



**Rutgers**

For sexual and  
reproductive health  
and rights

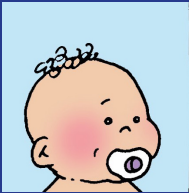
## Children's relational and sexual development

9 - 15 years old

Parenting tips for raising healthy  
children

## Relational and sexual development

For children to grow up and develop healthy and safely, it's important that they can explore their own bodies and learn to navigate feelings and relationships. For adolescents, this includes things such as being in love, dating, and physical changes, as well as expressing their wishes and their boundaries, and recognizing and respecting other people's wishes and boundaries.



### Baby

#### Cuddling is great

A baby explores the world through touch, sight, taste, and smell. Babies enjoy being touched and cuddled – it gives them a sense of security. Babies may start touching their own genitals, usually by coincidence rather than on purpose.



### Toddler

#### I have a penis. What about you?

Toddlers become aware of their own bodies and learn whether they are a boy or a girl. They are curious about their own bodies and those of others. They also begin to discover boundaries by, for instance, using 'naughty' words.



### Pre-schooler

#### Where do babies come from?

As children grow older, they gradually learn about appropriate behaviour at home and in school. Pre-schoolers ask lots of questions, such as how a baby gets into a mama's belly, and how it gets out. They learn by watching others and they enjoy playing games that involve exploring their bodies, such as playing house or doctor. At this age, they also form clear ideas about how boys and girls are supposed to behave.

As your child gets older, their body undergoes changes, along with the emotions they experience. Your child is having their first experiences with love and sexuality in the broadest sense of the word. They may feel insecure or have questions about this. It is great that you, as a parent, can be there for your child.



### **School-Age child**

#### **We are friends**

At this age, children can already experience deep feelings of love. Friendships also become more significant. Boys and girls often play separately, and playing together can sometimes be exciting for them. They start comparing themselves to others or to how they wish to be, leading to moments of insecurity. They may also start feeling self-conscious about their naked bodies.



### **Adolescent**

#### **In love and insecure**

Puberty typically begins between the ages of ten and fifteen. Adolescents undergo numerous changes in a short period. Their bodies grow and mature, and they may feel extremely uncertain about these transformations. They experience romantic feelings, experiment with kissing and touching, and explore masturbation. During this phase, young people often discover their sexual preferences.



### **Almost an adult**

#### **Flirting and intimacy**

As young people gradually approach adulthood, they practice flirting, dating, and, in some cases, engaging in sexual activities. Negotiation, communication, understanding desires and boundaries, and showing respect become crucial themes. By the age of eighteen, half of the young adults have experienced sexual intercourse. The other half may take things more slowly or await the right partner. Online platforms and social media play a significant role in establishing connections.

## Relational and sexual development and sexual upbringing

**Raising a child involves guiding them through their entire development, and relational and sexual development is a part of this journey. This encompasses aspects such as love and friendship, discovering whether you are a boy or a girl, saying what you want and what you don't want, and feeling comfortable in one's own skin. This development begins at birth.**

Sex education involves guiding your child through a safe and healthy relational and sexual development. Children are naturally curious about how their bodies work, where babies come from, and how to communicate their likes and dislikes. Sex education gives your children the knowledge and skills to get through these aspects of their development.

### ***When do I talk to my child about puberty?***

To prepare children for puberty, it is important to tell them in advance that their bodies will undergo changes. This should be done before they enter puberty, so they are not caught off guard by the growth of hair around their genital area and armpits, by the development of breasts and the growth of the labia or penis, or by their first ejaculation or first menstruation. You can also tell them that their emotions may change during puberty. For instance, hormonal fluctuations can lead to mood swings, making them feel very happy one moment and angry or sad the next. Let them know that these changes are a normal part of puberty.

### **As a parent, you are important for your child**

At this age, children feel a very strong bond with their parents or guardians. They are sensitive to everything you do and say. You are passing on important values and norms when it comes to love and respect. You are the first person they come to when they have questions. Let them know you are there for them. Talking about things that have to do with sexual development, in a way that is appropriate for their age, shows that it is normal and will make it easier to talk about things as they get older. Plus, at this age it is good to help guide your child through all the changes they are going through. By talking about it, you let your child know that they can always come to you if they have any questions.

*\* By the word parents, we also mean educators and guardians of children.*

## What can you do as a parent?

- **Provide safety.** Hugging your child or telling them they are special makes them feel safe, protected, and loved. When they are hugging, your child also learns what feels good to them.
- **Set rules.** By establishing rules, you teach your child what is acceptable and what isn't. For example, teaching them not to touch their penis or vulva in front of other people.
- **Pass on norms and values.** Sharing your thoughts about things and explaining why you think that way, helps your child think for him or herself. Often, this leads to your child adopting your values and norms.
- **Give them space.** Let your child explore their body and their feelings, with respect for themselves and others.
- **Respect wishes and boundaries.** By expressing your own wishes and boundaries, you teach your child that they can do the same. Additionally, take your child's wishes and boundaries seriously, such as greeting them in a way that they are comfortable with, even if it is different from what other people do.
- **Be an example.** Showing that you respect and love other people sets an example for your child. This includes how you communicate your wishes and boundaries and how you deal with other people's wishes and boundaries.
- **Be involved.** To give your child the support they need, it is important to understand what your child is going through and to understand how healthy sexual development works. Showing interest in your child's activities shows that you care, making your child more likely to approach you with questions or problems, including those related to relationships and sexuality.
- **Answer questions.** Talking with your child, in your own words, about the body, relationships, and sexuality, signals that it is okay to talk about these things. This encourages your child to come to you if they have questions.

