

Getting Started

Written by Sorah Stein

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Here are some basics about talking to your child about his or her sexuality

* When teaching a child with a disability, it is important to consider his or her ability to comprehend the material and the language you use. Your child may have a limited amount of information that he or she can successfully learn. Therefore, when teaching a child with a disability about sexuality, it is important to consider those things that he or she will most need to know and focus on them. We also need to look at how your child learns best and how he or she communicates.

For example, if your child learns by listening to a story, you might want to write one about the topic you plan to teach. You could write the story in the format of a Social Story .

As another example, if your child communicates using pictures, you may need to use some to teach this information as well. If you have access to Boardmaker, they have a special CD add-on with sexuality pictures. If you have difficulty accessing these, please contact me for assistance.

* To start with, let's limit the vocabulary. We should start with teaching the child to correctly label his or her body parts. This, while possibly uncomfortable, is essential. Your child may have to one day communicate to someone other than you, that he or she is in pain, or that, unfortunately, someone has touched him or her inappropriately. Your child does not, however, need to be able to label all of his or her anatomy with the fluency of a medical student.

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*All children need to learn about privacy. Your child needs to learn which activities he or she can do in the living room, at the grocery store, which are reserved for his or her bedroom, and how to be appropriately dressed in each of these and other environments. It is also important for your child to learn how he or she can touch himself or herself and others. An important thing to keep in mind, as many of our children are literal thinkers, is that 'private' parts are not only those covered by underwear. Presumably, you do not want your son or daughter parading around the house or the neighborhood in just his or her underwear. And, we hardly want him or her touching himself, herself, or others in public, only avoiding those parts covered by underwear.

* Next, let's look at what specifically your child needs to know. If your child is female, this will include, for example, information about menstruation. If your child is male, he does not necessarily need to know about menstruation. He may need to learn about wet dreams, however. Some of the books listed on the resources page of this site do an excellent job of breaking down these lessons into small, manageable chunks. I would be happy to address your specific questions related to these topics as well.

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