



Western
Health

Talking To Kids About Sex

Kim Dawson

October 2010



Objectives:

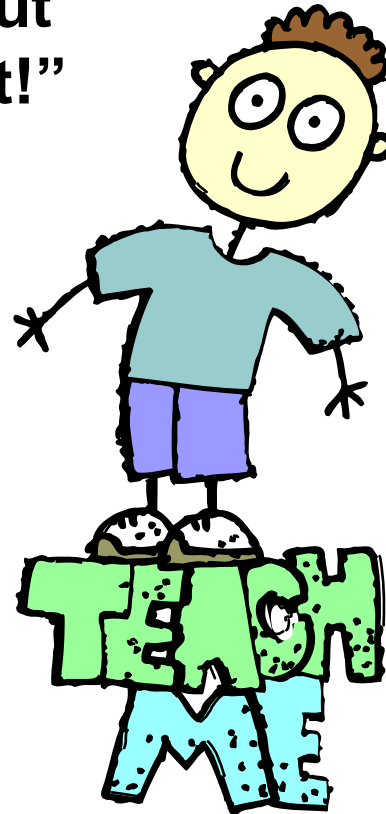


You will learn about:

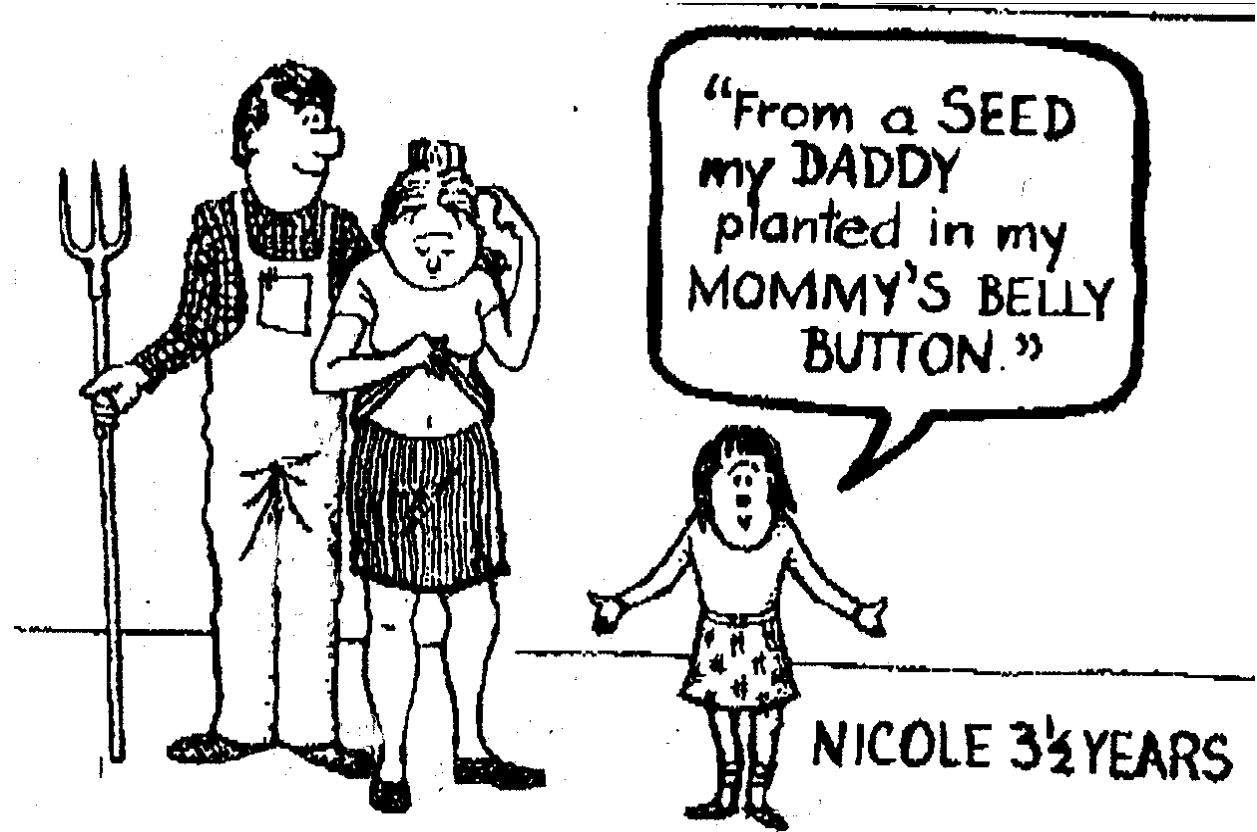
- Sexuality and child development (birth – 12 years).
- Normal sexual development/behavior.
- Tips on talking to children about sexuality and answering their questions.