### **You are an example for your child**

Each stage of your child's life brings new developments and experiences. You can support your child by discussing these changes and taking their questions and worries seriously. This should be done in a way that's appropriate to your child's age and development. When you talk to your child openly and in a relaxed way, he or she will have the feeling that they can discuss anything with you.

Plus, your role as a parent includes helping your child learn how to have relationships with others and how to make good choices. In other words, you are an example for your child. This way, your child will have enough knowledge and confidence to make conscious and safe choices, express their desires and boundaries, and recognise and respect those in others.

***We never talk about private parts at home, it makes me uncomfortable.***

Genitals are a part of the body and undergo changes during the children's early years and during puberty. Children and young people may have questions about them. While it is indeed a private area of the body, it is important for parents to talk to their children about it. This way, you can teach your child the proper terms for these body parts, penis and vulva, showing that they are normal parts of the body and that your child can come to you if they have questions. It is good for your child to know what changes to expect during puberty, to understand the different parts of the body, and to recognise that all genitals look different and they are all normal. If you have a hard time talking about this, there are also books you can give your child to read on their own. Alternatively, you can direct your child to [Pubergids.nl](https://www.pubergids.nl) (10+) (in Dutch) and [sense.info/en](https://sense.info/en) (13+).

## Why should you talk to your young child about these things?

### 1. It is part of healthy and safe development.

Every child goes through different phases of development. This is, of course, also the case for your child's sexual development. Answer questions and give information that's appropriate for your child's age and development, in your own words and in your own way.

### 2. As parent, you are their most important role model.

By talking to your child and answering their questions, you teach them that they can come to you. This gives them a safe space, ensures they receive reliable and age-appropriate information, and allows you to pass on your own values and principles. As your child grows older, you can continue to talk with them about these things.

### 3. You make your child more resilient.

A resilient child can stand up for themselves. They can express their own desires and boundaries and come up with solutions in challenging situations. You also teach your child to respect the wishes and boundaries of others.



## What happens during puberty?

**Between the ages of nine to fifteen, a lot happens in the adolescent body. There are physical changes and hormones going wild. It is helpful for your child to know what to expect.**

### The body changes

During puberty, adolescents experience rapid changes in their bodies. The body grows and matures. The hands and feet are the first to get bigger, then the body shoots up. In girls, this typically happens about a year and a half earlier than in boys. Girls develop breasts, broader hips, and larger labia. In boys, the penis and testicles grow. In addition, adolescents get hair under their armpits and around the pubic area. Boys start growing facial hair, and their voice gets lower.

#### Did you know?

At the beginning of puberty, boys may start developing breasts. This is nothing to worry about; it usually goes away on its own. In girls, one breast may be slightly larger than the other, which is perfectly normal.

### Hormones going wild

Changing hormones cause adolescents to sweat more. Good personal hygiene becomes especially important. Hormones also cause the skin to produce more oils, which can result in pimples. Living a healthy lifestyle and washing well, with just water, can help. If your child struggles with acne, it might be worth visiting the doctor for advice.

### Insecure

All these physical changes during puberty can make adolescents feel insecure. They might compare themselves to friends or to images they see in the media. Tell them that puberty lasts until the age of seventeen or eighteen, and until then, everything is still developing. Emphasise that each person's body is different, and images on social media have often been manipulated. Explain that everyone looks different, and every type of body is okay. It is okay to let your child know how beautiful and unique they are and that they should take pride in themselves!



### Menstruation and ejaculation

During puberty, a child becomes fertile.

Girls have their first menstruation, and boys experience their first ejaculation.

The age at which this happens varies, but typically falls between ten and sixteen years old for girls and often between

twelve and fifteen years old for boys. To prevent you child from being startled, it is important to prepare them in advance and talk to them about it. It is also good to tell girls about the changes boys go through, and to tell boys about the changes girls undergo. That way you can keep these changes from being taboo.

### Tip

Good care also includes washing your own genitals. Tell your child that they should wash their genitals with water only, not with soap, in order to maintain the body's proper acidity.

### Menstruation

Some girls may not feel well before or during the first days of their menstruation. For example, they might get sad or irritated quite easily, or have abdominal pain. Explain that this usually doesn't last longer than one or two days. Sometimes a hot water bottle and some extra attention can help. Menstruation can be irregular for the first two years. It is useful to note the start and end of each menstruation on the calendar. Also, tell your child about sanitary pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and menstrual underwear, and explain how to use them. Make sure you have these products at home before your child starts menstruating.

