

# THE GRANDPARENT PACK





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**Children and young people need the information, confidence and skills to manage the changes in their bodies and relationships and to handle pressures as they grow up.**

This resource has been written for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. It is based on international evidence and the practical experience of those working with young people.

The resource grew from a workshop held in Hawke's Bay with grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. These grandparents identified a number of areas where they wanted more information and this resource addresses each of these issues.

- ⊙ Talking about sex and relationships
- ⊙ Difference in attitudes to teenage sexuality
- ⊙ Normal behaviour and development – what to expect
- ⊙ House rules and family values
- ⊙ The law
- ⊙ Living with new technology
- ⊙ Raising resilient young people
- ⊙ Puberty – what's it all about
- ⊙ Sexuality education in schools – what, when and why?

You've done it all before, but here are a few reminders and updates we hope you'll find useful.

# VALUES

Knowing, understanding and feeling comfortable about your own sexuality helps you to discuss sex and sexuality with your young person. It will help you create a comfortable and open environment for discussion to take place.

Grandparents may find it difficult talking about sex and sexuality particularly because we don't get much practice talking about it. But silence can send a message of discomfort. How do you feel about sex and sexuality? Can you remember what it was like for you growing up? What did you want to know?

What was it like for your grandchild's parent? What things have changed since then, including in your own attitudes?

Take the time to think about how you feel about some of the questions below. You can fill this in along with any other caregiver who has close involvement in caring for your young person. Do it separately and then compare your answers. Take note of the similarities and differences. This gives you a good chance to talk together about your beliefs and ideas before you talk with your young person about sexuality and relationships.

## First caregiver

## Consider this

## Second caregiver

What are your dreams for your grandson or granddaughter?

How do you want your grandchild to find out about sex?

In your family, who should be responsible for sexuality education?

At what age is it okay for your young person to go on a date?

Would there be criteria? For example, a time to be home or where they go?

What are your beliefs about sex before marriage?

Is marriage expected?

If your granddaughter became pregnant in her teens how would you feel?

## First caregiver

## Consider this

## Second caregiver

What would you say or do?

What would you expect of your granddaughter?

If your grandson told you his girlfriend was pregnant, what would you say?

Would you have any expectations of your grandson?

What are your beliefs or feelings about abortion?

If your grandson or granddaughter told you they have been sexually abused, what would you do?

If your young person came to you and told you they were gay, how would you react? What would you do or say?

## First caregiver

## Consider this

## Second caregiver

What are your beliefs about casual sex?

What would you want their first experience of sex to be like?

What messages does your grandson or granddaughter get from your role modelling around alcohol use?

Is alcohol use by teens okay? What, where, and who should provide alcohol to teens?

What messages does your grandson or granddaughter get from you about relationship behaviours and roles?

Do you think your values about sexuality are different from your grandchild's parent(s)?

# TALKING ABOUT SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

Some people think that talking about sex and relationships, or sexuality education in schools encourages young people to experiment with sex. Research shows good sexuality education has the opposite effect.

Research also shows talking with children can raise the age young people start sexual activity with others. This means young people abstain from sex longer and make better decisions for themselves and their partners. This in turn:

- Reduces the likelihood of unplanned pregnancy
- Lowers the likelihood of young people getting sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

## START TALKING

Talking with young people is important. It is common to feel embarrassed talking about bodies, relationships and sex – what’s important though is to be honest. If you keep it at their level of understanding, it won’t be as difficult as you think.

Don’t give your young person a one-off talk, but build on it gradually. You can make it easier by using events that are happening around you to start the conversation e.g. the birth of a friend’s baby or a storyline in a television programme.

If they don’t get information from you, who will they get it from? Young people get conflicting and unrealistic messages from music videos, tv and films, magazines, friends and the internet.



They may seem to know more than most of us did at the same age. Some of it will be incorrect. They need clear, concise, unbiased information. Just as important, they need you to be open and non-judgemental.

It helps to discuss all aspects of sexuality – emotional, physical, spiritual and social. You can talk about your values and attitudes as well as different attitudes in society.

## **START EARLY**

Young children don't need very detailed information and this is a good way to start. You will also find it less embarrassing. You don't have to say much. Most children are happiest learning in small steps.

## **ANSWERING QUESTIONS IS A GOOD WAY TO TEACH**

Encouraging children to ask us questions is a useful way of helping them learn the things they want to know.

