



When does he become aware about himself ?

Around the age of three, a child becomes aware that he is a boy or she is a girl. He becomes aware that he has something extra, which his sister does not have. Similarly, a girl is aware that she lacks the appendage, which her brother has. Tell them that there is a difference, and to reassure them, tell them the boy will grow up like his father and the girl like her mother.

How can you help them deal with sexuality?

From two or three years onwards, the child will explore his genitals just as he explores his mouth, nose and other parts of his body. Many parents get embarrassed and concerned about this. Do not threaten the child or slap him or laugh. This can be very disturbing to a child. It arouses fear and guilt and may make him feel that in some way, that part of his body is dirty.

Some parents think that excessive handling of the male organs is, perhaps, due to his prepuce (skin covering the penis) irritating the child and they have him circumcised. The exploration of sex parts is normal for a child and nothing to be alarmed about. You can, however, give him plenty to do with his hands. Give him toys to play with and direct his attention elsewhere. Everytime a child is naked, do not tease him. This attitude makes him terribly conscious of his sex. Privacy should be respected. These attitude carry on in adult life and may create

psycho-sexual problems.

In fact, you need to worry if the child does not ask questions about sex. It may mean that his normal curiosity has, somehow been curbed and he is resorting to friends, relatives, books, or advertisements for information. He may, in the process, pick up information, that is incorrect. In a few schools, sex education is part of the curriculum. It is best that matters of sex are discussed with the child by parents or some senior member of the family with whom the child relates comfortably.

Your adolescent child needs to be given correct information about sex. Tell your daughter about menstruation before it happens. Similarly, tell your son about nocturnal emissions (wet dreams). Explain to the boy that nature provides an excess of seminal fluid and that it is perfectly normal, and to the girl that menstruation is nature's way of disposing off the unfertilised eggs.

You need to realise the importance of talking to your children. There may be very few teenagers who will directly ask their parents questions about sex. Emotional maturity at this age is rare and hardly expected of adolescent. Weaving discussions of sexual topics into everyday conversations – television shows, articles in books – may help your child consider sex as a normal part of life.

What is masturbation?

Sometimes small children of two to four years of age rub their thighs or play with their sex organs and find a pleasurable sensation accompanied by flushing of the face. This is known as masturbation. Like thumb sucking, this will also stop as the child develops other interests. Distract him, but do not scold him or beat him. Masturbation is also common among adolescents. It is not the physical act itself that is unhealthy but the guilt which accompanies it. Give your child plenty of affection, make him feel wanted and needed, and once he is well occupied he may stop masturbating. The more satisfaction he gets from activities within and outside the home, the less will he want to masturbate.

Parents as well as children need to know that masturbation is a natural and harmless way of feeling sexual pleasure and of relieving sexual tension. You should try to answer your child's direct or indirect questions helping your child develop informed and positive attitudes towards sex and sexuality.

Why is sex education in children important?

The growth of your child into adolescence may put your parenting and communication skills to the test. Sex education varies according to the beliefs of a particular community. It depends on many factors – religious, cultural, economic and social.

Many consider that sex is something private and personal and should not be discussed in public. But these days, growing awareness on the prevention of AIDS and the use of condoms, has brought the discussion of sex into each household. You cannot avoid telling your child about sex these days. Even for the mental health and adjustment of your child, it is necessary to frankly tell him the facts of life when he asks questions about sex.

How to deal with children between the ages two and four?

In this period the child asks questions about the world around him and he will also ask about matters relating to differences between a boy and a girl. His genitalia are the same to him as his nose or fingers. He does not attribute any special function to them. Do not dodge his questions or refuse to answer, for then he will think there is something secretive about it. In any case he will find out as he grows older, so it is much better for him to hear about it from his parents.

A question like “where do babies come from?” should obviously be answered in different ways to a four-year-old and a fourteen-year-old. Answer his questions simply and say only as much as he can understand. Always tell the truth. However you should not try to cover the whole field of sex in your answer, but just enough to satisfy his curiosity at that time. The process of birth is complicated enough for a child, so do not confuse him further. Having a pet in the house helps; you can discuss the question of puppies and kittens with him.

Sometimes he may ask the same question twice. Parents may think he is getting obsessed with sex. The simple reason is that he has forgotten the answers and he wants to ask the question again. When he is satisfied with your answers, he may come back later with more questions.