

Does the thought of talking to your almost teenager about big life topics fill you with dread? Can you recall the crucial conversations you had - or didn't have - with your parents? Can you remember the sex education that was part of your schooling?

How does it make you feel, picking up conversations like this with your young people?

We want to help you to not only have the "sex talk" but all sorts of other, necessary and helpful conversations with your young person.



In 2016, a survey featured in Times Magazine revealed - overwhelmingly - that teenagers wanted to hear from their parents rather than their peers or teachers. As youth workers with 20+ years' experience, that damages our pride slightly, but I want to reiterate: YOU are the most important voice in your young person's life

You are the parent they love and admire - even if they don't show it! With your conversation, also comes context. You can frame these conversations within your family values and beliefs, making your talks part of how you function as a family.

If you treat every conversation with them, not so much as THE conversation, but a series of many conversations you'll have over the years, the pressure is lifted to get it right in that moment.

The first step is always the hardest. We know it feels awkward and you might be wondering how and where do you even begin. Our aim is to offer a toolkit of ideas to use, to help you get started, open the door to topics and be led by your young person.

Our hope with this booklet is that you'll receive the basic tools to start conversations and get comfortable conversing with your young person, so by the last chapter, you'll find yourself talking about the birds and bees, with a confidence that you didn't know you had!

Let's start with some very simple conversational tips:

Find a good time and place. There is a right and a wrong time to start a conversation.

Make a deliberate action to put away your phone or turn off the television so your young person, knows by your body language, you are listening and they have your complete attention.

Ask questions, don't presume you know what they know.

Listen just as much as you talk.

Open the door to the conversation: if they don't respond immediately, they at least know they can return at a later date (they may be feeling a tad awkward).

Work together to solve problems that may arise.

Emphasise the importance of honesty, by encouraging and supporting your young person to tell the truth and praising them when they do.

To understand what they are really saying, focus not just on their words but also on their body language and tone.

Look for moments and use your surroundings to bring up conversational topics: news articles and current events can create natural gateways to conversation.

Don't feel like you need to have all the answers to every question: "I don't know that, but I will get back to you" is a valid answer - but do remember to get back to them!

Now we've given you some pointers, let's put them into action and begin with our first topic.



Let's begin with some simple ways you can do that in everyday life. **You are your young person's first and biggest cheerleader.** It is essential our young people hear from us that they are loved and valued for who they are and not just for their looks.

When you compliment, give specifics: your eyes have such a sparkle or, the way you smile brings me joy.

Emphasise the importance of our "inner" person. Take time to praise their character and personality, just as much as their outer appearance.

Don't fuss about fashion - remember these come and go, so pick your battles.

Take self-esteem seriously. We talk about this in detail so remember it's something that needs our deliberate and focused attention.



Be proactive when you see your young person become obsessed with diets, exercise etc. Be their moderator and help put things into perspective.

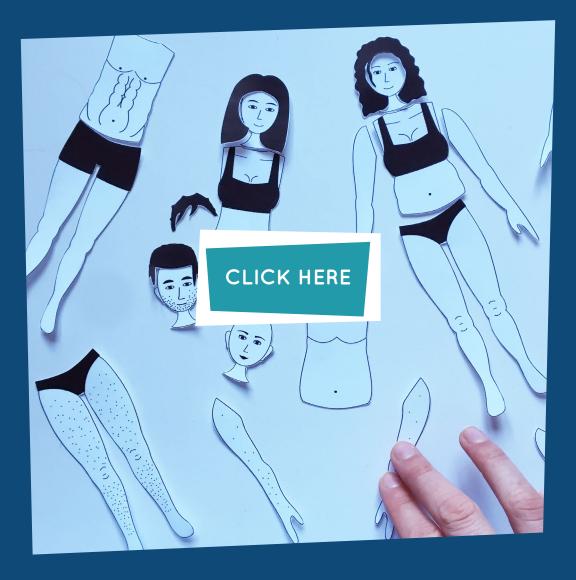
Think about your own body image. Remember, our actions speak louder than words.

Start a conversation and ask the question: "Who "sets" the standard on beauty?" Loads of money is poured into the beauty industry and if we all accepted the way we looked and didn't concern ourselves with changing, no one would spend money on beauty products!

There will be times you'll need to convince them of their own self-worth and remind them of the importance of healthy choices: taking regular exercise, not reaching for a chocolate bar whenever they want, taking daily baths etc however, remember to do so sensitively!