## **ACCEPT THE QUESTION AT FACE VALUE**

If you misinterpret, the young person will most likely tell you that it's not what they wanted to know. Check with them once you've answered the question – ask “Does that answer your question?” or “Is that what you wanted to know?”

Sometimes the questions asked are not actually what they want to know. The questions may be a way of checking a number of things:

- ⊙ Your willingness to talk about sex-related issues
- ⊙ Your availability
- ⊙ Your values surrounding a particular topic or issue.

## **ANSWER THE QUESTION AS SIMPLY AND HONESTLY AS YOU CAN**

Always keep it simple – too much detail can be confusing. Children take in what they want and need to learn and disregard information that is irrelevant to them.

## **IF YOU DON'T KNOW – SAY SO**

Offer to help find the answer with the young person – perhaps have a book or pamphlet they can take away and read.

## **RESPOND TO THE QUESTION NOT THE LANGUAGE**

Questions are often asked using slang. Answer the question first and if you know the technical names tell them what these are.

## **TRY TO ANSWER QUESTIONS AT THE TIME THEY'RE ASKED**

This can be hard if you're in a public place or with people you don't know very well.

Give a brief answer and then offer to discuss it more later. Follow up later, or the young person may see this as an area you don't want to discuss.

## **BUT WHAT IF THEY DON'T ASK QUESTIONS?**

- ⊙ Leave books or leaflets lying around the house.
- ⊙ Watch and discuss TV or films together.
- ⊙ Discuss magazine or newspaper stories.
- ⊙ Visit libraries or bookshops. This can be an opportunity to do some research with them on 'tricky' questions.
- ⊙ Discuss the pregnancy or birth of a friend or relative – use this as an opportunity to consider when would be the right time to have a baby.

## **WHAT ABOUT VALUES AND MORALITY?**

Questions that involve values or attitudes can be difficult as there is no one "right" answer. Questions such as "how do you know when you're ready to have sex" are not simple. Share your own point of view but also encourage them to listen to other people's points of view, and get them to talk about their own. Through this they can clarify their thoughts and feelings as they compose their own sets of values. Your experiences and ideas are valuable but must be owned, using 'I statements.' Explaining your point of view and backing it up with why you feel that way, helps young people to understand. Reflecting other people's views also allows them to see that you are aware of how others feel and gives a more balanced response.

# TALKING TIPS – AGES AND STAGES

## **BIRTH TO TWO YEARS OLD**

Young children are sensual. They learn about themselves and the world through touch. They learn how to love through being touched.

Boys have erections from birth and girls lubricate from birth. By the age of one year, most babies enjoy touching their genitals.

If a baby is told off or stopped from touching their genitals, they will start to feel there is something wrong with this part of them.

This is a good time to start naming body parts. You can point to and name parts of the baby's body. By the time they are two, most infants like pointing to and naming body parts.

## **THREE TO FOUR YEARS OLD**

By this age children are aware of gender difference. They peek under each other's clothing. Don't panic – this is normal behaviour for an enquiring little mind.

They like to undress their dolls and check the bottoms of pets. They begin to repeat swear words and have fun with toilet humour. They are not embarrassed to use words like penis and vagina unless their carers are.

At this age, children may enjoy masturbating. This is a good time to start teaching them about public and private behaviour. This is also a good time to start talking about public and private body parts and wanted and unwanted touching.

Reinforce the facts of reproduction, in simple terms, when the chance

arises. For example, if you see a pregnant woman, bring up the issue of pregnancy and how a baby grows inside a woman. Reinforce this teaching with books and illustrations.

Remember the way you say something tells them more than what you say – try to sound gentle.

## **FIVE TO EIGHT YEARS OLD**

Children at this age continue with sex-play and masturbation, unless taught otherwise. They start having strong friendships with people of the same sex. This is a good time to talk with them about how friendships work.

At this age they are intensely curious about pregnancy and childbirth. Reinforce earlier learning and build on it. For example, if you are unpacking shopping with

a box of tampons, explain what they are for.

At this age children might be able to recite the facts about reproduction but they still don't grasp the full story. Ask them what they know and where they got their ideas from. This will help you build on what they know and gently correct any myths or misinformation.