### Wet dream

Your child may experience his first ejaculation during sleep. This doesn't necessarily mean your child dreamt of anything sexual; it can just happen. Let your child know what to do if the sheets or underwear get soiled. Let them know that this is perfectly normal. During puberty, boys may also get an erection without intending to. This can make them feel uncomfortable. Assure your child that this is perfectly normal and can happen to anyone.



## Being in love and dating

**Not only does an adolescent's body change rapidly, but their emotional life can also be quite tumultuous. Emerging sexual feelings, the first kiss, or dating: it can all be quite confusing at times.**

### Head over heels in love

Being in love is also part of adolescence. If your child is often daydreaming, or suddenly bursting with energy, or extremely nervous, there's a good chance they are in love! It is possible that your child may slowly start taking the first steps to becoming sexually active. This usually begins with kissing and often gradually progresses to more intimate activities.

#### Did you know?

Fifty percent of adolescents have had a French kiss by the time they are 15 ½ years old. By the age of 18, half of all adolescents have had sexual intercourse. These are averages, and the age at which your child has their first experience can vary. If a child starts earlier or waits until later, that's perfectly fine.

### Information about sex

At this age, adolescents want to know more about sex and are curious to find information about it. They often look for this information themselves, with varying degrees of success. As a parent, you can provide your child with information or guide them to reliable sources that suit their age and development.

### Masturbation

Many adolescents masturbate, with boys generally doing so slightly more than girls. This is one way adolescents explore their bodies and their sexual feelings, figuring out what they like and don't like. This can also help them learn how to communicate their preferences to others later on. Masturbation is a normal part of sexual development, and there's no need to worry about it. As a parent, you can share your own values and norms about masturbation.

## LGBTI+

Most young people discover who they are attracted to during puberty, but for some it may take longer. Homosexuality and bisexuality are just as normal as heterosexuality, but are less common. Therefore, a child might be afraid of not being accepted or of being bullied. Respect your child's feelings and try to understand them. Even if it goes against your own values, keep talking with your child about it. You can't choose who you fall in love with. Let your child know that they can be who they are. Give your child time to process their feelings and thoughts. Don't push for a conversation if your child isn't ready, but make it clear that no matter who they are attracted to, you will be there for them.

### *Won't I confuse my child by talking about this?*

You might be concerned that discussing these topics will plant ideas in your child's mind, making them more likely to be homosexual or transgender. But that's not how it works. You can't choose who you fall in love with or how you feel about your gender. It is important to talk with your child about these topics so they understand the differences among people and the importance of respecting these differences. And by doing this, you create an environment where your child feels free to be themselves. You don't need to have all the answers; you can show your child where to find reliable information and share experiences of people who are similar to them.

## Gender

Gender consists of your gender identity (who you are) and your gender expression (how you express yourself). Sex is the gender assigned at birth. Based on external sex characteristics, most babies are assigned the sex of female or male. However, there's much more diversity than the labels male or female; everyone has their own unique set of sex characteristics. For most people, their sex aligns with how they experience their gender identity. That's known as cisgender. But your child may feel differently than their assigned sex: male, female, both, in between, or neither. When gender identity doesn't fit on one side of the division male or female, that is called non-binary. If sex and gender identity don't match, it is called transgender. Your child may develop these feelings. This happens with 1.7% of boys and 2.9% of girls. If you have questions, check [transvisie.nl](https://transvisie.nl) (in Dutch). Talk to your child about gender and gender identity; once again, this isn't something that can be influenced. Let your child discover who they are. Teach your child about diversity and the importance of respecting everyone.

## Intersex

Some children are born with both male and female sex characteristics. Sometimes sex characteristics don't develop as expected or expected sex characteristics aren't there, or are present in excess. This is called intersex. This isn't always about external genitals but can involve internal genitals, chromosomes, or hormones. Intersex is not a disorder; it is a natural variation in sex. It is important to tell your child that these kinds of variation exist. That makes it more normal and leads to more understanding for intersex children and adults. If you have questions, check [nnid.nl](https://nnid.nl) (in Dutch).

### Did you know?

Queer refers to someone who doesn't feel they fit into the categories of gay, straight, bi, man, or woman, or someone who reject these categories. Sometimes, queer is also used as an umbrella term for anyone who is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. Queer literally means 'different'.

### How do you know if your child is gay or lesbian?

A child discovers his or her own feelings and attractions over time. It is important that your child knows they can be themselves and always come to you. Also, let your child know they can fall in love with whoever they want, express themselves however they want, and decide how they want to be addressed.



