



# Conversation Starters

## What to talk about when

It's only natural to have questions about our bodies, how babies are made, puberty changes and sex. We are naturally curious beings. So what do you talk about when and how do you get the conversation going?

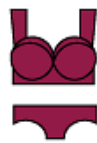
## Rules of Thumb

- Honour all questions as natural curiosity and try to respond positively and without judgment.
- Information should be taught to children/youth regardless of the difference between their chronological vs. behavioural age. A 12-year-old who is like a 5-year-old still needs to be prepared for menstruation and crushes.
- It's ok to admit you don't know the answer and to look for it together.
- It's ok to admit that these conversations make you feel a bit awkward or embarrassed - being real builds trust.
- It's ok to feel uncomfortable talking about something and to refer a client or family member to another trusted resource.
- If a child/ person is asking about something - they are likely ready to start talking about it or aspects of it.
- Children will take in what they are ready to hear and leave the rest. It's hard to give them too much fact-based information.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat - questions may come up repeatedly and you may need to discuss the facts multiple times for all the information to really resonate.
- The conversation evolves over time. You talk about periods slightly differently with an 8-year-old than you do with your 12-year-old who has started menstruating or your adult child who still struggles with personal care.
- It's never too late to get started.

## A Three- Step Formula for Answering Questions

- Respond positively and neutrally - "Great question, I'm sure a lot of people wonder that."
- Answer with the facts, less is more - "People have sex to have a baby and because it feels nice," or defer to another person. "I don't know, let's research together" or "who else could you talk to about this?"
- Check in - "Did that answer your question?"





## Ages and Stages

### Birth to Age 8 - Body Scientists

At this age kids are curious about their bodies. Become body scientists together. The reproductive system is no different from digestion. Talk about them in the same, fact-based, comfortable way. Bodies are cool and this is all the things they can do.

- scientific and anatomically correct names
- baby making basics (eggs, sperm, erections, and birth)
- pleasure - your body is made for it, it's ok if touching yourself feels nice but do it in a private place
- private and public places
- good and bad touch

### Age 8-12 Puberty Years

Puberty lessons should start BEFORE puberty starts so that kids are aware of the changes before they start to happen. This is true regardless of their mental capacity. If your body is changing and you don't understand and you don't have people to talk to you live in fear. Puberty talks include everything from growing pains and acne to periods and wet dreams.

### 12 and Beyond - Healthy Bodies and Healthy Relationships

No matter what age your child or client, it's never too late to teach all of the above using tools that work for their learning and engagement style.

Just like with puberty we want youth comfortable talking about the concept of sex and relationships before they are dating and having sex. This gives them the right tools to be prepared and make decisions that are right for them. Topics for this age include consent, sexual orientation, birth control and pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and healthy relationships.

### Conversation Starters

- use examples from their favourite movies and books to talk about relationships, gender roles, and crushes
- bring books home and read them together or leave them around
- share your own experiences if you feel comfortable
- ask them what's going on in life, who their friends are, what they wish for