## **EIGHT TO FOURTEEN YEARS OLD**

Boys need to be told about periods, changes to girls' bodies and how their own bodies will develop. Girls need to be told about changes to boys' bodies. Older children may not want to admit that they don't know things. Ask them what they do know and help them fill in the gaps.

If it feels too personal, try talking about people in books, films and TV programmes.

This is the age to be introducing, or reinforcing your religious or moral views about sexual responsibility. Don't be afraid to tell your child what you think, and why. Try to avoid making harsh judgements, and remember - just because they are asking questions does not mean they are having sex.

What does your child want to learn about sexuality? Ask them.

Try to talk about the positives - pleasure, fun, intimacy.

If you only tell children about the scary stuff and pregnancy, infections and abuse, they may feel you are out of touch and will be reluctant to raise the subject again.

If you talk openly about issues such as teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, virginity, abortion, and

respect each other's viewpoints, you are modelling good relationship skills. This helps young people to develop their own attitudes and values - which may be different from your own. Help them to make their own decisions. Value what they say. You don't have to agree.

Remember, there is always a generation gap, and growing up means developing independent views. If you don't like the words they use tell them why and suggest others.

Young people learn by taking risks and experimenting. As adults we often over-react. Try to keep things in perspective. We all make mistakes. It's part of growing up and they need to know that you love them even when they make mistakes.

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Talk about the private places in your house – the bathroom, toilet or bedroom. If a child is touching their genitals in the lounge, tell them that is a private part of their body and while it's okay for them to do that, it should be done in a private place, not the lounge which is a public space. This helps you put boundaries around the behaviour while allowing them to explore their bodies and to feel okay about doing so.

By simply putting the behaviour into either a public or private category and asking for the correct behaviour for that place, the discussion is focused not about whether the sexual behaviour is okay, but rather where it is okay to do it.

## SAFETY

Stranger danger is often the concept that children and young people are taught. Although it is a really important message it is not the whole story because research shows that children are much more likely to be abused by people they know than by a stranger. So here are some strategies to help keep your children and young people safe.

- Teach them that it is not okay for anyone else to touch the sexual or private parts of their body in a way that makes them feel not okay. Talking about washing or bathing and who does this to help keep them clean and healthy is an important distinction to make.

- ⊙ When talking about body parts use the technical names – penis, vulva, vagina. This will give your child language to use if they need to discuss inappropriate touching with you.
- ⊙ Teach them about okay and not okay touch. This will help them to tell the difference between touching that is okay and not okay. Talk about how their body might react to not okay touching – they may have butterflies in their stomach, get goose bumps or clench and tighten their hands. If a child understands these responses, it will help them to recognise when a situation is not okay.
- ⊙ A useful guide to teach children is “No, Go, Tell.”
  - No – saying no, very assertively, to the person who is touching them inappropriately.
  - Go – get away from the person if possible.
  - Tell – tell an adult, someone you have both identified as a safe person.
- ⊙ Discuss that not only strangers can hurt us – people we know can also do touching that is not okay. Reinforce that this is never okay and any person that might do this to them is wrong.



Children have a natural sense of what is not okay for them. Forcing children to hug or kiss friends or family when they say they don't want to shows them that even if they are having a 'not okay' feeling adults can override this and make them do things they don't feel good about doing. Letting them express their 'not okay' feelings when they have them and respecting them for doing so, shows them they have control over their own bodies and helps them develop confidence for the future.

## GENDER

One of the first ways that children learn about female and male gender difference is through the role modelling they see in their home. The tasks that you undertake at home, your attitudes to men and women, the language you use and the comments you make, all impact on children. Negative comments about someone on the basis of gender put children into gender boxes, male/female, that might not fit who our children think they are and can make them feel negative about themselves. Allowing children and young people to develop attitudes, behaviours and personalities that move across the spectrum of what is acceptable for both males and females helps them to develop a rounded sense of self and feel comfortable and confident with who they are.

# PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Young people are reaching puberty earlier than in previous generations. Puberty for New Zealand girls starts between nine and 14 years. For boys, it's a little later at between 11 and 16 years.

British research suggests that girls are reaching puberty about 18 months earlier than their mothers did, and almost two years earlier than their grandmothers.

This means people are becoming sexually mature earlier, but are not more grown up mentally or emotionally.

It also means that there is a long time between puberty and "settling down."