## Talking about sex

**It is important for young people to know how to have safe and enjoyable sex when they are ready, so they can communicate their desires and boundaries and protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and STIs.**

### What to tell them and when?

Many adolescents experience romantic and sexual feelings during puberty. However, some experience these feelings later, and some never do. Discovering one's sexuality is a part of growing up. It is important to provide your adolescent child information about sex and reproduction. Even if you think your child is too young or you prefer them to abstain from sex until marriage, providing information is still very important. This way, your child can make informed choices about when and how to engage in sexual activities. Lack of knowledge might make your child more susceptible to persuasion or to have difficulty setting boundaries. Every child has the right to knowledge and skills to protect themselves, if necessary, against STIs and pregnancy.

### Did you know?

As a parent or guardian, you play a vital role in your child's healthy and safe development. Keep working on having a good relationship with your child. Your child needs you now more than ever. Some parents prefer not to talk to their children about relationships and sexuality, and adolescents may be embarrassed to talk about such things. Keep in mind that not talking about it also sends a message. Your child might think that sexuality is a taboo topic, and that they can't come to you for advice if they are having problems. Additionally, your child might not learn everything they need to know or they might learn incorrect information.

Most adolescents have their first French kiss around the age of fifteen. Half of adolescents have had sexual intercourse by the age of eighteen. However, some young people choose to wait before they have sex. Everyone makes their own choices. As a parent, it is good to be aware of your child's development and give them the right information before they start kissing or engaging in sexual activities.

### What can you tell your child about sex?

Most adolescents start with kissing and caressing. Taking it further might involve being naked together. Explain that sex can also mean touching each other's genitals. While most people focus on intercourse (penis-in-vagina sex), explain to your child that there

are various ways to engage in sexual activities, and they are free to explore what they like. And they shouldn't feel like they have to do anything. Whether kissing or having intercourse, it is important that they don't do anything they don't want to do, or might regret later.

#### Tip

Let your child know that they can always turn to the Children's Helpline for questions or if they are having problems by visiting [kindertelefoon.nl](https://www.kindertelefoon.nl) (in Dutch) where they can chat or call at 0800-0432. Most of the questions that the Children's Helpline receives are related to relationships and sexuality.

#### Things to know about the hymen:

Tell your child that the hymen isn't a membrane but a thin layer of tissue around the entrance of the vagina. It may be a bit firm for some girls and softer for others. During the first sexual intercourse, this tissue may stretch a little, which can be painful. However, it doesn't always lead to bleeding.

### When is it fun?

To have safe and enjoyable sex later on, it is important for young people to know what they like and to be able to say so. To be able to do this, they need to know the parts of the body and how they work. Explain to your child about the different parts of a penis and vulva and their function. The glans of the penis and the clitoris of the vulva are the most sensitive parts that provide the most pleasure during sex. It is also important to tell your child that both partners need to be aroused for sex to be enjoyable. Arousal causes the vagina to become moist and the penis to become erect. If a girl isn't aroused, intercourse can be painful, and intercourse shouldn't be painful.

## Safe sex

Before young people engage in sexual activity, it is important to tell them how to do it in a healthy and safe way. Safe sex is not only about using contraceptives but also about respecting each other's boundaries. This is an important message to explain to your child.

### Contraception and STIs

Boys become fertile after their first ejaculation, and girls just before their first menstruation. From that moment on, girls can become pregnant. Sexually active adolescents also risk contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs). That's why contraception and the use of condoms are so important. Teach your child that both partners are responsible for preventing STIs.

#### Is your child fertile but not yet sexually active?

Even if your child isn't sexually active yet, you should still talk to them about sexually transmitted infections, contraception, and condoms. This way, your child is well-prepared and knows that they can come to you if they have questions.





## Contraception

There are various methods to prevent pregnancy, known as contraception. Besides condoms, there's also the pill, the diaphragm, the contraceptive patch, the contraceptive injection, hormonal implants, hormonal intrauterine device (IUD), and the copper IUD. To learn more about all contraceptive methods, you can explore [anticonceptievoorjou.nl](http://anticonceptievoorjou.nl) (in Dutch) with your child.

## Tip

You should tell your adolescent, girls (and boys!) about the morning-after pill. But also tell them it is only intended for emergencies.

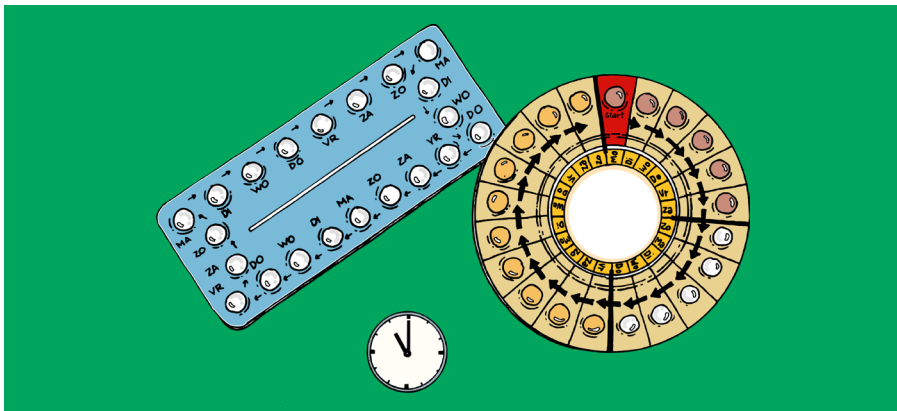
## STIs

Adolescents who have unprotected sex can get a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Condoms are the only protection against STIs. The pill and other contraceptive methods only protect against pregnancy.

