girls, girls are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders than boys by mid-adolescence with a prevalence of 14-20%. The good news is that mental health disorders in adolescence are generally amenable to treatment or intervention, especially when identified early.

Mood disorders may start to manifest as early as grade school, sometimes in conjunction with body changes and preoccupation with body image. As a result, thoughts of self-harm become more common in the teen years. Two additional issues that arise more frequently in girls than boys are eating disorders and self-injury (cutting). If you have concerns about your daughter you should consult a mental health specialist immediately. In addition, you can:

- Exercise with them to make sure they are getting enough movement in their lives. This also helps you bond with them (a double benefit).

- Teach them how to recognize their own emotional needs and how to give themselves a time out when they need to (like when they are angry). Helpful tools can include taking time to cool down, going for a walk, playing with a pet, or learning how to talk it out respectfully.

- Show them the benefits of positive talk: try new things, ditch negative friends, and speak up for themselves.

- Relate to them by telling them how you dealt with difficult situations and people. Help them brainstorm for ways they might deal with difficult situations in their own lives.

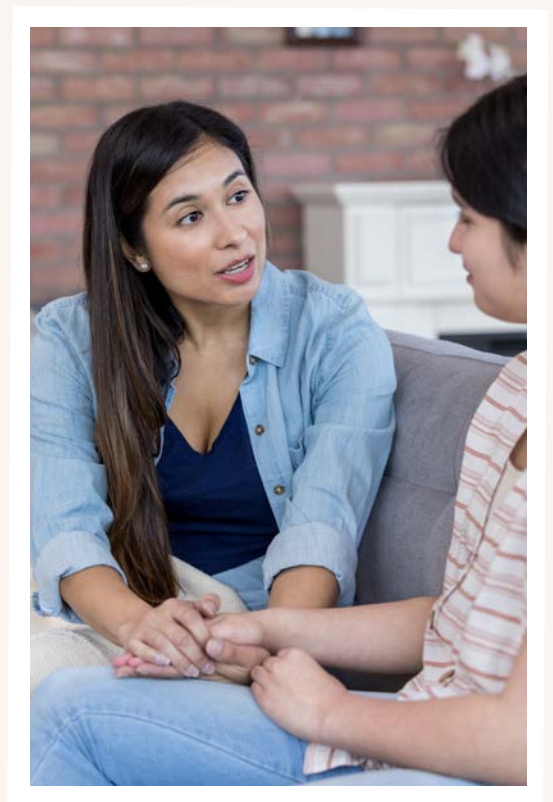
- Model healthy and respectful emotional behavior by talking about your emotions and making space for them to share theirs. Using “I” statements is a great way to do this without casting blame. For instance, “When you _____, I feel _____ because _____. I would like _____.”

- Help them learn to express their feelings, boundaries, and expectations clearly before they start to use social media.

- Listen to their concerns and validate them e.g. “That sounds hard.”

- Be there to help them make tough choices.

- If they show signs of experiencing excessive worry, anxiety, or depression make an appointment with a therapist. Girls are at much greater risk than boys for anxiety and depression.



- Teach them how to differentiate between secrets they can keep among their friends and things they should tell their trusted adult (situations such as, if they or a friend is threatening or exhibiting unsafe, or self-harmful, behaviors such as vomiting, cutting, skipping school, drug use, inappropriate behaviors, stealing, or vandalism).
- Recognize they are growing up and allow them to make their own decisions with your guidance when necessary. A common example is that they may want to set their own style that could result in unwanted attention. In that case, you could set certain parameters about being reasonably dressed for school and other similar events but allow her the flexibility to wear what she wants in other settings. You should also prepare her to deal with the consequences of her choices. Have a conversation that goes something like, “You look very grown up. Before you leave the house can we talk about how you can deal with reactions from others that may make you feel uncomfortable? Then you can decide what to do.” This and many other situations and conversations (including “conversation crashers,” conversations that may be unhelpful ways to broach subjects with your tween or teen) are covered in the excellent book “Fourteen Talks by Age Fourteen.”

