

- ⊙ Do NOT expect your middle schooler to ask you questions about puberty or sexuality, it may NEVER happen! You must open, and continue the series of many conversations. There is no such thing as starting the conversation too early.
- ⊙ There is age-appropriate information to share with your child – and remember that each child will be ready at a different age to receive it – and often in a different way.
- ⊙ Don't make it the "BIG TALK" – rather the "CONTINUING CONVERSATION"
This begins prior to preschool with proper terminology and simple – accurate answers – and the conversations need to be shared by both parents.
- ⊙ There is no such thing as too much information. Your children will tune out what is not relevant. It is natural if they feel a little uncomfortable when processing new information. Remember, your sense of humor is key to every great conversation!
- ⊙ When they say "I know that already," they probably have peer and social media knowledge, without the benefit of your family values and adult interpretation.
- ⊙ An effective tactic is to ask what your child understands, would like to know or is unsure about – so that you do not give too much information that they are not ready to hear. Try to get the question behind the question.
- ⊙ It is important to talk about your values and be certain that your child really understands where you stand. It is also necessary for them to know exactly where you stand – even if that changes one day. Although most parents believe they get their values across, less than 35% of kids feel that they have had a 'helpful' or 'open' conversation related to puberty issues; less than 15% on sexuality issues.
- ⊙ Keep communication ACCURATE, HONEST and SIMPLE. Use open-ended questions "So what have you heard about _____?" "What is your biggest confusion or fear about _____?" Answer in clear terms that provide the vocabulary that invite future discussion.
- ⊙ Honesty is the best policy. When you don't know an answer to something – let them know you will find it out; also, if you feel embarrassed about something – it's good to share that so they feel that it is okay to share their feelings.
- ⊙ Make TEACHABLE MOMENTS – and make them count. For example, a during a car ride, TV show, friend's pregnancy, older sibling dating, song lyrics – turn these into opportunities for discussion.
- ⊙ Promote the importance of PRIVACY on a myriad of levels: to maintain your privacy as a couple; not to share information at school; to maintain family privacy; to illustrate the importance of some topics being private and some places being personal and private.
- ⊙ Promote future discussion by ending with a statement like "Sometimes I think I am saying one thing – and you might understand it differently - so could you explain back to me what you heard?" and "Sometimes these things can be confusing or take time to sink in. Whenever you would like any more information – I am always available."

- 🌀 Teach your child to show respect for others. Model respectful behavior. Respect for himself and for others forms the basis of a healthy relationship.
- 🌀 Interest in the opposite sex depends occurs at a wide range of ages – don't worry if it hasn't happened – when it does it lasts forever. Encourage healthy and respectful relationships with the opposite sex so that it is not the forbidden fruit. Do not over-emotionalize it.
- 🌀 It is essential for your child to learn early on that he is in control of his body. He has permission to refuse any unwanted touch. If anyone does touch him, and it makes him feel uncomfortable, he needs to tell that person, and another trusted adult.
- 🌀 Remember, knowledge is power and gives kids a sense of control over their fears and confusion. **Don't delay.** The longer you wait, the harder it is for you to break your pattern of avoidance. Plus, you want to establish yourself early on as a source of good sexual information for your child, so they know they can come to you later!

Resources Worth Owning!

The Care and Keeping of You 2: The Body Book for Older Girls (2013), by Cara Natterson. American Girl – best book award for addressing puberty – 2 separate versions for younger girls and older girls, spot on topics per age, from body odor to body image and well beyond.

The Boy's Body Book: 3rd edition: Everything You Need to Know for Growing Up YOU (2015), by Kelli Dunham. Great pre-puberty through puberty book for boys, addresses, hygiene, body image, nocturnal emissions.... with humor and visuals that engage. Does not cover sexual intercourse.

Growing up: It's a Girl Thing, by Mavis Jukes. Straight talk about first bras, period, and your changing body. Engaging, easy read for young girls (4th-8th grader), although many adolescents refer to it like a bible. Early middle school.

The Period Book, Karen & Jennifer Gravelle. A humorous and factual book for girls, by women, about the changes and challenges of maturing physically, emotionally and sexually. Early or late middle school – depending on the maturity of your daughter.

What's Going On Down There? Answers to Questions Boys Find Hard to Ask (by the same authors as The Period Book). Humorous and light, this book addresses the many questions that boys feel very uncomfortable asking. Late middle school.

Lintball Leo's Not-So-Stupid Questions About Your Body, Walt Larimore, MD
Great format for addressing boys physical and emotional questions – however, strong biblical undertones.

The What's Happening to My Body Book For Girls, Lynda Maderas. A growing up guide for parents and daughters, addressing every topic, question, and issue from puberty to childbirth. More mature content and comprehension.

The What's Happening to My Body Book For Boys, Lynda Maderas A growing up guide for parents and sons, addressing every topic, question, and issue from puberty to circumcision and masturbation. More mature content and comprehension.

PERIOD: A Girl's Guide, Joanne Loulan and Bonnie Worthen. In simple terms and without getting into sex education, an informative book about what to expect and how to handle it.