## Emergency contraception

The morning-after pill is an emergency contraceptive. Girls who've had unsafe sex or forgot to use contraception can take the morning-after pill to prevent pregnancy. This happens, in part, by delaying ovulation.

The morning-after pill is available without a prescription at pharmacies and drugstores. It should be taken as soon as possible, ideally within 72-120 hours after having unsafe sex.



## Resilience

**Adolescents often place great importance on what others think of them, sometimes leading them to do things they don't want to do. Teach your child to recognise, respect, and discuss boundaries, both their own and those of other people.**

### Desires and boundaries

Tell your child that it is very important to respect desires and boundaries, both their own and other people's. Other people should respect your child's wishes, and your child should respect what other people want! For instance, ask them "What would you do if..."

- Someone asks you to be their girlfriend/boyfriend, but you are not in love with them?
- You want to kiss someone, but the other person isn't ready?
- Someone asks you to undress in front of the camera?
- Someone does something to you that you don't want?

### How to make your child more resilient?

- Ask your child their opinion about things, and do it often. This helps them develop their own opinions and learn how to talk about different things.
- Accept that you won't always agree with each other. Sometimes your child will see things differently than you. Show them that you respect that.
- Compliment your child every day and point out things they've done well. This boosts their self-confidence.
- Share stories about your own adolescence and talk about what came easily for you, or what was challenging.
- Talk about being in love, kissing, and being physically intimate with someone. Explain that young people may exaggerate when talking about their experiences with kissing and sex. In reality, it may take a while before they have such experiences.
- Make sure your child knows that they are the one who determines when they are ready for kissing, cuddling, or sex. Emphasise that everyone goes at their own pace.
- Explain that your child can indicate where their boundaries are. If they say A, they don't have to say B.
- Make it clear that your child can always check with the other person to confirm their consent. Without a clear "yes," it should be considered a "no," and they should always stop.

- Teach your child that they are in control of their own body. Nobody should touch them without their consent. Adults should never engage in any sexual activities with children and adolescents; it is against the law.
- Let your child know that if they experience anything sexually inappropriate, they can always tell you, and you will help them.

### How to teach your child about desires and boundaries

Teach your child to trust their own feelings. Explain that it is essential to clearly express when they don't want something. Others should respect their opinion, just as your child should respect other people's opinions. Make it clear that your child can say where their boundaries are.

Some useful phrases:

- **'You can have a yes-feeling, a no-feeling, or an I'm-not-sure-feeling.'** Your child can learn to differentiate between what they want (yes-feeling) and what they don't want (no-feeling). When they are not sure, they might cross their own boundaries a bit, but those feelings can be helpful for your child to figure out where their limits are.
- **'People can also show, without words, what they want and what they don't want. For instance, through their body language or by not actively participating.'** Teach your child to pay attention to non-verbal signs, emphasizing that they shouldn't engage in sexual activities with someone who can't consent. And they should never persuade or force anyone.
- **'With sex, it is important that both parties enjoy it.'** This can only happen if both people consent, are having fun together, and are paying attention to what the other person wants. So always check with the other person if they are okay with what you are going to do (ask for their consent). If they don't give a clear 'yes,' or if it is unclear whether it is okay, that means they haven't given their consent. Of course, this is also the case the other way around. Tell your child that it is never their fault if something unpleasant happens; the other person should always ask your child for their consent. If there's no consent and someone crosses the line, that means there was sexual misconduct.
- **Teach your child these phrases: 'Are you in the mood?', "Do you like this?", "Did you enjoy it?'** With these three questions, you can check for consent before, during, and after sexual or intimate activities.

## Okay behaviour or crossing the line

Your child will flirt, try things out, and may even fall in love for the first time. As a parent or guardian, you may have doubts about your child's behaviour. Is this part of my child's healthy and safe development, or does it cross the line? It is important to teach children when behaviour is or isn't okay to prevent sexual misconduct. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. **Is there mutual consent?** Does your child want it, does the other child want it, do both children enjoy the behaviour?
2. **Is it voluntary?** Is your child making this choice on their own? Can they say no?
3. **Is it equal?** Are the children equally strong, the same age, and equally smart, or is there a power difference?
4. **Is the behaviour appropriate for your child's stage of development?** Is your child doing something that they are too young for, or too old for? Does the behaviour suit your child's developmental age?
5. **Does the behaviour fit the context?** Is your child's behaviour appropriate, does it not disturb or shock others in the environment?
6. **Does your child understand the consequences of their behaviour?** Make sure the behaviour won't have a negative impact on your child and that they are not taking risks that could have harmful consequences.