Timing is just as important as the conversation. Responding out of frustration isn't best for either of you: pick your moment wisely. Remember not to criticise them in public and especially not in front of their friends. Take a deep breath and respond to what you have seen in the correct time, rather than reacting in the moment. This will yield far better results!

To continue with our conversation on Body Image, take a look at our resources, including our Body Image Game.





This is especially true if we've lived with those beliefs for a number of years. There is a quote that has always stuck in our minds when we work with our young people: "It is much easier to build hous and airls than to renair men and women."

Why spend many hours rebuilding something when we can do our best to do it well, first time around? Remember, perfection is a myth! We can deliberately build on our young person's foundational belief in themselves and give them a helping hand to life.

Our self-esteem affects our choices and our choices affect our future and what we believe we can achieve. This is why it is essential we invest time and resources into making sure self-esteem is part of our young person's personal development.

It's also important for them to realise this is a journey and not something we do once and then everything is sorted. You could illustrate this by being brave and sharing with your young person, some of the areas in which you may have struggled - or still struggle. Even as adults, we are a work in progress.

Having healthy self-esteem takes time, the same way being deliberate about a healthy lifestyle does, like making time to exercise and eat right. These are areas within our lives we always have to monitor and check we're doing okay.

Our aim is to have a healthy baseline whilst remembering we all have good and bad days and that is normal and perfectly fine.

When life gets hard and things are not going according to plan, your self-esteem reminds you of how utterly unique you are. If someone says you are rubbish at maths, whilst it might be completely true (we aren't all made to be good at everything) we need to be able to remind ourselves of the things we are good at.

Try to remind yourself and your young person to keep things in perspective.



Here is a practical way to help you show your young person how unique and amazing they are. It's a fabulous tool to celebrate our young people! They can also use this as a practical prompt when the going gets tough, to remind themselves of their great qualities and characteristics.

Please click below to access and print out more resources on Self-Esteem, including the Guard Your Heart Shield Activity.



It is always helpful to know what it is we are aiming for: we aren't looking for perfection. Perfection is unrealistic, unhelpful and let's be honest, totally unreachable.

Our goal is to have a healthy self-esteem and to strive for progress not perfection. In fact, Winston Churchill said it like this: "Perfection is the enemy of progress." We don't have to wait to get it all right before having a go. Create a culture in your home that applauds willingness to try, rather than just succeeding.

A great way to do this is over a family dinner or a trip in the car: ask each family member to list two positive things they like about themselves and one thing they'd like to improve. Acknowledge our flaws but focus on the good.

A healthy self-esteem will have these qualities and characteristics:

Liking ourselves - for the most part - as we are. Remembering that no-one is perfect.

Respecting ourselves as well as others. This means essentially allowing others to be different to us and celebrating and respecting our differences.

Being confident in who we are without being overbearing and feeling the need to prove ourselves.

Being able to be open and positive in our communication ie communicating our needs, and comfortable enough to maintain boundaries.

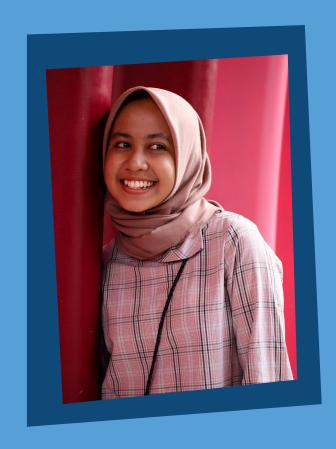
Unlikely to put others down for who they are.

Independent and resourceful without refusing help where needed.

Laughing at ourselves and not taking ourselves too seriously

We want our young person to realise that when we are confident and comfortable in who we are as a person, it helps us make good and healthy decisions in all areas of our lives.

It is when we are constantly looking for approval and trying to fit in with others, we make bad decisions.



Here are some conversation starters to help you talk through self-esteem with your young person:

What do you think is your greatest talent?

What is the best compliment you have ever received and why?

How can I (as your parent) encourage you to be more confident?

Tell me about a unique quality that makes you special?

Take a moment to write down five things that define who you are, listing them as "I am _____," statements. Now take a few minutes to think about each one. Which quality feels the best?

Think about a time when you did something you were afraid to try. How did you feel afterwards? Was it worth persevering?

