

# Appropriate Sex Education

An Age-by-Age Guide for Parents and Guardians



# About Invictus Africa

Invictus Africa is a civic organization that promotes human rights and gender equality through data-driven advocacy, tech solutions, and capacity development.

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# Keywords and Terms

**1. Abstinence:** The deliberate choice to refrain from engaging in sexual activity. It's important to present abstinence as a valid option while also providing comprehensive information about safe sex practices.

**2. Age of Consent:** The legal age at which an individual is considered capable of giving informed consent to engage in sexual activity. This age varies by jurisdiction and serves to protect minors from potential exploitation. In Nigeria, this is 18.

**3. Anatomy:** The physical structures and organs that make up the human body. Understanding the anatomy is fundamental to discussing various aspects of sexual health.

**4. Body Positivity:** Embracing and accepting one's body, regardless of societal standards or expectations. Promoting body positivity encourages self-confidence and self-love.

**5. Bodily Autonomy:** The fundamental right of individuals to make decisions about their own bodies without coercion or external control. This concept underlines the importance of respecting personal boundaries and consent.

**6. Bullying:** Repeated aggressive behavior that is intended to harm, intimidate, or control another person. Sexual bullying involves using sexuality or gender-related aspects to target and harm someone emotionally or physically.

**7. Child Sexual Exploitation:** The use of a child for sexual purposes, often involving coercion, manipulation, or force. This is a grave violation of a child's rights and well-being.

**8. Consent:** The voluntary agreement of all individuals involved in a sexual activity. It is important that all parties are fully aware of what they are agreeing to and have the freedom to say "yes" or "no" without pressure or coercion.

**9. Contraception:** Methods used to prevent unintended pregnancies. These can include hormonal methods (birth control pills, patches), barrier methods (condoms), and intrauterine devices (IUDs).

**10. Gender Identity:** A person's internal sense of their own gender, which may be different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender identity can be diverse and may not conform to traditional binary categories.

**11. Grooming:** The manipulative actions undertaken by an individual, often with ill intentions, to build an emotional connection with someone, typically a minor, in order to exploit or manipulate them sexually.

**12. Harassment:** Unwanted and persistent behaviors, comments, or actions that cause discomfort, distress, or fear in an individual. Sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

**13. Incest:** Sexual activity or marriage between individuals who are closely related by blood. In many societies, incest is considered taboo and is often prohibited by law.

**14. Puberty:** The natural process of physical and hormonal changes that occur as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood. It involves the development of secondary sexual characteristics.

**15. Rape:** Non-consensual sexual penetration or intercourse. It is a serious crime that violates an individual's bodily autonomy and consent.

**16. Relationship Boundaries:** The limits and guidelines that partners establish in a relationship to ensure mutual respect, comfort, and consent. Open communication about boundaries is essential for healthy relationships.

**17. Safe Sex:** Engaging in sexual activities in a way that minimizes the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies. This often includes the use of barrier methods, such as condoms.

**18. Sex Education:** The process of providing information and guidance about various aspects of human sexuality, relationships, and reproductive health. It aims to promote informed decision-making, healthy behaviors, and respectful attitudes.

**19. Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs):** Infections that are primarily transmitted through sexual contact. STDs can include infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HIV.

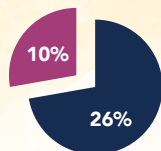
**20. Sexual Health Clinic:** A medical facility that provides services related to sexual health, such as STI testing, contraception counselling, and sexual health education.

**21. Sexual Orientation:** An individual's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to people of the same gender, different gender(s), or both. Common orientations include heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual.

# What Data Says

**5%**

In Nigeria, 6 out of 10 children experience some form of violence. Of children who reported violence, less than 5% received support.



A 2020 survey by Positive Action for Treatment Access found that 26% of girls and 10% of boys in Nigeria have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

**70%**

A 2021 study found that in parts of Nigeria, over 70% of rape survivors were children under 18 years old.



In Lagos State, sexual assault was the most commonly reported child abuse case in 2020. (Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team, 2020).

**2M Child Brides**

Child marriage remains highly prevalent in Nigeria, with 43% of girls married before age 18. Owing to population growth, there is a projected increase of over 2 million child brides in Nigeria by 2050 if current trends continue.

**31.4%**

A 2018 survey found that 31.4% of female respondents aged 18-24 reported experiencing sexual abuse before age 18.

## Human Rights IC

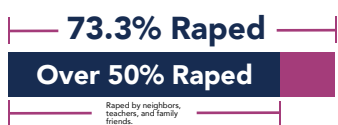
Research shows low rates of reporting and help-seeking among child and adolescent survivors of sexual abuse in Nigeria. Barriers include stigma, limited access to services, and lack of awareness of child rights.

**47%**

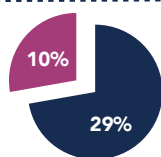
In a survey of secondary school students in South West Nigeria, 47% of students reported being sexually abused. Girls were significantly more likely to report abuse than boys.

**12years**

A 2014 study found that the mean age of first sexual abuse experience reported by university students in South West Nigeria was 12 years old. Over 60% experienced more than one incident of abuse.



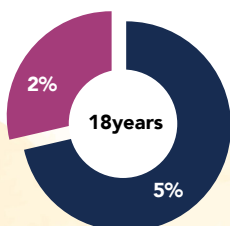
In a study of pregnant teenagers in Benin City, Nigeria, 73.3% reported being raped. Over 50% were raped by neighbors, teachers, and family friends.



A 2020 study of university students found that 29% of females and 10% of males reported a history of childhood sexual abuse. The most common perpetrators were neighbors, relatives, and family friends.



Data from the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey showed 30% of women aged 15-49 reported sexual abuse during childhood. 26% of women aged 20-24 reported first sexual intercourse before age 15.



A 2020 survey on violence against children found Nigeria had a high prevalence of emotional, physical, and sexual violence against children. Sexual violence was reported by 5% of females and 2% of males before age 18.

SECTION I

# Introduction



## 1.1 Purpose of the ASE Guide

In an evolving landscape of perspectives and concerns surrounding sex education, this guide seeks to address a critical question that has engaged educators, parents, religious institutions, and society as a whole: How can parents and responsible adults effectively navigate conversations with their children and wards about matters such as sex, abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, consent, and body autonomy? Amid the debates and myths, the fundamental goal of appropriate sex education remains: to impart age-appropriate knowledge to children while fostering their holistic well-being.

Numerous studies conducted by esteemed organizations have demonstrated that well-informed sex education plays a pivotal role in reducing rates of risky sexual behaviors among young individuals. For children, such education cultivates an understanding of their own bodies, empowering them to assertively decline unwanted physical contact. Armed with accurate information, children are more likely to confide in caregivers and trusted adults about instances of inappropriate touch or abuse.

Undeniably, discussing sex education can be a discomfoting prospect for adults, particularly when addressing children and adolescents. Parents and guardians often grapple with uncertainty, recognizing the imperative to safeguard their young ones from offline and online abuse. This very concern is what propels us, at Invictus Africa, to introduce this comprehensive guide. Our intention is to empower adults who are unwilling to leave the crucial task of sex education and child safety to chance. Through this guide, we aim to equip responsible adults with the knowledge and tools required to engage, educate, and protect children and teenagers effectively.

With this objective, we present the "Appropriate Sex Education Guide" as a pragmatic toolkit tailored for parents and guardians. This guide navigates the intricate terrain of sex education, ensuring its delivery in a manner suitable for various age groups. By taking a proactive stance in safeguarding children, we empower them with accurate information that serves as a shield against potential abuse. The advantages of embracing this guide are manifold:

- **Enhanced Parent-Child Relations:** The guide fosters an environment of open dialogue, enabling parents and children to engage in candid conversations about body autonomy and sex education.
- **Informed Vigilance:** Equipping parents with insights, strategies, and awareness to better comprehend risks empowers them to protect their children against inappropriate sexual situations.
- **Heightened Awareness:** By elucidating the perils of child sexual abuse and exploitation, the guide raises consciousness about these issues and underscores steps to counter them.
- **Accessible Resource for Curiosity:** For children and teenagers seeking knowledge about sex education, the guide provides a reader-friendly resource, catering to their inquiries.

Our commitment lies in offering comprehensive guidance, bridging the gap between parents, guardians, and the children and teenagers entrusted to their care. This guide seeks to facilitate essential conversations, nurture informed decisions, and ultimately fortify the well-being and safety of the younger generation.



## 1.2 What is Appropriate Sex Education?



Appropriate sex education means sharing information about how our bodies work and how we relate to others in a way that matches the age and understanding of people from 0 to 18 years old. This kind of education considers things like how old someone is, how well they understand

things, and how they feel about things. The main goal of this kind of education is to give the right and useful facts about our bodies, relationships, and being healthy. This helps us develop good thoughts and actions as we grow up and learn more about the world around us.

## 1.3 Importance of Appropriate Sex Education

Appropriate sex education plays a crucial role in helping young individuals lead healthier lives by understanding their bodies, relationships, and feelings better. It's like a guidebook that provides them with important information and skills to make good choices. Here's why it's so important:

**1. Healthy Growth:** It helps young people grow up healthily, understanding how their bodies change during puberty and what it means.

**2. No More Wrong Ideas:** It stops them from getting wrong or confusing ideas about things like love, relationships, and their bodies.

**3. Smart Choices:** It gives them the tools to make smart choices about things like relationships, sex, and protecting themselves.

**4. Safety First:** It teaches them how to stay safe from things like diseases and unsafe situations.

**5. Positive Attitudes:** It helps them have positive feelings about their own bodies and the bodies of others.

**6. Talking Skills:** It teaches them how to talk about these things with others, like partners or doctors.

**7. No to Bad Stuff:** It tells them about bad things like abuse and how to say no if something doesn't feel right.

**8. Feeling Good Inside:** It helps them feel good about themselves and their feelings.

**9. Everyone Included:** It teaches them to treat everyone with kindness and respect, no matter who they are attracted to.

**10. Family and Friends:** It helps families and kids talk openly, making their relationships stronger.

Appropriate sex education is like a friendly guide that walks beside them as they grow up, helping them understand the world of relationships, feelings, and bodies. It's all about giving them the knowledge and skills they need to live their best and healthiest lives.

## 1.4 Benefits of Appropriate Sex Education

Appropriate sex education presents an array of advantages for both young individuals and society at large. This educational framework serves as an indispensable instrument, endowing young people with the essential knowledge and tools requisite for navigating the intricate terrain of sexuality, relationships, and personal growth. Its impact resonates on multiple levels, fostering enhanced well-being, enriching lives, and fostering a society grounded in awareness and accountability. Herein lie some of the pivotal advantages:

**1. Informed Decision-Making:** By providing accurate information about sexual health, relationships, and reproductive choices, age-appropriate sex education empowers young people to make informed decisions that align with their values and goals.

**2. Delaying Sexual Initiation and Safety:** Appropriate sex education is associated with delayed sexual initiation and increased use of contraception and protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), reducing the risk of unplanned pregnancies and STI transmission.

**3. Holistic Relationships:** Age-appropriate sex education includes discussions about consent, respect, and communication in relationships, promoting healthier and more fulfilling connections with others.

**4. Empowering Against Abuse:** By teaching children about boundaries and recognizing inappropriate behavior,

appropriate sex education can help young people identify and report instances of sexual abuse or exploitation.

### **5. Elevated Mental Well-being:**

Providing appropriate information about puberty, body changes, and emotions reduces anxiety and promotes positive self-esteem, supporting overall mental health.

**6. Positive Body Image:** Appropriate sex education helps young people develop a realistic and positive perception of their bodies, promoting a healthier body image.

**7. Fostering Effective Communication:** Encouraging open communication about sexual topics from a young age helps children develop healthy communication skills, making it easier for them to seek support and guidance when needed.

### **8. Strengthened Parental Bonds:**

Appropriate sex education involving parents fosters trust and communication between parents and their children, making it more likely that children will turn to their parents for guidance.

### **9. Challenging Stereotypes for an Inclusive Society:**

By challenging harmful stereotypes and promoting respect and equality, appropriate sex education contributes to the creation of a more inclusive and tolerant society.

## SECTION II

# Preparing Yourself as a Parent/Guardian



## 2.1 Understanding Parenting Psychology and Overcoming Personal Barriers

Every parent comes from a different background, shaping their perspectives on sexuality. Some parents were educated about sex by their own parents, while others received limited or no information, or were misinformed. Regardless of past experiences, it is vital for parents to acknowledge the importance of giving children and adolescents accurate, age-appropriate information about sexual and reproductive health, grounded in family values, to empower them to make healthy decisions.

Teenagers are increasingly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and unplanned pregnancies, making it more difficult for them to obtain trustworthy information about sexual and reproductive health from reliable sources. With so much potentially misleading information on traditional and social media, parents play a critical role as their children's primary and most trusted sexual and reproductive health educators/mentors. We recognize our responsibility and opportunity as carers to guide our children in this aspect of their lives.

All parents want their children to be healthy, but navigating conversations about their sexual and reproductive health can be difficult. When discussing sexual and reproductive health topics with their children, parents may encounter a number of barriers and discomforts, including:

- **Cultural and religious beliefs:** Your views on sex may be influenced by strong cultural or religious beliefs. When discussing topics that contradict or challenge their values or norms, these beliefs can cause discomfort or resistance.
- **Personal discomfort or lack of knowledge:** Some parents may feel embarrassed, uneasy, or insecure when discussing sex issues with their children. They may have received insufficient or no sex education, resulting in a lack of knowledge or misconceptions that can make these discussions difficult.
- **Fear of encouraging sexual activity:** Some parents are concerned that talking about sex with their children will lead to early sexual experimentation or promiscuity. This fear may make them hesitant to bring up the subject or provide detailed information.
- **Communication barriers:** Communication problems between parents and children can arise as a result of generational differences, differences in language or terminology, or simply not knowing where to begin the conversation. These impediments can stymie productive discussions about sex education.
- **Fear of judgment or backlash:** Parents may be concerned about being judged by others, such as family

members, friends, or members of their community, for openly discussing sex with their children. They may be concerned about receiving negative feedback or consequences for taking an open and honest approach to sex education.

- **Emotional discomfort:** Parents may feel awkward discussing sensitive topics with their children, such as puberty, sexual desires, or contraception. Personal discomfort, anxiety, or embarrassment may result from these discussions.

- **Parent-child power dynamics:** Parents may feel awkward discussing sensitive topics with their children, such as puberty, sexual desires, or contraception. Personal discomfort, anxiety, or embarrassment may result from these discussions.

- **Fear of providing incorrect information:** Parents may be concerned that providing incorrect or misleading information will harm their children's understanding of sex and sexuality. Parents may be hesitant to engage in discussions due to their fear of being incorrect or misinformed.

At Invictus Africa, we understand that many parents may feel unsure about where to start or how to approach these discussions. This is where the Appropriate Sex Education (ASE) Guide for Parents/Guardians comes into play.

The Appropriate Sex Education (ASE) Guide is designed to support parents in becoming confident and effective sexual and reproductive health educators/mentors for their children. By equipping parents with the knowledge and tools they need, the guide empowers them to engage in open, age-appropriate, and non-judgmental conversations about sex with their children.

Through this guide, parents will learn how to educate themselves while seeing the need to start early and have age-appropriate conversations that evolve as children grow; foster a supportive environment that is safe for discussing sensitive sexual and reproductive health topics; identify the different needs of their children and provide age/level-based responses; use the right and non-judgemental approach to challenging topics related to the sexual and reproductive health of their children/wards; and model healthy attitudes towards sex and relationships.

## 2.2 Educating Yourself

While the most pressing question may arise, **"Why are parents frequently not the primary source of sex education for their children?"** It is possible that some themes will emerge. There is a sense of shame - the lingering effects of shame and discomfort prevent parents from discussing sex with their children. This shame can manifest as "fear, embarrassment, denial, and a sense of awkwardness." It may be a result of the parent's childhood, the shame of not knowing the answers to their children's questions, and the inability to have these conversations with their children. Many adults were raised in cultures or societies where discussing sex was frowned upon, resulting in feelings of embarrassment or shame when confronted with the subject. As a result, parents may avoid initiating sex discussions with their children or struggle to discuss it openly and honestly. A lack of adequate knowledge and support is another reason parents may not be the primary source of sex education for their children/wards. A lack of knowledge and understanding, a lack of generational support and experience, and a lack of communication skills may make it difficult for parents to discuss sex-related topics with their children.

As a result, it is critical that parents promote open dialogues with their children in order to overcome this shame and lack of knowledge. This

promotes open and nonjudgmental sex discussions within families.

Conversations about sex will become more normalized, and parents will feel more comfortable addressing the subject with their children while being open and honest about their own experiences and emotions, which will help model healthy attitudes towards sex and reduce shame and stigma surrounding the subject.

When parents participate in educational programs that provide parents with accurate and up-to-date information about sex, they can overcome a lack of knowledge and support. These programs can cover topics like child development, age-appropriate conversations, and how to approach sensitive topics with children. Parents can also ensure that their children have access to reliable and age-appropriate sex education resources, such as books, websites, and educational materials designed specifically for parents to support their children's sexual development. However, as a parent, it is critical to critically evaluate the sources you come across to ensure they provide accurate and up-to-date information. By educating yourself through trustworthy sources, you can approach sex education conversations with your children with confidence, promoting their well-being and understanding.

## 2.3 Effective Collaborative Communication

Effective collaborative communication between parents or guardians regarding age-appropriate sex education is critical because it allows parents to provide accurate and age-appropriate information about sex, sexual relations, and sexual activities to their children. This helps to ensure that children receive reliable information and reduces the likelihood that they will seek information from untrustworthy sources or engage in risky behaviours. Open discussions about sex education with parents or guardians can instill healthy attitudes and values about relationships, consent, boundaries, and respect. This helps children develop a positive and respectful attitude towards sexuality, promoting healthy sexual development and lowering the risk of engaging in harmful or exploitative behaviours. Open and supportive communication between parents or guardians and their children fosters trust.

Furthermore, discussing sex with children can help them feel comfortable discussing their questions, concerns, and emotions about their changing bodies and sexual development. When children feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics with their parents, their bond is strengthened and a sense of trust

and closeness within the family is fostered. This trust serves as a foundation for ongoing communication about other critical issues. Furthermore, discussing topics such as contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and responsible decision-making reduces the likelihood of risky behaviours such as unprotected sex, early sexual debut, and unintended pregnancies, while providing children with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions while protecting their sexual health. Parents or guardians can address misconceptions or myths that children may encounter from peers, media, or other sources by maintaining open lines of communication. This helps to dispel myths and ensures that children have accurate information about sexuality and relationships. Overall, open and supportive communication about sex education between parents or guardians is critical for promoting healthy sexual development, reducing the risk of negative outcomes, and fostering strong relationships based on trust and understanding.



# Tips for effective and collaborative communication between parents and children

Establishing effective channels of communication and collaborative interaction with children/wards stands as a linchpin for nurturing robust relationships and facilitating their holistic growth. Below, you'll find a compendium of strategies designed to elevate the quality of communication and collaboration with children:

**1. Active listening:** Practice active listening by giving your full attention when your child/ward is talking. Maintain eye contact, show interest, and avoid interrupting. This shows that you value their thoughts and encourages them to express themselves openly.

**2. Create a safe and judgment-free environment:** Build an environment of trust and openness where children feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. Avoid criticism and offer support and understanding instead.

**3. Be approachable and available:** Be physically and emotionally available for your children/wards. Let them know they can approach you anytime to discuss important matters, even if it's not a convenient time for you.

**4. Use age-appropriate language, examples, and explanations:** Tailor your communication to your child's age and understanding. Use language, examples, and explanations that match their level of comprehension, especially when discussing sensitive topics like sex.

**5. Encourage open dialogue:** Urge your children/wards to ask questions and share their opinions. Initiate conversations, share stories, and ask

open-ended questions to create opportunities for meaningful discussions.

**6. Respect their perspectives:** Show respect for your children's/wards' perspectives, even if you disagree. Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings, teaching them the value of listening and considering different points of view.

**7. Collaborative decision-making:** Whenever possible, include your children/wards in decision-making. This helps them feel responsible and empowered. Discuss options, weigh pros and cons together, and make decisions as a team.

**8. Set boundaries and expectations:** Communicate your expectations and set appropriate boundaries for behavior. Discuss these boundaries with your children/wards, explaining the reasons behind them and the consequences of crossing them.

**9. Use positive reinforcement:** Recognize and appreciate your children's efforts and achievements. Use praise, encouragement, and rewards to reinforce positive behaviors and motivate them to continue growing.

Remember that effective communication and collaboration is an ongoing process that requires patience, understanding, and consistent effort. By fostering open and respectful communication, you can build strong and meaningful relationships with your children/wards while supporting their growth and development.

*Ann rushed into the house after Uncle T had touched her breast and she felt so uncomfortable.*

*Ann dashed into the house to tap her mum*

*“Mummy, mummy, Uncle T just pressed his hand on me”*

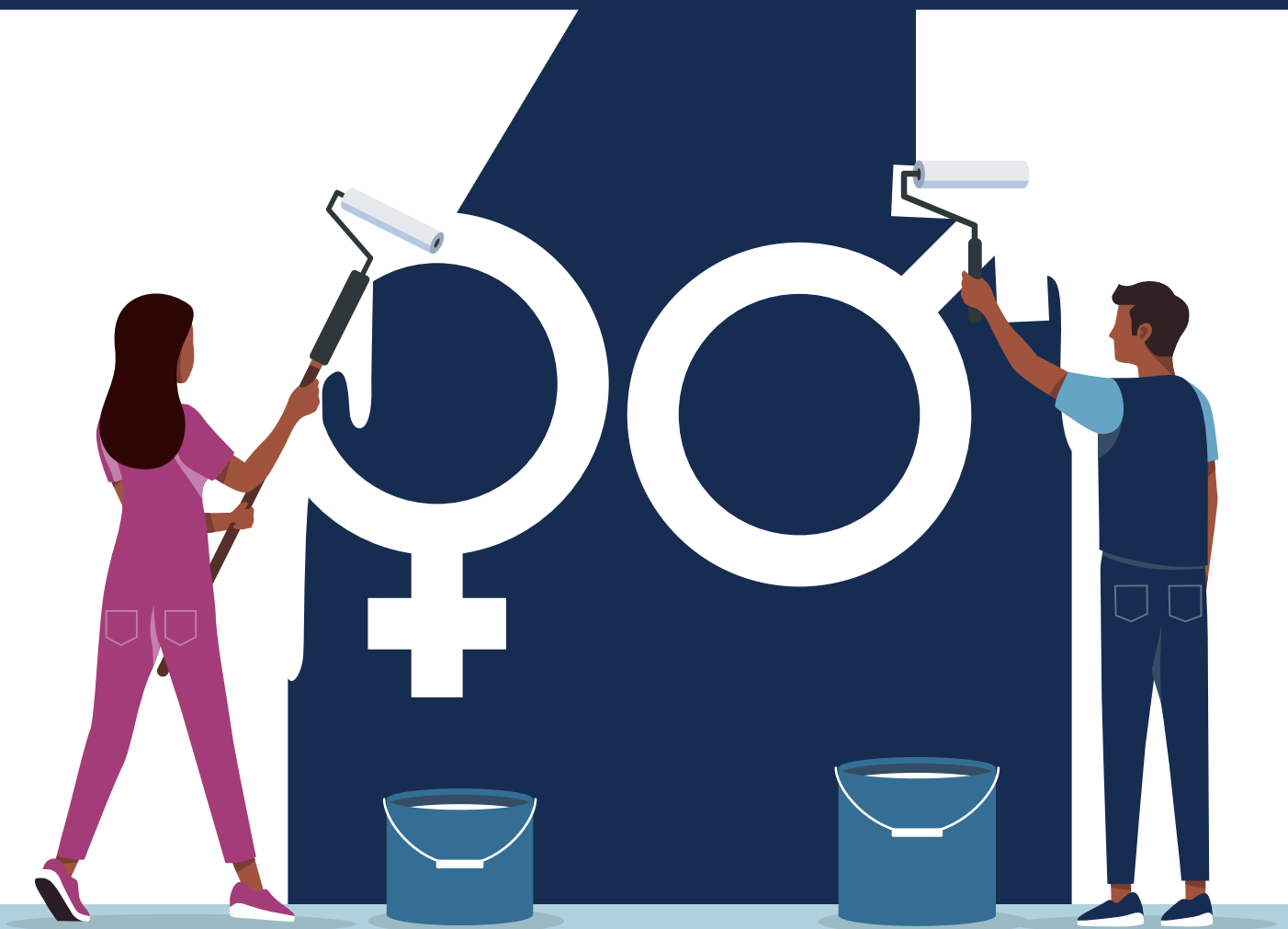
*Mummy turns to Ann and shouts: “I told you to go straight to the Malam stand to buy me Maggi but here you are going to the neighbours to gist”.*

*Ann never felt comfortable telling her mum more and Uncle T was busy molesting Ann.*



## SECTION III

# What To Teach Children and Teenagers about Sex



# Early Years (0-5 Years)

Teaching children/wards at this stage may prove to be a little difficult, as this is when they are relatively new to everything. At this stage, parents introduce basic concepts related to body awareness, consent, and boundaries in age-appropriate ways.