Children and Sexuality

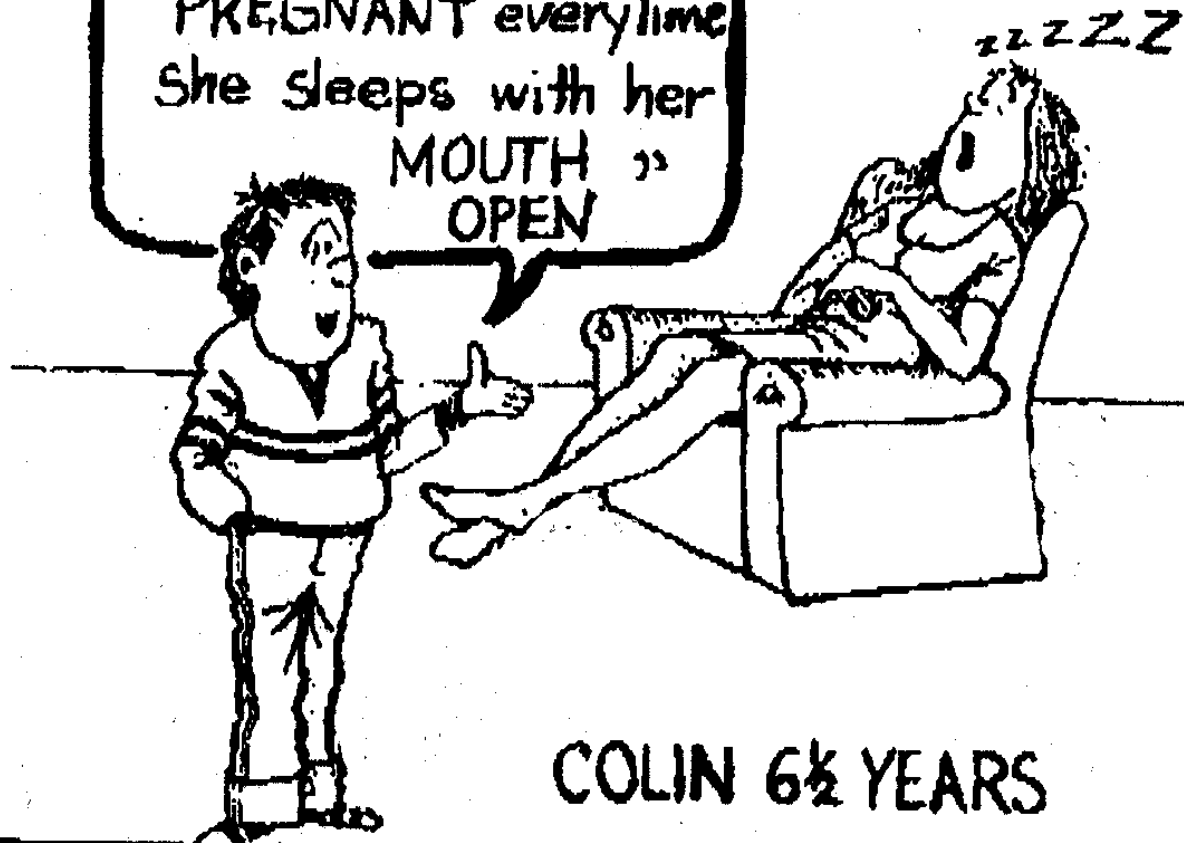
**“It’s funny, but it’s
harder to talk about
sex than to have it!”**



Why Do We NEED To Talk To Children About Sexuality?