Boundaries & Consent

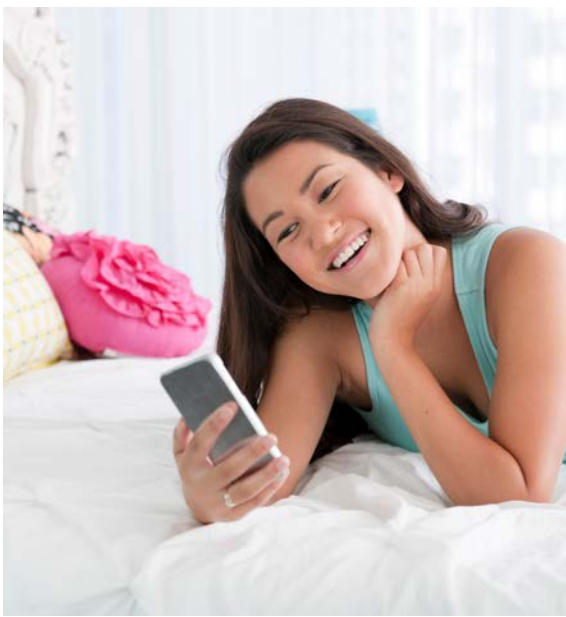
Starting at a young age, it’s important to teach your daughter what boundaries are and that she has the right to set boundaries for herself and her own body, as do others. Ensuring her boundaries are respected requires her to be clear about what she does and does not want, and what she expects.

You can begin teaching children as young as toddlers by empowering them to choose who may or may not touch them. You can also help them develop an awareness of their feelings (including any “uh oh” vibe they may get around certain people). This allows them to develop their intuition of safe and unsafe adults with your assistance.

“What is a boundary?
Boundaries are the practical and personal limits you set that protect and define what you will and won’t accept in your relationships with other people.”

This is also a good time to cover other important safety information such as: to develop their intuition of safe and unsafe adults with your assistance. This is also a good time to cover other important safety information such as:

- Your rules about privacy, such as not to give information to people who don't need it— like your physical or email address.
- She should never hide relationships from her trusted adult, especially if someone says "it's a secret" or "it's just between them."
- Know that any picture, video, text, or email exchange she has with one person may not be private and can be permanent, even if it's on an app (such as Snapchat or



vanishing texts on Instagram) that deletes content after a short period. Once it leaves her device she no longer has control over where it goes or how it's used.

- She should get permission from friends/family before posting any photos or content about another person.
- She has the right to control who sees what, who knows what, how much they see, and how much they know.

If your daughter ever feels uncomfortable about what someone asked her to do, from sending them a sexy photo to a physical act, she can and should talk to you (or another responsible adult) immediately. You must ensure that you will respond without judgment about any situation. If someone pressures your daughter to go beyond the boundaries she has set for herself that person is not someone she needs in her life, no matter how popular or desirable they might seem. You could consider role-playing how she could respond if/when she is put in this sort of situation. For example, if she goes to a movie with a boy she likes does she have the confidence and words to push back if he wants to engage in activities outside her comfort zone?

CONSENT

It is never too early to start teaching your child about consent. Starting at a young age, children should learn to recognize the power behind the words “No” and “Stop” and that these words must be respected. If those early steps are taken talking about consent later between people in sexual situations should seem more natural. One of the most important things to teach your daughter as she starts to think about relationships is how to communicate consent. What is it? What it is not e.g. previous consensual activity does not convey automatic consent)? How should it be conveyed? When can it be revoked? What are some ways to say no comfortably?