Earlier puberty plus increased sexual awareness means that children need

more knowledge at a younger age about what their bodies do, and about feelings and consequences.

## WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENS DURING PUBERTY?

- ⊙ There are a number of changes that happen to both boys and girls.
- ⊙ Body shape changes
- ⊙ Increased size and colour of the genitals
- ⊙ Hair growth around the genitals, under the armpits and on the legs and arms
- ⊙ An increase in sweating and oiliness of the skin
- ⊙ Sudden mood swings and intense emotions – love, hate, joy, anger, sadness
- ⊙ An increase in sexual feelings and fantasies
- ⊙ Blushing at almost anything.

Behaviour and relationships may change:

- ⊙ They may think everyone is looking at them
- ⊙ They may become argumentative
- ⊙ They may feel bullet-proof
- ⊙ They may eat constantly
- ⊙ They may masturbate or rub their genitals for pleasure
- ⊙ They may have intense feelings for the same or opposite sex. This is normal
- ⊙ They may feel pressure from their friends
- ⊙ There is a strong desire to fit in
- ⊙ Plans and minds may change constantly
- ⊙ They may want more time to themselves and more privacy
- ⊙ They may question family values and will be forming their own.

## **Young women:**

- ⊙ Oestrogen and progesterone are produced by the ovaries causing changes
- ⊙ Hips and waist change shape and enlarge
- ⊙ Ovaries start to produce eggs
- ⊙ Vulva, vagina, breasts and nipples get bigger
- ⊙ Pubic hair appears, breasts develop
- ⊙ Periods or menstruation begin – usually between nine and 14 years old
- ⊙ Can have vaginal discharge
- ⊙ Can orgasm when masturbating.

## Young men:

- ⊙ Testosterone is produced by the testicles causing changes
- ⊙ Chest and muscles grow larger
- ⊙ Penis, scrotum and testicles get bigger
- ⊙ Have more erections
- ⊙ Breasts may swell temporarily
- ⊙ Hair starts to grow on face, chest, arm pits
- ⊙ Voice gets deeper
- ⊙ Sperm will start being produced in the testicles at the time pubic hair appears
- ⊙ They can now ejaculate and/or orgasm. Some will have wet dreams.

## SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS - WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE LEARNING?

Sexuality education is now a compulsory part of the school curriculum for state and integrated schools, until the end of Year 10 (fourth form).

### **WILL TEACHING MY CHILD ABOUT SEX AT PRIMARY SCHOOL DESTROY THEIR INNOCENCE?**

No. Although children are given information on sex and sexual matters, they do not understand or act on it in the way adults do. Researchers say that children's understanding is limited regardless of how much information they are given – they can only

learn what they are ready to learn. There is a large gap between children and adults in reasoning and comprehension. This gap protects young children's innocence and your young person will not be corrupted or harmed by the information.

## **IS THERE A WAY TO BE INVOLVED WITH THE SEXUALITY EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE SCHOOL?**

In New Zealand, parents and carers are invited every two years to discuss and have input into their school's sexuality education programme. The meeting is usually advertised to parents and carers through the school newsletter or a letter home. You can use this meeting to hear about the way the programme has been put together, examine lesson plans,

debate the underlying values of the programme, ask teachers questions about the programme and to learn how you can support it.

You are also given the option of removing your young person from the class while the course is being taught. In practice, very few parents or carers remove their children from sexuality classes.

Parents and carers are often surprised that the programme is comprehensive and is not just talking about sex. It gives children the opportunity to practice important communication skills, they can hear each other's opinions and gain an understanding and tolerance of others.

The school can give up-to-date, accurate information that is sometimes not

easily accessible to parents and carers. And the young person has an opportunity to discuss these matters with their teachers. This is different from discussing these matters with you, because teachers are not emotionally involved with them in the same way you are.

### **WILL TEACHERS IMPOSE THEIR OWN VALUES ON THE YOUNG PERSON AND UNDERMINE THE VALUES I WANT THEM TO LEARN?**

No. Teachers are trained to be clear about the difference between facts and opinion in their sexuality teaching. If they talk about opinions, it will not be their personal opinions, it will be inclusive of a range of opinions. The role of sexuality education in primary school is to complement learning at home, not to challenge or undermine your values.

