



# Raising Sexually Healthy Children & Adolescents

An Interactive Guide for Parents and Educators



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# INTRODUCTION

Talking about sex and sexuality can be difficult especially with children. Many parents shy away from it completely and leave it to the schools to educate children on the subject. It's understandable. Sex and sexuality is not a comfortable discussion topic for many Nigerians. Many parents were raised with very little sex or sexuality education, let alone talking about these topics with their parents. So Nigerian adults may find that talking about sex is embarrassing or stressful. Some parents might even think it is wrong for them – and even wrong for the schools – to talk about sex and sexuality with children.

The concerns that parents in our society have about their children are similar to those all over the world, and they include worries that:

- Talking about sex encourages children to experiment.
- Experimenting with sex opens a door for abuse and victimisation.
- Talking about sexuality burdens our children with too much information, and even fear.
- Talking about sex and sexuality encourages 'strange' sexual behaviour or experimentation by encouraging curiosity.

## **So, why should we talk about sex and sexuality?**

1. It is documented that sexual education can actually delay sexual initiation, reduce the number of sexual partners, and increase the use of safe sex practises, among youth who are sexually active (Rosen, Murray & Moreland 2004).



## HOW CAN I MAKE IT EASIER?

Parents and teachers can feel uncomfortable or embarrassed talking about sex, but there are some ways to make it easier:

- **Start early.** You'll find it less awkward if you introduce the topic when your child is very young. Answer questions simply and naturally. This way sexuality discussions become natural and comfortable in your family.
- **Use everyday situations to start conversations.** TV programmes are often a good opportunity to talk about relationships, or talk when you're doing something like the washing up. This makes your child feel comfortable in asking you questions and makes it less awkward to introduce the subject.
- **Have books or leaflets like this one** for your child to read, or you to look at together. See our list of resources and organisations at the back of this booklet for more information.
- **Have a line up your sleeve for difficult moments,** such as: *"That's a good question, let's talk about it when we get home."* And make sure you do.



these games, their observations and other things children say, your child will have a lot of questions. It is important to answer these questions truthfully, but you can be very simple. Complicated answers will be too much information for a child at this age (The Family Planning Association 2009).

**The following are examples keeping it simple and truthful:**

**Where do babies come from?**

Babies come from Mummy and Daddy. Mummy and Daddy give body gifts to each other. And when they put these body gifts together it forms a baby. But only adults can give body gifts.

**How does the baby get inside Mummy?**

Mummy and Daddy love each other and when they agree to have babies, they give each other body gifts which Mummy keeps in the baby house inside her belly. These gifts become a baby and Mummy's belly grows bigger.

**Can Daddy have a baby?**

Daddy cannot have a baby because he is a man and men do not have a baby house in their belly like mummies do.



## Media and gender development

As we have discussed, messages from the TV, radio and the internet etc. are very powerful. TV, in particular, is very powerful when it comes to promoting gender-specific roles. TV messages go a long way in perpetrating the “blue for boys” and “pink for girls” myth.

## Parents and gender development

Parents and caregivers tend to encourage this division even more. Children and youth are constantly pressured to be more ‘girly’ or ‘boyish’ even if they do not want to conform to ‘ladylike manners’ or ‘manly stuff’.

Some parents worry that girls who don’t act girly and boys who don’t act boyish might not develop in the ‘right’ way. “Feminine” boys might go on to be gay men, and “masculine” girls might develop



### DID YOU KNOW:

The major ways which gender affect sexuality include:

- Pressure to conform to social expectations leading to anxiety in men and women
- Men are not considered as sensitive, gentle or intimate
- Women are not considered as same sexual beings as men
- Men and women get locked into specific roles leading to difficulty in division of labour
- Relationship conflict regarding emotional needs and expectations

*(Adepoju 2005: 14)*



- Myth:** **Women incite men to rape.**  
**FACT:** Rape is the responsibility of the rapist alone. Women, children and men of every age, physical type and demeanour are raped.
- Myth:** **There is a "right way" to respond to a rape situation.**  
**FACT:** Since rape is life-threatening and each rapist has his own pattern, the best thing a victim can do is follow his/her instincts and observe any cues from the rapist. If the victim escapes alive she/he has done the right thing.
- Myth:** **A victim should be discouraged from dwelling on the rape. She/he should "forget it".**  
**FACT:** This advice generally comes from people who are more concerned with their own feelings than the victim's. All victims should be offered the opportunity to talk about the assault with those personally close to them and knowledgeable professionals. Victims who are not allowed to talk about the rape have a much more difficult time recovering from it.
- Myth:** **Support from family members is essential to the victim's recovery.**  
**FACT:** Emotional and practical support offered by family and friends does not necessarily speed the recovery of rape victims. However, when the people that a victim relies on behave in unsupportive or negative ways, the victim faces a longer, more difficult recovery process. These



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An Interactive Guide for Parents & Educators

- An easy to read booklet on sex, sexuality and relationships for parents and educators
- Communication tips included
- Discussions to facilitate conversations with children and adolescents
- 'What to do' and 'case studies'
- Where to go for help



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