### Crossing the line?

If you answer no to one or more of the questions above, the behaviour may be crossing the line. You can also ask your child for their opinion. If the behaviour is okay and appropriate, you can choose to do nothing, you can acknowledge it, or you can ignore it. If the behaviour is not okay or if it is inappropriate, it may be crossing the line, and you need to intervene, and you may need to get help.

If the behaviour has crossed the line, explain why it is not acceptable and what your child can do to change it. Don't judge your child, but talk about the behaviour.

Has someone else has crossed your child's boundaries? Let your child know they can always come to you, and reassure them that it is never their fault; the blame lies with the person who crossed the line.

For more information, read '[Over de grens?](#) Seksueel opvoeden met het Vlaggensysteem (Crossing the line? Sexual education with the Flag system).

## Tip

Has your child experienced sexual abuse? Go to [centrumseksueelgeweld.nl/en/](https://www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl/en/) for help.

## Sexual misconduct

11% of girls and 3% of boys have been forced into a sexual act (such as a French kiss or sexual intercourse). A child needs to know that this is against the law. Are you worried that something like this has happened to your child? Has their behaviour changed? Do they have frequent nightmares? Do they have extreme mood swings? Ask if something unpleasant has happened and if they want to talk about it. Make it clear that you won't do anything with the information if your child doesn't want you to. If your adolescent has been a victim of sexual misconduct, discuss the next steps together: go to the doctor, the police, or talk to a professional? Reassure your child, and emphasise that if your child has been a victim of sexual misconduct, it is never their fault. And let them know that you are there for them.



## Media-wise

**Adolescents spend a lot of time online -- chatting, gaming, making plans, looking at and sharing photos and videos. The internet has become an integral part of the children's and adolescents' world. Some tips for both parents and adolescents!**

### Media education

Teach your child that there's a difference between the online world and reality. Online, people sometimes present themselves as more beautiful, successful, and wealthy than they really are. This can make your child feel inferior and feel like they've failed. Teach your child to look critically at fake or inaccurate images of sexuality or the body. Make sure that they can distinguish between 'media reality' and the real world.

### Photos and videos

Young people often share photos online or via their mobile phones. Tell your child that photos, videos, and texts can stay on the internet for a long time, even if your child deletes them. Someone else may have copied or forwarded the information. Explain that it is important to think carefully before posting anything online. It is also important for your child to secure their profile well.

#### Tip

Never blame your child if something goes wrong. For example, if your child looks up information about sex and accidentally lands on a porn site. Or if someone pressures your child to undress in front of the camera. Or if a nude photo of your child gets circulated. Let your child know that they can confide in you and ask you questions if they are in trouble. Also, tell them about other places where they can get help if something unpleasant happens, such as [helpwanted.nl/en](https://www.helpwanted.nl/en) and [kindertelefoon.nl](https://www.kindertelefoon.nl) (in Dutch).

## Sexting

Sexting involves sending and receiving sexually explicit photos and videos. Many young people do this – it is part of their sexual development. As long as both parties are willing and enjoy it, sexting is okay.

## Tip

Most young people don't know straight away what they want and what they don't want. On [canyoufixit.nl](https://www.canyoufixit.nl) (in Dutch), young people can practice setting boundaries in a playful and interactive way.

However, many parents are concerned about the risks of sexting, such as the chance that other people may get the images without their child's consent. Instead of prohibiting it, it is better to explain how sexting can be done safely and respectfully. For example, explain that you should only engage in sexting with people you know and trust. And always ask for consent beforehand. Also, explain that sending or forwarding sexually explicit images without consent is illegal. And that it is never the victim's fault when this happens.

## What else can you do?

- Once in a while, check the sites your child visits and show that you are interested.
- Together with your child, look at other people's profiles and discuss them.
- What kind of information would your child share or not share? And what would you do?
- Together with your child, secure their social media profiles.
- Make clear agreements with your child. For example, that they should not add strangers and they should block people who ask unpleasant questions.
- If it is ok with them, follow your child on social media. But respect their right to privacy if they don't want you to.
- Make agreements with your child that they check in with you if someone online makes a strange offer.
- Tell your child how they can support someone who becomes a victim of unwanted sexting. For example, by deleting forwarded images straight away and telling the person who sent them that it is not okay.

## Sex: just like in the movies?!

Young people encounter sex everywhere: on the internet, in movies, in magazines. This exposure can create misconceptions. A boy might think he always has to be strong and sexually active, while girls might believe that having a slim and sexy body is a prerequisite for being attractive. Movies often portray characters as always ready for sex, with everyone jumping into bed after the first eye contact. Explain that this is not realistic. Talk about how sex in the media usually isn't realistic. In the real world, sex involves more consideration for each other's feelings, and intimacy includes being affectionate and kind to one another.