### **WILL TALKING ABOUT SEX ENCOURAGE MY CHILD TO EXPERIMENT?**

No. Students who have good sexuality education are more likely to delay having sex until they are older and they are less likely to get pregnant or an infection when they are teenagers.

# RAISING RESILIENT YOUNG PEOPLE

Resiliency may be explained by the presence of “protective factors,” those qualities or situations that help alter or reverse expected negative outcomes.

Resilient individuals have a positive outlook and have developed coping and stress reduction strategies. Resilient children take responsibility for their decisions, and they engage others when needed.

Researchers have identified three themes involving protective factors:

- (1) Caring relationships
- (2) Positive and high expectations
- (3) Opportunities for meaningful participation.

## SELF ESTEEM

Self-esteem develops through action - mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom and meeting challenges. Praise the child for his or her accomplishments. Praise needs to be honestly given rather than given to make the child feel good. If what you say does not match the child’s experience about themselves they can feel confused and not trust what you say.

Children can be taught to see that there are many contributing causes to any problem and to take responsibility for what they have contributed to the problem, without blaming themselves for things out of their control.

## FEELINGS

Encourage your child to demonstrate empathy and caring, to be pleasant, and to do nice things for others.

Feeling anger, sadness and anxiety can be useful signals for us to take some kind of action. It is necessary to fail, feel bad and to try again repeatedly until success occurs.

Children learn from failure and from making mistakes. Accepting failure is a skill we need to learn. A child needs to be realistic about their own part in not succeeding and why it happened, but not blame themselves or others for what has happened.

We must also avoid the temptation to rush in and protect children from possible failure, or to lower our expectations so that children are not challenged, as this can rob our children of experiences where they can learn what they are capable of doing.

When we hear a child say negative things about themselves such as that they are ugly and dumb, our first inclination is to quickly support them by telling them that they are not. We don't want to agree with them, but rather show we understand how they are feeling. Showing they have been heard and not criticised for what they have said will help a child develop resilience. You might respond to a child's negative statement by saying, "I know you feel ugly and dumb but I don't see it that way. Let's work out what makes you feel that way and what will help you to feel better." This kind of statement is more likely to help them seek solutions to those negative feelings. Also, if our response is critical such as "no one will like you if you feel that way," they will be less likely to examine and change their behaviour.



When language is developing, acknowledge and label feelings and encourage your child to express their own feelings and to recognise feelings in others (for example: sad, glad, sorry, happy, mad).

## **SETTING LIMITS**

We tend to parent and grandparent the way we were parented. However, the world has changed. Reward and punishment may have been effective when we were children but may not be as effective now. Children are likely to challenge some of the limits we set. While you still have to set limits you may have to build in more choices so that a power struggle is not generated. For example, instead of saying to your child, "It is time to go to bed," you might have to say, "Do you want me to remind you five minutes or ten

minutes before it is time to go to bed." While this kind of choice is helpful for all children, it is especially useful for youngsters who are quick to experience requests as a challenge. And we must remember that if an approach doesn't work, it makes more sense to change it than continue to use the same ineffective strategy.

Remain fair and consistent and your child will be more open to changing their behaviour.

## **ROLE MODELLING**

Your ability as an adult to modify your behaviour models flexibility, adaptability, and receptiveness to new ideas and solutions. You want your grandchild to accept increasing responsibility and handle challenges better and better as they grow up. They will be

better able to do so if you have demonstrated this behaviour for them.

Ask yourself what your grandchild sees when you make mistakes. They will learn from the way you deal with setbacks and failure. Mistakes serve as opportunities for learning.

## **PROBLEM SOLVING**

Help your child begin to accept responsibility for his or her own behaviour and to understand that his or her actions have consequences. From an early age children love to be helpful. When we accept their help we show we believe in their ability and that they have something valuable to offer—a feeling that nurtures a sense of responsibility and resilience. Resilience is also reinforced when we help our children to learn

how to make choices and decisions. Children with good problem-solving skills are not afraid when faced with challenging situations since they have the capacity to figure out what to do.

Encourage your child to try things and do things on his or her own with minimal adult help.

## **ENJOYING SUCCESS**

Resilient children enjoy and take credit for their successes. Their sense of accomplishment and pride gives them the confidence to persevere the next time they face a challenge. It is important to acknowledge and highlight the ways in which children contribute to their own success.