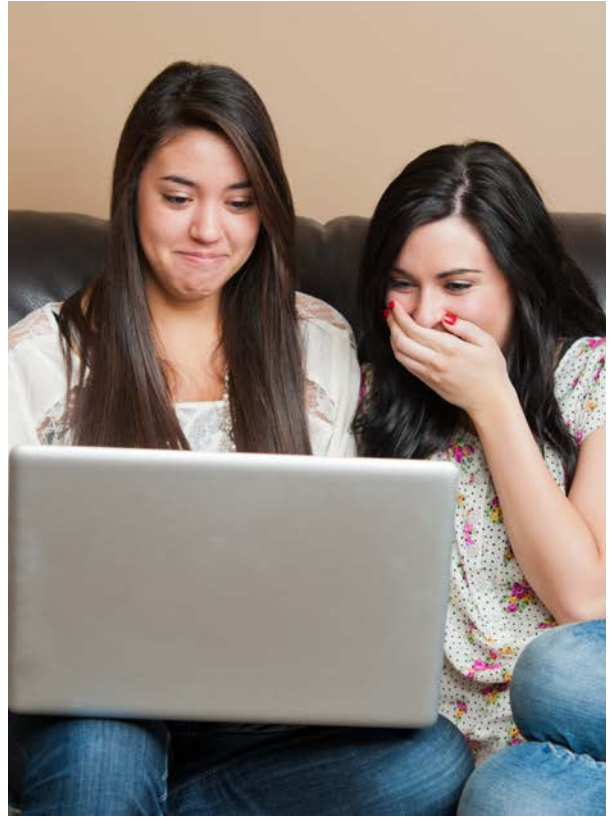
“ Before engaging in any type of dating/sexual activity both partners should be age-appropriate and give their affirmative and enthusiastic consent. To give legal consent a person must be able to exercise reasonable judgment, which can be revoked at any time, even after previous consensual encounters. Cajoling or other attempts to encourage a partner to go beyond his or her boundaries e.g “What are you, a prude? Don’t be such a tease!” is not only disrespectful, it risks sexual misconduct.

Teaching children skills around boundaries and consent can help reduce sexual coercion, harassment, and even assault. All humans are entitled to set boundaries that should be respected.

Sexual assault is any type of sexual activity or contact that is not consensual. It can be through physical force, threat of force, or other undesirable outcome. It can also occur if one person gave another person drugs or alcohol to make them unable to consent.

Stay informed & protect your child online

In addition to normalizing and discussing body talk, boundaries, consent, and puberty it's also vital to teach your daughter to protect herself online. Kids are curious! They are bound to hear things from their friends, in books, and on TV, and the first thing they are likely to do is Google it. Unfortunately, this can lead to accidental exposure to material far beyond what they are seeking. When it comes to internet use it's important to agree on boundaries with your child and stay in close communication with them about their technology – especially their phone, if they have one. While social media platforms and apps like TikTok and Instagram technically prohibit use by younger users (generally people under age 13), the age limit is widely ignored. So, below are some tips for parents of tweens and younger teens.



“ Hot tip! Common Sense Media, NetSmartz, KeepSafe, and Internet Matters are sites that can help parents get up to speed on how to help children identify inappropriate material online and what to do if/when they find it. They also share information about a wide variety of parental control options.

Passwords/social media contracts

Although it's helpful to know your child's passwords, your child is likely more digitally savvy than you and can easily change them. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't require your child to share them. However, instead of developing an adversarial relationship with your child over technology use, you may want to have regular check-ins with them, review their privacy settings, and let them know you have the right and responsibility to access their accounts— if needed. Organizations like Common Sense Media and Culture Reframed have model social