## Objectives

To enable parents to:

- Support their children to learn body awareness
- Teach their children how to set boundaries
- Teach their children how to communicate consent clearly
- Practice body awareness activities.



## 3.1 Promoting Healthy Body Awareness

### What is body awareness?

The ability to recognize the position and movement of our body parts is referred to as body awareness. It assists us in understanding how our bodies interact with the environment and with others.

Developing body awareness in children is critical for their overall development. The vestibular and proprioceptive senses, two lesser-known senses, play an important role in body awareness. The vestibular system is in charge of balance and effective movement, whereas proprioception is concerned with understanding the position of our body parts in relation to one another. These senses, when combined with the five traditional senses, contribute to sensory processing, which is necessary for various aspects of a child's development. Children's body awareness gradually improves as they grow. Parents and adults can assist children in developing this skill through a variety of activities that promote movement and sensory exploration. By engaging in these activities, children learn to understand their body's position in space, which is essential

for motor, speech, cognitive, social, and behavioral development.

Ultimately, body awareness is an important aspect of child development, and we can help and encourage children to become more aware of their bodies by providing opportunities for sensory exploration and movement. Children gain a better understanding of their physical abilities and how to interact with the world around them as they develop their body awareness. Children expend a lot of 'brain energy' to be aware of their body position, and when they divert their attention elsewhere, you often see them fall, slide off a chair, and be generally uncoordinated.

Kids with proprioceptive dysfunction, who lack awareness of body position, are often observed as:

- **Bumping into others:** They might accidentally bump into people or objects because they don't know where their body is in space.

- **Chewing on objects:** They might chew on objects more than usual as a way to get sensory input.
- **Avoiding physical activity:** They might not enjoy activities that involve moving their body, like running or jumping.
- **Having difficulty walking on stairs:** They could find it hard to go up and down stairs because they have trouble knowing how to position their body.
- **Having difficulty imitating the movements of others:** They might struggle to copy movements they see others doing.
- **Having trouble learning new gross motor skills:** Learning new movements, like riding a bike, might be tough for them.
- **Appearing to be clumsy:** They might seem clumsy and have a hard time moving smoothly.
- **Playing roughly with other kids:** They might play too rough with other kids because they don't feel their body's limits well.
- **Difficulty Sitting Still:** They might have trouble sitting still for long periods, as they might not feel comfortable in their body's position.
- **Messy Handwriting:** Their handwriting could be messy or uneven, as they might struggle to control the movements of their hands.
- **Tight or Loose Grasp:** They might hold objects too tightly or too loosely, finding it hard to judge the right amount of pressure.
- **Uneven Walking:** Their walking might appear uneven or unsteady due to difficulties in coordinating their body's movements.
- **Avoiding Certain Textures:** They might avoid touching certain textures or materials because their sense of touch is affected by their body's position.
- **Trouble with Self-Care Tasks:** They might struggle with tasks like getting dressed or tying shoelaces due to challenges in understanding where their body is in relation to objects.
- **Difficulty with Sports:** Participating in sports or games that involve precise movements could be tough for them, as they might find it hard to control their body's actions.
- **Preference for Tight Clothing:** They might prefer wearing tight-fitting clothes as the pressure can help them better sense their body's position.
- **Overreacting to Touch:** They might react strongly to touch, either by becoming overly sensitive or not noticing it at all.

This list is not exhaustive.

# Ways to promote body awareness

As parents/guardians, there are ways you can help a child become aware of their bodies either as a corrective measure or as a preventive measure. Here are some activities you can play with children:

## • Dance Exploration

Play your child's favorite songs and encourage them to dance, either slowly or quickly in tune with the music's beat. A challenge can be to dance while avoiding touching anyone else within the dancing space.

## • Mirror Expressions

Set up a large mirror or use a hand-held mirror and prompt the child to showcase various emotions on their faces: happiness, sadness, worry, fear, and silliness.

## • Balance Beam

Arrange a low balance beam or mark a line on the floor with tape. Invite children to walk along the line, either with their arms by their side or extended. Challenge them to stand on one leg as steadily as possible.

## • Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes Rhyme

This song is popular in Nigerian schools, even at religious places. The song teaches and educates children on the several body parts and gives

the awareness that the body parts belong to them and no one else.

## • Texture Exploration

Provide a variety of textured materials like sandpaper, fabric, and soft toys. Encourage children to touch and feel each texture, discussing how it feels against their skin.

## • Sensory Obstacle Course

Create a simple obstacle course using cushions, pillows, and other soft objects. Guide children through the course, prompting them to use their senses to navigate the challenges.

## • Guided Breathing

Introduce simple breathing exercises. Guide children to pay attention to their breath, helping them connect with their body's rhythm and sensations.

## • Nature Walk

Embark on a nature walk, encouraging children to observe how their body feels as they walk on different surfaces like grass, sand, and pavement.

## 3.2 Teaching Proper Names for Body Parts

Teaching children proper body part names is critical for their communication and self-esteem. As part of their natural curiosity, young children may naturally explore their bodies, including their genitals. As adults, it is critical to use correct terminology for all body parts, including those classified as "Private Parts," such as the penis, vagina, and breast.

We create a healthy environment for children to discuss their bodies without shame or taboo by using appropriate names for all body parts. This open communication is critical in preventing abuse and enabling children to speak up if they are subjected to inappropriate touching. It teaches children to distinguish between good and bad touches and gives them the knowledge and confidence to report any abuse they may encounter.

Teaching children to identify their body parts is an important step towards improving parent-child communication. It is critical for their safety and boundaries to understand that all body parts are private and that they have the right to decide who can touch them. We can create a safe and supportive environment for children to communicate their needs and concerns by normalising open discussions about bodies and consent.



### Good-To-Know

Sometimes, a parent may need to check a child's genital area for pain or discomfort, and a doctor or nurse will need to look if they are doing a physical exam. Kids should know that if anyone ever touches them in a way that feels strange, unsafe, or bad, they should tell that person to stop it and then tell you about it.

## Why it is important to teach children the names of body parts?

**1. Normalizing Proper Names for Body Parts:** Encouraging children to use accurate names for their body parts establishes an environment where conversations about their bodies feel natural, devoid of discomfort, embarrassment, or shame.

**2. Empowering Children to Speak Up:** Teaching children the correct names for their body parts equips them with the vocabulary to express themselves, especially in situations like sexual abuse. By using precise language, children can articulate their experiences and seek help if necessary.

**3. Clear Communication with Others:** Utilizing slang or informal terms for body parts can lead to misunderstandings. Employing accurate terminology ensures that children can communicate clearly with trusted adults, ensuring they are comprehended in any circumstance.

**4. Strengthening Family Bonds:** Encouraging open dialogues regarding body parts nurtures stronger connections and communication within families. Parents, children, and trusted adults forge an atmosphere of support where concerns can be shared without reservation.

**5. Protection from Bullies and Abusers:** Well-informed children possess a higher level of awareness about their bodies, rendering them less vulnerable to bullying or exploitation. They develop a discerning understanding of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate conduct.

## 3.3 Understanding Boundaries and Consent

In the previous topic in this section, we discussed the proper use of vocabulary to describe the body. This is the first place to start when discussing boundaries. This is because children would already know about their body parts and can understand when the touch is good or feel uncomfortable.

### Boundaries

Boundaries are important for our health because they represent our personal rules and limits. Personal boundaries encompass how we act around others and how others act around us, including factors such as physical comfort and disclosure of personal information. Personal boundary education is critical for children's understanding of appropriate behaviour in various social situations. Here are some strategies for assisting children in setting boundaries:

**1. Empowerment:** Let your children know they are in charge of their bodies. Encourage them to understand that they control their interactions with others and how others interact with them.

**2. Respecting Affection Limits:** Allow kids to decide when and if they want to show affection. Avoid pressuring them into hugging or pecking others. Offer alternative ways of showing affection, like high-fives or waves.

**3. Taking Children's Limits Seriously:** Listen attentively when children express their comfort levels and respect their wishes. Avoid dismissing their feelings and reassure them that their boundaries will be honored.

**4. Teaching Respect for Others' Boundaries:** Educate children about the uniqueness of their friends and the importance of respecting their preferences, customs, and traditions.

**5. Lead by Example:** Demonstrate your own personal boundaries to your child. Explain why certain boundaries, like privacy in the bathroom, are essential and ask for their cooperation.

**6. Communicate with Loved Ones:** Inform family and friends that you expect your children to ask for permission before sharing or taking food, toys, or engaging in physical contact. Encourage them to follow the **"ASK-WAIT-AFFIRM-RESPECT"** approach.

- **ASK** before a hug, kiss, or cuddle
- **WAIT** for a response
- **AFFIRM** the answer, then
- **RESPECT** it.



### Good-To-Know

#### Have your child's back

Remember, children are not responsible for protecting themselves. So, help children in a group setting when you see them being approached by an eager friend or loved one. Speak out loud so an approaching adult or child can hear you, "In our house we want everyone to ask before giving someone a hug or kiss, to listen to the response, and respect it. Don't apologize to anyone when a child does not want to hug or cuddle. Apologizing communicates to the child they may have done something wrong or gives them a mixed message about whether or not you support them and their decision. Let the children in your life know you will back them up, and they won't ever get in trouble when they don't want a hug or cuddle. Most importantly, when someone touches a child in a way that hurts them, tell the child clearly, "It's not your fault."



## Consent

The concepts of consent and boundaries are closely intertwined, extending beyond matters of a sexual nature into non-sexual relationships. Let's delve into these terms and their application:

**Consent** involves agreeing to or granting permission for a specific action or situation. Within this framework, several key principles come into play:

- **Free Choice:** All parties involved can make decisions without coercion, ensuring a voluntary participation.

- **Clear and Enthusiastic Agreement:** Consent thrives when there's a resounding and enthusiastic affirmation of willingness to participate.

- **Revocable Decision:** Everyone retains the right to change their mind at any point, and this choice must be honored.

- **Awareness and Rationality:** Consent is effective when individuals are awake, conscious, and thinking clearly.

- **Understanding Activity:** Essential to consent is a comprehensive comprehension of the nature of the activity in question.

**Empowering Children through Consent:** A profound understanding of consent empowers children to:

- **Confident Decision-Making:** They gain the confidence to make informed decisions about their bodies, asserting control over their experiences.

- **Open Communication:** A grasp of consent fosters comfort in conversing with trusted adults about topics like sex and other sensitive subjects.

- **Boundary Awareness:** Children recognize the significance of establishing and respecting personal boundaries, nurturing respectful interactions.



## Good-To-Know

By educating children on the concepts of consent, parents are teaching them what to do if someone touches them inappropriately.

## Introducing ideas about consent to toddlers and preschoolers

Introducing the concept of consent to younger children need not wait until it relates to matters of a sexual nature. It can be seamlessly integrated into their understanding of personal boundaries and mutual respect. Here are practical ways to instill the notion of consent in their daily lives:

**1. Honoring Their Choices:** Respect your child's decisions regarding touch. If they opt not to kiss, cuddle, or sit on someone's lap, reassure them that their choice is valid. You might say, 'Sam, it's perfectly fine if you don't want to hug Grandma. How about a wave or a smile instead?'



**2. Respecting Others' Limits:** Educate your child about the significance of respecting other people's boundaries. If your child wishes to offer comfort through a hug to a sad friend, but the friend declines, explain, 'When someone says no, like Zara saying no to hugs, it's important to listen and show respect.'

**3. Recognizing Non-verbal Cues:** Draw attention to nonverbal signs of consent. For instance, if your child and a playmate are roughhousing but you notice signs of discomfort in the other child, guide your child by saying, 'When both friends are having fun, it's great. But if Aiden seems unhappy, it's time to stop and check in.'

**4. Seeking Their Consent:** Model consent by seeking your child's permission. For instance, you could

inquire whether it's alright to share their pictures on social media. Respect their response, even if it's a no or if they prefer a different image to be shared.

**5. Teaching Touch Etiquette:** Encourage your child to seek permission before touching others and make them aware of the same expectation for themselves. With very young or nonverbal children, develop a habit of explaining your actions before touching, like, 'I'm going to zip up your jacket, so you're warm and comfy for your walk.'

**6. Explaining 'Good Reasons' for Touch:** Illuminate instances when touch is warranted for 'good reasons'. For example, 'Sometimes doctors or nurses might need to examine your body. But remember, it's only okay if Mom or Dad is there too.'

## 3.4 Answering Curiosity-Driven Questions

Children are naturally inquisitive, soaking up information from diverse sources such as playground interactions, movies, TV shows, older siblings, and parents. Their eagerness to ask intriguing questions is a testament to their trust in your guidance. Responding to these inquiries candidly and accurately is an opportunity to impart cherished values and principles. As parents, here are pivotal steps to effectively navigate these conversations:

**1. Prepare yourself:** Cultivate a sense of comfort when delving into sensitive yet age-appropriate discussions. Seek insights from various sources to adeptly engage your child in open and informative dialogues. This not only encourages them to seek accurate information from you but also establishes an environment of trust.

**2. Be honest and patient:** Provide honest answers, adjusting your responses based

on your child's age and understanding. Be patient, as they may not grasp everything immediately.

**3. Admit Not Knowing:** If a question stumps you, acknowledge your uncertainty and assure your child that you'll explore and return with an answer. Remember, these discussions are ongoing, evolving as your child matures.

**4. Factual Responses:** Consistently provide information grounded in facts, ensuring your child's confidence in your guidance and their continued reliance on your insights.

**5. Keep It Simple:** Employ language that matches your child's developmental stage, simplifying concepts to aid their understanding and broaden their perspectives.

## Common curious questions that children ask.

Creating an exhaustive list of sex-related questions and answers for responding to your children is an impossible task. Those curious minds will always come up with new questions! The best you can do is to encourage their curiosity and provide them with the resources they need to find the answers themselves. Some of such questions and answers are:

### Q: Why Are Some Words 'Bad'?

*A: Some words are considered bad because they might hurt someone's feelings. For example, if you call someone a name, they might feel sad or embarrassed. So, it's important to be careful about the words we use and how we use them. Sometimes because of the way they use it, even normal words are considered bad. It is best to avoid using bad words, so you don't end up hurting others. If you hear someone else using them, you can tell them that those words are not nice, and they might hurt someone's feelings. You should know that kids are tempted to do things you tell them not to. So, the more you tell them not to use bad words, the more they will be tempted to use them. It's essential to explain why certain words are bad. Just telling them not to use the words is not enough. They need to understand why they are bad so they can decide not to use them.*

**Q: Why does my friend have only a mother/ father (single parent)?**

*A: You could tell your child that sometimes parents cannot stay together. It is best for them if they live apart. Just like how they might not get along well with some kids in their class, sometimes parents are not able to get along well with each other too. It is also possible that one parent has passed away. But that's okay because even though they might not have both a mum and a dad, they still have people who love them very much. And that's what's most important. You should know that your child might have a lot of questions about single parenting. It's important to be honest with them and answer their questions as compassionately as you can. You should also reassure them they are loved and that even though their family might differ from other families, that doesn't make them any less special.*

**Q: How does a baby get inside a tummy?**

*A: When two adults love each other very much they show themselves love that can form a baby in the woman's body. The baby grows in a place called the womb. The baby will stay in the womb until it is ready to be born. This is usually a good enough answer for younger kids. If they're older and want to know more, let them ask questions and answer them as honestly as you can.*

**Q: Where do babies come from?**

*A: You can say babies grow from an egg in the mother's womb. You can point to the stomach to make the child understand the position of the womb in the body. This response will change for pre-teens.*

**Q: What is sex or what does sex mean?**

*A: Sex is also one of the ways two grown-ups can show that they love each other very much, by touching each other's body during private time together.*

**Q: What does having sex mean?**

*A: Explain to your child that when two individuals feel attracted to each other, they display their affection in many ways. Physical touch and sex are two of them.*

**Q: What is a condom?**

*A: A condom is something a couple uses when they are not ready to have a baby. You can stop at this if there are no further questions from the kid. If they ask a follow-up question, answer them as honestly as you can.*

**Q: What is a sanitary pad?**

*A: A sanitary pad is something that girls and women use when they have their period which comes once every month. It's just a natural process that happens to every girl/woman's body. During this time, the woman's body will shed the lining of the uterus, and this will come out as blood. Sanitary pads are just there to collect and absorb all the blood so that the woman can go about her day without feeling uncomfortable.*

**Q: Why do boys have a penis? Why do girls have a vagina?**

*A: Boys and girls have different organs that they use to urinate, and this is what makes them different.*

# Foundation Years (6-11 Years)

## Objectives:

1. To promote positive and healthy relationships among middle childhood-aged children, fostering strong friendships, family bonds, and respectful interactions.
2. To introduce the concept of puberty and its physical changes in an age-appropriate manner, addressing common questions and ensuring children understand this transitional stage.
3. To emphasize the significance of personal boundaries and consent, equipping children with strategies to respect their own boundaries and those of others.
4. To explore the impact of media on children's perceptions of relationships and body image, encouraging discussions about media messages and developing critical thinking skills in children.



## 4.1 Building Foundation for Healthy Relationships

Preteens go through physical and emotional changes, becoming more curious about their surroundings. Friendships with peers and family are important to children aged six to twelve. Building close and healthy relationships with your child is critical as a parent or carer. Relationships shape children's worldviews and have an impact on their overall development. Children learn about themselves and their surroundings through interactions with their parents and carers.

### Developing a healthy parent-child relationship

- **Show love**  
Express affection to your child daily with gentle, loving touches like hugs and warm expressions. Normalize saying "I love you" and avoid unkind words while still offering constructive criticism.
- **Set boundaries, rules, and consequences**  
Children need structure and guidance. Clearly communicate your expectations and age-appropriate consequences for rule-breaking. Be consistent in enforcing these consequences.
- **Listen and empathize**  
Connect with your child by listening to their feelings and showing understanding and support. See things from their perspective to foster mutual respect.
- **Play together**  
Engage in play with your child to aid their development and strengthen your bond. Enjoy quality time without distractions.

- **Be available and distraction-free**  
Spend 10-15 minutes daily talking to your child without distractions. Show them they are a priority in your life.

- **Eat meals together**  
Make mealtimes family bonding moments. Encourage putting away devices and focus on each other's company. Teach the importance of a healthy diet.

- **Mutual respect**  
Set limits respectfully and with empathy. Demonstrate kind and respectful relationships with others to teach your child to do the same.

- **Create parent-child routines**  
Spend individual time with each child to strengthen the parent-child bond and boost their self-esteem. Activities can be simple and enjoyable.

### Benefits of Parent-Child Relationships

- **Fostering Confidence and Resilience:**  
Positive interactions form the cornerstone of confidence and resilience. Through these exchanges, children learn to navigate challenges, cultivating a belief in their abilities to overcome obstacles. This skillset carries into adolescence and adulthood, empowering them to adeptly tackle problems and manage stress.

- **Enhancing Communication Prowess:**  
Engaging in open and meaningful conversations lays the groundwork for effective communication skills. Children who are accustomed to sharing their thoughts

and feelings with their parents develop the capacity to articulate their emotions, fostering healthier connections in future relationships.

• **Forging Strong Problem-Solving Abilities:**

The foundation of problem-solving is established through parent-child interactions. By jointly exploring solutions and approaches, children acquire the critical skill of analyzing situations and devising effective solutions, an asset that guides them throughout life.

• **Cultivating Emotional Intelligence:** A warm and responsive parent-child relationship serves as a classroom for emotional intelligence. Children who experience empathy, understanding, and emotional support learn to identify and manage their emotions, fostering a healthier mental and emotional landscape.

• **Securing Mental Well-being:** Early attachments lay the groundwork for robust mental health. Children who experience secure and positive relationships with their parents are more likely to exhibit fewer behavioral challenges and emotional difficulties as they grow, promoting a stronger mental well-being.

• **Forming a Resilient Foundation:** The bonds formed during early years ripple through life's tapestry. A secure parent-child connection provides a resilient foundation upon which children build their social and emotional well-being, influencing their future interactions and relationships.

• **A Lifelong Cornerstone:** A warm, responsive parent-child relationship is not confined to the present; it paves the way for a fulfilling future. The nurturing foundation you provide today shapes your child's outlook and capabilities, fortifying them for the challenges and triumphs life holds.

## What is a healthy relationship?

A healthy relationship is one in which everyone involved can retain their individuality while

remaining committed to each other. A healthy relationship should be founded on the belief that both parties are deserving of kindness, dignity, and respect. Teach your children what they can expect from a healthy relationship. Inform them that in a healthy relationship, you:

- **communicate how you feel without being judged**
- **take care of yourself and be happy**
- **feel good and are comfortable being around them**
- **maintain relationships with your other friends and families**
- **feel fulfilled – not stressed out or worried**
- **are able to work through any difficulties together**
- **are kind to one another**
- **are caring towards one other**
- **respect each other**
- **are safe and supported**

## What is an unhealthy relationship?

Where healthy relationships are inherently positive, unhealthy relationships are inherently negative. An unhealthy relationship can be defined as one that is characterized by an ongoing pattern of behaviors, such as lack of communication, power imbalances, lack of mutual respect, lack of boundaries, physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, etc. In an unhealthy relationship, there is usually a power imbalance. One child may have more control over the other in a relationship or friendship. Let your child understand that when they start acting against their values like telling lies to be accepted by their friends, they are in an unhealthy relationship with their friends. A very good example of an unhealthy relationship is bullying. Bullies control their friends and peers; they make the other child take actions that they may not be proud of.



## 4.2 Discussing Puberty and Physical Changes

Puberty is a natural and healthy period of transition from childhood to adulthood. As a parent, you play an important role in guiding your child through this transformative time. Puberty typically begins between the ages of 10-11 years for girls and 11-12 years for boys, with an average age range of 8-13 years for girls and 9-14 years for boys. Puberty can last from 18 months to five years. Genetics, nutrition, and social environment all have an impact on the timing and duration of puberty.

Puberty ushers in a period of notable transformations encompassing physical growth, sexual organ developments, cognitive shifts, and social-emotional progress. Throughout this phase, several common experiences are likely for most children:

- **Skin Changes:** Adolescents often encounter changes in their skin, which might manifest as increased oiliness. Acne, while not universal, is a possibility during this time.
- **Hair Transformations:** Hair can also exhibit changes, with increased oiliness possibly necessitating more frequent washing to maintain cleanliness.
- **Sweating and Odor:** Puberty introduces heightened perspiration and body odour. Regular showers and the use of deodorant become important allies in managing these changes.
- **Growth Spurts:** A substantial growth spurt characterizes puberty. Girls typically experience a growth of approximately 11 cm annually, while boys may witness a growth of up to 13 cm per year. Following this primary growth spurt, growth generally continues at a rate of one to 2 cm annually. Notably, certain body parts, like the head

and hands, might exhibit accelerated growth in comparison to the limbs and torso. Eventually, the body attains a harmonious equilibrium

Embrace these changes as vital milestones in your child's journey through puberty, guiding them with accurate information and support as they navigate this period of transformation and growth.



### Good-To-Know

#### Puberty and children with additional needs.

Children with additional needs are likely to go through the physical changes of puberty in the same way as other children.

Some children might have delayed physical development because of chronic health problems, which might cause a delay in the onset of puberty. How your child manages puberty emotionally might also be affected by additional needs.

Seek professional help if your child is autistic or has special needs.

## Age

## Key physical puberty changes in girls

### Around 10-11 years

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### Around 12-14 years (about two years after breast development starts)

- **Underarm Hair Growth:** Hair will initiate growth in the underarm area.
- **Vaginal Discharge:** Several months prior to the onset of periods, girls might notice a clear or white discharge from the vagina. If this discharge causes discomfort, using a panty liner is a helpful suggestion. In case of itchiness, pain, or a strong odor, consulting a doctor is advisable.
- **Menstrual Periods:** Generally, menstrual periods commence within two years of the onset of breast growth. However, it's possible for periods to take up to four years to start after breast development initiates.

