



How to Talk to Your Children about Intimacy

We recognize that imparting our values to our children requires time and thoughtful education. However, in the area of sexuality and relationships, we are often silent.

This communicates an important message. Not talking about sexuality, especially when it is so prevalent in movies and the media, gives an implicit message that parents, or perhaps Judaism, is at the very least uncomfortable or, worse, has nothing positive to say about sexuality.

If our children are to view a Torah lifestyle as relevant, they must experience Torah as addressing issues that concern them. Talking about sexuality and relationships from a Jewish perspective helps our children appreciate the wisdom and relevance of Judaism to their lives.

Children need to learn developmentally appropriate, traditional Jewish concepts of social, personal, and sexual development, beginning from an early stage in their own development and continuing through childhood and adolescence. They require a safe environment with opportunity for discussions and questions, so they can acquire Torah-based values these areas. They can then process the endless cultural messages they receive, choosing which to accept and which to reject through this prism of Torah-based values.

Here are 10 tips for talking with our children about sexuality.

1. Language is important. Not just what we say but how we say it makes a big difference. Give your children words that show respect for our bodies and our sexuality and that models a sense of dignity and beauty with regards to sexuality and intimacy.

2. Don't make speeches – listen! We learn a lot from asking our children questions and understanding what they think and know about intimacy and sexuality.

3. Always tell the truth. You do not need to tell the whole truth, but whatever you tell must be the truth, otherwise you lose your status as “askable” parents.

4. Help your children differentiate between private and secret. Keeping something private is usually about choosing boundaries and staying comfortably within them, so that we share certain things only with certain people on certain occasions. By contrast, keeping something secret is usually about actively hiding something, often for fear of the consequences of it being known. In general, privacy is good and secrets are not.

5. Children should learn about where babies come from in different ways at different stages of their development from their parents and not from anyone else.

6. Since children tend to develop physically earlier than they used to, they should be learning about puberty and bodily changes before they happen.

7. *Tzniut* is often the *mitzvah* that provides the greatest challenge to many of our daughters. It is unfair to measure their religiosity on the basis of the very *mitzvah* that provides the greatest challenge. If we can encourage their religious growth and commitment in all areas and continue to educate toward commitment to *halacha*, they will likely gradually move to greater commitment in *tzniut* as well.

8. Strive to help your children be aware that Judaism's approach to relationships between men and women is not because Judaism views sexuality as bad; quite the opposite. It is because it sees sexuality as something so wonderful, powerful and good that it needs to be limited so as to maintain its intensity and passion.

9. Modern society is grappling with many questions about gender and sexual identity. These questions impact on and can be confusing to our children. Help your children understand by discussing these topics with them and sharing your thoughts, ideas and understandings in these areas.

10. Remember to share with your children how much the lifestyle we live is one we have come to by choice, because we believe it to be good for our bodies and our souls and because it honors the fact that each of us is created in the image of G-d – with spirituality and physicality intertwined.

Ultimately, we parents need to keep lines of communication open with our children. We can help them feel respected by confirming the very real challenges and concerns sexuality can present while believing in their ability to navigate these challenges with dignity and commitment.

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