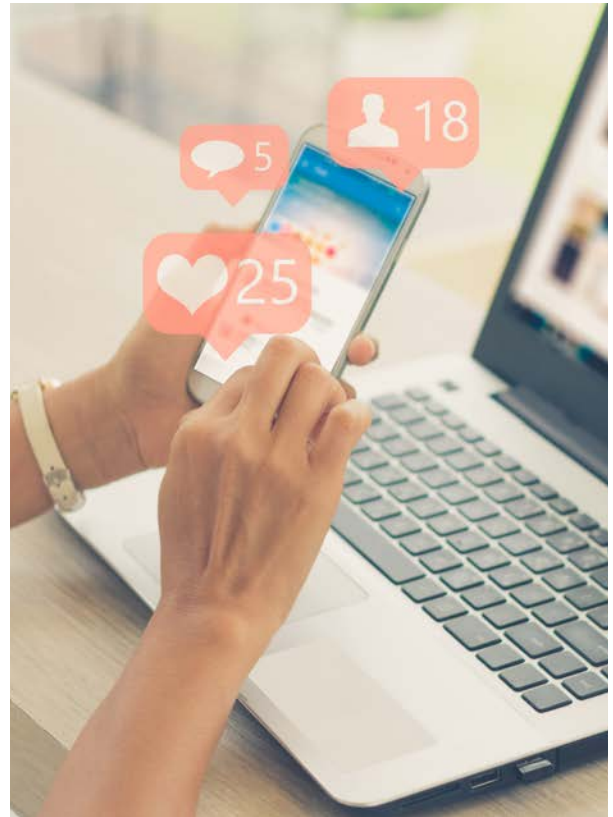


media contracts and tech guides parents can use to make these smartphone agreements with their children. It's important to know that excess use of technology at the expense of face-to-face interactions can result in isolation, withdrawal from activities, anxiety, depression, and feeling less connected. So, setting limits can be very helpful.

To minimize the physical and emotional adverse effects of screen time and to maximize the healing power of sleep many parents make the decision to not allow technology in their child's bedroom at bedtime. This can reduce stress associated with engaging in social media as their bodies should be winding down for the day, while eliminating the temptation to scroll, post, and comment into the late night hours.

Be On the Lookout for Certain Apps

The Body Agency is partnered with Culture Reframed to build resilience and awareness among young people about how to navigate a hypersexualized online world safely and with confidence. They suggest asking your child about any apps you don't recognize on your or their devices. What do the apps do? Some apps can mask predators, who may be other kids or adults. You can set up appropriate restrictions on devices, particularly those used by younger children. Additionally, be on the lookout for apps:



- With “content that disappears” after a set period of time. These apps can give the user a false sense of security because the recipient can always save or screenshot the material.
- With location/check-in features that would allow unwanted people to find or follow them. Posting locations in real time can lead to stalking or invite predators. In most cases, location features can be turned off. Alternatively, instead of posting on Instagram while you are there, wait until later to post location-specific content.
- That allow users to ask and answer questions anonymously. These apps such as YikYak can lead to hurt feelings, drama, and bullying.

ONLINE COMMUNICATION INCLUDING TEXTING AND SEXTING

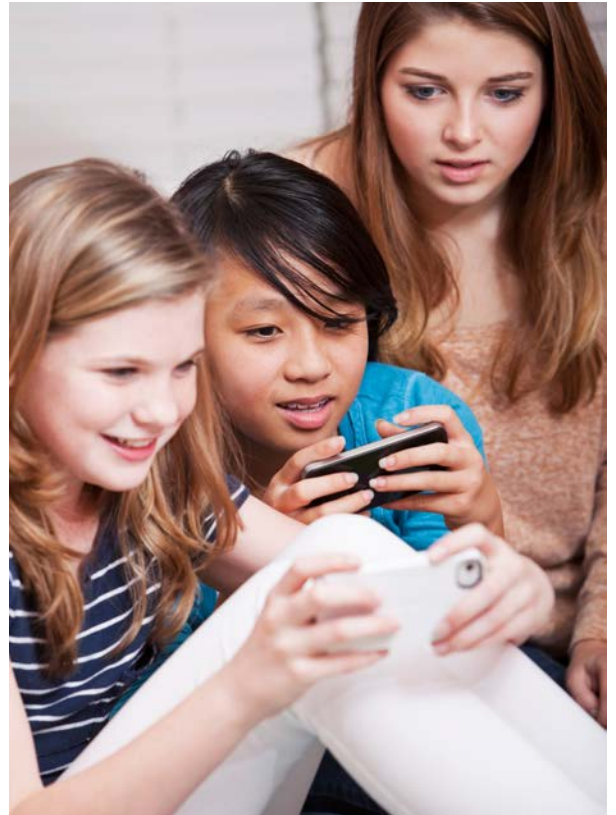
Unfortunately, it is not too early to start having the discussion about texting and sexting (the sending of suggestive or sexually explicit texts or photos) with your 'tween daughter. In the United States, children get their own cell phones at age 10, on average, and these conversations should be underway well before then.