Age	Key physical puberty changes in boys
<b>Around 11-12 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Growth Spurt:</b> Your child will undergo a period of rapid growth, resulting in increased height and broader chest and shoulders. Certain body parts, such as the head, face, and hands, might experience faster growth compared to limbs and torso, leading to a temporary disproportionate appearance. On average, boys experience growth of 10-30 cm during puberty and typically conclude their growth around 18-20 years of age.</li><li>• <b>Minor Breast Development:</b> It's not uncommon for boys to go through minor breast development during puberty. If your child expresses concern about this, provide reassurance that it's a normal process and usually resolves on its own. However, if the concern persists or if there's significant breast growth, consulting a doctor is recommended.</li></ul>
<b>Around 13-15 years</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Hair Growth:</b> Hair will commence growing in various other body areas, including the underarms, face, and the rest of the body. Both leg and arm hair will also become thicker. Some young men might continue experiencing additional body hair growth well into their early twenties.</li><li>• <b>Testosterone Production:</b> The hormone testosterone starts being produced, stimulating the testes to generate sperm.</li><li>• <b>Erections and Ejaculations:</b> Your child might begin experiencing erections and ejaculations (sperm release). Erections can occur spontaneously, and it's important to reassure your child that this is a normal process and usually goes unnoticed by others. Ejaculation during sleep is often referred to as a 'wet dream.'</li><li>• <b>Voice Changes:</b> The larynx (commonly known as the 'Adam's apple' or voice box) will become more prominent. It will increase in size, causing your child's voice to 'crack' and eventually deepen. Some boys' voices might alternate between high and low pitches, possibly even within a single sentence. These changes will naturally subside over time.</li></ul>

Further changes that occur during puberty include:

**1. Brain Development:** The development of the teenage brain influences behavior and social skills. Your child will start enhancing their self-control, planning, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. This progression continues into the mid-20s.

**2. Bones, Organs, and Body Systems:** Many of your child's organs will undergo enlargement and strengthening. Lung capacity improves, limbs grow, and bones increase in both thickness and volume.

**3. Clumsiness:** The rapid growth experienced in puberty can shift your child's center of gravity, affecting their balance. You may observe increased clumsiness, and your child might be more susceptible to injuries.

**4. Physical Strength:** Muscles gain both strength and size during this period. Hand-eye coordination and motor skills, such as catching and throwing a ball, progressively improve.

**5. Weight:** Your child will gain weight and require more nutritious food. Their stomachs and intestines enlarge, necessitating increased energy, proteins,

and minerals. Foods rich in calcium and iron become essential for bone growth and blood circulation.

**6. Sleep Patterns:** Sleep patterns undergo alteration, often causing adolescents to stay awake later at night and sleep in longer.

**7. Sweat:** A new type of sweat gland develops in the armpit and genital area during puberty, leading to body odor. Maintaining hygiene becomes important to manage this change.

**8. Skin and Hair:** Skin glands on the face, shoulders, and back become more active, producing increased oil, potentially resulting in skin conditions like acne. Teens might also notice their hair becoming oilier, requiring more frequent washing.

**9. Teeth:** Second molars typically emerge around the age of 13, while third molars (wisdom teeth) might appear between 14 and 25 years. Adequate dental care is crucial for your teenager's overall health.

## How you can support your daughter during puberty

Navigating your daughter's journey through puberty offers a pivotal opportunity to strengthen the bond between parent and child. Here's how you can provide essential support during this transformative phase:

- **Empower with Information:** Offer your daughter comprehensive information about her first period. Initiate open conversations that debunk any sense of shame associated with menstruation. Emphasize that periods are a natural part of a young woman's growth and signify an essential rite of passage into adulthood.
- **Supply Necessities:** Equipping your daughter with the necessary sanitary items for home and school reinforces preparedness. Offer guidance on their hygienic use, such as maintaining clean hands when handling pads or tampons.
- **Address Physical Changes:** Discuss the potential for cramping and mood fluctuations accompanying menstruation. Explore strategies to alleviate discomfort, such as using a hot water bottle. For severe cramps, consult a medical professional for advice on suitable remedies.
- **Seek Medical Guidance:** If your daughter hasn't experienced her first period by the age of 16 or 17, or if her menstrual cycles cease after initiation, consulting a doctor is advised to ensure her well-being.
- **Challenging Gender Norms:** Initiate conversations about societal gender stereotypes and challenge preconceived notions. Delve into the notion that girls and women can excel in fields traditionally perceived as male-dominated, and that their strength transcends appearances. Encourage her to admire role models based on their accomplishments rather than external factors.

## How you can support your son during puberty

As your son embarks on the journey of puberty, your role in providing guidance and reassurance is paramount. Here are ways to effectively support him during this transformative phase:

- **Testicular Development:** Offer reassurance that testes often develop unevenly, and it's quite common for one to be positioned lower than the other. However, if your son's testes appear significantly small or if they are not both in the scrotum, consulting a medical professional is recommended for proper evaluation.
- **Body Image and Penis Size:** Address body image concerns by explaining that penis size does not influence sexual function. Assure him that erect penises generally exhibit similar sizes. Emphasize that each individual's development timeline is unique. Discussing nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) and spontaneous erections as normal occurrences helps normalize these experiences.
- **Navigating Gender Stereotypes:** Initiate conversations about societal notions of gender and their implications. Counter stereotypes and conditioning that could impact his self-confidence during this period of pubescent changes. For instance, challenge the idea that penis size defines one's worth and emphasize that emotional expression, vulnerability, and gentleness are integral aspects of masculinity.
- **Breast Growth or Tenderness:** If your son encounters breast growth or tenderness, reassure him that these experiences are part of the process and entirely normal. Explain that any discomfort is likely to subside as his chest broadens.

- **Physical Growth and Confidence:**

Address concerns about body size by assuring him that growth takes time and is unique for everyone. Reiterate that his physical development will unfold in due course, ensuring he feels secure and positive about his own progression.

As your child enters the potentially challenging realm of puberty, prioritizing your own well-being is paramount. Puberty signifies the initiation of their journey into adulthood, marking a significant transition for both you and your child. Here are valuable insights to consider as you navigate this evolving landscape:

- **Acknowledging Transformation:**

Pause to recognize that puberty marks the onset of your child's evolution into an adult. This journey brings changes not only to your child but also to your role as a parent and the intricate fabric of your family dynamics.

- **Embracing Change:** Embrace the notion that change is an integral part of this phase. Your child's growth and development may introduce new dynamics to your relationship. Welcoming these changes with an open heart can foster a deeper connection between you and your child.

- **Letting Go of Absolute Control:**

Understand that as your child matures into a young adult, their journey will encompass personal choices and life directions that you may not have absolute control over. Embrace this natural progression, recognizing that it's an opportunity for them to shape their own path.

## Good-To-Know



**Always remember that you are the one who knows your child best. If you have any concerns about their development, don't hesitate to seek advice from your doctor.**

## 4.3 Reinforcing Personal Boundaries and Consent

In Section 3 we introduced the concept of boundaries and consent in the context of friendship and other relationships. In this section, we will discuss boundaries and consent in the context of relationships with the opposite sex.

### Boundaries

Boundaries are essential limits that individuals set to define when certain behaviors, whether their own or someone else's, are not acceptable and make them uncomfortable. Various factors shape our boundaries, including cultural norms, family dynamics, religious beliefs, education, and environmental influences. Additionally, personal life experiences and individual personalities play a role in determining our comfort levels with different interactions or activities.

#### Types of Boundaries:

Within our interpersonal interactions, various forms of boundaries serve as protective markers for our well-being and autonomy. Here are the distinct types of boundaries that establish a framework for respectful and healthy relationships:

**1. Physical Boundaries:** These concealed yet deeply personal limits establish rules concerning our bodies and personal space. These boundaries can adapt depending on the individuals present and are crucial in safeguarding our physical well-being and privacy. They also encompass the fundamental right to consent before any form of physical touch occurs.

**2. Emotional Boundaries:** Emotional boundaries play a pivotal role in preserving our inner thoughts and feelings. They carve out a secure realm where we can openly express our emotions while determining the extent to which we are comfortable sharing with others. Violations of emotional boundaries manifest when our sentiments are trivialized, criticized, or when we divulge an excessive amount of information, leading to an "unhealthy" level of vulnerability.

**3. Intellectual Boundaries:** These boundaries revolve around our intellectual explorations and contemplations. Violations may arise when our ideas are disregarded or when our eagerness for respectful discourse and comprehension is dismissed by others.

**4. Sexual Boundaries:** A foundation of healthy sexual relationships is the presence of sexual boundaries. These boundaries encompass mutual consent, a deep respect for one another, understanding of emotional and physical sexual desires and preferences, and the fundamental right to privacy.

**5. Material Boundaries:** Pertaining to our possessions and personal belongings, material boundaries delineate our ownership. Transgressions can occur when our belongings are damaged, borrowed items are not returned, or when our possessions are wielded manipulatively within relationships.

**6. Time Boundaries:** Recognizing the value of time, time boundaries dictate its usage. Effectively setting time boundaries involves the ability to decline commitments, prioritize tasks, and appreciate the significance of others' time.

## Consent

Everyone wants to have a safe, fun, and exciting physical relationship with others. Consent is a necessary and important factor to ensure both people involved feel safe and comfortable. Consent involves your child or teen knowing and respecting their own boundaries and those of others.

Understanding consent has two sides. The first is knowing they can joyfully say yes if they want. It's also embracing the fact that a person has the right to choose to say yes or no.

### Talking about Consent with Young Children

Here are some tips that will help your child begin to understand consent:

- **Fostering Ownership:** Assist your child in recognizing that their body belongs to them, reinforcing their right to make choices concerning their own body.
- **Body Language Awareness:** Encourage your child to be attuned to the body language of others. This skill allows them to interpret cues about personal boundaries. For instance, someone might step back slightly to safeguard their personal space or shift away when someone encroaches upon their comfort zone.
- **Role-Playing Scenarios:** Engage in role-playing exercises with your child to equip them with responses in situations where they feel uneasy or uncertain.
- **Voice of Empowerment:** Instill in your child the importance of voicing their discomfort. Encourage them to express their feelings if something doesn't feel right to them.
- **Practicing Consent:** Teach your child the

value of seeking consent. Encourage them to ask for permission before initiating actions that might impact another person's boundaries, such as asking for a hug.

- **Digital Boundaries:** Educate your child about online safety, elucidating the significance of safeguarding their privacy. Explain the need to acquire consent before sharing online content related to someone else, such as photos or videos.

### Sexual Consent

Sexual interactions/activities encompass various forms of engagement, from kissing and sexual touching to sexual intercourse. The scope of sexual intercourse encompasses oral, anal, vaginal, and manual activities. Central to these interactions is the concept of consent, which entails unanimous agreement and a lucid understanding of the nature of the engagement. It's vital to note that consent must be obtained separately for each distinct sexual activity, without exception. At its core, sexual consent upholds the fundamental right of every individual to autonomously decide their participation in sexual engagements.

### Tips for Talking about Sexual Consent with Older Children and Teens

It's important to talk to your child or teen about consent. Here are some tips for talking about sexual consent:

- **Share Family Values and Sexuality:** Begin by discussing your family's values and beliefs surrounding sexuality. This foundation sets the tone for open and honest conversations.
- **Address Personal Boundaries:** Delve into the topic of personal boundaries, emphasizing their significance in fostering respectful relationships. Encourage your child to reflect on scenarios where clarity about boundaries might be vital.



- **Explore Consent and its Complexities:**

Engage in conversations about sexual consent, as well as themes like coercion, harassment, manipulation, and sexual assault. Assure your child that their voice matters, and you're always available to listen to them.

- **Discuss Consequences:** Outline the social and emotional repercussions of sexual assault. Equip your child with an understanding of the far-reaching impacts, reinforcing the importance of being cautious about consent.

- **Emphasize Privacy:** Address the importance of safeguarding their own privacy and respecting the privacy of others. Discuss online safety, the implications of sexting, and the significance of not sharing images without proper consent.

### Important Points about Sexual Consent

When it comes to sexual consent, there are some important ideas to understand and talk about with your child.

- **Consent is freely given. Agreeing to do something is consent only if the person wants it.**

- If a person feels forced, or there's something to lose by saying 'no', it's not consent.
- If a person pressures, pesters, or guilt trips someone into doing something, they don't have consent.
- If a person fears for their safety or fears the loss of a relationship if they disagree, it isn't consent.
- 'No' always means 'no' whether given verbally or non-verbally. A lack of a positive, freely given 'yes' is also a 'no'.

- **Silence, not answering, or not resisting physically is not consent.**

- **People who are drunk, high, sleeping, or unconscious can't consent in the legal or practical sense. To clearly talk about consent, both people need to be sober and alert. Hence, for consent to happen, a person must have the chance to communicate 'no'.**

- **Flirting, clothing, sexual texts, or social media messages are not consent. Consent can't be implied based on these things.**

- **Everyone agrees and clearly knows what they're agreeing to. A healthy consent talk includes asking for consent and giving a clear answer.**

- If there isn't agreement at first, then they work out a solution both can agree to.
- When someone consents, they are confident in their decision.
- Body language and what is said should both give the same message.
- If there is any doubt, they need to ask again to ensure they have true consent.

- **Consent can't be assumed.**

- Your child or teen needs to know that they can't assume they have consent because they're close to someone.
- They also can't assume they have consent because they got it for the same activity before.
- They must ask and be given consent each time an activity begins, changes, or continues.

- **All those involved need to feel safe and comfortable.**

- It is important to feel safe and comfortable with themselves, their body, and the situation.

- It creates a setting where each person can freely participate in conversations about consent.
- It also makes it much more likely that when they engage in any activity, it will be positive for everyone.
- Teach your child or teen that consent can be taken away at any time. For this reason, they must keep checking that they have consent during any activity.

- **Consent is necessary for sexting.**

- If your teen decides to send a sext, it should always be their choice.
- Sending a sext one time doesn't mean they have to do it again.
- Sending a private sext to someone doesn't give that person permission to share it with other people.



## Good-To-Know

The term sexting stands for a combination of sex and texting. Sexting is the act of sending sexual text messages.



## Good-To-Know

While media undoubtedly plays a role in shaping pre-teen and teenage behavior and attitudes, it's essential to recognize that it is just one of several influences. Factors such as family dynamics, friends and peers, cultural background, and more can also have significant impacts. In many cases, these personal influences can be even more powerful than the influence of media. It's crucial for parents and caregivers to consider the broader context of their child's life when understanding their development and decision-making processes.

## 4.4 Addressing Media Influence and Stereotypes

Social media and other forms of media have a significant impact on pre-teen and adolescent attitudes and behaviours. They can handle the pressure put on them better if they are aware of the media's influence. Open conversations and encouraging questioning can be effective ways of assisting them in navigating social media and other media influences. Teenagers and pre-teens have the ability to be critical consumers of media messages. They do not simply consume everything they see on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube. They can develop the skills needed to critically assess and manage media influence as they become more aware of the brands and images promoted through media.

Media influence on this age group can be both deliberate and direct, as seen in advertisements specifically targeting children and teenagers. Additionally, indirect influence occurs through sexualized content on various platforms and exposure to violent imagery and coarse language in news media, documentaries, video games, and song lyrics. Though not directly aimed at pre-teens, they may encounter such content as it pops up as adverts or within the media they consume. Such influences can shape their perception of what is considered 'normal' behavior and appearance.

### Positive social media and other media influences on pre-teens and teenagers

Media can have positive influences on the behavior and attitudes of pre-teens and teenagers in various aspects of their lives.

- **Citizenship**

Engaging with news media nurtures the inclination of pre-teens and teenagers to immerse themselves in significant social and political matters, such as the critical issue of climate change. This exposure can ignite their drive to actively participate as responsible citizens within their communities.

- **Health and lifestyle**

Social media and diverse media outlets serve as conduits for crucial health promotion messages directed at pre-teens and teenagers. These messages encompass areas such as youth mental health, prevention of depression and suicide, fostering positive relationships, and endorsing wholesome dietary and lifestyle practices.

- **Identity**

Well-crafted narratives portrayed in television shows and films offer a platform for pre-teens and teenagers to delve into facets of their identity, encompassing matters like sexuality, relationships, gender dynamics, and ethical considerations.

- **New Knowledge and Information**

Educational programs extend valuable learning experiences to pre-teens, facilitating the acquisition of knowledge. Engaging in discussions with parents about the content of such shows amplifies their capacity to glean insights beyond sensory stimuli.

- **Problem-Solving Skills**

Tailored applications and games designed for their age cohort empower pre-teens to refine critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers and parents staying abreast

of these technological advancements can play a pivotal role in nurturing their ongoing learning journey.

## Negative social media and other media influences on pre-teens and teenagers

Media messages can significantly impact pre-teen and teenage behavior and attitudes, especially in areas like self-image, body image, health, and citizenship.

### • Self-image and body image

Media platforms, including social media and advertising, possess the ability to shape self-image and body perception in profound ways. The prevalence of meticulously staged and digitally enhanced images on social media can trigger feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Exposure to idealized body types, often portraying "thin" or "muscly" ideals, can impact body image and influence eating behaviors. These influences hold greater sway when not balanced by counter-narratives that challenge the perception that "thin equals beauty."

### • Health and lifestyle

Social media and various media outlets hold sway over the choices made by pre-teens and teenagers regarding their health and lifestyle. Media messages may inadvertently normalize or glamourize unhealthy behaviors, portraying junk food, smoking, vaping, alcohol consumption, and drug use as "normal," stylish, or reflective of maturity.

### • Citizenship

Fostering responsible citizenship necessitates access to reliable and substantiated information for pre-teens and teenagers. However, media, particularly on digital platforms, can be harnessed negatively, particularly during critical events like elections. The proliferation of fake news and deep fakes can mislead your child about public figures, politicians, or celebrities. Online forums can inadvertently endorse

biased viewpoints or propagate prejudiced attitudes towards certain segments of society, influencing your child's perspective.

## Media and Gender Stereotype

### How you can help pre-teens and teenagers handle media influence

Navigating media messages is an essential skill for modern life, and you can support your child in developing it through these approaches:

**1. Set reasonable time limits:** Establish home rules to regulate the number of hours your child spends online, promoting balanced media consumption.

### 2. Be a positive online role model:

Demonstrate the kind of responsible online behavior you want your child to adopt, emphasizing respect and digital etiquette.

**3. Engage in media discussions:** Discuss media messages with your child to help them understand the influence of social media and other platforms. For instance, if they watch beauty channels on YouTube, talk about product advertising and sponsorship. If they enjoy violent or crime-based games, address the portrayal of violence, exploitation, and criminal activities, discussing how they would handle such situations in real life.

**4. Encourage critical thinking:** Inspire a questioning attitude in your child when discussing media content. Encourage them to ask questions about facts versus opinions, identify advertising and fake news, recognize bias, and be cautious about the misuse of statistics.

Take an active approach to media discussions with your child. This would help your child develop critical thinking skills and become more aware of the intentions and influences behind the media they consume. You could select a YouTube channel or an Instagram

account they follow and ask them questions like:

- Who is the creator behind it?
- What do you think motivates them to create this content?
- What are their intentions or expectations from the viewers, including you?
- How does the content make you feel?
- Do you think they want to evoke specific emotions in you? Why do you think so?

**Extend the media discussions to celebrities and influencers as well. For your child to gain a better understanding of the influences and impact that celebrities and influencers can have on their perceptions and choices, encourage your child to reflect on the following questions:**

- What is the reason behind my admiration for these individuals?
- Do the portrayals of celebrities and influencers seem realistic, or is it a carefully crafted image?
- How might they be different from their online personas in real life?
- What values does this person promote through their actions and content?
- How does following this person's content make me feel about myself?
- What could be the underlying motives for them to endorse products or activities?
- Are there clear indications that this person is an influencer and might be endorsed by brands?

**During an election campaign, engage in discussions with your child about political news and memes which would help them**

**develop a more informed and discerning perspective on political messaging and its potential influence on public opinion during elections. Encourage them to ask the following questions:**


- What are the main ideas being promoted in this news story or meme?
- Who is the author of this story or the creator of the meme, and what could be their intentions or motivations behind it?
- How might this meme impact the opinions of voters during the election?
- What are the verifiable facts and information presented in this content?

**To reduce the impact of advertising on your child, have conversations about how advertisements not only sell products but also ideas. Encourage your child to ask the following questions:**

- Does this advertisement associate the product with a specific lifestyle or image?
- How does the advertisement make you feel about the product?
- What messages does this advertisement convey about how people should appear, dress, behave, eat, or drink?

**If your child spends significant time on online forums, it's essential to encourage them to consider the following questions:**

- What are the main topics of discussion on the forum?
- What are the attitudes towards ethnicity, gender, and sex expressed on the forum? Are any of these attitudes biased or hateful?
- How does participating in the forum make you feel? Do you feel safe, happy, or uncomfortable?



Children and teenagers may require assistance in transitioning away from negative forums and towards those that reflect their values. For example, if your child encounters a negative forum within a game, you could suggest that they take a break from the game and seek out another game to enjoy. Encourage your child to strike a balance between media use and other activities that expose them to a diverse range of influences, such as physical quests, creative endeavors, and face-to-face social interactions. Peers, community mentors, and family members may be included, in addition to the media. Involve your child in local community groups, sporting clubs, or mentoring programs to expose them to real-life, positive role models. This way, they can broaden their horizons and develop valuable connections beyond the digital realm.

# Pre-Adolescence (12-14 years)

## Objectives

- To explore the rights and responsibilities related to sex, emphasizing the importance of promoting autonomy, informed decision-making, and respecting the rights and boundaries of others.
- To guide parents in navigating emotional changes and relationships during various stages of life, fostering emotional intelligence and healthy interactions.
- To educate parents about the reproductive system and menstruation, addressing common concerns and misconceptions related to these topics.
- To discuss the concepts of gender and gender equality, promoting awareness and understanding of the difference between equality and equity.
- To emphasize the significance of promoting healthy body image and self-esteem, offering strategies to build confidence and resilience in individuals.



## 5.1 Understanding Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)

In order to make good decisions about their sexual and reproductive health (SRH), young people need reliable information, an opportunity to develop healthy values and attitudes, and the skills to behave consistently with their knowledge and values. This is where parents come in, these resources have provided information to enable parents to start communicating with their children from a very early age. You can be one of the reliable sources where your children can get factual information about sexual and reproductive health.

Let's start with the following definitions.

### Sex

The term "sex" denotes the intrinsic biological attributes that differentiate humans into distinct female and male categories. While these biological traits may not always be entirely distinct, they commonly classify individuals as either male or female. In casual conversations, "sex"

often alludes to "sexual activity." However, when delving into dialogues about sexuality and sexual well-being, precision and lucidity are paramount. In this context, the definition stated above is preferred to foster exactness in communication and understanding.

### Sexual Health

Sexual health is a holistic state of well-being that includes physical, emotional, mental, and social aspects of sexuality. It is more than just the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. To achieve sexual health, individuals must cultivate a positive and respectful attitude towards sexuality and sexual relationships, allowing them to engage in pleasurable and safe sexual encounters free of coercion, discrimination, or violence. To promote sexual health, it is critical to honour and protect all individuals' sexual rights, ensuring that they are respected, safeguarded, and fulfilled. (WHO, 2006)

### Key conceptual elements of sexual health

- Sexual health focuses on overall well-being, going beyond disease prevention.
- It encompasses respect, safety, and freedom from discrimination and violence.
- It is closely tied to the fulfillment of fundamental human rights.
- It is relevant at all stages of life, not limited to reproductive years, but also for the young and elderly.
- It is significantly impacted by gender norms, roles, expectations, and power dynamics.
- Understanding sexual health requires considering specific social, economic, and political contexts.

### Sexuality

Throughout life, sexuality is an important aspect of being human, encompassing sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships are all ways in which sexuality is experienced and expressed. While sexuality can encompass all of these dimensions, they are not always experienced or expressed. The interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious, and spiritual factors influences sexuality. (WHO, 2006)

Your child's sexuality is an important part of his or her identity and personal development. Their understanding and expression of their sexuality may evolve as they grow and experience different stages of life. It is critical for your child to be at ease with their sexuality because it

influences their overall well-being and self-esteem. You are your child's primary role model. You can help your child by modelling and reinforcing values and beliefs about safety, responsibility, honest communication, and respect in relationships by respecting your partner and discussing how to stay safe.

### Understanding Teenage Sexual Behaviour, Sexual Attraction, and Sexual Identity

During their teenage years, most teenagers will experience a natural and powerful urge to experiment with sexual behavior, which is a normal part of their development. However, it's essential to recognize that not all teenage relationships involve sex. Alongside their sexual curiosity, teenagers are also undergoing emotional and social maturation, seeking romantic intimacy and ways to express love and affection. Additionally, they may be curious about exploring adult behavior. It's crucial to understand that sexual attraction is distinct from gender identity, which represents a person's sense of who they are in terms of being male, female, both, or neither. It is important to always remember that:

- **Your Child's Learning Environment:** Your child will inevitably encounter discussions about sexuality in school, conversations with peers, and information on the topic through online platforms and social media. However, it's worth noting that young people do place a degree of trust in the information they receive from their parents.

- **The Power of Open Conversations:** Engaging in conversations about sex and sexuality with your child proves to be an invaluable tool. Such dialogues aid them in sifting through the myriad messages they encounter from external sources. This proactive approach can empower your child to make positive, well-informed decisions—both now and in their future endeavors.