When do you feel confident, what emotions do you experience when you do?

Tell me about a person you admire? How come? What qualities do you have in common with them?

What are some of your favourite things to do? How do you feel when you do them?

How do you know when you have succeeded at something?

Name three qualities you like about yourself.

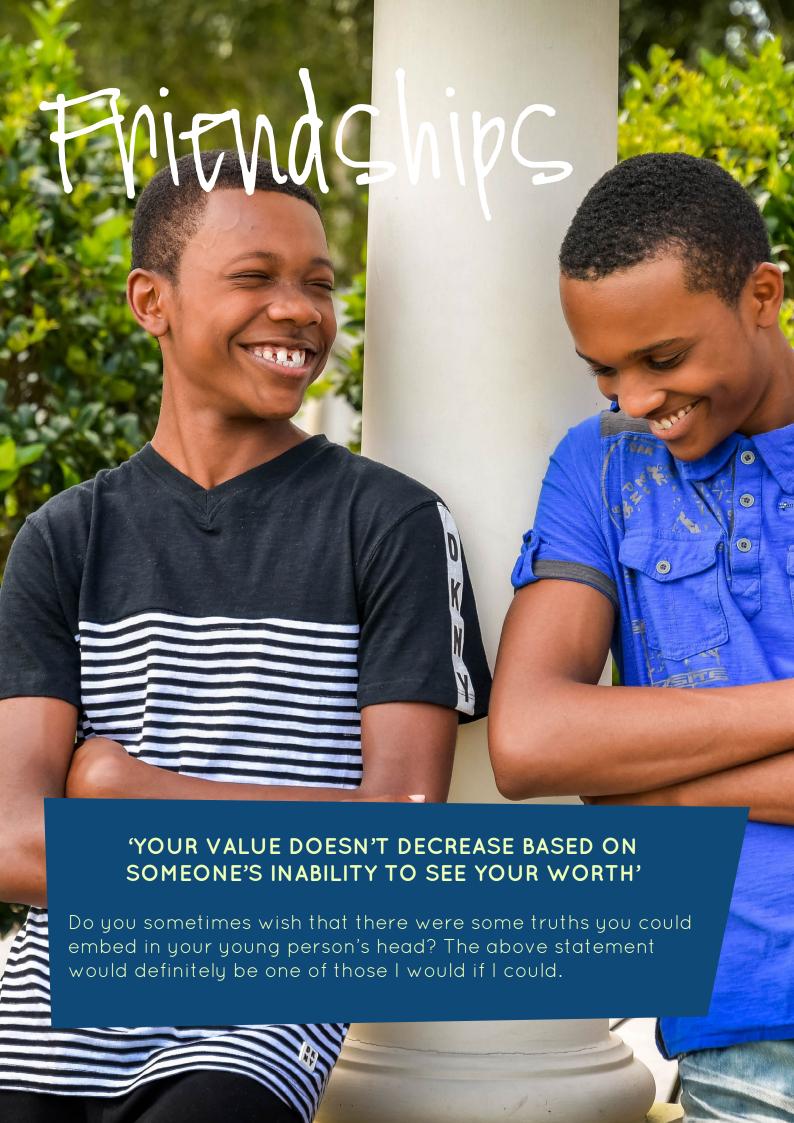
What do you see when you look in the mirror?

What do you think it means to have confidence?

Do you think confidence relates to happiness and how?

How do you think other people see you?

Warning! It is quite hard to think of positives especially about ourselves, so if the first time you have this conversation it goes wrong, don't give it up as a failure. Try again and again! It will take some practice to get going and you will have false starts, but the results will be worth it.



It is so foundational for our young people to be confident and comfortable with who they are. This affects the choices they make regarding friendships and how far they feel they have to go, in order to prove themselves in certain situations.

We want to help our young people think through friendships, especially with starting a new school and establishing themselves in their first few years of secondary.

Their friendship circles become wider and their choices more varied on who they hang out with and they also have a bigger say in how they manage their friendships. We want to give our young people the confidence to make those decisions and to know what qualities they are looking for in good friends.

Ask your young person these questions as a starter into a conversation on friendships:

What are the key ingredients to look for in a good friend? (e.g. laughter, respect, honesty)

What are you looking for in a friendship? (e.g. shared interests, place to be real)

What are some qualities you don't want to have in your friendships? (e.g controlling, egotistical)

What sort of things ruin a friendship? (e.g lying, mistrust)



Click below to download our "The good, the bad and the ugly" game.



