

The Talk

This is an excerpt from a Question and Answer Magazine column that Dr. Taft wrote several years ago and while the problems might not be the exact same as yours we feel the answers can be relevant and helpful to us all.

As a single mom, I am experiencing a problem I don't know quite how to handle: talking to my son about "it." You know what I mean. It was much easier to have "the talk" with my daughter, but I'm afraid there will be awkward questions that my son will ask me and I won't know how to answer. Plus, it might be embarrassing for him to ask me questions. I'm not a man, so I can't think like a man or give him certain answers he will probably need. My ex-husband is very rarely a part of the picture so it's out of the question to ask him to help with this dilemma. I thought about asking my best friend's husband to help me out with this and ask him to have "the talk" with my son, but that's not his responsibility. What should I do?

You asked a truly genuine and relevant question. I can see from your words that you feel anxious and ill equipped for this very important task. I am guessing that your son must be nearing puberty, which no doubt raises the awkwardness of discussing sexual development with him. Ideally, I recommend talking with your children about sexuality from a very early age. This approach allows your child to see sexual development as a normal part of life and takes tremendous pressure off of having one big "talk" when they experience puberty.

First, your intuition is absolutely correct. Dumping this task on your best friend's husband is not a good idea without first communicating with your son. He might feel ambushed and betrayed if someone else "pops" this conversation on him.

Second, although you fear awkwardness and embarrassment, you have a wonderful opportunity to develop a deeper relationship with your son. Kids yearn for realness and though they don't always outwardly show it, they love it when you "get real" with them. He needs you to risk talking about embarrassing and uncomfortable topics with him. If someone else talks with him they may give him poor or even misleading information. If no responsible adult talks with him he will get most of his information from friends, the media or even worse, pornography – now that's a scary thought! Sure, he'll receive some sexual education from school but the missing elements there are a trusting relationship and a safe environment to ask questions. The only way you can insure he is getting quality information is if you do it yourself. You must view this as the first in a series of important discussions

that you and he will have over the course of the next few years: puberty, dating, sexual temptation, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, character, integrity, etc.

Another fear you listed was lacking “man” knowledge. I suggest you get on Amazon.com and search for books that address the topic you want to discuss with him. You can find most topics on Amazon and buy them inexpensively. You can even read excerpts from the actual book before you order it. Whatever you select, read it yourself first. This will increase your comfort with the topic. Then read it WITH him. Don’t just leave it on his bed one day hoping he’ll read it. He needs your presence so he can ask questions. Don’t feel pressured to know everything. If he asks you questions you don’t know how to answer it could become a joint adventure to research the answer. Reminder: Don’t condemn him for asking questions that you feel are risqué. He will feel shut down and ashamed if he can’t ask what is truly on his mind. This also might be a great time to ask him if he wants to talk with your best friend’s husband or some other responsible adult male that he trusts and respects (of course make sure the friend is a willing participant before you volunteer them!) I searched Amazon.com and with the key words “sex talk teen” and found a huge assortment of choices. If spiritual matters are important to you as they are to me on this topic I recommend: “Every Young Man’s Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation” by Steven Arterburn and Fred Steoker.

If you are a member of a church, you could also talk with your youth minister about programs your church may offer to help pre-teens and teens have a comfortable place to learn about a Christian view of this topic.

Also, you mentioned that you had “the talk” with your daughter and found it easier to do with her. This means that you had already had one successful discussion on sexual development. You deserve credit for risking that with your daughter. Try asking her for ideas on how to approach your son. She might be able to give you some valuable feedback from her experience and help you add some missing pieces.

Finally, don’t let your fear paralyze you and cause you to avoid or delay this task. It is truly to you and your son’s benefit to develop openness with discussing sensitive topics. Think about how much you value the close, trusting relationships in your life. Such relationships allow us to ask questions without fear of rejection or condemnation. Good listeners are truly a blessing. Now consider how much you would love to be that for your own children.