## Pornography

Many young people watch porn, and there is nothing wrong with that as long as it is not their only source of sexual education. Explain to your child that porn is made for adults and is meant to arouse them. The positions people take in porn are done to arouse the viewer and to get a good shot for the camera. This has little to do with real-life sex, which involves intimacy and discovering together what you and your partner enjoy. Sex can also be clumsy and sometimes funny, and it is okay to laugh about it together.





### **Talking about sex: Does it give my child ideas?**

No, adolescents have questions about sex. They are looking for information, whether you talk to them about it or not. The disadvantage of not talking with them is that you might not know where they are getting their information and whether or not it is accurate. Talking to children and adolescents about sex does not mean they start earlier. On the contrary, it actually helps them make healthier choices and better decisions about what they want and what don't want.

### **Are young people starting to have sex earlier nowadays?**

No, in fact, young people are starting to have sex later than they did a few years ago. Currently, about half of all 18-year-olds have had sex. Five years ago, this was true for half of all 17-year-olds, so a full year earlier. The same goes for kissing and other sexual activities – adolescents start about a year later on average compared to a few years ago.

## Pulling away

**Adolescents are in the process of becoming adults. They are becoming more independent and they more often want to do things alone or with friends. They also start pulling away from their parents.**

### Insecure

Do other people think I'm likable? Do I look 'normal'? Crucial questions for an adolescent. Many young people are insecure about their appearance. This is because their bodies are changing rapidly. Many young people are embarrassed about themselves at times, but they are also easily embarrassed about their parents. More and more, they want to go their own way, be online, play games, or sleep in. One moment they may seem unhappy, and then suddenly they are in a great mood. These mood swings can be challenging, but it is all part of going through puberty.

#### Less conflict: tips for better communication with your adolescent:

- Explain what you are worried about.
- Ask your child what they think about it.
- Negotiate with your child and make clear agreements.
- Give them the chance to earn your trust by keeping to your agreements.
- If your child is angry, ask why. Sometimes it is just a question of miscommunication.

### Illness or disability

Young people with a chronic illness or physical disability are often more insecure than other adolescents. It is difficult for them to see their bodies as beautiful. It is especially important for these young people that you tell them how beautiful and worthwhile they are. Be careful, however, not to overprotect them, even with the best intentions. Encourage them to be independent. Even if an adolescent has a limitation or an illness, they are still an adolescent. Your child has the same need to try things out, discover boundaries, break free, and make new connections as any other adolescent. If you want to know more, read the brochure 'Children's with disabilities relational and sexual development 0-18 Years'.

## LOVE RULE FOR PARENTS

### **Look at and pay attention to your child**

Make sure you know what your child is up to. Who are their friends, what apps do they use, what kind of parties do they go to? What do these friends think about love, relationships, and sex? Also, pay attention to your child's behaviour. If your child falls in love or starts dating, it is an excellent opportunity to talk about your child's wishes and boundaries.

### **Open communication**

Many young people complain that their parents are mostly warning them. "Don't come home pregnant" or "Make sure you don't get a disease." By asking open questions, you give your child the space to share something with you. "How do you feel about being in love?" or "What are your ideas about puberty?" Be open to what your child tells you. Only start a conversation if you have time for it.

### **Value your child, be there for them**

Make that you have time and attention for your child. Adolescents need to know that they can always turn to their parents, even when they need to talk about difficult things. Children entering puberty say that they have less need for their parents, but it is still important to them that parents are available for if problems come up or if they have questions. They want space to develop and experiment but they also want to feel supported.

### **be a good Example**

Children pick up on what they see and hear at home. Don't be too quick to judge others. Terms like 'slut' or 'gay' are easily copied. Make sure that your child can see themselves in parents who treat each other and other people with love and warmth. There's a good chance that they will adopt the same attitude.

## How do you talk about relationships and sex?

**You might find it challenging to discuss relationships and sex with your child. These tips can make it easier.**

### 1. Answer questions

Respond to your child's questions. This helps your child realise that they can come to you with questions about sex. Answer in a way that's appropriate for your child's age. If you don't know an answer right away, let them know that you don't know but that you will get back to them. Then follow through on your promise.

### 2. Make use of your child's experience

It is often easier to talk with your child about something they are experiencing. Don't think you have to sit down for an extensive conversation - that just makes it more difficult. Make use of everyday events, social media trends, or news to start a conversation. It is often easier to start a conversation about something your child is going through at the moment.

### 3. Pick the right moment

If you are already doing something else with your child, it is often easier to talk about things, rather than sitting down and making it into a formal discussion. For example, talk about things while in the car together, walking the dog, or cooking. This helps make sexuality an ordinary topic of conversation.

### 4. Ask questions yourself

Ask questions to find out what your child already knows and what they think about things. Use questions that start with who, what, where, how, or which. And ask your child for their opinion, and tell them what you think. If you disagree with something, don't get angry, but engage in a conversation.

