

Tips for Talking: For parents and whānau

How you approach talking about sexual wellbeing with your children is important. The Tips in this handout can help guide your conversations and help you to support them to feel heard, validated and safe to kōrero with you about all aspects of sexual wellbeing. This includes topics from periods to anatomy, to sexual and reproductive health (like contraception and sexually transmitted infections), to healthy relationships and consent. You can find out more information at sexualwellbeing.org.nz about topics to include in your kōrero.

Note: These tips are derived from best practice guidance in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally. Please contact Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa for a list of references.

Tips for Talking

1. Include your family values

Before having a conversation, it can be helpful to reflect on your own values – and those of the people around you and your children. This can include values related to your family, culture, and community, as well as your own personal values. Think about how you can connect these values to sexual wellbeing topics - sharing your family values within the conversation will make it more meaningful. For example, *I know you've been learning about relationships at school. Let's talk about what this means in our family, because every family is different.*

2. Be curious

Approaching a conversation with curiosity, rather than assumptions, will give you an indication of your child's knowledge and perspective on a topic. Use open ended questions, for example: *What do you think about this? That's an interesting view – can you tell me more about that?*

3. Be empathetic, loving, and supportive

Your children are learning to navigate the world. Be patient, understanding and respectful of their feelings, emotions, and views, even if you don't agree with them or if they don't align with your family views or values. Be mindful of how you show empathy, care and support through your body language, including your tone of voice.

4. Build a network of support

Connecting with school, the wider community, other parents and professionals and organisations can help you feel more confident and equipped to give your children what they need. When communities work together to support young people, they are more likely to make healthy, informed choices about their sexual wellbeing.

5. Talk often and normalise the conversations

Instead of one big "sex talk", have short, ongoing and simple conversations about topics relating to sexual wellbeing. Choose relaxed, no-pressure situations, such as in the car, or when watching TV together. Normalise talking about these topics by including them in everyday conversation – it's just another thing you talk about, just like you talk about friendships, schoolwork, or plans for the weekend.

6. Create a safe and non-judgemental space

A barrier for young people to talk to their parents and whānau about topics relating to sexual wellbeing is fear of how they might react or that they might judge them. How can you create a safe and non-judgemental space to talk about these topics openly?

7. Know your facts

It's important that young people get factual information about sexual wellbeing - there is a lot of incorrect information online about sexual wellbeing topics. You don't need to be an expert, if you don't know the answer to a question, you can find out from credible sources together.

8. Match the conversation to their age and stage

Many parents and whānau worry about how to talk about sexual wellbeing in an age and stage appropriate way, whilst also meeting the needs of their child. Keeping information basic and simple is a great place to start and then following their lead by asking questions. Bring up the topic regularly and add information each time to allow for learning to happen at a pace that works for your child. And remember, if they're asking a question, they are probably at the stage to know the answer! Consider where they may get that information from if you choose not to talk to them about it.

Visit sexualwellbeing.org.nz to learn more about how to support young people with their sexual wellbeing.