



Common parent-child challenges

This section explores ways to overcome some of the more common challenges that you may face when talking to your teenage child about sexuality and contraception.

My child is refusing to talk to me

That's fine. For now. Don't push the issue as this may create an unnecessary barrier between you both, and it may make it harder if and when your child does want to talk.

However, if you are pretty sure that your child is in a sexually active relationship, and that they have relatively little knowledge about contraception, encourage them to seek advice from a third-party that you both trust. This could be your family doctor, a close friend or relative, or a teacher at their school. This should ensure that, despite them not wanting to talk to you at this stage, they still have all the information they need to be able to practice safe sex.

My child is pretending to know it all, but I know that he / she doesn't

If you suspect that your child knows less than they are claiming, treat them at face value, but make sure that they have easy access to the information that they claim to already know! This may sound complicated, but a simple way of doing this would be to leave a contraceptive factsheet (available from your doctor) in a place where they could easily find it. By reading it, they will quickly learn the things that you suspect they didn't know before, and it may also prompt them to openly broach the subject with you.

I don't know where to send my teen to get their contraception

If a condom is your teen's preferred contraceptive method, they can now be purchased from pharmacies and supermarkets and can also be obtained from family planning clinics and other specialist health centres (availability will vary according to where you live).

To receive all other contraceptive options, your teen must firstly see her doctor. Her doctor will ask about any other medications that she might be taking, and can provide additional advice on which

contraceptive method is right for her. If your teen is embarrassed about seeing a male doctor, she can ask to see a female doctor instead.

Depending on the contraceptive method chosen, your teen may also be referred to a specialist nurse (e.g. to have a coil fitted) or a specialist doctor (e.g. for further tests and health checks). Whichever contraceptive method is chosen, she must follow the instructions carefully to avoid becoming pregnant. She may find it useful to run through the instructions with you. That way, you will both be able to check whether she fully understands the advice that she's been given.

I think that my child may be pregnant

Firstly, consider why you think that your child may be pregnant? How sure are you? And if you ask her outright, are you ready to hear the answer? Also consider that if you confront her while you are emotionally charged, and you turn out to be wrong, it could be very upsetting for both of you.

However, if you are close to your child and you confide in each other regularly, it may be good for both of you if you openly ask her whether she is pregnant or not. Tell her why you have your suspicions, and explain that the fact that you are asking is in no way a judgment on the way she is living her life.

There is probably a good reason why she is 'keeping things quiet'. If she is not pregnant, of course, there is nothing to tell. However, if she is pregnant, she may be terrified that you may take the news badly, and will probably welcome the chance to 'share her big secret'. It may also bring you closer together.

My child is pregnant

If you have just found out that your child is pregnant, you may be feeling a diverse range of emotions. Depending on the circumstances, you may experience joy, anger, excitement, betrayal, or concern; and it is also normal to feel a combination of all these things and more.

However, your child is almost certainly experiencing the same emotional uncertainty, and she will probably need your help now more than ever. In order to provide the advice that she needs, you must stay emotionally strong, and despite everything, you must try to



remain as rational and calm as possible. This will enable you to keep a clear head and provide plain, impartial advice.

The first thing to remember is that your child has several main options. These include:

- terminating the pregnancy (providing the pregnancy is still within the legal time limit)
- carrying the baby to term and raising it herself, with or without the father
- carrying the baby to term and having it raised by relatives.
- carrying the baby to term and giving it up for adoption.

Each situation brings different factors to consider: your daughter's age, her health, your health, life plans, religious beliefs, financial means, and so on. Your daughter is going to need guidance and support as she works toward a decision that makes sense for her and her family. You may be upset or angry at her, but you need to be there for her, to help ensure that she stays physically and mentally healthy during her pregnancy or after her abortion.

I think that my child may be homosexual/bisexual

Firstly, ask yourself why you think your child may be homo- or bisexual. It could be very upsetting for both of you if you turn out to be wrong. Is it possible that you could be wrong? How sure are you? If you have clear evidence, is it just an experimental phase that your child is going through?

If your child does turn out to be gay or bisexual, they may want to tell you in their own time. Despite any concerns that you may have, don't try to push the issue, as this could cause unnecessary friction. Instead, think about how they would probably WANT you to react if they did decide to 'come out' to you. Your child may be going through a range of emotions, and may be wary about what people may think. If they are gay, to have your unwavering support would no doubt mean a lot to them, and may help to make it easier for them to 'come out' to their peer group.

I am embarrassed to talk to my child about sexuality and contraception

This is a perfectly natural reaction. After all, you may not feel that you yourself have all the answers! Most parents go through this type of emotion when dealing with delicate issues that they would rather just ignore, but as the 'ideal parent' list shows, discussing such matters enables you to 'tick all the boxes'.

It may help you to role-play the discussion beforehand, either with your partner or one of your close friends. This way, if any questions do come up that you have difficulty answering, you will have an opportunity to find the answers before your child has even asked them!

I need additional advice

There are many people that you can turn to for advice. Your local doctor, pharmacist and local family planning clinic will be used to giving advice about sexuality and contraception, and may have some ready-made leaflets which have all the necessary information to hand. You may also have friends with older children, who have already been through this type of experience with them. Ask them how they dealt with it, and learn from any mistakes that they may have made. Finally, although times may have changed since you were young, try to recall how you found out about sexuality and contraception. Draw upon your own experience about how you were feeling, what you wanted to know and what you felt confused about. The important thing to remember is that you are not alone – almost every parent will go through this uncertainty and it is perfectly natural.