Messages and pictures can live on forever on the internet and among peers. One rule of thumb you might consider suggesting to your daughter is that she never send a photo,

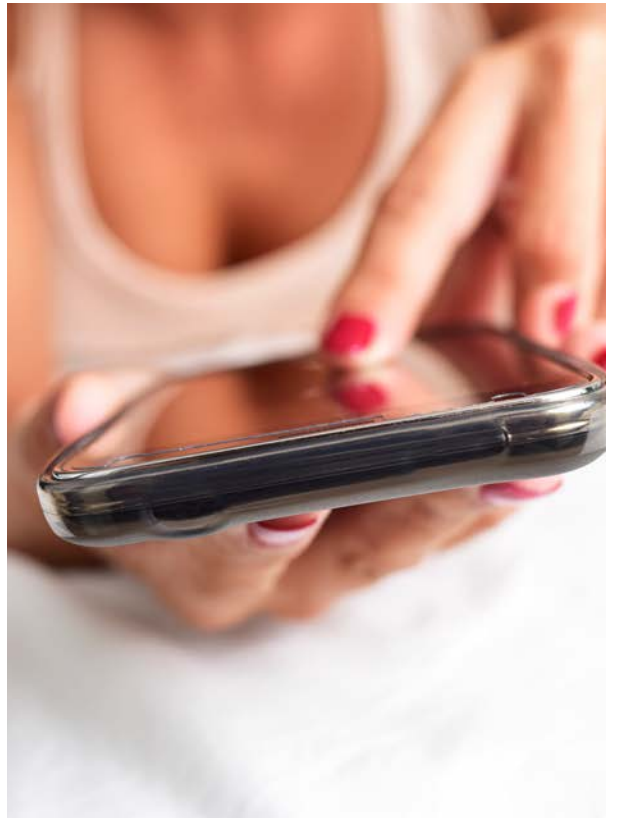
video, or message by email or text that she wouldn't want a grandparent, future employer, or all her peers to see— no matter how much she trusts the recipient(s). And never send one of somebody who is unclothed (including themselves). People can, and do, share screenshots of posts from social media platforms, like Snapchat, that are supposed to disappear. Friendships and relationships can change.

If your daughter has connected with you or any of your friends online you may want to check out what she posts so you can talk to her about where to draw the line between acceptable posts and potentially unacceptable ones (such as provocative swimsuit photos, negative comments about others, or things that might hurt others' feelings).

Because sexting, including the sending of suggestive or sexually explicit texts or photos (including nudes/partially nude pictures), is increasingly common, even among younger



tweens and teens, you may want to start by giving her the facts: teen sexting laws prohibit both sending and receiving of explicit images. If she receives a photo like this she should delete it immediately and tell a trusted adult. Creating, possessing, or distributing nude or explicit photos of someone under 18 can result in charges of child pornography or sexual exploitation of a minor, even for those under age 18. And yes, “possessing” means just having it on her phone. If your daughter is being pressured to send photos because “everyone cool is doing it”, talk to her about how to respond (or not) to the person asking.



Giving her these tools can empower her instead of making her feel embarrassed or victimized.

PORN

In addition to social media, technology has given rise to a whole new era in pornography. While porn has always been around it has never been as widely and easily available as it is today, such as on handheld devices like smartphones and tablets. Children today don't need to look for porn – it finds them. In fact, despite parents' best efforts and internet filters, children first see porn at the average age of 11, when they are still in elementary school. It often happens accidentally, when they are searching for something else online.

Not only is porn widely available but its images and content today go far beyond the old Playboy or Playgirl magazines you may have seen when you were growing up. This is all online and accessible to your daughter and her peers. You can install parental controls and monitor your daughter's internet use and browsing history.

But you can't be with them everywhere, all the time. So, in addition to these steps, you should talk to your daughter about pornography—what it is and what it isn't— more than once. But try not to create an atmosphere of shame around porn and sexuality, since it's unreasonable to assume your child will never see or enjoy porn. You should also have a plan for how to respond when your child does see porn, by mistake or on purpose.



The good news is that communicating about online safety in a non-judgmental way with your child can help protect them from

potentially harmful online materials. When your daughter knows she can come to you to learn about her sexuality, in a healthy way, it builds up confidence in her self-worth. And that's one step in protecting girls against the impact of hypersexualization in today's world.