## Talking With Your Child About Sex

Here are some helpful ideas and strategies to facilitate open conversations with your child about sex:

- **Start early:** Commence discussions about sex and sexuality from an early age. This foundation normalizes these topics, portraying them as natural aspects of life. Such early conversations set the stage for future dialogues that are more comfortable and candid.
- **Be prepared:** Be prepared for a spectrum of inquiries from your child—ranging from puberty and periods to contraception, wet dreams, and masturbation. Equipping yourself with accurate knowledge empowers you to provide informed and supportive responses.
- **Address important topics:** Some subjects are pivotal for every young person to comprehend, including concepts of consent and safe sex. Ensure these fundamental aspects are covered to arm your child with the understanding they need for informed decision-making.
- **Read your child's signals:** Tune in to your child's nonverbal cues to discern whether the

moment is appropriate for an in-depth conversation. If your child is occupied, tired, or preoccupied, it might be wise to choose a more receptive time. Remember, you can revisit the conversation when they're more receptive and engaged.

## Young people with additional needs

Speaking about sex and sexuality is equally important for children with special needs. Autistic teenagers, for example, develop sexually in the same way that other teenagers do, but they may require additional assistance in developing the social skills and understanding that come with sexual development. Autistic teenagers require assistance in understanding sexual feelings, cues, and relationships. A clear understanding of consent, good and bad touch, and masturbation aids in the protection of autistic teenagers. Visual supports and social stories can help autistic teenagers understand sexuality.

Navigating sexual relationships and sexual health can be crucial for autistic teenagers as they enter puberty and begin to explore their sexual feelings. It is critical to have open discussions about these topics with your child. Teaching them how to interpret sexual cues from others can boost their self-esteem, increase safety, and prevent unintentional harm.

It's natural for both you and your child to experience unease when discussing topics related to sex and sexuality.

## Good-To-Know

The application of existing human rights to sexuality and sexual health constitutes sexual rights. Sexual rights protect all people's rights to fulfil and express their sexuality and enjoy sexual health, with due regard for the rights of others and within a framework of protection against discrimination." (WHO, 2006, updated 2010)

## 5.2 Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Responsibilities

### Sexual Rights

Sexual rights encompass the fulfillment of sexual health, which is closely tied to the respect, protect, fulfill obligations of States for ensuring the full realization of human rights. These rights, recognized in international and regional documents, national laws, and consensus agreements, are extended to the realm of sexuality and sexual health to form sexual rights.

At its core, sexual rights champion the preservation of individuals' capacity to express and fulfill their sexual identities while upholding the rights of others and being shielded from discrimination. Within this framework, pivotal rights underpin the realization of sexual health. These include the rights to equality and non-discrimination, protection from torture or inhuman treatment, personal privacy, access to the highest attainable standard of health (including sexual health), and the freedom to enter into marriages and form families founded on consent.

Furthermore, individuals possess the prerogative to determine the timing and extent of their parenthood, access comprehensive information and education, exercise freedom of expression, and seek recourse when their fundamental rights are infringed upon. The responsible exercise of these rights is paramount, ensuring that the dignity and autonomy of every individual are preserved and respected in harmony with the rights of others.

### Tween/Teen Autonomy

Fostering autonomy assists teenagers in forming emotional, behavioral, and values-oriented judgments as they prepare for adulthood, though this can occasionally

lead to conflicts between parents and adolescents. Providing encouragement for your adolescent's autonomy development is of paramount importance, as it occurs during two pivotal life stages: early childhood and adolescence. Autonomy can be defined as the capacity to experience, act, and think independently, encompassing self-governance and the freedom to make decisions.

Throughout adolescence, young individuals initiate the process of constructing their own identity, distinct from that of their parents, and cultivating independent thought. The parent-child relationship during this phase can either nurture or jeopardize autonomy in adolescents. Striking a harmonious equilibrium between granting independence and offering support is crucial, as both excessive autonomy and excessive control carry potential risks.

Parents of teenagers should recognize that adolescence signifies the concluding phase of childhood. The striving for independence by adolescents arises from their journey toward self-governance and the establishment of self-reliant adulthood, separate from their parental figures.

To nurture healthy, autonomous adults, adolescents can practice autonomy in the following ways:

- **Emotional Autonomy:** This involves seeking personal solutions to emotional challenges rather than relying solely on parents or peers for support. In early adolescence, parents may be viewed more critically, and emotional support may be sought from peers. As they mature, teenagers become more self-reliant in making emotionally charged decisions.



## Good-To-Know

During the tween and teen years, young individuals might showcase their independence by challenging or occasionally disregarding the guidelines established by their parents. Additionally, they will begin asserting distinct preferences in matters like clothing, music, and potentially even in social or political viewpoints.

- **Behavioral Autonomy:** Teens develop the ability to make decisions and take actions based on their own reasoning rather than merely copying others. As they grow and gain abstract thinking skills, they become more confident in their decision-making abilities, moving towards achieving true behavioral autonomy.

- **Values-Based Autonomy:** Value autonomy empowers adolescents to make decisions based on their own independent beliefs and attitudes in spiritual, political, and moral matters. This allows them to form their own conclusions about their values, rather than solely adopting the values they were raised with or those of their peers.

### How Parents Can Support Their Teens' Autonomy

Guiding teenagers through their journey of self-discovery involves striking a balance between support and autonomy. As parents, your role transforms into that of a guiding facilitator, assisting your teens as they learn to navigate their lives independently. Here are some strategic steps to cultivate their autonomy while offering a safety net of guidance:

1. **Establish Clear Rules:** Outline a set of consistent expectations regarding curfews, dating, responsibilities, and privileges. These rules provide a framework for autonomy, letting your teen understand their freedoms within defined limits. Be open to renegotiating these boundaries as your teen's growth continues.

2. **Improve Communication:** Forge a foundation of trust through candid and transparent conversations. Discuss the rationale behind rules, inviting your teen

to express their perspectives. Approach these dialogues with empathy and an understanding that their viewpoint matters.

3. **Value Peer Influence:** Acknowledge the profound impact of peer relationships on your teen's development. Rather than disregarding their friends' viewpoints, encourage your teen to analyze their friends' choices in various scenarios, prompting critical thinking about potential consequences.

4. **Seek Discussion Opportunities:** Create an environment where discussions about values, ethics, and future aspirations are encouraged. Engage in exchanges that allow your teen to voice their thoughts while being exposed to diverse perspectives, including your own.

5. **Nurture Decision-Making:** Provide opportunities for your teen to practice decision-making, starting from personal choices like style and hobbies. Involve them in family decisions, offering them a sense of contribution and responsibility in matters like vacations, celebrations, and day-to-day plans.

6. **Support Responsible Freedom:** As your teen matures, gradually grant them more autonomy, fostering a sense of responsibility that aligns with their newfound freedoms. This balance empowers them to make informed choices while understanding the weight of their decisions.

7. **Respectful Guidance:** While entrusting them with autonomy, remain a steady source of guidance. Offer advice without imposing your perspective, recognizing that their unique journey may lead to distinct conclusions.

## 5.3 Navigating Emotional Changes and Relationships

Navigating the teenage years alongside your child presents both challenges and rewards. Puberty, a transformative phase, brings about physical, hormonal, and emotional changes in both boys and girls.

The emotional shifts experienced during adolescence are highly individual and can evolve over time. Your teenager might find a newfound sense of empowerment, embracing fresh responsibilities and making independent choices. They could also prioritize building stronger social connections beyond the family circle and aspire for greater self-reliance in specific aspects of their lives. Conversely, some teens might grapple with frustration when confronted with hurdles, leading to negative emotional experiences.

Throughout this period, your teen's emotions, energy levels, and sleep patterns could vary, occasionally posing challenges in your interactions with them. Nevertheless, it's essential to recognize that these emotional fluctuations are integral to their maturation. As a parent or adult figure, you play a pivotal role in guiding your teen through these emotional changes. By offering patience, support, and empathy, you can provide the necessary assistance for them to navigate this transformative journey successfully. Your presence and attentive listening can significantly contribute to bolstering their emotional well-being and fostering a strong parent-child relationship.

### Social changes in adolescence

Adolescence brings about significant social changes in your child's life, such as the exploration of their identity and place in the world. They may experiment with various clothing styles, subcultures, music, art, and friendship groups during this time,

influenced by friends, family, media, and culture.

- **Independence** becomes a growing priority for your child, as they desire more freedom in making decisions about their activities, transportation, and spending.
- **Responsibility** is another aspect that your child may embrace, taking on tasks both at home and school, such as cooking dinner or participating in the school council. Encouraging them to take on more responsibility can be beneficial.
- **Seeking new experiences**, including some risky ones, is a normal part of adolescence as they explore their limits and individuality. However, their developing teenage brains may occasionally lead them to overlook potential consequences and risks.
- **Values and morals** start to solidify during this period, and your words and actions play a significant role in shaping your child's sense of right and wrong. They may also question more things as they develop a stronger set of individual values.
- **Influences from friends and peers** can significantly impact your child's behavior, appearance, interests, self-concept, and self-esteem. As a parent, you still have a substantial influence on their long-term decisions, values, and moral development.
- **During adolescence**, your child might begin to have romantic relationships or go on 'dates,' but these relationships may not necessarily be intimate. Intimate or sexual relationships might occur later on in life for some young people.
- **The internet and social media** have both benefits and risks for your child's social

development. Engaging in open conversations with your child is essential to protect them from potential social media risks and ensure their internet safety.

## Emotional changes in adolescence

Adolescence ushers in a series of transformations within your child's emotional realm: their moods and sentiments can surge with intensity and unpredictability, as their developing brain grapples with mastering the control and expression of emotions in a more mature manner. As they mature, their sensitivity to others' feelings improves, enabling them to adeptly gauge and comprehend the emotions of those around them. Nonetheless, this phase of development can occasionally lead to misconstrued facial expressions or body language.

The emergence of self-consciousness frequently impacts teenage self-esteem, and as physical changes unfold, your child might grapple with self-consciousness concerning their outward appearance. Engaging in comparisons of their physique with that of friends and peers can contribute to these sentiments. Additionally, the art of decision-making is still evolving, and there may be instances where your child acts impulsively without fully evaluating the potential outcomes or associated risks. Gradually, they are assimilating insights into the repercussions of their actions.

## Navigating Intense Disagreements

You might notice an uptick in disagreements between you and your teenager, and rest assured, this is a typical occurrence. Your sincere attempts to provide guidance for making sound decisions may not always align with what

they're seeking to hear. As your child strives for greater autonomy, they're embarking on a journey of questioning various viewpoints, including your own.

Keep your focus on the ultimate objective: aiding your teen's positive development. Keep in mind that their intention isn't to provoke you; they might not fully grasp how their words can impact you. It's important to remember that this phase is transient. Turbulence in communication is often most pronounced during the teenage years and signifies your child's progression toward maturity.

## Supporting your adolescent's social and emotional development

Supporting your child's social and emotional development during adolescence is crucial for their journey to adulthood. Here are some strategies to help you in this important role:

- **Exemplify positive behavior:** Display respectful and understanding relationships with peers, family, and colleagues as a role model. Teach your child healthy methods of handling challenging emotions and conflicts. When you're feeling overwhelmed, illustrate effective communication by expressing your emotions and suggesting a better time for discussion.
- **Get to know your child's friends:** Establish a connection with your child's friends and create an open environment in your home for them. This demonstrates that you appreciate your child's friendships, which play a crucial role in their self-esteem. If any concerns arise about specific friends, gently steer your child toward alternative social circles without outright criticism or bans.

- **Engage in active listening to your child's emotions:**

When your child seeks to communicate, give them your full attention and listen attentively. Respect their emotions and viewpoints, even when they differ from your own. Active listening strengthens your bond and helps your child feel heard and valued.

- **Share your feelings openly:**

By expressing your emotions when reacting to your child's actions, you teach them how to identify and manage emotions effectively. Displaying positive and constructive ways of interacting with others is accomplished through transparent emotional expression.

- **Promote open discussions about relationships, sex, and sexuality:**

Foster trust by addressing these topics with your child in a non-judgmental manner. Seize

everyday opportunities to broach these subjects instead of relying on a single extensive conversation. Correct misunderstandings and provide accurate information. Utilize these talks to cover topics like appropriate sexual behavior, consent, sexting, and pornography. Reassure your child of your ongoing availability to address their inquiries and concerns.

- **Accentuate the positive:**

Amid conflicts or moody phases, highlight and reinforce the favorable aspects of your child's emotional and social development. Commend them for being a supportive friend, assisting with household chores, supporting their siblings, or dedicating effort to their studies. Commemorating their positive actions encourages wholesome growth and advancement.



## 5.4 Understanding Reproductive System and Menstruation

### The Reproductive Process: Creating New Life

Reproduction is the biological mechanism through which organisms generate offspring similar to themselves. Within the context of human reproduction, two types of sex cells, or gametes, exist. The male gamete is known as sperm, while the female gamete is referred to as an egg or ovum. For the process of reproduction to occur, these male and female gametes must unite through sexual intercourse or artificial insemination, resulting in fertilization. Fertilization, the merging of sperm and egg, gives rise to a fertilized egg, scientifically termed a zygote. Subsequently, the zygote undergoes a series of transformations, developing from an embryo into a fetus.

### The Male Reproductive System

The male reproductive system contains internal and external parts. Internal parts are inside your body, and external parts are outside your body. Together, these organs help you urinate, have sexual intercourse, and make biological children. The organs in the male reproductive system perform the following:

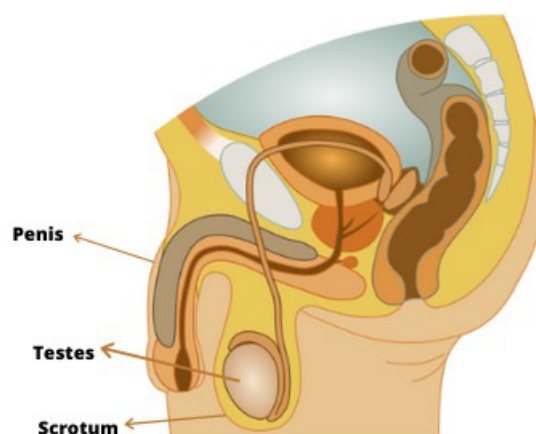
- Produce, maintain, and transport sperm cells and semen. Sperm cells are male reproductive cells. Semen is the protective fluid around sperm.
- Discharge sperm.
- Produce and secrete male sex hormones.

External male reproductive organs are: The penis, scrotum, and testicles make up the male external reproductive organs.

• **Penis:** The penis is the male organ used for urination and sexual intercourse. It has spongy tissue which can fill with blood to cause an erection. It contains the urethra, which carries both urine and semen. The average penis is about 3.5 inches (8.9 cm) when flaccid (soft) and a little more than 5 inches (13 cm) when erect.

• **Scrotum:** This is the loose pouch-like sac of skin that hangs behind and below the penis. It contains the testicles (also called testes), as well as many nerves and blood vessels. This bag of skin helps to regulate the temperature of the testicles, which need to be kept cooler than body temperature to produce sperm.

• **Testes:** Testes (or testicles) are a pair of egg-shaped glands that sit in the scrotum, on the outside of the body. They produce sperm and testosterone, which is the male sex hormone. In a male who has reached sexual maturity, the testes make and store millions of tiny sperm cells.



## Internal male reproductive organs

The internal organs of the male reproductive system, are also called accessory organs. They are:

- **Epididymis:** The Epididymis is a highly coiled tube that lies at the back of the testes. It transports and stores sperm cells that are produced in the testes. It is also the job of the epididymis to bring the sperm to maturity since the sperm that emerge from the testes are immature and incapable of fertilization.

- **Vas Deferens:** The vas deferens is a long, muscular tube that travels from the epididymis into the pelvic cavity, just behind the urinary bladder. The vas deferens transports mature sperm to the urethra in preparation for ejaculation.

- **Ejaculatory ducts:** These are formed by the fusion of the vas deferens and the seminal vesicles. The ejaculatory ducts empty into the urethra. The ejaculatory ducts move through the prostate, where they collect fluid to add to semen. They empty into the urethra.

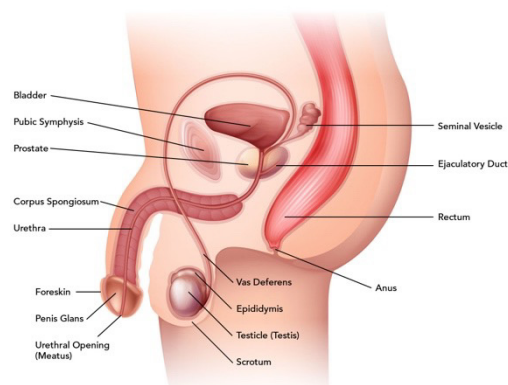
- **Urethra:** The urethra is the tube that carries urine from the bladder outside of the body. In males, it has the additional function of ejaculating semen when the man reaches orgasm. When the penis is erect during sex, the flow of urine is blocked from the urethra, allowing only semen to be ejaculated at orgasm.

- **Seminal vesicles:** The seminal vesicles are sac-like pouches that attach to the vas deferens near the base of the bladder. Seminal vesicles make up 80% of the ejaculatory fluid, including fructose. Fructose is an energy source for sperm and helps them move (motility).

- **Prostate gland:** The prostate is a walnut-sized gland that rests below the

bladder, in front of the rectum. The prostate adds additional fluid to ejaculate, which helps nourish sperm.

- **Bulbourethral (Cowper) glands:** The bulbourethral glands are pea-sized structures on the sides of the urethra, just below the prostate. They create a clear, slippery fluid that empties directly into the urethra. This fluid lubricates the urethra and neutralizes any acids that may remain in the urine



## How the male reproductive system works

The functioning of the male reproductive system hinges on hormonal regulation. The primary hormones governing the male reproductive system encompass follicle-stimulating hormone, luteinizing hormone, and testosterone. Follicle-stimulating hormone holds a pivotal role in facilitating the generation of sperm (spermatogenesis), ensuring a consistent production of spermatozoa. Luteinizing hormone prompts the secretion of testosterone, a key player in the sperm production process. Testosterone assumes responsibility for the development of masculine traits, encompassing enhanced muscle mass, body fat distribution, bone density, growth of facial hair, deepening of the voice, and male sexual drive. These hormones collaborate harmoniously to uphold the effective operation of the male reproductive system.



## The Female Reproductive System

Similar to the male reproductive system, the female reproductive system comprises both internal and external organs. The female reproductive organs play roles in sexual activity, fertility, menstruation, and reproduction. These organs fulfill the following functions:

- Emission of eggs, which have the potential for fertilization by sperm
- Synthesis of female sex hormones, including progesterone and estrogen
- Provision of a nurturing environment for a fertilized egg's development during pregnancy
- Assistance in labor and childbirth processes

External female reproductive organs

The function of the external genitals is to protect the internal parts from infection and allow sperm to enter the vagina. The vulva is the collective name for all your external genitals.

- **Labia majora:** The labia majora ("large lips") encloses and protects the other external reproductive organs. During puberty, hair growth occurs on the skin of the labia majora, which also contains sweat and oil-secreting glands.
- **Labia minora:** The labia minora ("small lips") can have a variety of sizes and shapes. They lie just inside the labia majora and surround the opening to the vagina and urethra. This skin is very delicate and can become easily irritated and swollen.
- **Clitoris:** The two labia minora meet at the clitoris. The clitoris is covered by a fold of skin called the prepuce and is very sensitive to stimulation.
- **Vaginal opening:** The vaginal opening allows menstrual blood and babies to exit

your body. Tampons, fingers, sex toys, or penises can go inside the vagina through your vaginal opening.

- **Urethra opening:** The opening to your urethra is the hole through which urination is done.

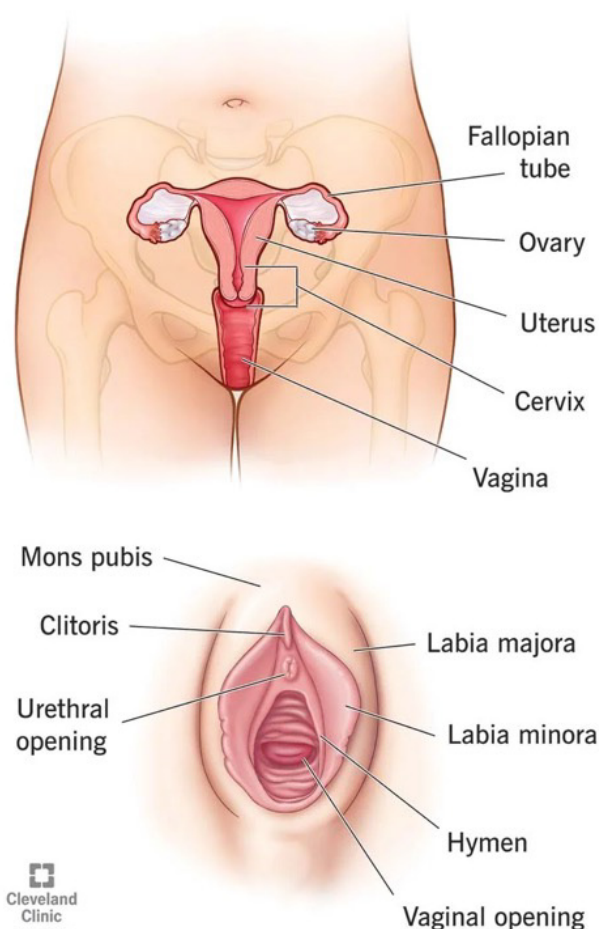
## Internal female reproductive organ

The internal organs of the female reproductive system are:

- **Vagina:** the vagina is a muscular canal that joins the cervix (the lower part of the uterus) to the outside of the body. It can widen to accommodate a baby during delivery and then shrink back to hold something narrow like a tampon. It's lined with mucous membranes that help keep it moist.
- **Cervix:** The cervix is the lowest part of the uterus. A hole in the middle allows sperm to enter and menstrual blood to exit. The cervix opens (dilates) to allow a baby to come out during vaginal childbirth. The cervix is what prevents things like tampons from getting lost inside the female body.
- **Uterus:** The uterus is a hollow, pear-shaped organ that holds a foetus during pregnancy. The uterus is divided into two parts: the cervix and the corpus. The corpus is the larger part of the uterus that expands during pregnancy.
- **Ovaries:** Ovaries are small, oval-shaped glands that are located on either side of the uterus. The ovaries produce eggs and hormones.
- **Fallopian Tubes:** These are narrow tubes that are attached to the upper part of the uterus and serve as pathways for the egg (ovum) to travel from the ovaries to the uterus. Fertilization of an egg by sperm normally occurs in the fallopian tubes. The fertilized egg then moves to the uterus, where it implants into the uterine lining.

## Female reproductive system

*Internal and external*



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## How the female reproductive system works

The female reproductive system undergoes significant changes during a girl's journey to womanhood. When a baby girl is born, her ovaries already contain hundreds of thousands of immature eggs, which remain dormant until puberty. As puberty begins, the pituitary gland in the brain releases hormones that stimulate the ovaries to produce female sex hormones, including estrogen. These hormones play a crucial role in the physical and sexual development of a girl, leading to her transformation into a sexually mature woman. As puberty progresses, girls reach a stage where they start releasing eggs as part of a monthly menstrual cycle. This process, known as ovulation, occurs approximately once a month. During ovulation, one of the ovaries releases a tiny egg into one of the fallopian tubes, where it awaits potential fertilization by sperm. The menstrual cycle is a natural part of a woman's reproductive process and prepares her body for the possibility of pregnancy.

## The menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle is a natural process that occurs in the female reproductive system. It involves a series of changes and events that prepare the body for potential pregnancy. The menstrual cycle typically lasts around 28 days, although it can vary from person to person. During this cycle, the following events take place:

### Stage 1: Follicular Phase (Days 1-14)

- Day 1 marks the beginning of menstruation as the uterine lining is shed. This phase continues as estrogen levels rise and mature an egg in the ovaries.

- Approximately 20 eggs start developing in the ovaries. One dominant follicle and egg will continue maturing.
- Estrogen thickens the uterine lining (endometrium) in preparation for a fertilized egg.
- Cervical mucus becomes thin and slippery, allowing sperm to enter the uterus.

### Stage 2: Ovulation (Day 14)

- The mature egg is released from the dominant follicle - this is ovulation. The egg travels to the fallopian tubes.
- Usually only one egg is released per cycle.

In rare cases, two or more eggs may be released (multiple ovulation).

### Stage 3: Luteal Phase (Days 15-28)

- After ovulation, the follicle turns into the corpus luteum which secretes progesterone.
- Progesterone thickens the uterine lining further and prepares it to receive a fertilized egg.
- If the egg is not fertilized, hormone levels drop, the uterine lining breaks down, and menstruation begins again.