# SETTING BOUNDARIES

When setting rules do it with your child or young person. Discuss limits and boundaries in advance. Your child should understand the limitations that have been set and also the consequences for misbehaving and breaking the rules. Taking time to make sure that your child understands the expectations helps them learn acceptable behaviour and the difference between right and wrong.

Younger children will remember rules and boundaries with a visual aid such as a chart. The clearer you are on the how and why of your boundaries, the more likely they are to comply.

Consider the age and developmental stage of your child. Setting boundaries is not about trying to control your child.

Boundaries for young children should be about safety, with you making all the decisions. Limits for older children, while still involving their safety, should present them with appropriate opportunities for decision-making. Children don't magically grow up to make good decisions. They learn how to do it from experience.

Enforce the limits consistently. When you first set a limit or boundary, your child may test it, several times. He may complain, cry, throw a fit, call you mean, or any other challenging behaviour. It is their job to test those boundaries to make sure they are solid, sturdy and will hold up under pressure. If you cave in to their pressure, the ultimate result is that you undermine their feeling of security.

Some tips:

- Don't solve every problem for your grandchild
- Don't be overly critical of the child's attempts to problem-solve
- Model a flexible problem solving strategy yourself.

## HOUSE RULES

In your house there might be rules about things like:

- ⊙ Are young people allowed to have a boyfriend or girlfriend?
- ⊙ Are they allowed to go out with friends? If so, do they have a time they need to be home? Do they need to let you know where they are and how they will be getting home?
- ⊙ Are they allowed to have friends to stay over?

- ⊙ Is their boyfriend or girlfriend allowed to stay over in their room?

Different families have different rules and values. What's okay for someone else's family may not be okay for yours. It is useful for our rules to also reflect the law e.g. 16 years is the legal age of consent; the alcohol purchasing age is currently 18 years.

As young people grow older, they will meet people with different religious or cultural values to yours. They might read books or see films that explain or illustrate different values – this can lead them to make new choices or decisions. This may be hard to accept but remember that trust and respect work both ways – if the young person behaves like an adult they should be respected as an adult.

## ALCOHOL

Many young people enjoy the social aspects of drinking and the “buzz” they get from it.

Research shows that alcohol is sometimes used to facilitate sexual encounters, as people report feeling more confident and at ease.

Young people need to know how to handle themselves when they are drinking.

- ⊙ Alcohol affects decision-making so it’s good to have a plan before they start drinking (e.g. how much they want to drink, how far they want to go if they are with a partner or think they’ll hook up with someone)
- ⊙ Drink a glass of water after every drink of alcohol, to keep hydrated and slow down the effects of alcohol
- ⊙ Have a plan for getting home – e.g. a cell phone to call you to collect them, a sober driver, taxi fare.

# PRESSURES

## PEER PRESSURE

Friends become increasingly important in the life of a young person as they get older. Friends are usually a positive influence but pressure to be part of the group can result in a young person making less good choices. This is peer pressure and it's often hard to manage.

Encourage your young person to talk about any stress peer pressure is putting them under. Perhaps they're being pressured to drink or smoke. Talk about strategies they could use to help them through this. Do they know of someone else who's also being pressured? Perhaps they could join forces – it's easier for two people to resist a pressure.

Be there at all times and let them know you're available to talk. This could mean that you tell them you'll come and pick them up from a party whatever the time or that you're always available to talk – if they want to. You might have to repeat these offers over and over so they understand it's genuine.

Talk through some situations they might find themselves in. Work out ways for them to say no or people they can go to for help.

Choose your arguments – it could be you don't like their music or the clothes they wear. Decide if that's the biggest and most important issue for you and for your young person – if not, let it go.

While we probably hope that our children and young people share our values they may instead take on the values of their friends or peers and we can't control this. We can control our reactions and work hard at making ourselves available and accepting.

## **MEDIA PRESSURE**

Young people are naturally interested in their and others' bodies and development. In New Zealand, young people are flooded with relationship and body image messages from TV shows, music videos, DVDs, pre-teen and teen magazines.

Messages about ideal body shapes and styles of dress may affect children's self-esteem and put pressure on them. It is a challenge to allow children to enjoy their childhood without undue pressure to conform. Young people are exposed

to intensive marketing, and are aware of brands and their association with image.

There are strong messages about the expected behaviours of girls and boys. Children who do not fit these stereotypes can feel especially isolated.

