

SEX EDUCATION FOR PRESCHOOLERS

By age 4, most children develop a healthy sexual curiosity. They ask a variety of questions and need honest, brief answers. If your child doesn't ask sexual question by age 5, bring up the subject of sex yourself. Otherwise, your child may acquire misinformation. Take advantage of "teaching moments" when the subject comes up naturally, such as in stories, with animals, or related to pregnant friends or family members. Teach the differences in anatomy and proper names for body parts. An easy time to do this is when your child is taking a bath.

Teach your child about pregnancy. Ask a pregnant friend if she will let your child feel the movements of her baby. Explain the birth process. Tell your child that the baby comes out through a special passage called the vagina. Help your child understand the process by seeing the birth of puppies or kittens. Questions about intercourse should be answered simply and directly rather than postponed "until you are older."

NORMAL SEXUAL PLAY:

In normal sexual development between ages 3 and 5, children commonly undress together and look at each other's genitals. This is their attempt to learn about sexual differences. You can help make this discovery a positive experience for your child.

After your child's friends have gone home, read your child a book about sex education. Help your child talk about how a boy's body is different from a girl's body.

Tell your child that genitals are private and that's why we wear clothes. Clarify basic rules: It's OK to see other people's genitals but not to touch them or stare at them. It's not acceptable to show someone your genitals deliberately.

In the future, supervise your child's play more closely. If your child and friends occasionally expose their bodies to each other, ignore it. But if such exposure becomes frequent, tell the children it's not polite and they need to stop. If they continue this behavior despite your talking to them, give them a 5-minute timeout in separate rooms or send them home for the day. Don't give any major punishment or act horrified.

NUDITY:

Feelings about nudity vary from family to family. Exposure to nudity with siblings or the parent of the same sex is commonly accepted and continues indefinitely (for example, in locker rooms). Nudity with the parent or sibling of the opposite sex probably should be phased out when a child is between ages 4 and 5 for these reasons:

- Your child will soon be entering school and nudity is not accepted at school
- Most families in our society practice modesty, so a child who is interested in looking at other people's bodies can get into trouble.

If you agree with these reasons, try the following recommendations to begin to teach your child respect for privacy when he or she is 4 to 5 years old:

- Stop showering and bathing with your child (especially if the child is of the opposite sex).
- Close the bathroom door when you use the toilet.
- Close the bathroom door when you get dressed and suggest your child do the same.