

# **Answering Children's Questions About Sexuality**

## **Why we should always answer children's questions about sexuality**

- Children are curious about sexuality.
- Children see things around them all the time that are confusing.
- By always welcoming questions, your child learns that s/he can come to you when something is confusing instead of turning to sources that may not give accurate or caring answers.
- This is a way of building a healthy parent/caregiver-child relationship.
- This is an opportunity to share family and cultural values with your children.
- Answering questions in a positive way reinforces that sexuality is a wonderful and valuable part of who they are.

## **When we should answer children's questions**

- Whenever they ask. Even if we do not know the answer, we can respond by saying: **“Good question. We can talk about that later”**. Be sure to remember to do this later!
- Whenever we see a chance to talk, for example watching a TV program, seeing a pregnant woman, when a pet has babies.
- Ask questions even if they don't – **“What do you think?”**, **“What do you know about that?”** - without forcing them to talk. Just asking says that you can talk when they are ready.
- When you can find a time and place that is comfortable for both of you such as at bedtime, when taking a walk together, etc.

## What we should say when answering questions

- Make answers accurate, honest, short and simple.
- Answer using words and ideas they can understand at their age.
- Teach values that are important to your family/culture/religion.
- Teach what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour for their age.
- Be positive. Let your children know you are glad they came to you with their questions.
- Avoid lectures and angry talk.
- Answer questions about your personal sexual activities by teaching about privacy. **“You asked if daddy and I have oral sex. There are some things that are private and we do not share these with others. You will have private things too that you will not tell other people.”**

## How to answer questions

- Ask your child what they know, think, feel.
- Take time to think about how to answer. This could be a few minutes or a few days, as long as you help your child gets an answer. You may want to talk with another adult about how you might answer a difficult question.
- Acknowledge when you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.
- Acknowledge when you don't know an answer.
- Find a book on the topic of your child's questions and read the book with your child.
- Answer in a way that boosts your child's self-esteem.

**Parents/caregivers may find it helpful to keep the following four points in mind as they practice discussing sexuality with their children.**

### Children need to be taught:

- Facts
- Values
- Responsibility
- Self esteem

For more information please call:

AIDS –Sexual Health InfoLine 1-800-668-2437 or (416) 392-2437

PH9902-0004