The length of the menstrual cycle varies among individuals, with an average of about 28 days. However, cycles can range from 21 to 40 days, and lengths may vary from month to month. The duration of menstruation (period) is typically around five days, but it can last between two to seven days. The average amount of menstrual blood lost during a period is 3-5 tablespoons, and most girls change their sanitary products about three to six times a day.

The choice of using a pad, tampon, or menstrual cup depends on individual preferences. Experimenting with different methods can help find what works best. If using a tampon, it's essential not to leave it in for more than 8 hours to avoid the risk of toxic shock syndrome. When women reach menopause (around age 45-55), their periods will permanently stop. Women also won't have a period while they are pregnant.

### Premenstrual Syndrome

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) refers to a range of emotional and physical symptoms that can occur in the days leading up to a woman's menstrual period. Symptoms usually begin 1-2 weeks before menstruation starts and go away within a few days after bleeding begins. Common emotional symptoms include mood swings,

irritability, anxiety, depression, changes in appetite, food cravings, trouble sleeping, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and social withdrawal. Common physical symptoms include bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, joint/muscle pain, acne breakouts, and cramps. For some women, PMS symptoms can be severe enough to disrupt work, school, and relationships. However, symptoms typically subside within 4 days of starting one's period. There are various ways to help manage PMS symptoms, including exercise, relaxation techniques, improved sleep habits, healthy eating, vitamin supplements, and medications. Understanding and alleviating PMS can help girls better cope with this stage of the menstrual cycle.

### Menstrual Hygiene Practices

Menstrual hygiene practices refer to the habits and routines that individuals follow to manage their menstrual periods in a clean, safe, and healthy manner. These practices are essential to ensure physical comfort, prevent infections, and maintain overall well-being during menstruation.

Here are some practices to help maintain good menstrual hygiene:

1. Wear lightweight, breathable clothing, such as cotton underwear. Avoid tight fabrics that can trap moisture and heat, creating an environment for germs to thrive.
2. Change menstrual products regularly to prevent bacterial and fungal growth. Prolonged use of pads or period underwear can lead to rashes or infections.
3. Keep the genital area clean by washing the outside of the vagina (vulva) and bottom daily. Use water only to rinse the vulva, as the vagina is a self-cleaning organ. Avoid using chemicals or douching, as they can disrupt the natural pH balance and lead to infections.
4. Use unscented toilet paper, tampons, or






pads to avoid skin irritation and maintain the natural pH balance.

5. Stay hydrated by drinking enough liquids to help flush out the urinary tract and prevent infections like vaginal candidiasis.

6. Track and monitor your menstrual cycle. Irregular periods can be a sign of underlying health conditions, such as

diabetes, thyroid dysfunction, or celiac disease. Use a calendar or a menstrual tracking app to monitor your period regularly.

7. Visit a healthcare provider for regular check-ups to ensure overall reproductive health and address any concerns related to your menstrual cycle.

	 YES	 MAYBE	 NO	
				
<b>SPECIALITY</b>		<b>SANITARY PADS</b>	<b>TAMPONS</b>	<b>MENSTRUAL CUPS</b>
<b>Safe</b>				
<b>Easy to use</b>				
<b>No Toxic Shock Syndrome</b>				
<b>Comfortable to wear</b>				
<b>Upto 12 hour usage</b>				

## Myths and Misconception About Menstruation

Myth	Fact
During periods girls are impure	There is nothing impure about periods. Period is a biological process and nature's way of saying the girl is growing up.
Girls having their periods should not cook or visit sacred places like places of worships	Menstruation is not a sin; it is a natural process. Girls and women can go about their daily activities including worshipping their God.
Sanitary products should be kept and covered when purchasing.	Buying sanitary products is like buying soap or toothpaste. They are all personal hygiene products.
Girls having their periods should not touch or go near plants. The plant will die if they do so.	Plants do not discriminate; they thrive on good care like all humans.
Girls having their periods should sleep in a separate room.	Menstruation is not contagious and causes no harm to anyone else in the same room
Any form of physical activity can disturb menstrual flow	Unless you have severe cramping or excessive blood flow that interferes with your ability to participate in physical activities, there's no reason to refrain from exercise or regular strenuous activities when you have your period. Exercise and playing sports can actually help relieve pain.
A girl should not talk about her periods in public. If she does so she will be shamed publicly.	Talking about periods is like talking about your hair, complexion, and other issues.

## 5.5 Discussing Gender and Gender Equality

### Good-To-Know

Equal rights and opportunities for girls and boys help all children fulfil their potential.

On a daily basis, both girls and boys observe instances of gender inequality within their households and local surroundings. This inequality is apparent in educational materials, media portrayals, and interactions among adults. Such inequality manifests as a bias towards male children, unequal educational opportunities, preconceived notions about suitable behaviors for boys and girls, and a range of discriminatory practices based on gender. Studies have indicated that inflexible gender roles and narrow perceptions of what it means to be masculine or feminine contribute significantly to acts of violence against women. As a result, cultivating an understanding of gender and promoting gender equality within the home emerges as a crucial approach to advance overall gender parity.

### Understanding Terms Related to Gender and Gender Equality

**Sex** pertains to the inherent physiological distinctions between males and females, which are widespread and typically remain relatively constant unless altered through surgical interventions.

**Gender**, on the other hand, encompasses the economic, social, political, and cultural characteristics and prospects linked with identifying as women, men, boys, or girls. It represents a societal concept shaped by individuals and exhibits divergence across different cultures, rendering it devoid of universality.

**Gender stereotypes** encompass notions about masculinity and femininity, prescribing behaviors and capabilities for boys and girls. These preconceived

notions, like the expectation for girls to be obedient and adorable, and for boys to be courageous and refrain from showing emotion, can curtail children's choices, actions, ambitions, and accomplishments, resulting in adverse effects on both individuals and society at large.

**Gender roles** encompass the behaviors, attitudes, and conduct deemed suitable or unsuitable for individuals based on their gender, as defined by cultural norms and traditions. These roles are acquired through learning and can be altered. Challenging gender roles might involve teaching boys how to cook and girls how to address plumbing issues within the household.

**Gender inequality** refers to bias founded on sex or gender, leading to systematic privileges or preferential treatment for one gender over another. It can manifest in various forms, influencing people's lives in diverse ways.

**Gender equality**, in contrast, is the state or condition that ensures women and men enjoy equal human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources. It is considered a fundamental human right. Equality does not imply that women and men, as well as boys and girls, will become identical, but rather that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities should not be dependent on their gender. Gender equality means considering the interests, needs, and priorities of both girls and boys and recognizing the diverse experiences of different groups of women and men.

As young individuals progress through their formative years, they observe and absorb their parents' roles and behaviors, including their financial contributions. Parents assume the initial roles of being their children's primary exemplars, and the perpetuation of

inequality within their presence transmits challenges across generations. This not only directly affects the children, but also carries broader implications for society at large. Children acquire lessons on interpersonal conduct from their parents; for instance, when boys witness their fathers treating their mothers with consideration, they are more inclined to extend the same respect to other females. Conversely, girls who witness their mothers enduring mistreatment or disrespect from their fathers might internalize such conduct as typical and may be more prone to tolerating similar mistreatment in their own lives. By role-modeling respect and parity within the dynamics of the family, parents can exert a positive impact on their children's attitudes and behaviors, thereby contributing to the cultivation of a more just and equitable society.

### Promoting Gender Equality in the Home

Here are some ways gender equality can be actively and regularly promoted:

**1. Play without Boundaries:** Encourage children to explore their interests by playing with toys of their choice, irrespective of gender stereotypes. Every form of play contributes to their holistic development.

**2. Home as an Equality Haven:** Be a beacon of gender equality at home by sharing household responsibilities equally with your partner. Instill a culture where cooking, cleaning, gardening, and other tasks are embraced by all family members.

**3. Challenge Stereotypes:** Break free from stereotypes by celebrating the achievements of influential figures from diverse genders and ethnic backgrounds throughout history.

Inspire children to take pride in their identities.

**4. Cultivate Cultural Awareness:** Broaden children's horizons through literature, movies, and music that explore a myriad of cultures, fostering an appreciation for global diversity.

**5. Empower Body Positivity:** Educate children about their bodies and empower them to resist societal pressures propagated by social media. Cultivate self-care practices and bolster self-confidence.

**6. Normalize Emotional Expression:** Teach children that expressing emotions is a natural and healthy part of being human, regardless of their gender.

**7. Navigate Digital Influences:** Engage in dialogues with children about the influence of social media, sensitizing them to harmful stereotypes they may encounter. Equip them with the discernment to recognize and challenge such biases.

**8. Embrace Caring Roles:** Illuminate the value of caregiving roles and highlight their significance. Ensure that both boys and girls witness the power of nurturing and caring responsibilities.

**9. Deconstruct Gender Norms:** Encourage boys to freely express their emotions, dismantling the notion that vulnerability compromises masculinity.

**10. Shatter Aspirational Limits:** Refrain from making assumptions that pigeonhole aspirations based on gender. Break away from stereotypes that confine certain careers to specific genders or prescribe traditional roles.

## 5.6 Promoting Healthy Body Image and Self-Esteem

### Good-To-Know

Equal rights and opportunities for girls and boys help all children fulfil their potential.

### What is body image?

Body image pertains to an individual's inner reflections and emotions concerning their own physical form. It encompasses the mental visualization they hold of their body, which might either correspond with or diverge from its actual dimensions and proportions. This perception of the body is subject to transformation over time. A constructive or well-balanced body image involves experiencing contentment and fulfillment with one's physical self, and embracing a sense of comfort and acceptance towards one's outward appearance. Conversely, a detrimental or distorted body image leads to sentiments of discontentment regarding one's bodily features, often triggering a desire to modify body weight or structure. Particularly during the adolescent phase, cultivating a positive body image is of paramount importance. When young individuals harbor affirmative feelings about their bodies, it exerts a positive influence on their self-regard and psychological wellness, while also encouraging a sensible approach to nutrition and physical engagement. Fostering a healthy body image stands as a critical endeavor, essential for the enhancement of holistic well-being and a constructive self-perception.

### What influences body image in teenagers:

Numerous elements shape a child's perception of their own body. These factors encompass the familial setting, capabilities or limitations, the viewpoints of peers, the impact of social media, cultural heritage, and additional variables. The advent of puberty also constitutes a significant influence. Throughout puberty, a child's physique undergoes a multitude of

transformations. Concurrently, the aspiration to conform and resemble others gains heightened significance.

### Signs a child has an unhealthy body image

It's common for pre-teens and teenagers to be conscious of their bodies and want to lead a healthy lifestyle. But there are signs to look out for to know when a child is focusing too much on their body while stressing and being anxious about how they look. A child might show this by:

- Criticizing their body, using derogatory terms like "fat" or "ugly."
- Constantly comparing their body with others, which results in feelings of inadequacy.
- Avoiding leaving the house due to dissatisfaction with their appearance.
- Refraining from participating in activities or trying new things because of body-related insecurities.
- Becoming fixated on weight or specific body parts, such as the face, stomach, or legs.
- Expressing a desire for cosmetic procedures or surgery to alter their appearance.
- Engaging in excessive mirror-gazing or taking numerous photos to find perceived imperfections.
- Covering their body with loose and baggy clothing to hide their shape.
- Associating food with feelings of guilt, shame, or blame to the extent of forming unhealthy eating habits



### Promoting healthy positive image for children

- Be a role model; avoid negative body comments
- Encourage healthy lifestyles; good food, sleep, and activity.
- Value people for actions, not appearance.
- Create a safe space for them to express feelings about their body.
- Avoid negative comments relating to their weight, shape, or appearance.
- Emphasize personal qualities and interests.
- Explain puberty effects and normal weight gain.
- Discuss media messages and expose them to healthy role models.
- Encourage healthy friendships and positive body attitudes.
- Focus on the body's abilities, not just looks.

### Self Esteem

Self-esteem refers to an individual's inner evaluation of themselves, encompassing their self-affection and recognition of their character, attributes, abilities, and achievements. This aspect is of utmost importance in cultivating a favorable perspective on life and fostering a sense of personal pride. Adolescents who possess positive self-esteem tend to derive greater enjoyment from life, cultivate healthier relationships, adeptly navigate through errors, and exhibit determination in their pursuits. The presence of self-esteem instills the confidence to venture into uncharted territory, harbor self-belief, make sound decisions, and enhance their performance within academic, domestic, and social contexts. Conversely, young individuals grappling with negative or low self-esteem often find themselves grappling with uncertainty, evading social situations, and tolerating mistreatment. They may encounter difficulties in advocating for themselves, yielding readily to challenges, and grappling with the aftermath of errors or setbacks, which can subsequently impact their level of accomplishment.

Teens with positive self-esteem:	Teens with negative (or low) self-esteem:
They feel liked and accepted	Are self-critical and hard on themselves
They feel confident	They feel they're not as good as other kids
They feel proud of what they can do	They focus on the times they fail rather than when they succeed
They think good things about themselves	They lack confidence
They believe in themselves	They doubt they can do things well

## How Parents Can Help Build Children's Positive Self-Esteem

Every child possesses a distinct identity, and the cultivation of self-esteem may vary across individuals. Certain life experiences or hurdles can have a dampening effect on a child's self-esteem. Nevertheless, parents wield significant influence in elevating their child's self-esteem by:

**i. Fostering Learning:** Offer unwavering support to your child's journey of learning, whether it involves basic tasks such as grasping a cup or more intricate endeavors like reading or bicycling. Permit them to attempt tasks and learn from missteps, fostering a sense of accomplishment in their successes.

**ii. Constructive Encouragement:** Instead of confining accolades to outcomes or inherent traits, concentrate on acknowledging their effort, progress, and an optimistic attitude. Recognize their advancements and diligent work, as this encourages them to persevere and thrive.

**iii. Exemplifying Positivity:** Exhibit dedication and a positive demeanor in your everyday activities, providing a role model for your child. Approach

chores with enthusiasm and take pride in a job completed well, imparting the value of commitment.

### **iv. Refraining from Harsh Critique:**

Eliminate severe criticism and pessimistic messages from interactions, recognizing their potential to undermine a child's self-esteem. Correct them with patience and empathy, fostering a nurturing atmosphere.

**v. Spotlighting Strengths:** Direct attention to the child's strengths and areas of interest, creating opportunities for the refinement of these talents. Concentrating on strengths rather than shortcomings bolsters their self-esteem.

### **vi. Encouraging Contribution:**

Engage your child in helpful endeavors at home or within the community. When they observe the positive influence of their actions on others, it fortifies their self-esteem.

# Adolescence (15-18 years)



## Objectives

- Promote awareness and understanding of human rights and their connection to sexuality.
- Foster exploration of healthy relationships and effective communication skills.
- Encourage discussions about consent and making informed sexual decisions.
- Educate on safer sex practices and contraception options to promote sexual health.
- Address peer pressure and risky behaviors in a supportive and constructive manner.

## 6.1 Understanding Human Rights and Relevance to Sexuality

Human rights are intrinsic and universal, belonging to every individual, irrespective of factors like nationality, gender, ethnicity, disability, faith, social standing, educational background, geographical location, or any other designation. These encompass fundamental entitlements like the right to life, along with rights associated with education, labor, health, and progress. Among these, sexual and reproductive health and rights hold essential significance as basic human rights linked to matters of sexuality and reproduction. These rights empower individuals to make educated choices concerning their sexual well-being, encompassing relationships, family planning, and bodily sovereignty. A comprehensive grasp of human rights in the context of sexuality becomes imperative for the advancement of parity, dignity, and self-determination among all individuals. As previously noted, human rights are both universal and intrinsic, a quality that makes them inalienable and applies to every human being purely by virtue of their humanity, without regard to nationality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or any other distinguishing trait.

For adolescents, these rights are especially important:

- **Right to equality:** Every young person should be able to exercise their sexual rights without discrimination based on gender, disability, class, or any other status.
- **Right to participation:** All young people have the right to actively engage in decision-making processes that affect their lives and society, regardless of age or other factors.
- **Right to health:** Young people have the right to access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services and be protected from factors that may negatively impact their health.
- **Right to education and information:** All young people have the right to access accurate and comprehensive sexuality education to make informed decisions.
- **Right to life and freedom from harm:** No one should be subjected to coercion, violence, or harm due to their sexual practices.

- **Right to privacy:** Young people have the right to make autonomous decisions about their sexuality privately, without interference from others.

- **Right to personal autonomy and recognition before the law:** Young people have the right to make decisions about their sexuality freely and be recognized as individuals under the law.

- **Right to express oneself freely:** All young people have the right to express their thoughts and opinions related to sexuality without being limited by cultural beliefs or ideologies.

- **Right to non-discrimination:** All individuals should be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their sex or gender.

- **Right to bodily autonomy:** Individuals have the right to make decisions about their own bodies, including matters related to sexual and reproductive health.

- **Right to access sexual and reproductive health services:** Everyone should have access to comprehensive and quality sexual and reproductive health care, including family planning and prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

- **Right to comprehensive sexuality education:** Individuals have the right to accurate and age-appropriate information about sexuality, relationships, and reproductive health.

- **Right to freedom from violence and coercion:** Everyone has the right to live free from any form of violence or coercion related to their sexuality.

Understanding these human rights in the context of sex is key for advocating for the

protection and realization of the above rights for all individuals, combating discrimination, and promoting a society that embraces the dignity of every person.

## Talking to young people about sexual and reproductive health

1. Sex is an integral part of human life. Young people have the right to receive reliable, science-based, and comprehensive information about it.

2. Young people are less likely to take sexual health risks if they are taught respect for their bodies.

3. Young people will be provided with correct information about sex, reproductive health, and the effects of alcohol and drugs in an age-appropriate manner.

4. For instilling in young people self-worth and confidence toward a healthy future.

5. It will promote good communication skills between adults and young people.

6. Encouraging the ability to think for themselves and not do what everybody else is doing.

7. Enables them to have an understanding that their actions can cause harm to themselves and others.

8. Empowers them to build a connection to home, family, and other caring adults in their community, school, or religious institution.

9. Gives the opportunity to share values and morals and explain to them unhealthy choices can affect their future and the lives of others.

## 6.2 Exploring Healthy Relationships and Communication

In the previous section, we dealt with healthy and unhealthy relationships, including how to identify healthy and unhealthy relationships. This section dwells more on communication, especially how young people can communicate boundaries, and consent in a healthy relationship.

Healthy	Unhealthy	Abusive
A healthy relationship means both you and your partner are:	You may be in an unhealthy relationship if your partner is:	Abuse is occurring in a relationship when one partner is:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating</li> <li>• Respectful</li> <li>• Trusting</li> <li>• Honest</li> <li>• Equal</li> <li>• Enjoying personal time away from each other</li> <li>• Making mutual choices</li> <li>• Economic/financial partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not communicating</li> <li>• Disrespectful</li> <li>• Not trusting</li> <li>• Dishonest</li> <li>• Trying to take control</li> <li>• Only spending time together</li> <li>• Pressured into activities</li> <li>• Unequal economically</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating in a hurtful or threatening way</li> <li>• Mistreating</li> <li>• Accusing the other of cheating when it's untrue</li> <li>• Denying their actions are abusive</li> <li>• Controlling</li> <li>• Isolating their partner from others</li> </ul>

Communication denotes the act of transmitting information from one location, individual, or collective entity to another. This intricate process encompasses a sender, a message, a conduit, and a recipient. The modes through which communication occurs include face-to-face dialogues, online blogs, telephone conversations, and text-based chats. Achieving effective communication mandates a combination of lucidity and consideration toward the recipient, as misconstrued meanings can culminate in disputes and strained associations. To nurture a constructive communication environment, it is imperative not only to articulate one's thoughts but also to engage in active and respectful listening. In formal, informal, or intimate relationships alike, addressing intricate subjects while sustaining respect and empathy assumes a paramount role in cultivating trust and nurturing resilient bonds.

Practicing healthy communication requires planning and effort. Here are some tips to help your child communicate effectively:

- Use "I statements": Express your feelings using phrases like, "I feel upset when you \_\_\_\_, " rather than blaming or accusing others of intentionally hurting you.
- Be clear and direct: Communicate your thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly, as no one can read your mind.
- Address concerns early: Don't ignore things that bother you; address them early on to prevent them from escalating into bigger problems.
- Build trust: Unless given a reason not to, assume that others are being truthful and have good intentions, which helps establish trust.
- Ask questions: If you don't understand something, ask questions rather than making assumptions.
- Opt for in-person communication: Text messages or emails can be easily misinterpreted; talking in person or through video chat allows you to understand tone and body language.
- Avoid yelling: It's natural to feel upset or defensive during an argument but take a break to cool off before continuing the discussion.
- Be willing to apologize: Everyone makes mistakes; apologizing sincerely helps move on after a disagreement.

## How young people can communicate "No" to sex and negative peer pressure

Conveying to someone you have feelings for that you're not interested in engaging in sexual activities, consuming alcohol, or using drugs can indeed be challenging. However, addressing preferences and boundaries is an integral facet of relationships. While refusing should ideally be straightforward, the reality is that a young individual might experience feelings of pressure, guilt, manipulation, or coercion when expressing their refusal. Forcing or coercing someone into sexual activities or pressuring them to consume alcohol is unequivocally unacceptable. It holds great significance that their peers

honor their boundaries, and the reciprocity of this respect is equally vital.

The concepts of consent and boundaries hold immense value within any relationship. It's crucial to educate young individuals that if they encounter pressure or threats to engage in sexual activities or other actions, they're uncomfortable with—such as staying out late, consuming alcohol, or using drugs—it's an indicator of an unhealthy relationship. Furthermore, it's essential to emphasize that if a partner says "no" to sex, respecting their decision is of utmost importance. Their refusal pertains to the act itself, not to the person making the request. This encapsulates the essence of sexual consent.

## Helpful tips. Tell them to:

- **Be confident and know what they want:** This means thinking through why they want to wait before engaging in sex or drinking alcohol. During a parent-child talk, let them know the risks involved and why it is important for them to wait or avoid alcohol or drugs.
- **Say “no:”** They don’t owe anyone – even someone that they love – an explanation for their choices. They can explain if they want, but they don’t have to.
- **Tell their friends what they want or don’t want to do:** They should be clear about what activity they want to do or don’t want to do, whether it is acceptable to their friends or not. They can also let them know that you really do like or love them, but you’re just not ready for sex or other peer influences.
- **They should be bold, clear, and direct.** Look them in the eyes and use a serious tone of voice.

## 6.3 Addressing Consent and Sexual Decision-Making

In Sections 3 and 4, we dealt extensively with consent. This section will be a recap on consent and focus more on sexual decision-making.

Consent is an ongoing process of discussing boundaries and what one is comfortable with. For consent to occur, the people involved must be able to talk about what they want with respect for themselves and the other(s). Consent involves knowing and respecting one's boundaries and that of others. Understanding consent has two sides. The first is knowing they can joyfully say yes if they want. It's also embracing the fact that a partner has the right to choose to say "yes" or "no."

### Remember!

- Consent should be clearly and freely communicated. A verbal and affirmative expression of consent can help the persons involved understand and respect each other's boundaries.
- Consent cannot be given by individuals who are underage, intoxicated, incapacitated by drugs or alcohol, or asleep or unconscious. Unequal power dynamics, such as engaging in sexual activity with an employee, subordinates, students, members (of religious centres), etc., also mean that consent cannot be freely given.

### How does consent work?

Participating in sexual interactions underscores the significance of consent as a form of communication. This essential aspect should be present each time, regardless of the nature of the activity involved. Granting

consent for a particular action during one instance does not imply automatic consent for different activities or the same action during subsequent occurrences. For instance, agreeing to a kiss doesn't imply authorization for the removal of clothing. Previous instances of engaging in sexual activity with someone also don't inherently translate to future permissions. Establishing open conversations about boundaries and anticipations with your partner prior to any sexual engagement holds great importance.

### What is enthusiastic consent?

Enthusiastic consent emphasizes the importance of seeking and receiving an affirmative "yes" for sexual activity, rather than relying solely on the absence of a "no." It involves openly communicating desires through clear verbal and nonverbal cues to ensure mutual interest and comfort. While positive body language like smiling, eye contact, and nodding may reflect consent, explicit verbal confirmation is still essential. The core of enthusiastic consent is regularly checking in with your partner during intimacy to confirm they actively want to continue. This model promotes more open and honest conversations around consent, rather than just assuming it based on a lack of resistance. The goal is to create a culture of mutual respect, comfort and safety for all participants.



## Good-To-Know

Physiological responses like an erection, lubrication, arousal, or orgasm are involuntary, meaning your body might react one way even when you are not consenting to the activity. Sometimes perpetrators will use the fact that these physiological responses occur to maintain secrecy or minimize a survivor's experience by using phrases such as, "You know you liked it." In no way does a physiological response mean that you consented to what happened. If you have been sexually abused or assaulted, it is not your fault.

