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WHERE DO BABIES COME FROM?



Young children often ask the question (when you are least expecting it), "Where do babies come from?" This first attempt to understand their origins is often met with a response that gives the impression the subject is off limits, taboo. The parent may say: "Ask

your mother" or "Ask your father" or "You're too young to understand" or "I'll explain when you get older."

Some children never ask the question, but that does not mean they are not interested. They just take in all the misconceptions coming from their playmates or dreamed up in their imagination.

Whether asked openly or not, the question usually makes parents uneasy. This may be because parents tend to think about it from the adult point of view. They think in terms of love, sexual intercourse, unwanted pregnancy, disease, etc. Note that such subjects are beyond the answer needed by the very young child.

Another reason for unease may be the concern that children will use the information on sexuality for experimentation. This applies especially as more details are given with increasing age.

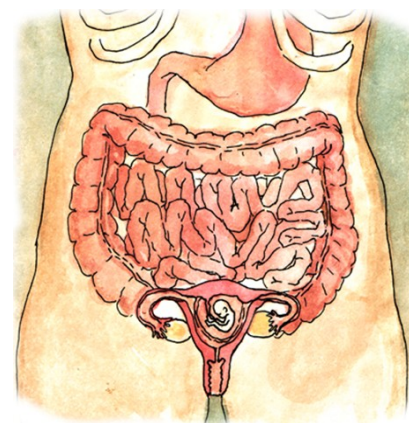
Perhaps you may think that children will interpret willingness to talk about sexual matters as a sign that you approve of early and inappropriate sexual behavior. Research has shown that this is not true. In fact, children who know at an early age how their bodies work and understand issues of sexuality are more likely to postpone sexual intercourse to an adult age. Children are healthier and safer when they hear correct information from their parents.

Your child's level of understanding is something only you can judge. You probably know what your child can take in. Answer accordingly.

When very young children ask about where babies come from, your response should be simple and brief. No more than two or three sentences may be all that is needed to satisfy a preschooler's curiosity. Many children between the ages of 3 to 7 believe that babies have always existed, and it is just a matter of going to the hospital or a store to pick them up. Keeping this in mind will help you answer in a simple and straightforward manner.

Here is a sample conversation—between Madeline, age five, and her mother—of how to deal with the subject.

Madeline comes home after kindergarten and asks: "Mom, where do babies come from?"



Mother: *"Well, let's see. Have you noticed that Mrs. Wilson is having a baby? Where do you think her baby comes from?"*

Madeline: *"I'm not sure, but she sure is fat."*

Mother: *"A baby grows in a special place inside a mother's body that is there just for growing babies—a special room."*

Madeline: *"In your tummy, right?"*

Mother: *"No, the special place is called the uterus or womb, and it's right here below your belly button."*

PUBERTY IS COMING

Puberty is the time when a child's body begins to change and develops the ability to reproduce. Today many girls start puberty changes as early as age 8 and 9. Boys usually don't start their changes until age 11 or 12.

Many of the changes of puberty are the same for both girls and boys. These include rapid growth, body hair, and oily hair and skin, and mood swings. The hallmark for girls is their first menstruation and for boys it is their first ejaculation. This ejaculation may occur during sleep (called "nocturnal emission" or "wet dream").

Because menarche (first menstrual period) can occur anytime between the ages of 10 and 15, it is best to prepare your daughter with good information before she needs it. The same attention should be given to a son's need to know about wet dreams even though they usually come later and are less conspicuous. For both sexes advance knowledge can be empowering. It builds self-confidence.

As to menstruation, you might say:

"Menstruation (also known as having a period) happens to all young girls at puberty. It is natural and a normal part of growing up. It is the way the body begins to practice for later on, if and when a woman decides to have a baby."

The older the daughter, the more detail will be needed, including the source and nature of the menstrual flow. However, many young girls will be eager to learn about puberty sooner rather than later.

For mothers, this is a wonderful opportunity to form a new alliance with their daughters. You can attend a class together, shop for bras, communicate more, and take time to discuss family values.

As to first ejaculation, you might say:

"When a boy's body starts to change, he will start to produce sperm, which is his contribution for making a baby. He also makes semen, which is the fluid that contains the sperm. The body may from time to time get rid of its build up of sperm and semen by sending them out through the penis. This may happen during sleep while dreaming. It is a healthy and natural part of growing up."

The boy's father or other respected male should be taking an active role in communicating during the early years of puberty.