

Teenagers and parents

In this section we will discuss the following:

Worries that young people might have about the physical and emotional changes they are going through

How to reassure your child that their fears and anxieties are normal

Talking to your child about difficult issues such as mood swings, periods, unexpected erections and wet dreams

The media and its influence over your child

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Young people's worries

Puberty is a time of great change for a young person and often one that is characterised by worry and uncertainty. Young people can worry about the emotional and physical changes they are going through. "Why am I taller, shorter, spottier than the others in my class!?!” You can help with these worries by responding in the following ways.



Is this normal? Reassure your child that they are normal, and offer them support. Changes don't happen all at once – most of them happen slowly over a few years. Changes happen at different ages and in different stages for different people.

Encourage them to ask questions and share their feelings about what's happening to their body. It is really important to assure your child that the changes they are going through are normal. Explain how everyone is not the same, and that's normal in itself.

Mood swings Pay attention to your child's feelings and encourage them to talk about them and say what they feel. Explain that these feelings are a natural part of growing up. It can help them learn to accept that all feelings are natural, even uncomfortable ones. Sometimes, just letting your child know that you have noticed their feelings without trying to change how they feel can help them feel better.

Extreme moods, which range from being tearful to being aggressive, are common, and can be caused by a combination of hormonal change, pressure and stress



Unexpected erections and wet dreams

Tell your son about unexpected erections and wet dreams before he has them. Reassure him that they are nothing to be worried or ashamed about. They are a natural part of growing up.

Unexpected erections and wet dreams are likely to start happening to boys between the ages of 10 and 13.

Tell your son that unexpected erections and wet dreams happen to most boys and men. Suggest tips for dealing with unexpected erections, for example, thinking about something else. Give him practical tips to avoid embarrassment, such as putting underpants, bedding and so on in the laundry.

It is a good idea to discuss periods with boys and unexpected erections and wet dreams with girls so they can understand what is going on for the opposite sex. This may help young people feel less embarrassed about the changes they are going through themselves.

Periods

Give your daughter all the practical information she needs to help her deal with her period, long before she has her first one. Periods usually start around 12 years old. Evidence shows that girls are starting their periods at a younger age - even as young as nine - so make sure you prepare your daughter early enough. Have a supply of pads (sanitary towels) or tampons ready to show her and describe how to use them.

Understanding the media: Navigating the sea of voices

A great concern for many parents is the amount of sex and sexual references that are to be found in the media. Research from a number of countries shows that up to 50% of all programming contains scenes of a sexual nature – something that causes worry for a lot of parents.

The media and the world at large give a lot of messages about sexuality, but only the parent knows how their child really feels inside and can connect to them as a person.



Young people report that while they do learn a great deal about sexuality from television they would much rather learn about sex from their parents, schools and the people in their immediate environment. Having a friendly voice to explain the mixed signals they receive from television will prevent them from picking up incorrect information or drawing the wrong conclusions.

Far from being something to be concerned about, parents can use the media as a tool to teach children. Remember that while young people will get information about sex from the media, their attitudes and values are much more influenced by parents and their immediate environment.

“ Young people are very sophisticated in terms of how they read TV and are very clued in to the conventions and codes that TV uses - particularly in relation to sex. ”

- Dr. Carol MacKeogh

If your child has a physical or learning disability



Parents whose children have learning or physical disabilities may require more specialised supports and information around sex education. It is important not to overlook this issue, even though your child may be developing at a different rate than their peers or siblings. You know your child best and the type of information that is appropriate and relevant for them. However, many of the issues discussed in this booklet will still be important for you, your family and your child.

Further information and supports are available from some of the agencies listed in the General Information section of this booklet.

Questions about sexuality

Sexual orientation is an issue that may emerge in some families during the teen years. Children might have questions regarding terms or phrases they hear from peers or the media relating to sexuality. Parents can panic when they hear the words lesbian or gay from their child. Concerns about sexuality can be confusing and isolating for both children and parents alike. It is important for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people that their sexual identity is accepted and affirmed by their parents in order for them to develop positively as a whole person.

Information and further supports can be found in the General Information section of this booklet.

“ There’s something liberating about knowing who you are. Being content with who you are makes a big difference in who you become. ”

- Dillon age 17