When to get involved

It's helpful for our young people to be able to identify the behavioural traits that make friendships successful - or not. This helps them be aware when issues creep into their friendships as well as understanding what's expected of them and the part in which they play. None of our young people are perfect and it's good for them to have a healthy understanding of their own short-comings too!

As a parent we need to be able to distinguish between a young person and their bad behaviour. When we are having conversations with our young person around friendship issues they are experiencing, it is important that we as parents, do not put down the friend but rather discourage the behaviour.

Hear us out:

We aren't saying do not warn your young person when you feel things are not right, or when your radar is saying a situation is unhealthy. We have valuable life experience behind us and there is definitely a time and place to bring parental wisdom. Whilst there are times you need to get involved and call the shots, there will also be times where your young person is having a spat and you may disapprove of their friends' behaviour, but you don't have to ridicule or judge the young person upsetting your son or daughter.

Our end goal is to empower our young people on what to look for in unhealthy relationships and be confident in responding when they feel unhappy or uncomfortable.

Navigating Peer Pressure and learning to say no

It is always helpful to support a young person think through scenarios before they find themselves within that situation. This enables them to process out aloud and run through different options. Together, you can then work out the pros and cons of each scenario.

Obviously, you are never going to be able to know every tough situation your young person will be thrown into, nor are you able to prepare them for every challenge they face. What you can do is equip them with a memory bank of helpful tips for a variety of scenarios and the knowledge of who their safe people are to call upon.



Sending an SOS

A really brilliant tip to helping your young person out of a tricky situation where they feel uncomfortable and out of their depth, is to simply send you a text or whatsapp with just an "x" in it.

Let them know as soon as you receive it, you'll call and say you are coming to collect them as they are needed at home for some reason.

Your side of the deal once you have picked them up, is that they will not be punished for wherever they are - with whomever - in whatever situation.

It is a tough side of the deal to uphold but it's so worth it, knowing your young person is aware they can turn to you whenever they find themselves in need of help.

We also want to encourage our young people to say no if someone is trying to pressurise them into doing something they don't want to do. Running through some ways of saying no, will be helpful practice and they can store them in their memory bank, to pull out as and when they are needed.

Ways to say no could include:

Say no firmly and mean it.

Explain clearly why you are saying no

Say no and walk away

Use your body language to show you mean it

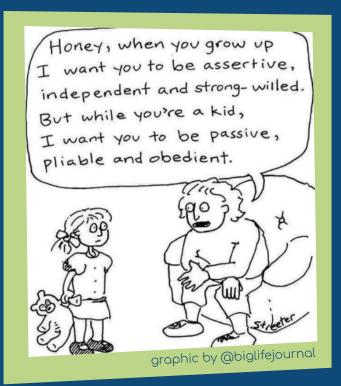
Offer an alternative suggestion

Assure the person that you value, respect and enjoy hanging out with them, but refuse their offer

Return the challenge: "if you really are my friend you shouldn't be making me do something that I am not comfortable with"

This is a great video to watch with your young teenager to help them think through dealing with peer pressure -





We always laugh at this graphic, but it does bear considering: we want our young people to be both teachable and mouldable with us yet independent and confident around friends.

There are times we need to allow them to be able to say no and not override their feelings or will. If your young person is feeling uncomfortable in a social setting and doesn't want to kiss all their aunts and uncles hello, don't force them.

They need to be able to make decisions and know those decisions will be upheld and respected. This helps them learn to be able to say no and stand up for something when they are with their peers.

Click below to download more resources on Friendships.





What is positive self-talk?

Have you taken a moment to listen to how you speak and address situations going on around you? Are you constantly putting yourself down - perhaps calling yourself stupid when making a mistake? Do you put other people down around you? Perhaps shout at people as you drive - or accuse a pedestrian of being an idiot for getting too close to the road?

It's important for us to be aware of negative talk as our young people will model what they see and hear.

If you are looking for the positive in people around you - and yourself - that will rub off on your young people. Let's be deliberate in changing the narrative for our family's wellbeing.

Being kind to yourself is an important part of developing a healthy mental and emotional wellbeing. Let's model that to our young people and I guarantee you will see a difference.

Caveat – we are not talking about boasting here! The point is to be kind and celebrate who you are and the good parts of who we were made to be.



