

It's a big topic, one we want to do well, but how do we talk to our children about sex when they are young? Studies show us that by 9, most children have sadly been exposed to pornography or some kind of sexually provocative images. Have you ever walked past a lingerie shop, seen an ad on TV or even just passed a young teenage couple and had your kids look with intrigue, and even worse ask you a question?

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TALKING TO OUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX IS SOMETHING MOST PEOPLE WILL AVOID DOING UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE.

If your child is exposed to sexual content or even chatted with friends before you have had a conversation with them, it is almost certain that that experience will shape their view of sex far more than the words we say. As Christians, a conversation about sex can be such a powerful, Holy Spirit-led time. God created it, so we can't shy away from it. It should be about more than biology as well, for if we only tell our children about the physical act but omit the spiritual component, when a child sees porn it technically matches that description.

It is our role as parents to help shape a child's view of sex, the way God designed it, so that when they see something that does not match God's perfect creation, they feel confident to know that it is not the truth.

So, when and how do we talk to our children about sex? My husband and I have been having conversations with our children since they started asking them, which was around three years old. Each time we have expanded on what they might need to know. We like to think of them as child-led but parent-controlled conversations. If you have been struggling for the words to say or how to say them, I hope these practical tips may help you have life-breathed, Holy Spirit-led conversations with your children.

BEFORE FIVE

A child under five is likely to ask questions about how babies are born. It may be that a sibling is in the works or they know someone who is pregnant. This is a great opportunity to build a foundation for future conversations. It is so important to answer their questions and not dismiss them. If it is not the time, because you're in the Coles check out, it's important to just let them know you can't wait to tell them about it at home, and what a great question.

When talking to a young child, this does not need to be a serious conversation (although a serious topic), and the tips below are just one example of how we can start building that foundation. But using a gentle, but fun approach is important. Use language that a young child will understand – no need to introduce new words or big

ideas just yet. Although it can feel awkward, these chats can be a great way to help a child know about some of their own biology.

When asked questions about where babies come from or how did they get in mummy's tummy, it is important to start to let children know that it takes a man and a woman to make a baby. Most people just leave it there and shy away from the how it got there. The how? This is where you can't freak out and say, 'wait till your older'. This is where the foundation for the future is built, so again use words and language you feel confident but also let young children know it does not just happen one day or when mummy and daddy just decide. We let our kids know mum and dad share a 'special cuddle' that God created for married couples to create a baby, and that mummy has some eggs in her tummy and when they have the cuddle daddy gives her the seed that makes the egg grow. If they ask more about the cuddle then you could say things like "I would love to tell you about that, but I think it would be great when you are a little older and can understand more about it. Is that ok?" Children need to know they can ask the questions, but it's ok to let some detail develop as they develop.

Young children also love to ask how babies get out. Anatomy is an important thing to talk about for child safety and is just as important for conversations about the birds and bees. So, let kids know about their anatomy, and mummy's anatomy. This is a great age to do it because you can tell them about their anatomy, and they don't think it is gross, unlike teenagers!

It's important to let your child lead the conversation and for you to ask them questions rather than throw information at them. If they don't or have not asked you anything and you know you want to start talking to them, then you can ask them, how do you think a baby comes out? Or, how did you think it got in there? It might be fun to see what they say and let them know it's ok to think about these things and have questions about life. All these chats are building the relationship and telling our children, "I can talk to my parents." If we avoid them, they might be asking someone else like another five-year-old, or if you dismiss them, they may feel it's a topic not to discuss and that is not how we want our kids to feel.

BETWEEN SIX-NINE

At this age kids might become aware of things like crushes and relationships. Questions about mums and dads not being together, people kissing, and love can be confusing topics. Big questions about divorce and that special cuddle happening when people are not married or don't love one another can start to happen after prep and we all need to be prepared to answer them. We pray a lot as a couple and let God be our guide. Even though they're still young, the exposure of schoolyard talk is high, but we knew we wanted to not create shame about something so precious that God had created.

Knowing that by age nine children are more likely to be exposed to pornography, use this time to introduce the idea that that special cuddle is not always done right and encourage them to talk to mum or dad about it. Books like Liz Walker's 'Not for kids' can be helpful when introducing the idea of pornography. We have also found Moral Revolution very helpful and I recommend reading the [blog post by Cole Zick](#).

For us, this conversation happened at dinner after a lead-up of lots of smaller questions about relationships. Our older daughter had asked me at the shops after

seeing a baby, “Mummy how can a cuddle get a baby in your tummy, and can anyone put it there?”. Being in the shopping centre, I let her know that was a great question and we could talk about it as a family at dinner. So, at dinner, I asked our eight-year-old if she remembered her question and she did. I asked her if she remembered because this told me she was not just asking a one-off, but she had been thinking about it. She had also been asking me a lot of questions about families where parents were not married and had stepchildren, so we had been discussing this and thought it was a good time to expand our conversations.

We decided to introduce the word sex, so told the girls that the special cuddle has some things about it that make it special. First a mum and dad have to be naked (insert children laughing) and second, they use their private parts to get daddy’s seed in mummy’s tummy and this is called having sex. We also told the girls daddy’s part is called sperm and is a little swimmer so that is how it gets up to the womb. Laughter, lots of laughter is what transpired! The idea of mum and dad cuddling naked was so funny to them. We asked the girls if they have ever heard the word sex before: our eight-year-old had not, our six-year-old had. Yep, that’s right our six-year-old had children in her class in prep saying something about sex, and people having it. She didn’t know what it was though. So, although it seems young, this was the perfect time to talk to our girls.

We had lots of laughs during this chat. Lots of questions about daddy being naked and it being gross. We all laughed together, and we let them lead the conversation asking them things like, do you think it’s a big deal to make a baby, do you think it’s a private thing or something other people can see? This allowed us to open the door on porn.

We have not used the word porn yet in our family and our older daughter is nine. We will start to use that word closer to her teenage years, but we wanted to let her know about when sex is done wrong without telling her about porn or causing her to look at other families at her school like they were wrong families if the parents were not married.

We communicated to her that sex is a special, and a beautiful thing that God created for married couples, but that not everyone treats it as special. Some people don’t wait till they are married and sometimes they have a baby before they are married. We asked if she thought this was a good idea – once again, child-led. She agreed if mum and dad are married, that is best. We talk about how God loves all families, no matter how they look too. We asked her if she had ever seen something that she thought was sex, she said “no, why?” We told her that sometimes people make videos or take pictures of it, which is not ok because God made it private for a married couple. So, if she ever saw a video or anything that is ok, she can just say that she does not want to see that and chat to mum or dad about it. I let her know that as she gets older more and more people might talk about sex and that’s ok, she can just talk with me about it and ask questions. She has had lots of questions and we always answer them honestly.

Have we had sex with anyone else? Do we like it? Why would we do it? Why would someone video that? None of these questions worry me, because the great thing is, she is asking them, and we are guiding and building our daughters’ view of sex. If and when she sees porn, she will see that it is not what she knows sex to be, and it is wrong. This is why talking to children about more than biology is important. The

love and spiritual component of sex is as important as the physical act, and it is so important our pre-teens know that, so they recognise when it's not sex the way God designed it.

Although talking to children under the age of nine about sex and porn seems like an unnecessary, too-soon thing to do, the reality is in a digital, overly sexualised world, we need to be the narrative our children learn from. It is not enough to protect them from it. We need to guide them through it and do our best to point them to God's plan at every opportunity. We still have a long way to go, but with God's guiding, we will hopefully pass on a legacy to our children that reflects the sanctity of sex and God's design for it to be used in a covenantal relationship.