“ My MOM gets
PREGNANT everytime
She sleeps with her
MOUTH OPEN ”



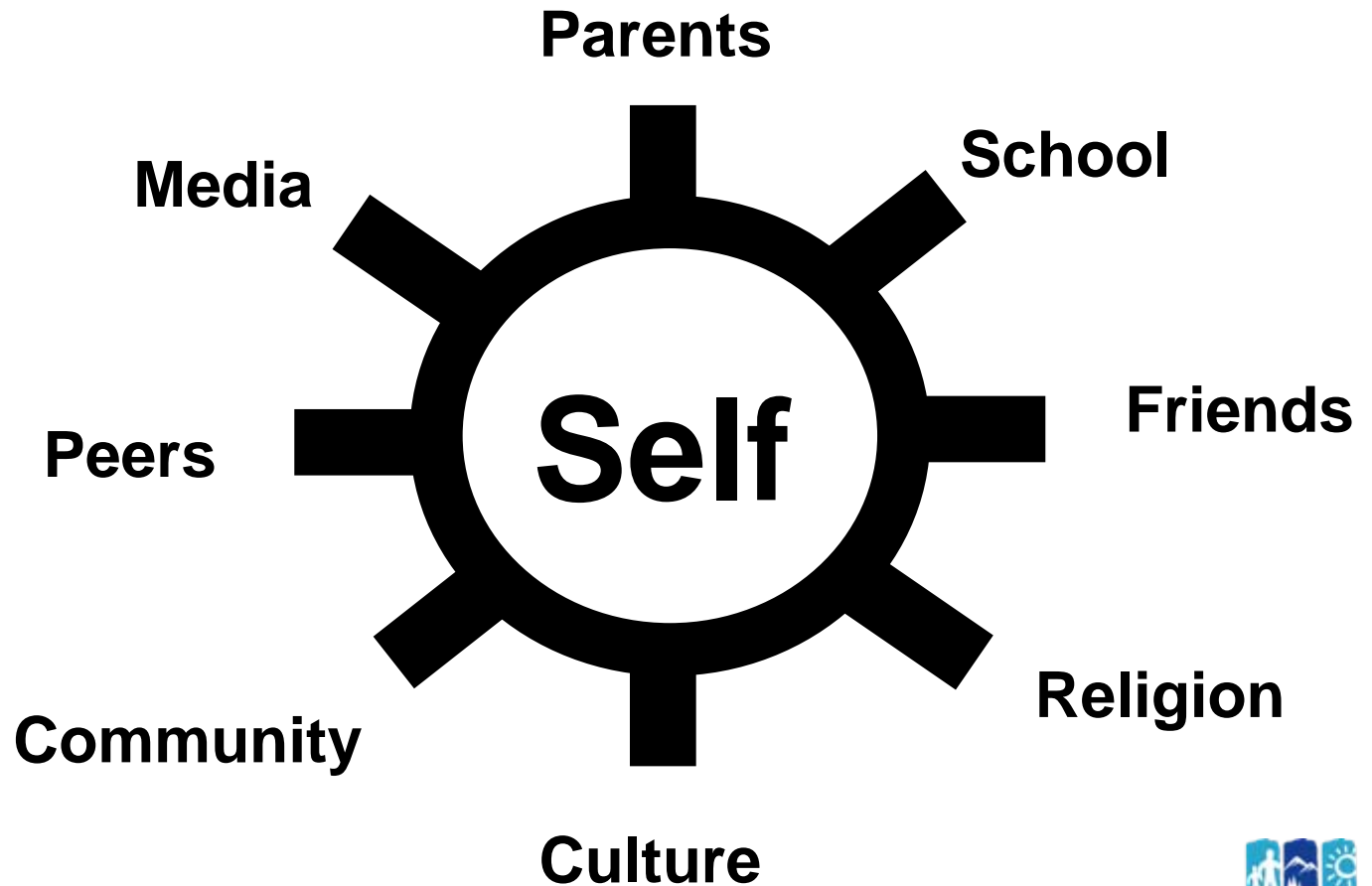
COLIN 6½ YEARS

Sexuality

- We are all sexual beings.
- Sexuality is part of everybody's life. It includes, gender, sexual orientation, sex and reproduction.
- Sexuality is not the same as being sexually active.



ATTITUDE WHEEL





Sexuality and Child Development

- It is important that people who guide and work with children have a basic knowledge of the development of sexuality from infancy to adolescence.
- While most children don't become sexually active until they are adolescent, many of the building blocks of sexual development and sexual health occur in childhood.



Early Development

At a young age children are:

- Learning how to interact with others and engage in socially appropriate behaviors.
- Developing their understanding of relationships and values.
- Learning a great deal about sexuality by observing people interacting around them.



Talking To Children About Sexuality:

Helps:

- Give the facts and correct misinformation.
- Develop an open relationship that will continue into the teen years.
- Them become comfortable talking about body parts and sexuality.
- Increase awareness of sexual abuse: “good touch/ bad touch”.



Always answer children's questions about sexuality:

- Children are curious and see things around them all the time that are confusing.
- By welcoming questions, children learn that when they are confused they can come to you for correct information.



Parents/ Caregivers need to:

- Be role models.
- Provide accurate information and teach values.
- Understand and teach appropriate behavior for their age.
- Encourage children to ask questions; there is no such thing as a silly question.



When should you talk to your children about sexuality?

- Talking at a younger age will make it easier.
- Use “teachable moments” whenever they happen.





How to answer questions:

- Listen first – Ask what they already know, think and feel.