Click below to see and download our resources on Thankfulness.



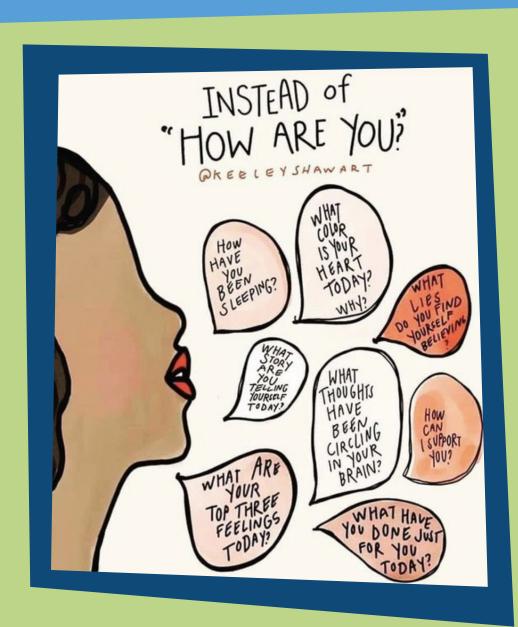




Transition is generally a time where we need some extra TLC and your young person moving from junior to secondary school, going through puberty (and all that comes with the early teenage years) is a trying time for the entire family. During this period, your young people are going to need extra support. No-one has it all together, all the time. It is good to get advice and seek help from someone who knows more in this area than you do.

Remember, this is by no means an exhaustive resource. Our desire is to give you some pointers and to release you from the mindset you have to solve all your young person"s dilemmas on your own.

We want to be there to help you open the doors to the conversations you need to have and point you in the right direction with support, tools and resources that will help you through this time.



Try these six simple steps next time your young person is going through a rocky patch:

Listen to Understand

So often we think we know what is going on and often put our own experiences, emotions and feelings into a situation. This means we think we know what our young person is going through, because we have been there and done that but actually, that might not be the case. We may also be listening to answer rather than listening to hear. Don't worry about what you need to say next, or how you are going to right this wrong, just listen.

Empathise

Brene Brown is New York bestseller and professor who studies and speaks on vulnerability, courage and empathy. She describes like this: "Empathy means to feel with other people." When we empathise with our young person, we make the effort to see things as they see it and by taking the time to empathise, we build a bridge with our young people, making a deeper connection. This in turn strengthens our relationship and helps them feel understood.

I found this quick clip from Brene Brown on empathy, a great watch:



Ask open ended questions

We don't want to assume we know the context and reasons behind what our young people are thinking and feeling. By asking open ended questions, we gain a better understanding, for example: "How did that make you feel when that happened?" or "Why did that upset you when she said that?" etc.

Invite problem solving

Helping our young people through their emotions is really important. Once they have felt heard and understood, we want to help them move forward. Prompting them to think on the next course of action puts healthy habits in place for the next time they find themselves in a pickle.

Offer Insight

You are their parent and have life experiences that will benefit. Sharing a time with your young person where you were able to deal with a tricky friendship or an overwhelming experience at work will help them see another perspective and find answers to their stressors. You can develop their skills in talking to others by using language like "when that happened I felt like" – rather than using "you make me."

Trust your young person

You love your young person and will want to wrap them up in cotton wool and solve each and every problem that comes their way, but that isn't going to benefit them in the long run. Allow them to get things wrong a time or two and learn from the experience. Just as when theywere a toddler and learning to walk, you had to let them take those first steps and fall over a time or two. You can give them all the advice they need but at the end of the day, they have to give it a go themselves.

We all face daily challenges - irrespective of who we are - it's how we deal with them that makes the difference. Our resilience is our ability to deal with the stress and challenges life throws at us. How we handle stress differs from person to person, we want to be able to give you and your young person some healthy - and practical - coping strategies.

Spend some time going through our Emotional Wellbeing Activities below, including the Stress Busters and the Stress Bucket Activity.







Before you talk to your young person about sex it is always good to recap with them (and yourself) on puberty. They've probably learnt this at school, but it doesn't harm to put in some groundwork to help with the sex talk you are working towards.

We find it helpful to stick to the scientific names for everything. This could be a tad uncomfortable for you but practice it a couple of times, under your breath first, so that it comes out as natural as you can muster.