### Sexual Decision-Making

The decision to engage in sexual activity with others is very personal and is usually influenced by many social factors such as personal values, cultural beliefs, and self-esteem. Making healthy choices about sexuality and relationships is part of becoming a healthy teen. A sexually healthy teen will have the following qualities.

#### 1. Relationship with Self

Sexually healthy teens will:

- Value their own body and prioritize behaviors that promote their health and safety.
- Take responsibility for their actions and understand the potential consequences of their behavior.
- Can differentiate between their own desires and the pressures of their peer group.
- Be well-informed about sexual health issues, enabling them to make informed decisions about their sexual activities

and showing acceptance towards individuals with diverse values and experiences.

Sexually healthy teens will have positive relationships with their parents and family members. They will:

- Communicate easily with family members about various issues, including sexuality.
- Balance their family roles and responsibilities while seeking more autonomy and independence.
- Negotiate and set boundaries with their family, attempting to understand their parents' perspectives.
- Respect the rights of others and treat them with courtesy and kindness.
- Consult with their parents and family members about values and consider their opinions when forming their own beliefs.
- Seek guidance from parents and other trusted adults on sexual health matters while also developing their own beliefs and values.

Relationships with intimate partners: sexually healthy teens will:

- Express love and intimacy in ways appropriate for their age and stage of development.
- Embrace the belief that everyone has equal rights and responsibilities in love and sexual relationships.
- Respect their own boundaries and the boundaries of their partners, being able to say 'no' and accept it when a partner says 'no.'
- Possess the skills to assess their readiness for mature sexual relationships, engaging in open communication with their partner about sexual limits before engaging in any sexual activity.
- Discuss and reach a mutual agreement with their partner on the sexual activities they are comfortable with.
- Take responsible steps to protect themselves and their partner from unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) by using safer sex practices if they choose to have sex.
- Demonstrate the skills and maturity to handle the process of breaking up with an intimate partner, seeking emotional support from loved ones or professionals if needed, and not hesitating to ask for help when necessary.

## 6.4 Discussing Safer Sex Practices and Contraception

One of the most challenging dilemmas that numerous adolescents encounter involves the consideration of engaging in sexual activity. Opting to partake in such activities carries with it the obligation to assume responsibility for safeguarding against unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

### Terms in Safe Sex Practices

#### Unsafe Sex

Engaging in intercourse without the use of a condom, commonly referred to as unsafe or unprotected sex, carries a heightened risk. This practice elevates the probability of acquiring HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). During sexual intercourse, bodily fluids such as blood, vaginal secretions, and semen are exchanged between partners. Consequently, if a partner is affected by HIV or another STI, even in cases where they are unaware of it, the virus or infection can be transmitted during sexual encounters.

#### Contraception

Engaging in conversations about safer sexual practices and contraception becomes paramount for teenagers who are in the process of discovering their sexuality and contemplating involvement in sexual activities. Rendering knowledgeable and judicious choices concerning sexual well-being plays a pivotal role in safeguarding their health and averting unforeseen repercussions. Equipping teenagers with insights into safer sex practices and contraception endows them with the capacity to assume accountable decisions regarding their sexual health. It becomes imperative for parents, educators, and healthcare providers to dispense

accurate information and foster an environment of safety and support that encourages candid dialogues on these subjects. Through such endeavors, we can facilitate teenagers' ability to safeguard themselves and make well-informed choices for their overall well-being.

Safer sex practices involve using methods that reduce the risk of transmitting or acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and preventing unintended pregnancies. Some common safer sex practices include:

- **Condom Use:** Consistently and correctly using condoms during vaginal, anal, or oral sex can greatly reduce the risk of STIs and unintended pregnancies.
- **Regular STI Testing:** Regular testing for STIs is essential, especially for sexually active individuals, to ensure early detection and timely treatment.
- **Open Communication:** Effective communication with sexual partners about sexual history, STI testing, and contraception is essential for making informed decisions together.
- **Mutual Monogamy:** Being in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested for STIs can reduce the risk of transmission.

When it comes to contraception, teenagers should be informed about the various birth control options available to them. These options may include:

- **Birth Control Pills:** Oral contraceptive pills, when taken as prescribed, can be highly effective in preventing pregnancy.
- **Intrauterine Devices (IUDs):** IUDs are long-acting and reversible contraceptives that

provide ongoing pregnancy protection.

- **Contraceptive Implants:** Implants are small, flexible rods placed under the skin, providing effective contraception for several years.
- **Condoms:** As mentioned earlier, condoms not only protect against STIs but also serve as a form of contraception when used consistently and correctly.
- **Emergency Contraception:** Also known as the "morning-after pill," emergency contraception can be taken after unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy.

## What is emergency contraception?

Emergency contraception (EC) constitutes a method of birth control utilized subsequent to instances of unprotected sexual activity. Unprotected sexual encounters encompass scenarios where birth control methods were not employed, instances where condoms break or inadvertently dislodge during intercourse, or situations where birth control measures were overlooked. Emergency contraception remains viable for ingestion up to five days following unprotected sexual activity; however, its optimal effectiveness is attained when administered promptly after the sexual encounter.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

A Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) is an infection transmitted through sexual contact, which includes oral, vaginal, or anal

interactions. Any form of sexual activity carries inherent risks. STIs can exert adverse impacts on an individual's sexual and reproductive well-being. Interestingly, numerous individuals with an STI exhibit no symptoms and remain unaware that they are transmitting the infection to their partner. Mitigating risk can be achieved through the adoption of safer sexual practices. Undergoing regular testing forms an integral facet of maintaining one's health. Various examples of STIs encompass Chlamydia, Genital Herpes, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Gonorrhoea, Hepatitis B, Syphilis, Trichomoniasis, and Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV).

## Unintended Pregnancy

An unintended pregnancy refers to a pregnancy that occurs without prior planning or desire. It encompasses both pregnancies that are unwanted due to the absence of plans for children or the completion of childbearing, as well as pregnancies that are mistimed, arising earlier than intended.

## Abstinence

Abstinence entails opting to refrain from engaging in sexual activities. It stands as the sole safe sexual practice that guarantees complete prevention against both STIs and pregnancy, offering a hundred percent safeguard.

## Reasons Why Saying No To Sex Makes Sense

Participating in sexual activity necessitates careful consideration due to its significant implications and potential aftermath. It is imperative to possess a comprehensive understanding of these factors prior to arriving at any decisions. One must recognize that sexual intercourse can lead to pregnancy, entailing substantial responsibilities and complex choices. In such instances, young individuals should consistently introspect whether they are equipped to confront the potential ramifications of their actions. Pondering the conceivable impact of pregnancy on health, finances, education, career, relationships, and familial dynamics is essential. Additionally, engaging in sexual activities carries inherent health risks, most notably the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). These infections encompass conditions such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, trichomoniasis, hepatitis B, herpes, HIV (the virus that results in AIDS), human papillomavirus (HPV), and syphilis. While certain STIs are treatable, others can inflict enduring harm on one's well-being.

Furthermore, initiating sexual activity before being emotionally prepared has the potential to result in emotional distress and diversions. If a young individual feels coerced into sexual involvement or experiences a breakup with their partner following a sexual encounter, it can evoke sentiments of sorrow or resentment. Additionally, concerns about privacy may emerge if the partner divulges intimate details to others. Having a comprehensive understanding of these conceivable repercussions equips a young person to exercise responsible and informed judgment concerning their sexual well-being. Therefore, it is imperative for young individuals to allocate sufficient time to reflect on their emotions, values, and state of readiness before engaging in sexual interactions. When deliberating on decisions about sex, it is of utmost importance to prioritize their overall well-being and emotional welfare.

## Safe Sex Practices

Safer sex, often referred to as Safe Sex Practices, encompasses any form of sexual engagement aimed at safeguarding individuals involved from the risks of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies. These practices serve to reduce or avert the exchange of bodily fluids during sexual activities.

### Helping young people decide about having sex

Addressing the topic of sex can be challenging, but avoiding it can prove even more difficult. Sexuality is pervasive in various aspects of our lives, from news and entertainment to social media and advertisements. Guiding teenagers to understand sexual matters not only instills family values but also cultivates a sense of responsibility for their actions. Here's a constructive approach to aid them:

- **Initiate Conversations Early and Continuously:** A solitary "birds and the bees" conversation isn't sufficient. Begin discussing safe sex with preteens and sustain these discussions into early adulthood. Adapt the dialogue to match their growth and development.
- **Embrace Honesty:** If discussing sex makes you uneasy, acknowledge it, but continue the conversation. If you're unsure how to respond to your teenager's queries, offer to find answers together.
- **Be Candid:** Express your viewpoints on sex clearly. Provide factual information about associated risks, such as emotional distress, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unplanned pregnancy.
- **Consider Their Perspective:** Approaches that emphasize strictness and fear might hinder connection and foster rebellious behavior. Instead, listen attentively. Grasp the pressures, obstacles, and concerns that teenagers confront.

- **Extend Beyond Information:** Equipping young individuals with accurate sexual information is vital, but it's equally crucial to delve into emotions, attitudes, and values. When parents communicate their understanding and listen to their teens, the likelihood of adopting family values increases
- **Prioritize Well-Being:** Adolescence often involves risk-taking behaviors. Nonetheless, this phase also marks the initiation of healthy self-care practices. Alongside discussing risks, exemplify and express the importance of making healthy relationship choices.
- **Encourage Ongoing Discussions:** Assure your teenagers that they can approach you with their questions or concerns about sex. Encourage dialogue by responding positively to their inquiries with statements like, "I'm glad you reached out to me."
- **Stay in a monogamous relationship:** Lower the risk of STIs by committing to a monogamous relationship where both partners remain faithful and free from infections.
- **Wait and test:** In the early stages of a new sexual relationship, it's wise to abstain from vaginal and anal intercourse until both partners have been tested for STIs. For oral sex, use a latex condom or dental dam to create a barrier between genital and oral mucous membranes.
- **Get vaccinated:** Early vaccination before sexual exposure can prevent certain STIs. Vaccines are available for human papillomavirus (HPV) and hepatitis B.
- **Use condoms and dental dams consistently and correctly:** Consistently and correctly use a new latex condom or dental dam for each sexual encounter, whether oral, vaginal, or anal. Use water-based lubricants and avoid oil-based ones with latex condoms or dental dams. Bear in mind that while condoms reduce the risk of most STIs, they may offer less protection against STIs involving visible genital sores, like HPV or herpes. It's crucial to recognize that non-barrier forms of contraception, such as birth control pills or IUDs, do not provide defense against STIs.
- **Exercise caution with alcohol and drugs:** Steer clear of excessive alcohol consumption and drug use, as they can impair judgment and lead to risky sexual behaviors.

## Preventing Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

Empowering your child with preventive strategies equips them to proactively safeguard their sexual health and overall well-being. By fostering candid conversations and providing education on sexual health, you offer them the tools to make informed choices within relationships and ensure protection against STDs or STIs. Achieving this involves a range of proactive measures:

- **Abstain from sex:** The most effective way to avoid STIs is to refrain from sexual activity.

## Addressing hard topics

Providing sexual education to teenagers covers a wide spectrum of significant subjects, which encompass abstinence, date rape, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other matters of sensitivity. Being well-prepared for the potential emergence of inquiries is crucial, including:

- **How will I know I'm ready for sex?**

Numerous influences, such as peer pressure, curiosity, and feelings of solitude, might lure teenagers into early sexual involvement. It's paramount to provide your teenager with the assurance that choosing to wait is perfectly acceptable. Sexual engagement is a responsibility that aligns with adult intimate relationships, like marriage, and there exist alternative meaningful methods of forming connections with others. Foster an atmosphere of open dialogue about emotions and sentiments. Elaborate on the fact that intimate discussions, leisurely walks, hand-holding, music appreciation, dancing, and embracing are all secure avenues for expressing affection without necessitating sexual involvement.

- **What if my partner wants to have sex, but I don't?**

Reiterate the fundamental principle of consent, underlining that the word "no" always holds its meaning. Stress that the act of sex should never be coerced or imposed upon anyone. It's vital to communicate to your teenager that any instance of forced sexual activity constitutes rape, regardless of whether it occurs with a stranger or someone they have been in a relationship with. Moreover, draw attention to the potential hazards linked to the consumption of alcohol and drugs, substances that can impair judgment and obscure decision-making. Initiate a dialogue about the potential perils of date rape and other harmful situations that are more likely to occur when substances are involved. In the context of sex education, it's essential to foster a secure environment that encourages teenagers to pose questions and openly discuss these

intricate subjects. Equipping them with accurate information and guidance is pivotal in promoting thoughtful decision-making and cultivating healthy relationships.

- **Stress the importance of safe sex.**

Illustrate the significance of prioritizing safe sex with your teenager by following these outlined measures:

- **Promote Open Dialogue:** Prior to entering any significant sexual activities, urge your teen to engage in open and candid conversations with their partner regarding the practice of safer sex. It's imperative that they openly agree on acceptable activities and delineate boundaries that should be upheld.

- **Understand Contraception:** Ensure your teen comprehends how to access and correctly utilize contraception, including condoms and birth control methods. Educate them about the array of available options and underscore the consistent usage of protection.

- **Encourage Exclusivity:** Advocate for your teen to contemplate exclusive sexual relationships, as this can cultivate trust and respect while concurrently diminishing the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Reiterate the potential consequences linked to engaging with multiple partners.

- **Establish Sensible Limits:** Set forth and reinforce curfews and regulations pertaining to interactions with friends, particularly if you observe a mutual sexual attraction between your teen and specific acquaintances. The implementation of guidelines can serve as a protective measure against involvement in hazardous behaviors.

- **Scheduled Health Assessments:** Champion the idea of routine STI testing for your teenager. Encourage both them and their partner to undergo testing prior to initiating a sexual relationship. Regular screenings hold pivotal importance in the early identification and prevention of STIs.

## 6.5 Tackling Peer Pressure and Risky Behaviours

Peers encompass individuals who share common social or age affiliations. Peer pressure or influence pertains to the

inclination to engage in actions with the aim of gaining acceptance and recognition from friends or others within the same social or age groups. Adolescents regularly encounter their peers in diverse settings, including educational institutions, places of worship, sports venues, recreational areas, social gatherings, family events, and more. For teenagers, comprehending the potential impact peers wield over choices and behaviors proves crucial. Crafting an environment with positive influences and basing decisions on personal values and well-being aids in withstanding detrimental peer pressure, fostering responsible decision-making. Additionally, showing support and fostering positive conduct among friends can actively contribute to a constructive peer milieu. Irrespective of the context and manner in which interactions occur with peers, the influence they exert can manifest as either constructive or detrimental.

### Positive Peer Influences

Positive peer influence entails fostering and endorsing behaviors that contribute to personal advancement, self-assurance, and accomplishments among peers. Consider these instances:

- Motivating a friend to dedicate more effort to studying, thereby enhancing their academic performance.
- Championing the concept of saving money and inspiring friends to embrace the same practice.

- Expressing disapproval of and actively discouraging frivolous jests or engaging in gossip.

- Dissuading engagement in unlawful or precarious activities, including underage drinking or smoking.

### Negative Peer Pressure

Negative peer pressure encompasses coercing individuals into participating in harmful or perilous activities that can have adverse consequences for themselves or those around them. Consider the following instances:

- Persuading a friend to skip school, potentially compromising their education.
- Uplifting and supporting peers to partake in altercations or engage in bullying conduct.
- Endorsing the act of sexting among peers, which can lead to privacy breaches and emotional distress.
- Pressuring a friend to partake in alcohol consumption or experimentation with drugs, posing risks to their health and well-being.
- Convincing someone to purchase e-cigarettes online, potentially contributing to health complications.

### Helping Teens Manage Peer Pressure and Peer Influence

In your role as a parent or guardian, it's only natural to harbor apprehensions regarding the impact of peers on your teenager and whether this influence might lead them to



compromise their principles or become involved in hazardous conduct in order to conform. Here are several approaches to assist your teenager in effectively navigating peer pressure and the sway of peers:

**1. Build Confidence:** Encourage your teen to try new things and praise their efforts to build their confidence. Be a role model for confidence to help them feel empowered to make safe decisions.

**2. Foster Self-Compassion:** Promote self-compassion in your teen by being supportive, loving, and accepting. A strong relationship with you can help them handle stress and anxiety related to peer influence.

**3. Keep Communication Open:** Stay connected with your teen to create an environment where they feel comfortable talking to you if they face peer pressure. A positive relationship encourages open communication.

**4. Teach Assertiveness:** Teach your teen how to say no in face-saving ways when feeling pressured. Help them set boundaries and express their choices confidently.

**5. Provide a Way Out:** Establish a code with your teen to call or text for help in risky situations. Focus on their positive choice to seek help rather than on the situation itself.

**6. Encourage a Diverse Social Network:** Encourage your teen to develop friendships from various sources to have more options and support in case of friendship issues.

**7. Get to Know Their Friends:** Create opportunities for your teen's friends to come over, allowing you to get to know them and monitor any potential negative influences.

**8. Compromise:** Be open to compromising with your teen on certain aspects of their appearance or activities that are important to them while ensuring their safety.



## Good-To-Know

If your teen is happy with who they are and their choices and values, they're less likely to be influenced by other people.

## Warning Signs of Impact of Peer Pressure

Stay attuned to potential indicators that your teenager might be grappling with peer pressure or encountering challenges linked to it. Should you observe these signals, it becomes imperative to extend assistance for your teenager's emotional well-being and consider seeking professional intervention when warranted. By fostering transparent communication and establishing a supportive atmosphere, you empower your teenager to effectively navigate the sway of peers and adopt more prudent decisions.

- **Persistent Emotional Lows:** Sustained feelings of despondency, frequent tearfulness, or a sense of hopelessness.

- **Uncharacteristic Aggressiveness:** Behaviors marked by unexpected aggression or anti-social tendencies.

- **Abrupt Behavioral Shifts:** Sudden changes in conduct devoid of apparent explanations.

- **Sleep and Appetite Disruptions:** Manifestations like disruptions in sleep patterns or alterations in eating habits.

- **Loss of Interest:** A reluctance to engage in activities that were previously sources of enjoyment.

- **Expressions of Despair:** Verbalizations revealing contemplation of giving up or life's lack of worthiness.

SECTION IV

# Handling Challenging Conversations



## Objectives

- To educate teens about the nature and potential effects of pornography, promoting critical thinking and responsible internet usage.
- To raise awareness among teens about sexual violence and abuse, provide resources for support, and promote a culture of consent and respect.
- To engage teens in discussions about discrimination and gender-based violence, fostering empathy, understanding, and the promotion of gender equality.
- To inform parents about the legal framework protecting children's rights, empowering them to advocate for their child's rights, well-being, and safety.

# 7.1 Understanding Pornography

The world has gone digital; hence, anyone can access any information they need off the internet including unsolicited information and messages from advertisements that pop up. In this digital age, it is very easy for children to come across pornography. This can happen by accident, as most sites are free and don't require any type of age verification, or intentionally out of curiosity. While children might see porn for the first time by accident, teens are more likely to be seeking it out. It's normal for young people to be curious about sex. The best way to support them is to have open, honest conversations about what they might see and how it's different from real sex and relationships. Beyond seeing pornography on the internet, adults might aid children to see porn by allowing children to watch movies that have been rated as adult movies, walking around the house naked, or not teaching your children to respect privacy by asking them to knock before entering your room or bathroom. As children grow, providing them with age-appropriate information, setting boundaries and consent is important.

## What is Pornography?

Pornography, commonly known as porn, encompasses any content of a sexually explicit nature, which can include images, videos, or text, designed with the intention of arousing or sexually stimulating those who consume it.

## How pornography affects children, teenagers, and young people

Most pornography sends negative messages like these:

- Mutual consent and safe sex aren't important.
- Violent sexual acts are normal and appealing.
- Loving relationships aren't important.
- Aggressive behavior towards women is normal and OK.
- Sexual relationships in which women have no power are normal and OK.

## Are My Kids Really Going to Encounter Pornography?

Parents need to grasp that their children will probably come across pornography at some juncture in their youth, particularly as they transition into adolescence. Despite implementing parental controls and maintaining watchfulness, explicit content can still permeate their online experiences via diverse channels. Unwanted messages, inadvertent clicks, and innocuous searches can inadvertently expose them to inappropriate material. As they mature and develop curiosity about matters of sexuality, they might deliberately seek out pornography or chance upon it within their social circles. It becomes paramount for parents to adopt a proactive stance, imparting knowledge to their children about healthy sexual attitudes and equipping them with the skills to navigate such scenarios responsibly.

## Good-To-Know

While sexual exploration is normal and healthy, it's important that children know that the sex that is depicted in pornography is not realistic and often depicts unhealthy forms of sexual expression.

### Talking to your children, pre-teens, and teenagers about porn

- Talking with pre-teens about pornography  
Initiating open and honest conversations with pre-teens about pornography is crucial in protecting them from its influence. Tailor your discussions based on their maturity level and exposure to the internet and media. Help them understand what is acceptable and what is not regarding images and content. For instance, explain that pictures of people kissing at their wedding

are okay as it portrays adults in committed relationships expressing their feelings, while explicit content is not appropriate for them.

## Good-To-Know

Regularly engaging in online activities with your child is a proactive approach, as the online environment is where your child is most likely to encounter pornography. If you happen to stumble upon explicit or sexual content while browsing together, it presents an excellent opportunity for an open conversation.

Explain why pornographic content is not suitable, emphasizing that it is not an accurate representation of healthy relationships and that people in such videos are acting. Encourage your child to share if they come across uncomfortable content and teach them how to handle such situations by turning off the screen, walking away, and confiding in you or a trusted adult.

Initiate these conversations by discussing content seen in movies, TV shows, or online videos. You can also integrate discussions about pornography when talking about sex, respectful relationships, or internet usage. Begin by asking questions like if they have ever encountered uncomfortable online content or people without clothes online, or what they know about pornography, and if they have any questions. Listen actively and be open to their responses. Answer their questions honestly, and if you don't know an answer, promise to consider it, and get back to them. Creating an open dialogue will foster trust and help your child navigate the complexities of the digital world responsibly.

In addition to having open conversations with your pre-teen about pornography, here are some other ways to help them avoid exposure:

- **Activate parental controls on devices:** Enable parental controls on devices like television subscriptions and internet settings. Follow internet safety guidelines and create a family media plan to restrict access to mature content, reducing the chances of accidental exposure.

- **Discuss scenarios outside the home:** Talk to your pre-teen about situations they might encounter outside your home, such as at a friend's place, school party, or sleepover, where they may come across explicit content. Teach them to stay calm and immediately inform you or a trusted adult who is supervising them. Assure them that they won't get in trouble for sharing and that you appreciate their honesty.

- **Reassure and maintain open communication:** When your pre-teen talks to you about encountering explicit content, reassure them that they can always confide in you without judgment. Listen to their feelings and actions without pressuring them to explain the details of what they saw. Praise them for being open and encourage them to ask questions or discuss any confusing or unsettling situations.

### What to say when children deliberately view pornography

Your child might have deliberately looked for pornography, by searching some words like kissing, and sex on the search bar. If this happens, you could tell your child that it's OK to be curious about bodies and sex. Then you could explain what pornography is and why it isn't good for children to see it. It's important to emphasize that naked bodies and sex aren't wrong or bad. Then you could suggest looking for useful information together.

- **Talking to Teens About Porn**

When talking to teenagers about pornography, it's essential to approach the conversation with sensitivity and understanding of their growing independence. Here are some conversation starters to guide you:

- **"I heard that many teenagers are learning about sex through porn. What are your thoughts on this?"**

- **"Are your friends talking about or watching porn? What do you think about porn?"**

- **"I recently learned about Safe Surfer, a filter to protect young people from seeing porn. Have you ever come across porn?"**

After initiating the conversation, you can work with your teen on developing 'porn literacy.' This means helping them think critically about the messages conveyed in porn regarding sexism, gender, and diversity, and how these relate to their own beliefs and values. Encourage discussions on the following topics:

### 1. How does porn align with your values and beliefs?

- Discuss healthy sex and relationships and how they contrast with the portrayal of sex in porn.
- Examine beliefs about gender and sexism and how they relate to porn content.
- Reflect on how what they see in porn aligns with their cultural values and beliefs.

### 2. What's the difference between porn sex and real-life sex?

- Emphasize the importance of consent, respect, emotional connection, and pleasure in real-life sex.
- Contrast the portrayal of sex in porn, which often includes sexual violence, lack of consent, and dominance, with healthy and respectful relationships.

### 3. What's the impact of porn on your sex life?

- Help your teen understand the potential negative effects of excessive porn consumption, such as reduced sexual enjoyment, riskier behavior, and unrealistic sexual expectations.
- Discuss the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between porn consumption and real-life intimacy.