You can learn more about talking to your child about porn in The Body Agency's forthcoming parental guide informed by our partners at Culture Reframed.

GENDER IDENTITY, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AND SEXUALITY

At some point during puberty girls will start to recognize sexual feelings as the amount of hormones circulating in their bodies grows. Unless you want them to be “informed” by their often clueless peers or porn, it’s important to step up and talk to your daughter about these sometimes difficult topics. Fortunately, youth today generally have a far more nuanced and inclusive understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation than previous generations – so much so that you may learn from her when you discuss them! Unfortunately, being more knowledgeable about these constructs doesn’t make it easier to deal with sexual and romantic feelings when they strike – that awkwardness has not changed.



Gender identity is a person’s innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither. It’s how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. A person’s gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. For some, this realization happens as early as 2 or 3 years old; for others, it can take many years to recognize. Gender identity is different than sexual orientation (see below).

Most people categorize their gender identity as:

- Woman or girl
- Man or boy
- Transgender: someone who is born with the body of one gender, but feel they are the opposite gender, like they were born into the wrong body.

- Gender nonconforming: someone whose gender identity or expression doesn't match traditional dichotomous man/woman nomenclature. Examples of how some gender nonconforming people may describe themselves include non-binary, genderqueer, gender expansive, and gender creative.
- Gender questioning: someone who is exploring their gender identity as a boy, girl, or another gender. They might also be experimenting with different genders.

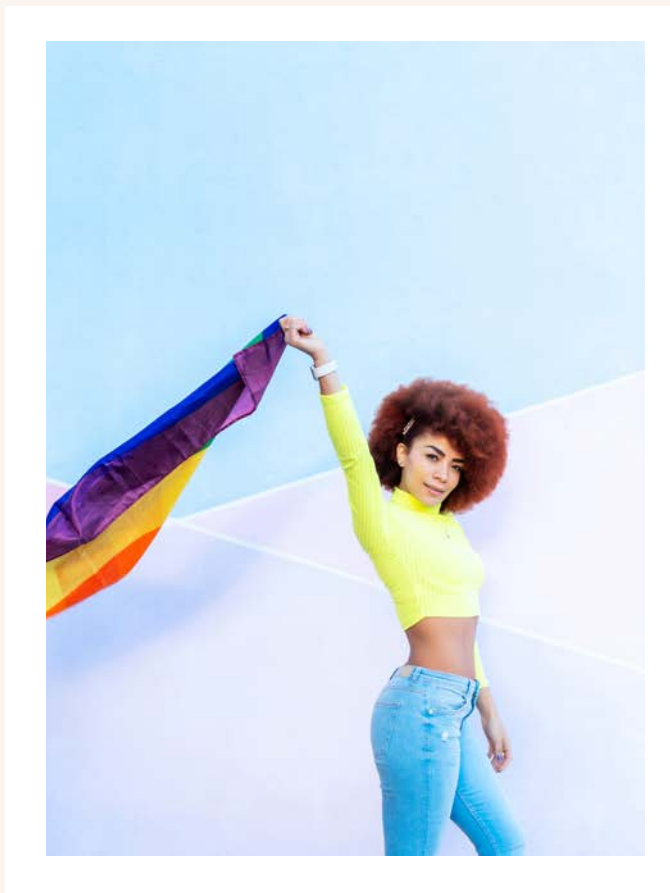


Gender expression refers to how people express their gender identity, such as the way they dress, the length of their hair, the way they act or speak, and whether they wear make-up. This may change from day to day.

Sexual orientation is an inherent or immutable emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people. Being interested in someone of the same sex doesn't necessarily mean a person is gay (similarly, an opposite sex attraction doesn't mean a person is straight). Most people become aware of their sexual orientation during the preteen and teen years. During the teen years, when sexual thoughts and attractions are new, it can be common to have sexual thoughts about different genders. In general, these are categorized as:

- Heterosexual (straight): People who are romantically and physically attracted to individuals of the opposite sex. Heterosexuals are sometimes called "straight."