You can counter these messages and images, and give some balance to the flood of information children receive, by talking with your young people about how realistic the images are.

# TECHNOLOGY

## **PORNOGRAPHY**

Exposure to pornography – for example via the internet, older friends' DVDs and magazines - is also an issue you need to consider even for younger aged children. While children generally do not have a natural sexual capacity until between the ages of ten and twelve they are susceptible to influences affecting their development. Exposure to pornography can short circuit children's learning about sex in stages they are ready for.

Pornography has underlying messages that can be extremely damaging, for example that sex without responsibility is best; sex is about male desires and is not mutually pleasurable; women are

sexual objects and not people. Porn also presents unrealistic body types and outside the norm body parts. All of these can put pressure on young people growing up, distorting reality and expectations of relationships and sex.

## **NEW TECHNOLOGY**

The internet, especially social networking sites such as Bebo or Facebook, is the way many young people get their information, talk with their friends and spend their free time. Because they can be online anytime and anywhere, from their cell phones and lap tops, it means they have to work so much harder to make decisions for themselves – to decide who and how they want to be.



## **INTERNET SAFETY**

Young people can be very good at actually using new technology but less adept at assessing some of the risks involved with being online. This can be a challenge too for grandparents who may be less confident when dealing with technology.

There are a number of actions you can take to minimise risks.

- ⊙ Have the home computer in a family space such as living areas rather than in bedrooms or home offices
- ⊙ Set times and sites for computer use
- ⊙ Talk with children about images or sites they may have seen that were concerning to them
- ⊙ Explain to older children your concerns about certain sites or images and discuss the differences between pornography, fantasy and real life relationships
- ⊙ Be aware that any equipment with wireless access (including cellphones and iPods) may expose young people to pornography, or possibly exploitation.

## SOME GENERAL RULES OF ONLINE SAFETY

- ⊙ Be careful about what you say and which photos you put on a blog or social networking site.
- ⊙ Don't send a message that you wouldn't want to be reposted from friend to friend.
- ⊙ Don't stand for anyone sending you porn photos or information by email.
- ⊙ Try not to choose email addresses or a chat room name that makes you sound like a young boy or girl.
- ⊙ Don't give your address, phone number or other personal contact details on blog sites or social networking sites.
- ⊙ Never send your bank details or any financial information over the internet (except internet banking) as it can lead to a scam.
- ⊙ Set your facebook profile to private and only accept or add people that you know in real life.
- ⊙ Photos can be changed or altered. Take care when posting photographs because you don't know who is looking at them or has stored them.
- ⊙ If you're getting questions from someone you don't know don't answer them. Young people should be encouraged to tell a trusted adult if they're being asked questions like what school they go to, what sports team they play for, where they do their homework.

- ⊙ Online friends are strangers until you meet them in real life. Remember, not everyone on the internet is who or what you think they are.
- ⊙ Report bad behaviour to the site administrator. This could be nudity, pornography, harassment or unwelcome comments. You should also report suspicious people.
- ⊙ Never share your password with anyone.
- ⊙ Adjust your privacy settings to a level you feel comfortable with and check regularly that you're still okay with them.
- ⊙ Remember that the profile of the person is something they've created themselves. The real person might be quite different.
- ⊙ Never go alone to meet someone you've only connected with through the internet. If you're going to meet, make sure it's in a public place and that you've told someone else where you're going. Tell the person you're going to meet that you've done this too.

## TEENAGE SEXUALITY

Young people have a right to enjoy and express their sexuality. They are naturally curious, and bursting with hormones. Young people often learn by taking risks and experimenting. Try to keep things in perspective. If your teenager makes mistakes, remember that's a part of growing up and young people need to know you love them. Give reasons why you value what you do but don't lecture.

Show confidence that your teenager can weigh up different points of view and make good decisions about their own health.

Not all teenage relationships will be sexual, and not all teenagers will be sexually active.

The Youth 2007 survey of 10,000 randomly selected secondary school students found that most students had never had sexual intercourse.

### **KEEPING OUR TEENAGERS SEXUALLY SAFE**

Sexual safety means a lot of different things:

- ⊙ Avoiding infections (STIs)
- ⊙ Not getting pregnant unless it is planned
- ⊙ Having the kinds of sex you want, and your partner wants – not being pressured or coerced into something you don't want
- ⊙ Being emotionally ready for the good stuff and the hard stuff.