- Take time to think about your answer.
- Let them know when you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.
- If you don't know the answer, search together.
- Get informed ...



What to say?

- Give answers that are honest, short and simple.
- Teach correct names for body parts (i.e. penis, breasts).
- Answer using words they can understand.
- Teach what is appropriate behavior for their age.
- Be positive – avoid lectures and angry talk.
- Teach about personal space and privacy.

Normal Sexual Development

Birth – 2 Years

- Explores their own body including genitals.
- Begins to develop trusting relationships with caregivers.
- Distinguishes between male and female.
- Begins first social/ play interactions with peers.





Birth – 2 Years

Concerns:



- Signs of possible sexual abuse (trauma to genitals).
- Child is resistant or fearful of touch from caregiver.

Birth – 2 Years

What to discuss:



- Teach correct names of body parts, including genitals.
- Help the child learn the difference between male and female.
- Provide opportunity for social interaction with same age peers.

Normal Sexual Development

3 – 5 Years

- Toddlers are curious about bodies – their own and others.
- Children touch their own genitals (masturbate) for comfort or relaxation.
- Able to identify oneself as male or female.
- Children often explore each others bodies (e.g., playing doctor).



Normal Sexual Development

3 – 5 Years

- Special bonding with opposite sex parent.
- Begins to understand where babies come from.
- Starts to understand which body parts are private and the difference between “good touch and bad touch”.
- May use slang terms for bodily functions.
- Enjoys nudity.

Early Childhood 3 - 5

Concerns:



- Signs of possible sexual abuse (i.e., trauma to genitals, inappropriate sexual behaviors).
- Belief that she/he is the opposite gender or he/she wants to be the opposite gender.
- Persistent nudity or sexual behavior in public after being given privacy guidelines.



