

## Fact Sheet

# Answering Children's Questions About Sexuality



Answering children's questions about sexuality can be an embarrassing and difficult experience. While there is no right or wrong way to go about it, the following are some hints on how to deal with issues which may arise.

### Try not to interrogate the child

Questions and statements such as the following can make a child shrink from discussion...

- Why do you want to know that?
- How did you hear about that?
- What do you mean?
- We'll talk about this later

### Accept the question at face value

Go with your initial understanding of the question. If you misinterpret it the child will most likely say, "No, that's not what I meant. I want to know..."

### Answer the question as simply and honestly as you can

Always keep it simple - too much detail will only confuse.

After you have answered, check up on it. Casually ask the child, "does that answer your question?" or "is that what you wanted to know?"

### If you don't know - say so

Be honest and admit when you don't know something, but offer to find the answer with the child.

### If you are embarrassed - admit it

Honesty is the best policy. Most children will accept a parent or teacher saying, "I feel a bit embarrassed about this because I'm not used to talking about it but I will try to answer your question."

### Respond to the question, not the language

Questions are often asked using slang. Answer the question first then offer the correct terminology afterwards.

### Try to answer the question immediately

Sometimes this can be difficult if you are in the middle of the supermarket or having a meal with people you don't

know very well. A brief answer and the offer to discuss it more fully later may be okay, but it is better to answer sooner rather than later. If you try to raise it later you may find that the child has forgotten all about it. If you avoid answering or even acknowledging the question the child will learn that this is an area you don't want to discuss.

### Discuss values and attitudes if appropriate

Parents - always answer the question simply and, if relevant, raise any attitudinal or value implications in further discussion.

Teachers - after you have answered the question, briefly explain that people have different views about the issue and suggest that the child talk to their family regarding their attitudes.

### Examples of questions children ask

Q. How big does the penis get?

A. As a boy gets older, his penis will grow along with all the other parts of his body.

This is an example of a confusing question because the child may want to know how big the penis grows on erection.

Q. What is masturbation?

A. Masturbation is when a person massages the sex parts of their body because it feels good. It's okay to do it in a private, personal place but it's also okay if a person doesn't want to do it.

This is an example of including different attitudes. You can always use a touch of humour - if you are a teacher you could say that it's not compulsory!

Q. What is a period?

A. A period is about four days of bleeding from the vagina that happens to most females about once a month. It starts when girls go through puberty.

Depending on the maturity of the child you may add:

The bleeding is sort of oozy and it means that the female's body is cleaning out the lining of the uterus and a tiny egg that is not going to be a baby.

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Q. How does a rattlesnake have sex?

A. I have no idea but there are some great books on snakes in the library and we can see if they have the answer.

Q. Where do babies come from?

A. The mother has lots of tiny little eggs in her body and if one of them meets a sperm, it can become a baby. There is a special place inside the mother called the uterus and the baby grows in there until it's ready to be born.

Q. How does the baby get out?

A. There's a special passage that leads from the uterus to the outside of the woman's body between her legs. It's called the vagina and the baby usually comes through the vagina to be born.

Q. How did it get there in the first place?

A. The father produces sperm, which get out of his body through his penis. If he puts his penis in the vagina the sperm can come out and find one of the tiny eggs inside the mother's body. If this happens, they will join and start developing into a baby.

The above questions (or ones like them) may be asked separately. It's a good idea to briefly revise information given previously and then add the new eg "Remember how we talked about the special place inside the mother where the baby grows called the uterus? Well, there is a passage that leads from the uterus..."

## Practise Questions

The following are genuine questions from primary students:

- Do girls have wet dreams?
- Why do men have stiffies?
- What if the condom breaks?
- How long does sex take?
- What is an orgasm?
- What makes a baby be born wrong?
- Why does it hurt if you get kicked in the balls?
- What if the baby gets stuck?
- Can you put a tampon in the wrong place?
- What is a vibrator?
- Do people have to have sex?
- What happens to the cord?
- Can lesbians have babies?
- What's menopause?

## For more information

- Contact the Family Planning NSW Talkline on 1300 658 886 or go to [www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline](http://www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline)
- NRS (for deaf) 133 677
- Or visit your nearest Family Planning clinic
- Visit "The hormone factory" website at: <http://www.thehormonefactory.com/index.cfm>

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