Don't panic - you are not about to sit GSCE Biology, so ignore the butterflies in your stomach and take the pressure off yourself! It's okay to have a giggle and embrace the embarrassment together.

We are going to lay out some of the things it will be helpful for you to say. Remember, you don't have to know all the answers - it's perfectly fine to reply: "what a good question, let me have a think and get back to you."

So here goes -

What is puberty and how does it impact their lives?

Puberty is a significant time for young people and can be very challenging as they try to understand what is happening in and to their body - nevermind us, as onlookers.

Hormones come alive, initiating physical and emotional change, and awakening sexual feelings. Young people need support to understand these changes and how to manage them.

They need to be reassured that what they are feeling is "normal" and a part of growing up. And that it's okay to not quite understand everything that is happening in their body as the changes come thick and fast.

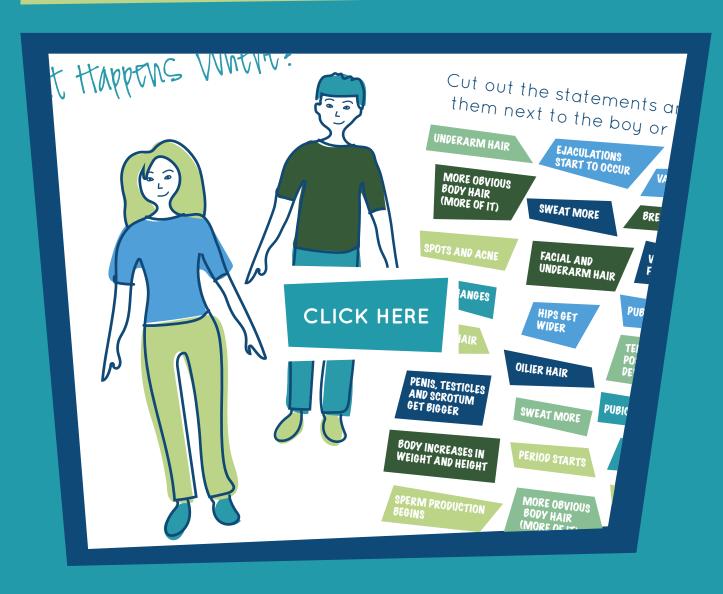
Take a moment to acknowledge they will experience many different emotions - sometimes within minutes - and it will take time and experience to learn how to respond to them.

As you reassure your young person what they are going through is normal, take a moment to also reassure yourself that your teenager has not gone mad! Their pent-up feelings and emotional outbursts are not directed at you and they are not out to make your life a misery. You, as their parent, are their safe space and so unfortunately, more often than not, you will bear the brunt of many of their outbursts.

Hear me out for a minute, I am not saying allow your teenager to swear, kick off and rant at you - there is nothing wrong with setting boundaries and discouraging or even putting a stop to certain behaviour. Just remember, they are often still figuring out what is going on in their body and not yet in control of their crazy mood swings.

It is good to point out here, that your young person's brain is still developing and at this stage, their risk-taking side is more developed than their rational side. As relationships change and grow, they are also finding their new "place" in the home. Be aware there might be some vying for top spot as they experiment with how far they can push in finding their boundaries.

Make a cup of tea, print out our puberty resources and have a laugh, as you discuss the changes our bodies go through - click below.





As and when it is appropriate to do so, it is important for your young person to understand that sexual feelings are a normal part of growing up. We don't want to demonise their feelings, we want to help them understand that what they are experiencing is a normal part of growing up.

Understanding that sex should feel good both physically and emotionally is also an important part of healthy sexual development and a key building block to helping them make the right decisions in future relationships, at the appropriate time.

Let your young person lead your conversations. You are opening the door to many more conversations to be had, as and when they are ready. As a parent you know best, where they are at emotionally and developmentally.

We love watching the video below. It speaks of the miracle of life and a far cry from the hazy black and white videos making up many a young person's sex education growing up!



We find it helpful to take a different approach and talk about the marvel of how a new life is born, developed and grown, when an egg and sperm come together. We hope that you enjoy it as much as we have.