- Homosexual (gay/lesbian): People who are romantically and physically attracted to people of the same sex. Females who are attracted to other females are lesbian; males who are attracted to other males are often known as gay. The term gay is used to describe homosexual individuals of either sex.
- Bisexual: People who are romantically or physically attracted to individuals of both sexes.
- Asexual: People who may not be interested in sex, but they still feel emotionally close to other people.



LGBTGQIA+ stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, and asexual and/or ally." Intersex is a general term used for a variety of situations in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't neatly fit the typical binary boxes of "female" or "male."

SEXUALITY

Regardless of your child's sexual identity or orientation, as hormones start to accelerate in late tweens and early teens your child is likely to start having romantic feelings towards others and may start to notice pleasurable, physical feelings during certain activities. While this guide is intended to

help parents have the puberty talk with their younger daughter, learning about sex, including what to expect, how to protect themselves, and also how to enjoy themselves (both alone and with a partner) is an important part of growing up. These topics are covered more comprehensively in The Body Agency's forthcoming guide for parents of adolescents. Stay tuned!

In the meantime, however, you should continue to find opportunities to talk to your daughter about sex, sexuality, and things to come that will help her develop a healthy attitude toward pleasure as she matures. There is so much more to sexual education than prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy! When the time comes, you can let her know that masturbation is a very normal, private matter. You can share with her that there are many health benefits to orgasms, including relief from menstrual cramps. should be pleasurable, not shameful. While sexuality may not be the most comfortable topic to discuss with your

child it is so important that they know you can be a judgment-free resource to help them navigate puberty and beyond— especially for girls. Despite decades of movement towards women's legal rights, a significant pleasure gap remains between straight men and women in sexual encounters. The Body Agency is working to eliminate this pleasure gap by empowering girls to feel confident and knowledgeable about their bodies.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR DAUGHTER: SETTING THE STAGE

Realistically, as children get older and more independent they are less likely to stick around when you start to talk about uncomfortable topics. It can help to establish a special time, private place, or name for these conversations, like the "Circle of Trust", with snacks, if appropriate, to help provide a positive association. That way when they see you approaching with a bag of their favorite snack they know what's coming, or they can grab the bag and approach you if they want to initiate a chat. You may even want to have a set of agreed-upon ground rules such as respectfulness, full-body listening, no technology and, of course, no judgement.



This is easier said than done – especially the “no judgment” part. You may hear some unexpected things, so practice your poker face and mindful breathing to avoid responding in a way that will shut down the dialogue. You are human but it’s your job in this space to remain calm and listen instead of reacting hastily, harshly, or with an “I told you so” attitude. If you need time to respond appropriately or to research something let them know and explain that you will get back to them – then follow through. If you cross a boundary or break a rule apologize sincerely and commit to them that you will try to do better. Building strong relationships takes trust and time but it is possible, even with teenagers.

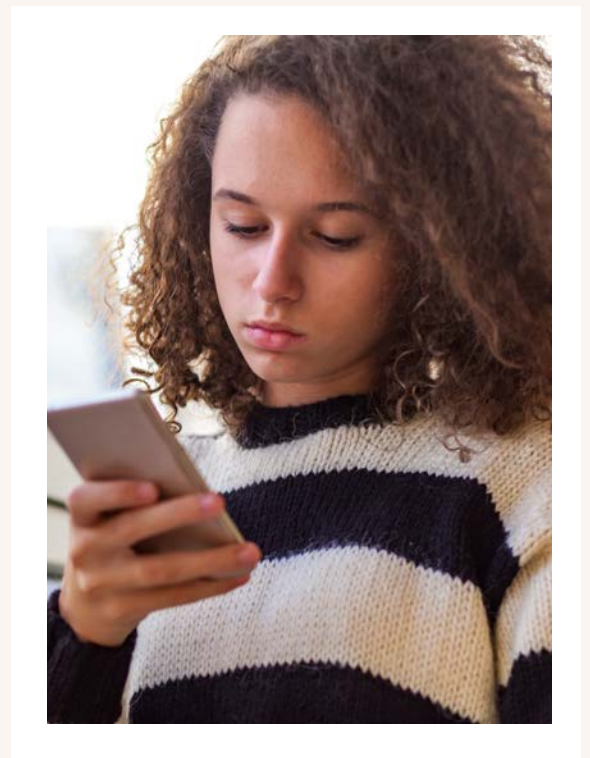


FOLLOWING THESE GUIDELINES CAN HELP DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR DAUGHTER:

Start young: Try to be as open and honest as you can from the time she is young so she sees you as a trusted source of information. Answer her questions and teach her the proper names for natural functions, including body parts and changes, how babies are made, periods, and adding more detail as you feel appropriate and if you feel she is capable of understanding and appreciating more.