## Porn Addiction

Signs of porn addiction in a child or teenager can become noticeable when they consistently display a strong craving for explicit content and find it challenging to control their impulses. This addictive behavior can lead to a decline in different areas of their life, including academic performance and social interactions, as their attention becomes increasingly fixated on consuming pornography. Observable behaviors that could signal this addiction may involve accessing explicit material in inappropriate public settings, like schools, religious establishments, or public transportation.

Some manifestations of porn addiction in teens are:

1. Strained relationships with friends and family members due to excessive porn consumption.
2. Spending an excessive amount of money on pornographic material, sometimes neglecting basic necessities.
3. Consuming large amounts of internet data while watching porn.
4. Engaging in risky sexual behaviors.
5. Using porn as a coping mechanism for difficult emotions like pain, anxiety, and sadness.
6. Watching porn in inappropriate situations, such as during class, family gatherings, or late at night.
7. Feeling anger or resistance when advised to stop porn consumption.
8. Inability to quit porn despite attempts to do so.

9. Experiencing shame after using porn but being unable to stop the habit.

10. Progressing to more extreme forms of pornography to find pleasure.

11. Finding sexual intercourse to be less satisfying due to excessive porn consumption.

12. Hiding porn habits from sexual partners and others.

### What To Do If Your Teen Is Addicted To Porn

You can ask these questions to know how deep-necked they are in the addiction:

- How often do you watch porn? For how long?
- Do you feel pressure to watch porn? Has anyone pressured you to watch or try something from porn?
- How do you feel about what you see? Have your porn habits changed from when you started watching porn? Are you worried about what you are watching?

In handling this, and helping your teen navigate porn addiction, it is important to:

- Be patient and don't judge them;
- Don't throw blames;
- Take action and set restrictions and access to porn sites; and
- Support them to find ways of distractions such as engaging in other activities like sports, reading, social outings, etc.

## 7.2 Addressing Sexual Violence and Abuse

### What Is Abuse?

Abuse entails the infliction of harm or emotional distress upon another individual. This damaging behavior can impact anyone and is not restricted to specific circumstances. It can manifest within various types of relationships, including friendships, romantic partnerships, and familial bonds. Abuse can encompass physical, sexual, emotional, or mental harm, among other forms.

- **Physical abuse** pertains to the act of causing bodily harm to another individual. This encompasses actions such as hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating, and other behaviors that result in physical injury, leave visible marks, or induce pain.
- **Sexual abuse** encompasses any form of sexual interaction involving an adult and a minor or between a considerably older child and a younger child. This classification of abuse remains applicable regardless of age if one individual exerts dominance over another.
- **Emotional abuse** transpires when expressions of anger and shouting exceed reasonable bounds or when influential adults persistently subject children or teenagers to criticism, threats, or derogatory comments that erode their self-esteem and leave them with a sense of profound inadequacy. Emotional abuse wields the power to inflict harm and inflict damage similar to the repercussions of physical and sexual abuse.

Abuse infiltrates various settings where children and adolescents are present, and one such arena is the online or virtual realm. Every manifestation of abuse finds its digital counterparts in this space. To illustrate, online emotional abuse encompasses any digital communication aimed at intimidating or causing harm to another individual (such as menacing or threatening messages). Online sexual abuse involves soliciting inappropriate images, engaging in sexual activities via webcams or smartphones, and/or participating in explicit conversations through text or online chats. At times, those perpetrating such acts offer or pledge rewards to induce compliance with these activities. The enduring consequences of this abuse encompass the creation of images and videos that can circulate long after the abuse has ceased.

Other types of abuse include:

- **Neglect:** This arises when a child or teenager lacks sufficient nourishment, shelter, clothing, medical care, educational opportunities, attention, or supervision. Emotional neglect pertains to situations where a parent, guardian, or responsible adult fails to provide adequate emotional support or rarely offers attention to their child's emotional needs. This does not pertain to instances where parents withhold material desires, such as a new computer or smartphone. Rather, it pertains to more fundamental necessities like sustenance, shelter, and affection.
- **Bullying:** Inflicting fear, threats, or taunts through bullying can be as damaging as physically harming someone. Individuals who engage in bullying behavior may have been victims of abuse themselves.

## What is Sexual Violence?

Sexual violence encompasses any form of sexual activity or behavior (including online interactions) that transpired against one's wishes or involved any combination of the following elements: coercion, manipulation, bullying, intimidation, threats, deceit, and physical force. In essence, it refers to any sexual engagement or conduct that occurred without obtaining consent. Sexual violence manifests in various guises, such as rape, sexual assault, incest, acts of sexual aggression within intimate relationships, unwarranted sexual contact or touching, instances of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, displaying one's genitals or nude body to others without consent (commonly referred to as "flashing"), engaging in public masturbation, and secretly observing someone during a private activity without their awareness or approval.

## What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault denotes any form of sexual contact or behavior that takes place without obtaining clear and voluntary consent from the victim. Varieties of sexual assault encompass attempted rape, unwelcome fondling or physical contact of a sexual nature, coercing a victim into performing sexual actions such as oral sex, or compelling the victim to engage in penetration of the perpetrator's body. Moreover, it also involves the act of forcibly penetrating the victim's body, commonly referred to as rape.

## What is rape?

Rape is a serious and heinous crime that involves any non-consensual sexual activity or penetration. It occurs when one person forces, coerces, or manipulates another person into engaging in sexual acts against their will. Consent is a fundamental element in any sexual activity, and without clear and voluntary consent from all parties involved, any sexual activity becomes unlawful and classified as rape.

Rape can encompass a wide range of situations and actions, including but not limited to forced penetration, oral sex, anal sex, or any other sexual act performed without the explicit and enthusiastic agreement of all parties involved. It is a violation of an individual's autonomy, bodily integrity, and human rights.

It's essential to understand that rape is a crime of power, control, and violation, and it is universally condemned by law and ethical standards. It causes severe physical, emotional, and psychological trauma to the survivor, and those responsible for committing rape can face legal consequences. Section 1 of Nigeria's "Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015 (also known as the "VAPP Act") provides that a person commits the offense of rape if –

- He or she intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with any other part of his or her body or anything else.
- The other person does not consent to the penetration; or
- The consent is obtained by force or means of threat or intimidation of any kind or by fear of harm or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act or the use of any substance or additive capable of taking away the will of such person or in the case of a married person by impersonating his or her spouse.

## Child sexual assault

Child sexual abuse constitutes a category within the realm of child abuse, encompassing sexual interactions involving a minor. It's important to note that a child is incapable of providing valid consent for any kind of sexual activity. Various forms of child sexual abuse exist, including, yet not restricted to:

- Exhibitionism, or exposing oneself to a minor (also known as flashing)
- Fondling



- Intercourse
- Masturbation in the presence of a minor or forcing the minor to masturbate
- Obscene conversations, phone calls, text messages, or digital interaction
- Producing, owning, or sharing pornographic images or movies of children
- Sex of any kind with a minor, including vaginal, oral, or anal
- Sex trafficking
- Any other contact of a sexual nature that involves a minor.

## Incest

Incest pertains to sexual interactions occurring between individuals within the same family unit. In Nigeria, the act of incest has been deemed illegal as stipulated by Section 3 (1) (b) of the Matrimonial Causes Act. Moreover, Section 33 of the Marriage Act specifically prohibits sexual relations and marriages among individuals who share a blood relation. This is categorized as a "Prohibited degree of consanguinity." According to the VAPP Act, any instance of sexual involvement between individuals closely related to the point where their marriage would be forbidden, regardless of consent, falls under the definition of incest. The law mandates a minimum sentence of 10 years imprisonment without the possibility of a fine for this offense. It's important to note that only a few, if any, convictions have been reported in Nigeria under these provisions.

## Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment encompasses any unwelcome sexual conduct that induces feelings of distress, fear, offense, humiliation, or discomfort in the recipient. This behavior is intended to provoke such emotions. It spans actions like catcalling and overly tight hugs that can create an uncomfortable atmosphere.

## Sexual exploitation

According to the United Nations, sexual exploitation encompasses the act or attempt to misuse an individual's state of vulnerability by a person in a position of power or influence to gain sexual favors. This can involve various inducements, including, but not limited to, financial incentives or other social, economic, or political benefits. The scope of sexual exploitation also encompasses activities like human trafficking and involvement in prostitution.

Effects of Sexual Violence and Abuse  
The effects and extent of sexual violence and abuse differ and may appear in different forms:

**1. Physical Effects** – After experiencing sexual violence or abuse, a child or teenager might exhibit physical signs like facial or bodily swelling, bruises, cuts, and more.

**2. Emotional Responses** – Individuals who have encountered sexual violence or abuse may express a range of emotions including anger, mood swings, short temper, embarrassment, humiliation, guilt, fear, distrust, a sense of worthlessness, anxiety, panic, worry, fatigue, exhaustion, depression, tearfulness, heightened alertness, social isolation, confusion about their emotions or the incident, thoughts of suicide, aversion to intimacy or sex, disgust, and more. In exceptional instances, some might even feel emotionally unaffected by the experience, which is also valid.

**3. Behavioral Changes** – Effects on behavior might encompass withdrawal, diminished self-esteem, sleep disturbances, eating disorders, and resorting to substance abuse as a coping mechanism.

**4. Health Complications** – Sexual violence and abuse can lead to unintended pregnancies, contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and other health issues.

**5. Mental and Psychological Consequences** – The trauma resulting from sexual violence can

trigger conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that can emerge after a traumatic incident.

### Protecting children and young people from sexual violence and abuse

Sexual abuse knows no boundaries of race, socioeconomic status, religion, or culture when it comes to affecting children. While it's not possible to completely shield children from the risk of sexual abuse, there are measures that can be adopted to mitigate this threat. It's important to emphasize that in cases of sexual violence or abuse, the fault lies solely with the perpetrator and not with the victim or survivor. Below are some preventive measures aimed at safeguarding children and adolescents from sexual violence or abuse:

- **Be involved in the child's life.** Being actively involved in a child's life can make warning signs of child sexual abuse more obvious and help the child feel more comfortable coming to you if something isn't right.
- **Get to know the people in your child's life.** Know who your child is spending time with, including other children and adults. Ask your child about the kids they go to school with, the parents of their friends, and other people they may encounter, such as teammates or coaches. Talk about these people openly and ask questions so that your child can feel comfortable doing the same.
- **Choose caregivers carefully.** Whether it's a babysitter, a new school, or an afterschool activity, be diligent about screening caregivers for your child.
- **Talk about the media.** Incidents of sexual violence are frequently covered by the news and portrayed in television shows. Ask your child questions about such media coverage to start a conversation. Questions like, "Have you ever heard of this happening before in your school, religious places, etc?" or "What would you do if you were in this situation?" can signal to your child that these are important issues that they can talk about with you. Restrict

access to social media and platforms where they can experience online abuse. In recent times, there have been cases of child sexual abuse from some schools in Nigeria, you can use such scenarios to understand their views.

- **Know the warning signs.** Become familiar with the warning signs of child sexual abuse, and notice any changes with your child, no matter how small. Whether it's happening to your child or a child you know, you have the potential to make a big difference in that person's life by stepping in.
- **Encourage children to speak up.** When someone knows that their voice will be heard and taken seriously, it gives them the courage to speak up when something isn't right.
- **Teach your child about boundaries.** Let your child know that no one has the right to touch them or make them feel uncomfortable — this includes hugs from grandparents or even tickling from mom or dad. It is important to let your child know that their body is their own. Just as importantly, remind your child that they do not have the right to touch someone else if that person does not want to be touched.
- **Teach your child how to talk about their bodies.** From an early age, teach your child the names of their body parts. Teaching a child these words give them the ability to come to you when something is wrong. Learn more about talking to children about sexual assault.
- **Be available.** Parents can be busy trying to ensure that their children live the best lives but it is also important to set time aside to spend with your child where they have your undivided attention. Let your child know that they can come to you if they have questions or if someone is talking to them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. If they do come to you with questions or concerns, follow through on your word and make the time to talk.
- **Let them know they won't get in trouble.** Many perpetrators use secret-keeping or threats as a way of keeping children quiet about sexual abuse. Remind your child

frequently that they will not get in trouble for talking to you, no matter what they need to say. When they do come to you, follow through on this promise and avoid punishing them for speaking up.

### If Your Child/Teen Tells You About A Sexual Assault

In the unfortunate event that your child or adolescent opens up about experiencing sexual assault, it becomes crucial to offer them the necessary support and empathy they require during such a difficult period. Here are a few actions you can consider taking to provide them with the support they need:

#### Listening and talking:

- Listen attentively without interrupting, allowing them to share at their own pace.
- Avoid asking detailed or leading questions; instead, seek clarification if needed by asking, "What do you mean?"
- Reassure your child/teen that it's not their fault and that they are not to blame, and remind yourself that you are not to blame either.
- Express your love for them and acknowledge their bravery in sharing their experience. Let them know they did the right thing by confiding in you.
- If they disclose in the presence of others, respectfully tell them that you would like to hear more privately.

#### Responding to the disclosure:

- Believe and validate what your child/teen is telling you, even if it may initially seem unreal or confusing.
- Let them know that they can talk to you about anything and that nothing is too awful for them to share with you. Avoid assuming anything about their feelings or experience.

- Be prepared to do whatever is necessary to make them feel safe and loved. Share your plan of action with them.
- Avoid making promises you cannot keep or that may compromise their safety. For example, if they ask you not to tell anyone, explain that ensuring their safety might require involving appropriate authorities.
- Stay calm and composed on the outside, even if you experience strong emotions internally. If you get upset, reassure them that their disclosure does not change how you feel about them.
- Be available and present for them, making accommodations as needed to support them during this difficult time.

## Good-To-Know



It's a common misconception that only girls experience sexual abuse, but it's important to recognize that boys can also be victims. Encourage boys who have experienced abuse to come forward and share their stories. Assure them that speaking out doesn't diminish their masculinity or strength.

### Addressing Sexual Assault Or Abuse

- **Prioritize Medical Checks:** The first step is to ensure your child/teen receives immediate medical attention. Seek medical examinations and screenings for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), as well as medications like Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) for potential HIV exposure and emergency contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. Medical reports can be vital if

you decide to pursue legal action.

- **Report to the Police:** File a formal statement with the police to report the sexual assault or abuse. This is crucial in initiating an investigation and holding the perpetrator accountable for their actions.
- **Seek Counseling:** Professional counseling is essential for both your child/teen and yourself as a guardian. Counseling will help your child/teen cope with the emotional trauma they may be experiencing, both in the present and future. For you as a guardian, counseling will provide support in managing the psychosocial effects of the situation.
- **Be Supportive:** Be there for your child/teen throughout the process. Encourage them to regain a sense of control, freedom, and safety by slowly reintroducing their routine. Let them know that you are there to support them unconditionally.
- **Accept Support:** Encourage your child/teen to accept offers of support from friends, family, or professionals. Having a strong support network can aid in their healing and recovery.

### Looking After Yourself If Your Child/Teen Has Been Sexually Assaulted

It's important to look after your own well-being so you have the strength to support your child.

- Talking to friends or family can be good, but agree with your child beforehand on whom you can share the information with. If you do share it, be clear that you want people to respect your child's privacy. And also, be mindful that

friends or family might be distressed to hear about your child's sexual assault.

- If you feel you can't speak about it with people you know, you could try talking with a counselor who specializes in handling sexual assault cases.
- You and your partner, if you have one, might have different feelings about this situation. It can be a good idea to seek counseling together to work out how best to support your child and how to manage any stress this may cause in your relationship.

Sexual abuse, while undoubtedly traumatic, does not signify the end of the world for a child. If such an unfortunate incident occurs, the primary focus of every responsible adult should shift toward providing the child with appropriate care and comprehensive support. This encompasses medical attention, psychosocial assistance, legal guidance, potential relocation aid, and other resources tailored to the child's specific circumstances and needs. It is imperative to dispel harmful myths and misconceptions surrounding child abuse. For instance, a child should not be regarded as possessed due to being abused, nor should they be stigmatized as "damaged goods" as a result of experiencing sexual abuse. Seeking professional help for a sexually abused child may not always be effectively addressed within religious centers. Moreover, it's essential to recognize that a girl who has experienced abuse is not to be unfairly labelled as a prostitute, and a boy who expresses emotions after being abused is not displaying weakness. The burden of shame from abuse rests squarely upon the abuser and should never be unjustly placed upon a child.

## 7.3 Addressing Discrimination and Gender-Based Violence

Gender equality stands as an essential human right, one that is undermined by acts of gender-based discrimination. In the preceding chapter of this guide, we provided a definition of gender equality and introduced relevant terminology. As we progress through this unit, we will delve into additional concepts that play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality.

### What is gender discrimination?

Gender discrimination refers to the unjust treatment of individuals based on their gender, resulting in obstacles for girls, boys, women, and/or men to fully acknowledge, experience, or exercise their equal human rights. This encompasses various challenges, such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, and healthcare services, as well as disparities in wages and instances of sexual harassment, among other inequalities.

### What is gender inequality?

Gender inequality entails the unjust differentiation based on sex or gender, leading to the consistent privileging or prioritization of one sex or gender over another.

### What is gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a phenomenon entrenched in the disparities of gender equality and remains a prominent transgression of human rights

across all societies. GBV signifies violence targeted at an individual due to their gender. While both men and women, boys and girls can be victims of gender-based violence, it predominantly affects women and girls. GBV manifests in various forms, including:

- **Physical violence:** Any act which causes physical harm as a result of unlawful physical force. Physical violence can take the form of, among others, serious and minor assault, deprivation of liberty, and female genital mutilation.
- **Sexual violence:** Any sexual act performed on an individual without their consent. Sexual violence can take the form of rape or sexual assault.
- **Psychological violence:** Any act which causes psychological harm to an individual. Psychological violence can take the form of, for example, coercion, defamation, verbal insult, harassment, or neglecting a child's emotional needs. As parents, avoid telling your children "You don't know how to do anything only to pay" or things like, "You are good for nothing." Verbal insults make a child lose their self-esteem.
- **Economic violence:** Any act or behavior which causes economic harm to an individual. Economic violence can take the form of, for example, property damage, restricting access to financial resources, education, or the labor market, or not complying with economic responsibilities, such as alimony.

## How can parents be gender-sensitive or gender-responsive

- **Use gender-neutral words.** When talking to children that include boys and girls instead of saying 'Guys, it's time to go home' say: 'It's time to go home, everyone.'
- **Allow boys and girls to engage in home chores;** boys can prepare dinner and girls can wash the cars.
- **Model gender-equitable behavior and roles that positively challenge gender stereotypes,** e.g., doing activities traditionally connected to the opposite gender, like fathers cooking in the kitchen, and mothers participating in outdoor sports.
- **Encourage school attendance** and give girls and boys equal and adequate time to play and participate in household chores.



## 7.4 How the Law Protects Children and Teenagers Against Sexual Violence

Legal frameworks have been established on international, regional, national, and sub-national scales to establish principles and standards aimed at safeguarding children from abuse, violence, and exploitation. These legal instruments, both international and regional, encompass the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. On a more localized level, Nigeria has instituted laws that uphold the rights of every child and provide protective measures against abuse, violence, and exploitation. Some of these laws include:

### The Constitution

In the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended), Chapter II establishes specific fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy, while Chapter IV outlines fundamental rights applicable to all Nigerians, which implicitly extend to children as well. These state policies encompass economic, social, educational, and environmental goals, while the fundamental rights encompass essential aspects like the right to life, the right to human dignity, the right to private and family life, the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as the right to be free from discrimination.

Section 17(3)(f) of the Constitution specifically ensures the protection of children from any form of exploitation and shields them from moral and material neglect. Furthermore, Section 18(1) guarantees children the entitlement to equal and sufficient educational opportunities across all levels. Notably, during the March 2022 voting on the constitutional amendment in Nigeria, both the Senate and the House of Representatives endorsed a bill that establishes free, compulsory, and basic education as an inherent right for all citizens. Within the Constitution, Section 29(4) defines a child as an individual below the age of 18, cementing the legal understanding of childhood in Nigeria.

### Criminal Laws

Nigeria operates under two main Criminal Laws – the Criminal Code Act (1916) applicable in the southern region, and the Penal Code Act (1960) applicable in the northern region. In the Criminal Code Act, section 216 regards as a felony the indecent treatment of boys under fourteen, attracting a seven-year term of imprisonment. In section 218, defilement of girls under thirteen years is a felony resulting in life imprisonment, with or without caning. According to section 219, any person who is the owner or occupier, or one with control or management of any premises, and who induces or knowingly permits a girl between thirteen and sixteen to be defiled, is also guilty of an offense and would be imprisoned for a term between two years to life imprisonment. Sections 221 and 222 of the Criminal Code criminalize the defilement of girls under sixteen and above thirteen,

including those considered idiots or imbeciles. Section 223 prohibits the procurement of girls under eighteen years for the purpose of prostitution within or outside Nigeria. Additionally, in the Criminal Code, section 357 defines rape, section 358 prescribes the punishment for rape, section 359 is on the offense of attempted rape, while section 360 prohibits and states the punishment for indecent assaults on females. In the Penal Code, section 282 lays out different ways in which rape could occur which includes when sexual intercourse is had with a girl under fourteen years of age or one of unsound mind. Section 55 of the Penal Code defines rape and prescribes punishment. Additionally, section 56 covers the offense of attempted rape, while section 57 addresses the punishment for indecent assault on a female.

## Child Rights Act

According to Section 277 of the Child Rights Act of 2003, the term "a child" refers to "a person who has not yet reached the age of eighteen years." Consequently, the age of consent is established at 18 years, and any form of sexual engagement involving an individual under this age is classified as sexual abuse. The Child Rights Act additionally stipulates the necessity of safeguarding children against a range of issues, including child marriage, child betrothal, the exposure to and use of illicit drugs, the abduction, removal, or transfer of children from lawful custody, child labor, and illicit sexual intercourse.

Furthermore, the Child Rights Act outlines specific primary rights that children are entitled to, encompassing the following:

- **Right to survival and development:** Government is to ensure the survival and development of the child to the maximum extent possible – physically, mentally, morally, and psychologically. For example: equipping schools, providing health insurance, ensuring safe environment, etc.
- **Right to name:** Guarantees the right of children to a name which shall be given at birth or on a date as prescribed by the culture of the parents. In Nigeria, a child's birth shall be registered in accordance with the provisions of the Compulsory Registration Act, 1992.
- **Freedom of association and peaceful assembly:** Every child has a right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, as long as it is in line with the laws of the land and with guidance from parents/guardians. Freely associating with robbers, for example, is a crime.
- **Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion:** Guarantees the right of children to freely think and practice religion with guidance from parents in the best interest of the child. Even in adoption cases, the right of the child to practice their religion must be foremost.
- **Right to private and family life:** While this recognizes that every child is entitled to his/her privacy, family life, home, and communication, it also upholds the rights of parents/guardians to exercise reasonable supervision over their children's behaviour.
- **Right to freedom of movement:** This upholds the right of every child to move freely subject to parental control which is not harmful to the child. While a child can decide to move freely from place to another, a parent has the right to stop that child for their safety.
- **Right to freedom from discrimination:** A child shall not be subjected to any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, sex, or state of origin. For example, parents who deprive their female children of education are actively discriminating on the ground of gender.



- **Right to dignity of the child:** No child shall be subjected to abuse of any form – sexual, physical, mental, emotional. This includes torture, inhuman treatment, slavery, and servitude. For example, employing children as house helps is a crime under the Child Rights Act.
- **Right to leisure, recreation, and cultural activities:** Children are entitled to rest and engage in sports and other play activities appropriate for their age. Parents/guardians must recognize that this is not a waste of time, but a core part of children's growth.
- **Right to health and health services:** Every child has the right to the best physical and mental health. For example, parents/guardians of children under two must ensure full immunization. Failure to comply might result in payment of fine and/or one-month imprisonment.
- **Right to parental care, protection, and maintenance:** No child shall be separated from the parents against the wish of the child except for the child's education and welfare or in cases where a court mandates a separation, in the best interest of the child.
- **Right to free, compulsory, and universal primary education:** While the Government of Nigeria has the duty to provide such education, parents must ensure that their child attends and completes at least primary and junior secondary education.
- **Right to special protection measure:** Every child in need of special protection measures is entitled to such measure as appropriate to his/her physical, social, economic, and mental needs in a way that protects the child's dignity. For example, education and play opportunities.
- **Right of the unborn child to protection against harm, etc:** A child may bring an

action for damages against a person for harm or injury caused to the child wilfully or carelessly before, during, or after the birth of that child. For example, a child born with drug dependency.

## Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015

The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, often referred to as the "VAPP Act," was established with the purpose of eradicating violence both in private and public spheres, prohibiting all forms of violence directed towards individuals, and offering robust protection and effective remedies for victims while imposing sanctions on wrongdoers. This multifaceted legislation not only aims to safeguard everyone from violence but also places special emphasis on the well-being of women and girls. As instances of sexual violence manifest in various contexts, the need for updated and comprehensive definitions of sexual abuse, especially in comparison to the outdated descriptions found in the Penal and Criminal Code, became increasingly apparent. The objective is to ensure justice for victims and survivors of such heinous acts. The VAPP Act, in its all-encompassing approach encompassing all individuals, also takes into account the vulnerabilities of children, particularly girls. Among its many innovative provisions, the VAPP Act presents an expansive interpretation of rape (as articulated in section 1) and additionally mandates the creation and public awareness of a Sex Offenders Register (stipulated in section 1(4)) in states where the act has been adopted, functioning as a deterrent against potential perpetrators.

## Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act

The Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act serves as

the legal framework responsible for establishing the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP). NAPTIP is tasked with the crucial role of preventing, suppressing, and penalizing the trafficking of individuals, particularly women and children. Its responsibilities encompass a range of actions, such as investigating and prosecuting individuals involved in human trafficking, as well as coordinating the rehabilitation and counseling of those who have been trafficked, among other related matters. One of the key provisions of the NAPTIP Act is outlined in Section 15, which criminalizes the act of procuring, inducing, or detaining individuals below the age of 18 with the intent of engaging in illicit sexual activities with others. Similarly, Section 16 addresses the subjecting of individuals under 18 to prostitution or various forms of sexual exploitation, also constituting a criminal offense. These violations, as stated in Section 18, can transpire even beyond the country's borders. Furthermore, Section 17 of the NAPTIP Act strongly condemns the procurement or recruitment of individuals under 18 for the purpose of pornography or involvement in a brothel. Section 22 places a prohibition on forcing anyone, whether within Nigeria or abroad, into forced labor. Section 23 goes on to prohibit the employment of children under the age of 12 as domestic workers, including exposing them to serious harm. Additionally, the section prohibits the engagement of children in jobs that are exploitative, detrimental, or hazardous to their overall physical, social, and psychological growth. As stipulated in these provisions, the penalties for these offenses vary and include imprisonment for a minimum duration of five to seven years, coupled with fines ranging from N500,000 to N5,000,000. In certain instances, the option of a fine is not available.

## Cybercrimes Act

Section 23(1) of the Cybercrimes Act encompasses various activities that are unequivocally prohibited in connection with

computer systems or networks and child pornography. These activities include intentionally engaging in the production of child pornography, offering or providing access to child pornography, disseminating or transmitting child pornography, obtaining child pornography for oneself or another person, and possessing child pornography within a computer system or on a computer-data storage medium. The Cybercrimes Act categorizes these actions as offenses, and those found guilty of such offenses could face severe consequences.

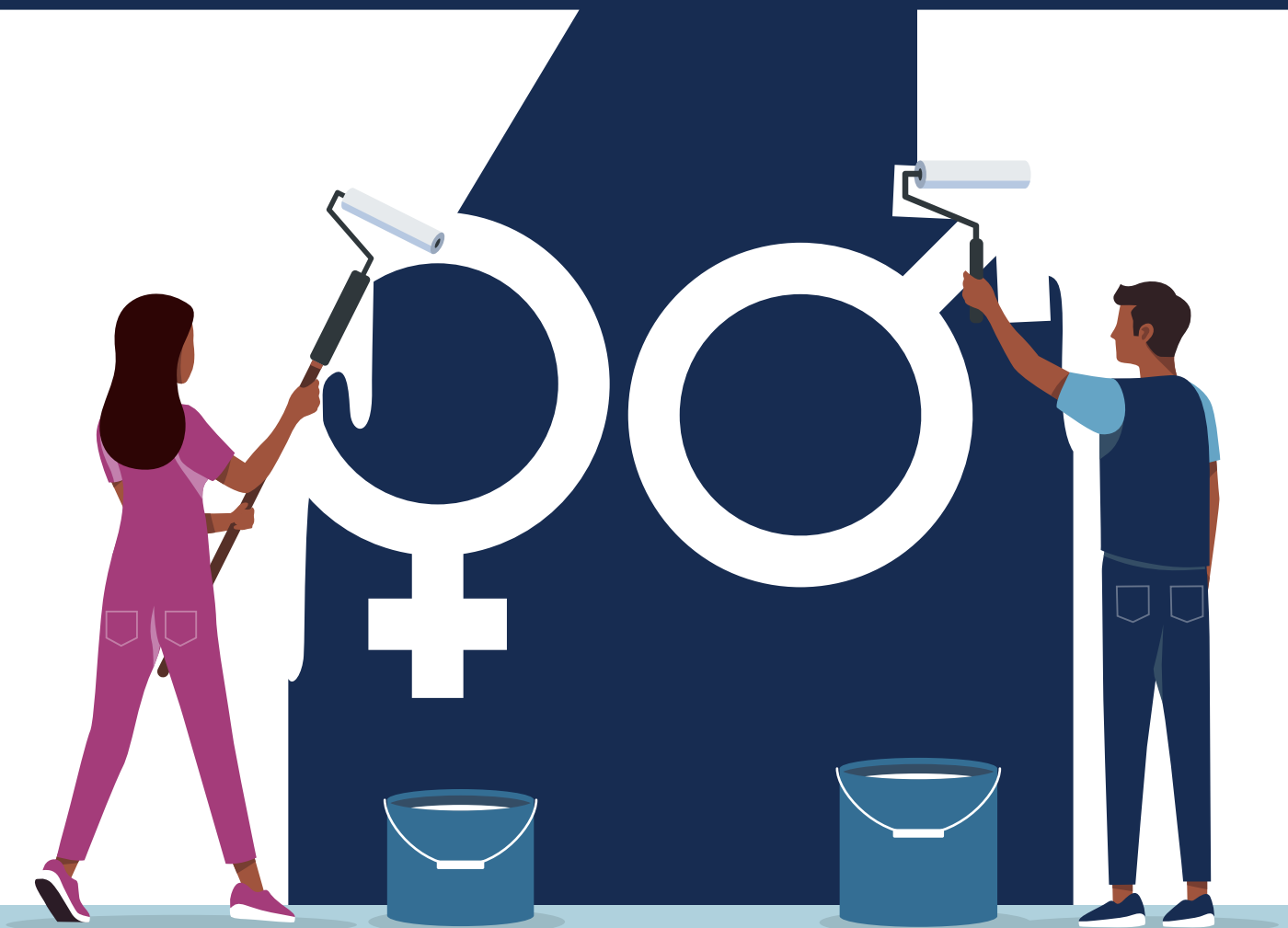
Upon conviction, individuals who commit these offenses are subject to imprisonment for a duration ranging from five to ten years. In addition to the potential imprisonment, offenders may also be subjected to a fine, the monetary range of which falls between N10 million and N20 million, or a combination of both penalties. Section 23(5) of the Cybercrimes Act outlines that for the context of this section, the terms "child" or "minor" specifically pertain to individuals who are under the age of 18.

Furthermore, section 23(4) of the Act provides an inclusive definition of "child pornography." This definition encompasses explicit visual depictions of minors participating in sexually explicit actions, representations of individuals appearing to be minors engaged in such conduct, and realistic images portraying minors involved in sexually explicit actions. The inclusion of the term "includes" within this definition highlights that the specified list is not exhaustive.

Recognizing the laws that safeguard children from the grave impact of child sexual abuse is paramount. Equally essential is the action of promptly reporting instances of these crimes to the appropriate authorities. By doing so, the legal framework can be leveraged to attain justice for the affected child and to serve as a deterrent to potential sexual predators.

## SECTION V

# Navigating Sex Education In The Digital Era



## Children and Teenagers as Digital Citizens

**Children and Teenagers as Digital Citizens**  
In the modern digital age, youngsters, including both children and teenagers, are dedicating more of their time to online activities. Consequently, it becomes crucial to address the potential hazards and difficulties that these young individuals might encounter when navigating their sexuality in the digital realm. As a result, it becomes imperative for parents and guardians to familiarize themselves with the concept of fostering secure and conscientious online conduct within the framework of sexual education. While online, young people typically participate in a variety of social interactions and engage with diverse content. The array of online platforms at their disposal serves as invaluable tools that enable them to maintain friendships, share their experiences, and provide support to their peers, contributing to a sense of belonging within a broader global community.

In their role as digital inhabitants, adolescents utilize a variety of methods to communicate, including sharing comments, pictures, and videos, as a way to convey their thoughts and feelings. Through these forms of online expression, they delve into their personal identities and take initiatives regarding issues that resonate with them. This can involve actively participating in important matters like addressing climate change, becoming a part of virtual communities, and generating content such as videos or memes. These endeavors enable them to contribute significantly to the digital realm, adding depth and significance to their online presence.

The anonymity afforded by the internet can offer benefits to adolescents who are eager to explore different facets of their identity

or are seeking assistance with private matters they might feel reluctant to openly discuss. This sense of anonymity creates a secure environment for self-discovery and seeking guidance. Furthermore, the internet plays a crucial role in providing teenagers with access to news and information, becoming a central platform for them to gain insights into both their own identities and the broader global landscape. The wealth of diverse perspectives and information available online enriches their comprehension and influences their perspectives on a wide array of subjects.

## Essential Principles for Safe and Responsible Digital Citizenship

Encouraging your child to have a safe and enjoyable online experience while promoting responsible behavior:

### **1. Cultivate Respect, Expect Respect:**

Emphasize the importance of treating others online with kindness and respect. Encourage your child to expect the same treatment from others while engaging in digital interactions.

**2. Safeguard Your Reputation:** Educate your child about the significance of maintaining a positive online reputation. Remind them that their digital actions can have lasting effects on their image and future opportunities.

**3. Prioritize Privacy:** Teach your child the value of safeguarding their personal information online. Emphasize the need to be cautious about sharing sensitive details and to use privacy settings appropriately.

**4. Think Critically:** Encourage your child to develop critical thinking skills while navigating the digital realm. Encourage them to question information, sources, and

content encountered online to make informed decisions.

## Online safety and responsible use of digital media

In the contemporary digital era, the widespread prevalence of social media, online platforms, and digital communication holds considerable sway over the experiences of youngsters and adolescents. As caregivers, it is crucial to comprehend the ways in which these digital channels can shape the self-esteem, body perception, and general welfare of our children. The objective of this section is to offer parents valuable insights into the repercussions of digital media on their children's lives and to furnish them with effective approaches for nurturing constructive digital behaviors and cultivating a favorable online influence.

The significance of internet safety for teenagers cannot be overstated, given their pervasive utilization of digital technology across various spheres of their lives. Whether it's maintaining social connections on social media platforms, completing academic tasks, or seeking guidance on health matters, teenagers have integrated the internet into numerous aspects of their routines. As they frequently traverse the online realm without constant oversight, it becomes imperative for teenagers to cultivate the skill of independently distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate online content.

Recognizing the significance of displaying respectful conduct online and remaining conscious of potential online hazards holds utmost significance for their overall well-being and security. Given the expansive and multifaceted nature of the internet, it is imperative for teenagers to

possess the necessary insights and abilities to safeguard themselves against potential perils and detrimental materials. Offering guidance on privacy configurations, adopting secure online habits, and identifying online risks empowers teenagers to exercise discernment, enabling them to responsibly traverse the digital landscape.

Moreover, cultivating a culture of open dialogue with teenagers regarding their online encounters and difficulties can establish a secure space where they feel at ease seeking advice and assistance whenever required. By nurturing an awareness of internet safety, parents and guardians can empower teenagers to navigate the digital landscape effectively, safeguarding their welfare and security. A holistic approach includes recognizing the impact of digital media on relationships and self-perception, as well as addressing concerns like cyberbullying and online harassment, ensuring a well-rounded strategy to empower young individuals in the digital age.

## Influence of Social Media on Self-Image

Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook have seamlessly woven themselves into the fabric of children's and teenagers' daily existence. These digital arenas serve as portals into the experiences of others, offering fleeting insights into meticulously crafted visuals and projecting seemingly flawless ways of life. Often, users showcase their triumphs, journeys, and impeccably presented personas. Nevertheless, beyond these edited snapshots and choreographed updates resides a multifaceted landscape that significantly impacts one's perception of self-image and self-worth.

Continuous exposure to these meticulously crafted depictions can deeply influence how

young people perceive themselves. As they browse through their social media feeds, kids and adolescents are inundated with a constant stream of seemingly flawless lifestyles, triggering emotions of jealousy, insecurity, and unease. This phenomenon, referred to as social comparison, takes effect as young minds instinctively measure themselves against these meticulously edited and carefully presented images of others. Consequently, they begin to internalize the notion that their own lives and appearances pale in comparison, ultimately resulting in a decrease in their self-esteem.

Driven by a desire for social validation and acceptance, young individuals might feel an inherent pressure to project themselves in a similar idealized fashion. This could lead them to invest substantial amounts of time and energy in crafting their digital personas, meticulously choosing images that present them in the best light and showcasing a lifestyle they perceive as socially coveted by their online companions. Yet, this continuous act of self-presentation can place a significant emotional load, as the demand to sustain an impeccable image can become all-consuming and mentally taxing.

Furthermore, the facet of social media that enables users to receive likes, comments, and followers accentuates the inclination toward seeking validation via external endorsement. An increased count of likes and favorable comments may offer a fleeting elevation to self-esteem, whereas a dearth of interaction or adverse comments can precipitate sentiments of exclusion and self-questioning.

For parents, recognizing the influence of social media on self-perception holds utmost significance when it comes to supporting their children and adolescents in navigating these complexities. Establishing an environment of open and non-judgmental communication becomes crucial in creating a safe haven where youngsters can freely express their emotions and opinions concerning their online

encounters. Equipping young individuals with the skill to critically assess content on social media can also contribute to mitigating the adverse effects of comparing themselves to others. By encouraging them to scrutinize the authenticity of the content they encounter, they can develop a more grounded perspective on the digital realm. It's valuable to remind them that social media often showcases only the highlights, not the complete reality of someone's life, helping them grasp that nobody's life is flawless, and making comparisons is counterproductive.

Furthermore, cultivating robust self-esteem rooted in self-acceptance and inherent virtues can serve as a shield against the detrimental effects of social media. Prioritizing their distinct attributes, skills, and intrinsic significance beyond their digital presence reinforces the notion that their worth isn't contingent on the quantity of likes or followers they amass. By nurturing a firm sense of self-value and resilience, youngsters can traverse the realm of social media with a more wholesome outlook. Encouraging them to participate in offline pursuits that foster individual development and a diverse lifestyle can also engender a more well-rounded perspective, alleviating the excessive fixation on their online personas.

## **Distorted Body Image and Unrealistic Beauty Standards**

Social media platforms, magazines, advertisements, and even the entertainment industry frequently feature depictions of individuals showcasing seemingly flawless and impractical beauty ideals. These portrayals are often extensively retouched, airbrushed, or filtered to present an exaggerated concept of beauty that remains out of reach for the majority of individuals. For children and teenagers, who are still in the process of shaping their identities and constructing a sense of self, this continuous exposure to implausible beauty standards can yield particularly detrimental effects. As they scroll

through their social media timelines or peruse glossy magazines, they may inevitably begin comparing themselves to these digitally manipulated images, fostering feelings of inadequacy. This occurrence, identified as "social comparison," can result in dissatisfaction with one's body and a skewed perception of their own self-image.

In addition, the digital media's focus on physical appearance has the potential to sustain damaging body ideals, further ingraining the idea that an individual's value is exclusively defined by their external appearance. This dynamic can contribute to the development of an unhealthy and harmful relationship with one's own body, as teenagers might experience the pressure to conform to these impractical beauty norms in order to gain approval or recognition from their peers and society. As parents, it is imperative to acknowledge the influence of distorted body perceptions and impractical beauty standards on our children's mental and emotional wellness. Prioritizing the cultivation of a positive body image and advocating for self-acceptance should be a central aspect of our parenting approach.

To aid children and adolescents in nurturing a healthy body image, we can initiate discussions that are candid and open about beauty ideals and the often unattainable portrayal of images in the media. By imparting the skill of critically evaluating the visuals they encounter and recognizing the extensive editing involved, we can assist them in adopting a more grounded perception of beauty. Encouraging youngsters to emphasize their internal attributes, talents, and achievements instead of fixating solely on their external appearance can contribute to fostering a more positive self-perception.

Highlighting the significance of embracing oneself and cultivating self-affection, irrespective of societal norms, holds the potential to empower young individuals to exude confidence and ease within their own

identities. Moreover, we can establish a nurturing and supportive atmosphere within our households, where conversations about body perception and self-assurance are warmly welcomed. Steering clear of negative discourse about our bodies or making derogatory remarks about our own or others' looks can serve as a positive model for our children, aiding them in fostering a wholesome outlook towards their physical selves. Engaging in activities that champion body positivity—such as practicing self-care, participating in physical endeavors for enjoyment and well-being rather than appearances, and celebrating diverse body forms and dimensions—can likewise contribute to nurturing a positive body image in the younger generation.

## Addressing Cyberbullying and Online Harassment

Cyberbullying has surfaced as a distressing and widespread concern that can profoundly affect the emotional welfare of children and adolescents. This form of harassment entails using digital platforms to demean, shame, or intimidate others, leading to profound repercussions on the target's self-confidence and psychological well-being.

For parents, taking a proactive stance toward addressing cyberbullying and online harassment is of paramount importance. Keeping a vigilant eye on our child's online interactions and activities can enable us to identify early indicators of cyberbullying. Fostering open and honest conversations with children and teenagers regarding their online encounters can also yield valuable insights into any challenges they might be encountering. Should we uncover that our child is grappling with cyberbullying, it becomes vital to address the issue promptly and efficiently. Offering emotional support to children and teenagers and assuring them that they are not alone stands as a pivotal initial step in this process.

Collaboration among parents, guardians, and adults is essential in assisting children and teenagers in documenting and reporting instances of cyberbullying to relevant authorities or platform administrators. Equipping young individuals with the knowledge of how to effectively address cyberbullying empowers them to respond confidently and safeguard themselves in the digital realm. This involves imparting the skills to recognize when it's necessary to block or unfollow harmful individuals and encouraging them to reach out to trusted adults for assistance when needed. Furthermore, educating children and teenagers about responsible digital conduct and fostering an atmosphere of kindness and respect in the online sphere can play a crucial role in the prevention of cyberbullying. Encouraging them to interact with empathy can contribute to cultivating a more positive and supportive online community.

## Communication Challenges in the Digital Era

In recent times, communication has achieved unprecedented levels of convenience and accessibility. Nevertheless, the transition to digital channels such as text messages, instant messaging, and social media introduces its own array of difficulties. Among the foremost challenges is the absence of non-verbal signals like facial expressions and vocal intonations, which play a pivotal role in grasping the genuine intent behind a message. This dearth of non-verbal cues can pave the way for misinterpretation and confusion among individuals. Textual messages or online communications may be construed differently from the sender's original intention, potentially giving rise to conflicts and straining relationships, both in the virtual and real world.

In tackling these obstacles, it becomes paramount to impart effective communication abilities that extend beyond mere words. Introducing the use of emojis or emoticons can infuse messages with emotional nuances. Stressing the significance of precision and context in online communication can further mitigate the risk of misconceptions. Additionally, advocating for candid discussions and attentive listening is indispensable for proficient digital communication. Encouraging individuals to seek clarification when a message appears unclear and displaying openness to feedback can amplify comprehension and avert disputes. By acknowledging and proactively addressing these communication hurdles, individuals can cultivate more robust and substantial relationships in the digital age.

## Privacy Concerns and Online Safety

The simplicity of sharing personal details on the internet has introduced novel dimensions to concerns surrounding privacy and online safety, particularly for young individuals like children and teenagers. While they explore the expansive digital landscape, they might inadvertently expose themselves to potential vulnerabilities that could result in significant repercussions. It becomes crucial for parents and guardians to take a proactive approach in addressing these matters and engage in substantive conversations with their children regarding online safety and the conscientious utilization of the internet.

The proliferation of privacy concerns stems from the vast quantity of personal information that can be gathered and disseminated on diverse online platforms. Social media networks, e-commerce sites, and gaming portals frequently amass users' data, which could be exploited for tailored advertising or possibly traded with external entities. Young





individuals, including children and teenagers, might not entirely comprehend the consequences of divulging personal details—like their complete name, address, educational institution, or location—on public online spaces. This renders them vulnerable to potential hazards, including identity theft, cyberbullying, or predatory behavior from individuals online.

Enhancing the online safety of children and teenagers can be achieved by providing them with education about phishing attempts, online scams, and the critical nature of employing robust and distinct

passwords. Underlining the importance of exercising caution when interacting with unfamiliar links or downloading files can shield them from potential cyber threats. Additionally, it is crucial to engage in conversations about the potential hazards associated with meeting individuals in real life whom they've encountered online. Encouraging children to involve parents or guardians in such scenarios and stressing the significance of arranging meetings in public spaces with a trusted adult present is of paramount importance.

# Frequently Asked Questions



**Q1: What is child sexual abuse?**

“ A1: Child sexual abuse encompasses various forms of sexual activities carried out by adults on children. It doesn't necessarily require penetration or physical touch to qualify as abuse. For instance, showing explicit content or watching pornography with a child is considered child sexual abuse.

**Q2: How should I handle a situation where a family member is sexually abusing a child and the family is covering it up?**

“ A2: It's crucial to report this to the appropriate authorities, treating it as the crime it is. In Nigeria, under the Child Rights Act and the Lagos State Child Protection Policy, not reporting child sexual abuse is considered a violation. Act responsibly and report it to ensure the safety of the child.

**Q3: How can we protect children from online predators?**

“ A3: Establish an open line of communication with your child. Set an appropriate age for social media use and educate them about online safety. Instill awareness and restrict access to inappropriate content. If we don't teach them, they may learn harmful information elsewhere.

**Q4: How can individual privacy be protected when children of opposite sexes share the same room?**

“ A4: Implement a rotation system for dressing times. For example, if there are both boys and girls, each gender can dress separately while giving space and privacy to one another.

**Q5: When should a mother stop bathing with her son?**

“ A5: From birth onwards. Maintain separate bathing times for children and adults to ensure personal boundaries.

**Q6: What factors should I consider before enrolling my child in a school?**

“ A6: Inquire about the school's child protection and safeguarding policy. Ensure that the school prioritizes child safety and has measures to prevent and respond to sexual predators.

**Q7: How can I educate a child with intellectual disabilities about child sexual abuse?**

“ A7: Use a variety of methods, including demonstrations and pictures, to teach body boundaries and appropriate behavior. Repeat these lessons to reinforce understanding. Seek assistance from someone skilled in communication methods suitable for the child's needs.

**Q8: What should I do if my child discloses being abused?**

“ A8: Stay calm, believe your child, and thank them for sharing. Seek professional help and support. Resources like Invictus Africa's "Orange Pages" offer assistance for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

**Q9: How can you identify potential child sexual abusers?**

“ A9: Abusers don't fit a stereotype. They can be anyone, regardless of gender, religion, or background. Be cautious and observant, as abusers often hide behind facades.

**Q10: How can teachers encourage students to report abuse?**

“ A10: Foster a safe classroom environment where students feel comfortable. Be observant of behavioral changes and ask open-ended questions to show support and concern.

**Q11: Do survivors of child sexual abuse inevitably become**

“ A11: No, childhood abuse does not guarantee future abusive behavior. Psychological support can help survivors break the cycle and lead healthy lives.

**Q12: What are the effects of child sexual abuse?**

“ A12: Without proper professional care, survivors can experience lasting effects, including PTSD, substance abuse, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. Breaking the cycle requires support and understanding.



# How To Get Help

In Nigeria, there are specialized shelters, sexual assault referral centres, as well as professionals who are trained and experienced in providing care and support to survivors of sexual violence, including children. Some of these responders and service providers are enlisted in the Orange Pages.

Orange Pages is a directory of about four hundred organizations and professionals across Nigeria that respond and provide a diverse range of support services to victims and survivors of gender-based violence, including sexual violence. Orange Pages is a product of Invictus Africa, produced with support from the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA).

**Orange Pages can be accessed and freely downloaded via [www.invictus.ng/OrangePages](http://www.invictus.ng/OrangePages).**



# Conclusion

As the ongoing debate among adults is centered on whether children should receive sex education, it's important to acknowledge that children are already gathering information from potentially harmful sources. The influence of movies, music, the internet, social media, magazines, television shows, and peer interactions all contribute to the formation of children's perceptions about sex. Concurrently, instances of child sexual abuse persist, often remaining underreported and shrouded in secrecy.

The emergence of survivors of child sexual abuse sharing their stories even after several decades underscores the fact that their childhoods were marked by fear, trauma, or a profound sense of neglect. The prevalence of child abuse serves as a stark reminder of the very real dangers that children encounter from predators and perpetrators of abuse. Turning a blind eye to this issue will not lead to its resolution, nor can it be wished away through mere prayers.

Our aspiration is that this Comprehensive Guide on Appropriate Sex Education proves to be a valuable resource for you and the children under your care.

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