### 5. What would you do if...?

You can help prepare your child to deal with difficult situations by asking them how they would react in different situations. You can ask, "What would you do if...?" This gives you insight into what your child would do in certain situations, and you can provide additional information if necessary. For example, you can ask: 'What would you do if you are dating someone but you are actually in love with someone else?' or 'What would you do if you want to kiss, but you can tell that the other person would rather not?'

## 6. Use a book or website

If it is challenging to discuss sexuality with your child, you can read a book together or give them a book to read on their own. You can also direct your child to a website with reliable information. For pre-teens (10+), you can refer them to [pubergids.nl](http://pubergids.nl) (in Dutch). For teenagers (13+), [sense.info/en](http://sense.info/en) is a good resource.

## 7. Don't judge

Don't pass judgement. Let your child know that they can say and ask anything. Don't use a condescending tone or unintentionally condemn things that you see happening around you by saying, 'Surely you wouldn't do that, would you?' or 'That's stupid.' This can put off your child, making them less likely to talk with you about things.

## 8. Share your own experience

Share your own experience with your child, such as how it was when you had your first kiss. This shows that you had to learn things too and that it is okay to make mistakes.

## 9. Let your child know you are there for them

Regularly say that you love your child and that they can come to you with questions.

### Word choice

There are lots of different words for things having to do with sex. Choose words that you and your child are comfortable with, but make it clear what you are talking about. Use the correct names for genitals or teach your child the correct names: penis and vulva. This shows that it is a normal part of the body, and your child can come to you with questions. Children who know the correct words are also better able to say when something unpleasant has happened.

## To wrap it up

### **Sexual upbringing is a task for both parents and school**

Parents, as the primary caregivers, bear the greatest responsibility in raising children, including things having to do with relationships and sexuality. You give your child love, respect, and core values, and you are the person they come to with questions. Additionally, you are an important example for your child.

Schools also play a major role in imparting knowledge and skills. It is important that schools keep parents informed so that you, as a parent, can take into account what is being discussed at school. This gives you the chance to talk to your child in advance and tell them your own information, norms and values.

As with other subjects, schools decide how they go about teaching about relationships and sexuality and they choose their own teaching materials. If you have questions, ask someone at the school about it. Many schools tell parents about sexual education in their school plan or newsletters and many also organise parent evenings.

### **Adolescents are already interested in love and relationships**

They are in the process of discovery and they learn from others how people react. It is important as a parent to guide your child in a positive way. There is never one right way to bring up a child. This brochure is meant to provide you with some basic information on how to do this so that you can approach it in your own way.

### **If you talk to children about sex, that doesn't mean they will start having sex sooner**

Children who are well informed are usually less curious about sex. And when they start having sex, they do so at a later age, they are more likely to practice safe sex (using the pill and a condom) and they are more resilient (they experience less inappropriate sexual behaviour).

## Relational en sexual upbringing helps your child:

- Develop a positive self-image and a positive perception of their own body.
- Gain more self-confidence and become better at asserting themselves.
- Learn to express and recognise their own wishes and boundaries, and respect those of others.
- Later life, to have the ability to have pleasant, safe and equal (sexual) relationships.
- Be less influenced by peer pressure or online content.
- Develop resilience against (sexual) boundary-crossing behaviour.
- When they do become sexually active, to protect themselves better against STIs and unplanned pregnancy.

Further reading [seksueleopvoeding.info](https://seksueleopvoeding.info).

Questions? Or remarks/feedback/comments? Please contact us at [contact@seksueleopvoeding.info](mailto:contact@seksueleopvoeding.info).



**You can download for free more brochures about sexual education from the Rutgers' website (<http://shop.rutgers.nl>). For example:**

- Children's with disabilities relational and sexual development 0-18
- Children's relational and sexual development 0-18
- Children's relational and sexual development 0-6
- Children's relational and sexual development 6-9
- Children's relational and sexual development 9-15

#### **Websites for parents/guardians**

- [www.seksueleopvoeding.info](http://www.seksueleopvoeding.info) (in Dutch)
- [www.ouders.nl](http://www.ouders.nl) (in Dutch)

#### **Books for parents/guardians**

- 101 vragen over seksualiteit (Belle Barbé) (in Dutch)
- Kinderen en seksualiteit (Sanderijn van der Doef) (in Dutch)
- Kleine mensen grote gevoelens (Sanderijn van der Doef) (in Dutch)

#### **Websites for children and young people**

- [www.pubergids.nl](http://www.pubergids.nl) (voor pubers 10+) (in Dutch)
- [www.sense.info](http://www.sense.info) (voor jongeren 13+) (in Dutch)

#### **(reading) Books**

- Puberboek (Sanderijn van der Doef) (in Dutch)
- Dokter Corrie geeft antwoord (Niki Padidar) (in Dutch)
- Heel eerlijk, het ultieme boek voor jongeren (Astrid Nylander) (in Dutch)
- Het Meidenlijfboek (Nina Brochman) (in Dutch)
- Lijfboek voor Powergirls (Sanderijn van der Doef) (in Dutch)