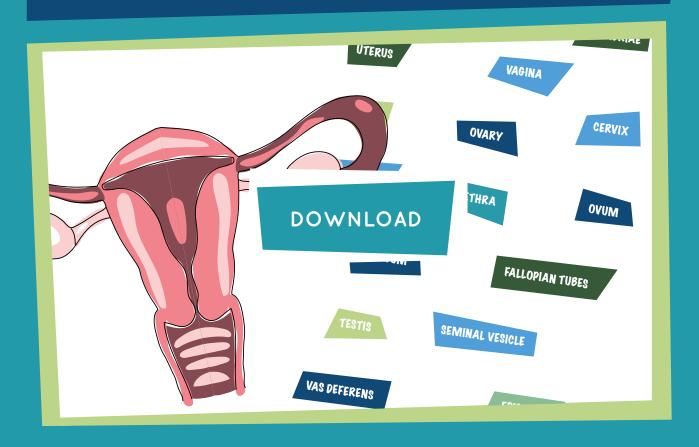
As we have done with all our topics thus far, our aim is to provide you with a framework to be able to have these conversations with your young person and open the door to many more.

This is not a quick, one stop shop where you deliver all you think they need to know about the birds and the bees and walk off thinking, job done.

As we have said right in the beginning of this booklet, your young person wants to hear from you and this is as important - if not more so - than just an explanation of sex.

The reason they need to hear it from you, is the topic needs context. Hearing it from their biology teacher will provide a scientific view, reading it in Cosmopolitan magazine, another. You are not just giving them a science lesson but an opportunity to talk around your family values and place this within the framework of relationship and relational connection.

Click below to download our resources on Conception and Nurture.



Firstly and most importantly keep conversational lines open.

The first time you bring this up, your young person might shut you down or say they are not interested - don't lose heart and give up.

They will want your input but also don't want to be seen asking for advice! Let them know you are available and ready to talk when they are. Remember, there is a high chance they are likely to choose bed time to talk (once you are ready to turn your attention to other things) open up, ask questions and process.

Secondly, give sex a positive spin.

The things that you say and how you frame this conversation is going to be something they will remember. So often with this conversation, it is not so much what you say but how you say it. Again, you are providing the framework for how they see sex and where it fits into their future.

Thirdly, if you don't speak to your young person about sex, someone else will.

It might be a conversation in the locker room, a video sent on whatsapp or even a magazine passed around the class. Media has a lot to say on this subject and so, as parents it's important for us to take the first, awkward step.



Be honest.

You might be on the receiving end of some tough - or even personal - questions at this time. Before it comes up, think about how much of your story you'd like to share.

We are not saying you should unveil all the details of your past, but let's be honest and not give unrealistic expectations or paint things the way they are not.

Relationships and sex can bring up memories and not always happy ones, so if you have struggles in this area, perhaps you could share some of your learnings or experiences.

Bring context.

We have said this before. Your young person will learn the biological lessons of sex at some point. The most important thing they need from you, is where sex fits into relationships and that essentially, sex is more than just romance.

As a parent, share that sex is more than just a one-off experience and actually, the best sex comes from a consenting, respectful, committed relationship where both people's thoughts and feelings are taken into consideration.

With regards to relationships, take the time to get to know your young person's friends and who they are hanging out with. If you can, welcome them back to yours for pizza/movie/games nights – if they have fun hanging out at yours, they are less likely to be stuck for a place to be and you will know where they are and who they are with.

Lastly, love them unconditionally.

Your young person is not going to always make the right decisions or do things the way that you think they should or would like them to do. They need to know that you will love them regardless - no matter what they do or whatever they decide - and you will be there, with open arms.

Remember what we said at the beginning: our aim is to open the door to conversations with your young person and create a safe and loving environment that will encourage them to come back to you.

"If at first you don't succeed then try and try again." We are in this for the long haul. We are establishing foundations of communication for our young people that will last throughout the teenage years and beyond.

As you walk this journey with your young person, it's worth bearing in mind the African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child." You don't have to have all the answers, or all the knowledge! Some of the best things you can do for your young person is love them unconditionally and let them know they are loved.

When you feel out of your depth, reach out to the community around you to help you with the expertise they hold, as and when you need it.

You can do it! We can do it! One conversation at a time. So, go on - give it a go!

If you wish to purchase a hard copy of this manual, with resources included, please contact us through the contact form on our website.

This booklet is not a comprehensive digest of every challenge your young person may or may not face and does not address specific topics such as gender identity and sexual orientation or other physical and emotional challenges your young person may or may not face. What it does do, is enable you to create a safe space for your young person, if and when they face specific challenges. If your young person is asking questions around the above topics please view our resource page, on our website for further advice and information