- Real world stories or issues that have arisen in her school or community can be a great starting point for these teachable moments. Ask her questions like, “Was that appropriate? Why or why not? What could have been done differently?”
- You can also use movies or TV shows you have watched together to reflect on a plotline or character. Solicit her views or share your own on images, consent, respect, or other key issues portrayed. Like, “Why do you think she did that? What would you have done in her situation?”

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Empathize:

You should be sure your daughter knows that all teens experience confusion about their bodies and sex because they are all going through the same hormonal changes and trying to answer many of the same questions. This is perfectly normal, even though it can be hard.

Reflect on Lessons You've Learned

Think back to your childhood and how your family addressed (or avoided) discussions on puberty and sex. What worked well? What do you wish had happened differently? What do you wish your younger self had known? You can weave some stories about yourself into your narrative with your daughter during these talks or any other time as a way of teaching her indirectly what you'd like her to know. Talking about yourself, without talking at your daughter, is an easier way for her to absorb the message, and possibly relate to you.

Strengthen Your Bond

Spend time doing activities she enjoys. This time spent together can create informal opportunities to chat about issues or questions as they arise without setting aside time for a serious talk.

Don't Lecture

When you answer a question or try to get something across, skip the long-winded lecture. Instead, get to your main point and share any useful, supportive information. Make sure to pause as you speak to gauge her response. At the end, you don't want to assume that you have addressed her questions so ask, "Does this answer your question?"

Actually Listen

Above all, listen. Listen to what she is asking you and pay attention if there are questions between the lines. Ask clarifying questions so you understand what she really wants to talk about, but don't interrogate.

When she is finished speaking try to summarize what she has said based on your understanding and mirror it back. For instance, “So you’re telling me that the boys in your class [fill in blank]. Is it just one of the boys? Does this happen every day?” This echoing or mirroring shows that you are listening and are understanding what she is saying.

Ask How You Can Help

It may not be immediately clear if she is just venting or if she is actually asking for help. You may want to ask her, “Would you like feedback?” or “How can I support you?” “Would you like me to help come up with some options or solutions with you?”

Be Open and Express Care

Always leave the door open for future discussions. If she told you something uncomfortable or private say something like, “Thank you so much for sharing that.” If she asked you an uncomfortable question you can say, “I’m so glad you asked me about this. It can be a difficult thing to understand and I’d be happy to talk to you about it or anything else that’s on your mind.” At the end of every conversation an “I love you and I won’t judge you or get mad” goes a long way.

Know When to Stop

After you’ve communicated what you want to get across if she isn’t sending signals that she is looking for more, then pause (for now). You might conclude with a hug to reinforce your bond. Then make your exit, fall silent, or change the subject as appropriate. At this point, most girls are ready to move on, so don't ramble! You don't want to scare her off for future chats.

Capture her – literally

If you would like to discuss something with her before she has asked any questions, and you want to make sure she doesn't flee the scene, you might try bringing it up on a car ride when other siblings, friends, or family members aren't present. This way you have privacy but don't need to make eye contact if it would be too difficult for her. It helps to know there is an end just around the corner.

Stay in the Know

Educate yourself using The Body Agency's parental resources so you're ready for the next time. We have lots of different topics, and if you don't see your question or concerns addressed, email us here.

CONNECT WITH US

Let's Get Social

Engage with us on social as we curate information and products which will help you and your reproductive health journey.

Ask any question by posting comments or send a DM on your favorite social media channel and a member of our Body Board will reach out to help.

Don't miss your chance to be a part of the next big movement in women's self-care and empowerment. We look forward to staying in touch!



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www.thebodyagency.com