

Tips and FAQ for Parents

When should I start talking to my child about HIV/AIDS?

It is never too soon to start discussing this topic especially since they will begin to learn about it in elementary school.

- Children need to be able to protect themselves
- They should be equipped to take control over their bodies
- To be able to cope with their feelings regarding some of the issues that the topic might raise
- They also need to be prepared for challenges that might face them as teenagers or later as young adults

How do I answer my child's questions if I don't know the answers?

Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Don't Panic! Your children will probably ask some things that you are not prepared for and that could make you feel awkward. Panic, which could result in no response or a dismissal of the question, will not help. Good information can help them stay safe and make wise decisions
- Encourage Talk – Be open to talking with your children about all sorts of things. Chat, share, laugh, communicate!
- Start Young – The earlier you begin, the easier it is. By the time your children are teenagers they will be prepared, and less likely to make unwise choices.
- Be Sensitive – Respect the stage and age that your children are at. Don't give more information than they want or need. (E.g. a 6-year-old and a 9-year-old will have different questions and concerns). If you are not sure ask for advice. Don't carry on talking when they have stopped listening.
- Start Conversations – Create an environment of trust and communication. Find ways to gently start talking about difficult things NOW!
- Talk Often – A once-in-a-lifetime sex talk will not give your children all the information they need. Repeat yourself. Make sure you have been understood. Children need to hear things over and over again to learn.
- Be Honest – If you do not know an answer, say so. If you do not feel good talking about sex, say so. But try and say it in a way that does not stop communication. Perhaps you could suggest that the child talks to a relative or health worker. Better still, offer to go together! Try and learn with your children.
- Make sure that YOU are equipped! You cannot always predict when a difficult topic is going to be raised. You do however need to be clued up on the facts regarding HIV/AIDS and you need to feel comfortable talking about difficult things.

There are tons of resources out there for parents to use to educate themselves so they can talk freely and openly to their child. The guide at <http://www.beingalive.org/aboutus/TalkToYourKidsAboutAIDS.pdf> is an excellent place to start.

- Access the [curriculum Broward County Public Schools utilizes](#) with students.

I am uncomfortable talking about HIV/AIDS and sex with my child. What do I do?

Talking about issues of sexuality with their children can be a difficult experience for many adults. That is understandable because when many of today's adults were children, their parents did not talk about sexuality or other topics with them. Today's parents may want to take a different approach with their own children, but have no experience to guide them. Remember, parents are the most influential teachers of their children. The benefits of establishing this pattern of communication will continue as your child grows up. Youth need to carve out their autonomy during adolescence.

As young people begin to separate from their parents, they may be more resistant to parent advice. Parents may have unfounded concerns about talking to their kids, such as fear that talking about sex will increase curiosity and cause them to experiment prematurely, or that giving information about birth control is a green light for kids to have intercourse. In fact, open discussion with parents can help postpone sexual activity, protect from risky behavior and support the healthy sexual socialization of youth.

How can my child protect themselves?

Teens want good, solid advice on sexual issues from parents. That means you are their best resource! Talking with your kids about HIV, AIDS, sex, and drug abuse can be a tough task. Here are some tips to help you along the way: **Talking to your kids**

You can find these and other tips about how to talk to your kids about HIV/AIDS at ChildrenNow.org's ["Talking with Kids about Tough Issues: HIV & AIDS"](#).

- Bring up the topic with your child. You could start talking about HIV when your child sees or hears a TV ad about HIV. Ask, "Have you heard about HIV or AIDS before? What do you think HIV or AIDS is?" This way, you can figure out what your child already understands and work from there.
- Give just the facts. Offer honest, correct information that's right for the child's age and development. To an 8 year old you might say, "AIDS is a disease that makes people very sick. It's caused by a virus, called HIV, which is a tiny germ." An older child can hear more details. Pre-teens should understand how HIV is spread and that condoms help protect people from getting HIV/AIDS. You may need to talk about how sex works before explaining HIV. Otherwise your child may be confused. When the time is right, talk to older children about what they can do to stay safe from HIV. Be specific.
- Correct misunderstandings. Children's misconceptions about AIDS — such as the idea that they can "catch" it by being near someone with HIV/AIDS — can be scary for them. It's important to correct them as soon as possible. Be sure to check back with your child and see what she or he remembers. For young children, understanding AIDS takes more than a single conversation.
- Build your child's confidence. Praising your children a lot, setting realistic goals, and keeping up with their interests are good ways to build self-esteem. When kids feel good about themselves, they are better able to ignore peer pressure. They're less likely to use drugs or to have sex before they are ready. So they are less likely to put themselves at risk of AIDS.
- Be ready to talk about death. When talking with your kids about HIV and AIDS, questions about death may come up. Explain death in simple terms. You could say that when someone dies, they don't breathe, eat, or feel hungry or cold, and you won't see them again. Although very young children won't be able to understand such finality, that's okay. Just be patient and repeat the message whenever appropriate. Never explain death in terms of sleep. It may make your child worry that if he falls asleep, he'll never wake up. Offer reassurance. If

appropriate, tell your child that you are not going to die from AIDS and that he won't either. Stress that while AIDS is serious, it can be prevented.

- Prepare kids for sex. Teach your child about safer sex. Explain that the only sure way to prevent HIV and other STIs, and unwanted pregnancy, is to not have sex of any kind. Of course, it can be hard to talk about topics like sex. But the girlshealth.gov Parents and caregivers section can help with lots of tips for talking about sex, relationships, and more. You owe it to girls you care about to share your thoughts!
- Encourage your kids to speak up. When your child is ready, teach him or her about safer sex, so that your child's risk of HIV infection is lower when he or she does decide to have sex. Don't wait too long to explain this to your kids.

What do I do if my child is infected?

If you are worried that your child may have contracted HIV you can take them for an HIV test. Take children aged 6 weeks to 18 months to the referral hospital to be tested, and children older than 18 months to the VCCT (Voluntary and Confidential Counseling and Testing) clinic. Your child can be tested for HIV from as early as 6 weeks old. You can always go to www.hivtest.org for the nearest location to you.

Where can I get some resources for me to use to help my child?

There are numerous websites that offer great information about HIV/AIDS prevention.

Some are:

- www.thebody.com
- [www.http://hab.hrsa.gov/](http://hab.hrsa.gov/)
- [www.http://aids.gov/](http://aids.gov/)
- www.hivtest.org
- <http://www.avert.org/>
- www.preventyouthHIV.org.