

The Growing Up Program Fact Sheets

Responding to Children's Questions

Even from a young age, children are exposed to a lot of messages about gender, relationships and sexuality through the internet and the media. Not all children have the opportunity to discuss these with trusted adults to help in understanding these messages.

As parent/carer or teacher you have the chance to provide them with accurate information, develop their critical thinking skills and help them understand the messages they receive.

Children will ask questions for many different reasons: they may have heard or seen something they don't understand; they may want further information about something they already know; they might simply be trying to shock you or show off in front of their peers.

It can sometimes be hard to know the difference, so try to provide a simple, matter of fact, accurate answer. If the intention was to shock or show off, this often diffuses the situation.

Below is a guide to the possible responses you can give when asked a question about relationships and sexuality.

OPTIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
Answer honestly (If this would violate professional boundaries, use a different strategy)	I really don't know I believe that...
Answer factually	It is generally believed that... Research shows that... Some people believe... I believe...
Distance or re-phrase the question (can be helpful with personal questions)	I've read that... I've heard that... People do all sorts of things to express themselves sexually... (in answer to a question about an esoteric practice)
Direct to other sources	Where might we find the answer? Who else could help you answer that? How about you ask the people in your family what they think? There are very different points of view on this question.
Pass, with an open-ended invitation	We'll be talking about that next time... I'd like to pass on that question, but you could... Now is not a good time to talk about this, you can talk to me privately later.
Pass to maintain personal boundaries	That's a personal question and I'd prefer not to answer it.
Open the question up for discussion	What do you think? Can anyone else answer that?