Early Childhood 3 - 5

What to discuss:

- Teach the basics of reproduction (i.e., babies grow in the uterus of a women).
- Teach basic rules around privacy.
- Teach child “Your body belongs to you.”

A 3 year old touches his/ her genitals.

- Why is the child doing this?
 - It feels good, it reduces anxiety.
- What message do you want to send?
 - Masturbation is OK but is private.
- Possible answer:
 - I know it feels good and you don't have to stop, just do it in private because it is personal.

Normal Sexual Development

6 – 8 Years

- Children often explore each others' bodies with same and opposite sex friends.
- Children touch their own genitals (masturbate) for pleasure.
- Seeks stronger bond with same sex parent.
- May have confused feelings toward children of the opposite sex.



Sexual Behavior

Masturbation can sometimes be defined as deviant or unsuitable behavior if it contravenes the norms of a group or society. The above is based on the view of masturbation as an expression of sexual desire, while Gagnon & Simon (1973), for example, consider instead that masturbation can be described as a non-sexual act for the child, as the child has not learned that masturbation behavior has sexual connotations. According to Gagnon & Simon, the behavior is given sexual connotations by the adult world.



Normal Sexual Development

6 – 8 Years

- Use slang words to describe body parts and sexuality.
- Understands they will always be female or male regardless of changes in appearance or behavior.
- Some children show early signs of puberty (i.e., menstruation, body development).

Normal Sexual Development

6 – 8 Years



- Understands basic human reproduction.
- Refers to body parts with proper names (i.e., vagina, penis).
- Some understanding of people being straight, bisexual, gay, queer or lesbian (sexual orientation).
- Begins to develop sense of privacy.



Middle Childhood 6 - 8

Concerns:



- Not understanding their gender identity.
- Signs that a child may have been sexually abused or exploited.
- Doesn't understand basic human reproduction.
- No understanding of nudity, privacy and respect for others.

Middle Childhood 6 - 8

What to discuss:

- Human reproduction.
- Changes associated with puberty.
- Sexual orientation.
- Privacy – “your body belongs to you”.



A 6 year old girl asks “Why do you have breasts and I don’t”?

Why is the child asking this?

- She may be curious about how girls become women.

What message do you want to send?

- I am glad my daughter feels comfortable asking me questions like this. This is a good time to explain how girls become women.

Possible answer:

- I am glad you asked me. As you grow up, your body will change in lots of ways. One way is that your breast will grow as you become a woman.

Normal Sexual Development

9 – 12 Years

- Children develop at different ages and need information about puberty and to be reassured they are normal.



- Begins to separate from parents and spend more time with peers.
- May masturbate, sometimes to orgasm.



Normal Sexual Development

9 – 12 Years

- May be preoccupied with sexuality and hides this interest from parents.
- Some understanding of the responsibilities in dating and relationships.
- Should have some sexual health education in schools.



Late Childhood 9 - 12

Concerns:



- Being sexually active at a young age.
- Difficulty adjusting to:
 - Homosexual or bisexual orientation
 - Body image
 - Social skills

Late Childhood 9 - 12

Kids need to:

- Understand puberty.
- Understand the need for sexual health education.
- Understand how media uses sex.



A 9 year old asks, “What’s a prostitute?”

Why is the child asking?

- Your child may have heard the word from friends or during a TV show. They may want to see your reaction.

What message do you want to send?

- You want to answer the question, but you also want your child to know what you think about prostitution.

Possible answer:

It helps to begin with the facts. A prostitute is a person who is willing to have sex in exchange for money. This is not legal in most countries, but it happens anyway. Now I want to tell you what I think of prostitution...

Useful Tips:



- Listen.
- Clarify what they really want to know before you answer.
- Keep it simple. Find out how much the child already knows.
- Be honest and give the facts. If you can't answer – be sure you get back to it as soon as possible.
- Let them know there's no stupid question.
- Leave the door open for follow-up.