Teenagers want to enjoy their relationships. Some also want to enjoy sexual experiences. All teenagers want to avoid heart break and harm.

Both partners may not even have the same motives for sex. Young people should be clear about why they want to have sex – this is important in being honest with themselves. It might be love, lust, curiosity, fun, something to do, a way to feel independent or to get back at someone. Whatever their reasons, they need to be honest and to treat others the way they'd like to be treated.

Both young men and women highly value intimacy and many think that having a partner will help them fit in and gain respect. Young people need to know that sex can be intense and wonderful. It can change how they think about themselves and the person they're having or had sex with. Sometimes it can be disappointing too. And not every relationship lasts.

Not all teenage pregnancies are unplanned or unwanted, but for most young people and their carers, pregnancy is a big fear.

The real facts about getting pregnant:

- ⊙ You can get pregnant the first time you have sex
- ⊙ You can get pregnant if you have sex while you have your period
- ⊙ You can get pregnant even if you have sex standing up
- ⊙ Washing or squirting things into the vagina (sometimes called douching) will not stop or prevent a pregnancy
- ⊙ You can get pregnant if you have sex in the water
- ⊙ You can get pregnant if the man pulls out before he ejaculates (cums)

You can emphasise protecting and enjoying themselves without worry, rather than the risks of some behaviour. Taking risks with sex or making decisions based on bad information, can lead to situations that can change a young person's life forever.

Young people want to enjoy their relationships and sexual experiences and to have enough information and confidence to be able to prevent themselves coming to any harm. You can help by:

- ⊙ Discussing the emotional aspects of a sexual relationship. This will help teenagers make better decisions in their relationships
- ⊙ Helping young people to think about their own values and sex and sexuality
- ⊙ Helping them decide what they feel comfortable with before they get into a sexual situation. Remind them it's okay to say no to sex
- ⊙ Helping them develop the skills to make sound decisions about relationships and sexual intercourse and how to stand up for those decisions – for example, to say no if that's what they choose. They also need skills to help them recognise a situation that might turn risky or violent and to deal with pressures for unwanted sex or drug/ alcohol use
- ⊙ Helping them to know how to negotiate protected sex and other forms of safer sex when they're ready for a sexual relationship
- ⊙ Telling/showing them where to access help and support and sexual and reproductive health services.

## UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Young people are not immune from unhealthy, coercive or violent relationships.

Warning signs:

- ⊙ Put downs, name calling, being made to feel bad
- ⊙ Threatening
- ⊙ Cutting off from friends and family
- ⊙ Extreme jealousy
- ⊙ Checking up on whereabouts
- ⊙ Constantly giving gifts
- ⊙ Constant texting when out with other people
- ⊙ Physically violent
- ⊙ Pushed into having sex, touching, or kissing when not wanted
- ⊙ Being forced to pose for sexual pictures

- ⊙ Posting pictures on websites, sending to mates
- ⊙ Being “loaned out” to others for sex.

Relationship abuse is not a one-off event. It is a cycle and it usually gets worse if nothing is done to stop it.

Talk with your young person about what makes a healthy relationship and an unhealthy relationship. Help them to recognise the signs of an unhealthy relationship.

# LEGAL STUFF

## **SEX**

It is legal in New Zealand for young men and women to have sex once they have turned 16. This is called the age of consent. The same law applies to sexual relations between young people of the same sex.

## **ABORTION**

A woman can consent to, or refuse, a legal abortion at any age. No-one can force her into having an abortion. Two certifying consultants have to agree to her having an abortion. The legislation governing access to abortion is found in the Guardianship Act 1968; The Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977; The Crimes Act 1961.

## **CONTRACEPTIVES**

Young people can buy or obtain contraceptives at any age. A parent, teacher,

doctor, Family Planning Clinic can give advice about and provide contraception. The legislation covering this access is the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977 as amended by the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Amendment Act 1990.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Young people have the right to access confidential health services. This is provided for under the Code of Health and Disability Services.

Family Planning has a confidentiality statement for under 16 year olds which says:

*“Everything you say to us will be confidential. We will not tell anyone else unless there is a risk that someone could harm you, you could harm someone else, or you could harm yourself. In those circumstances we may need to tell someone else in order to help you better, but we will always try to inform you first.”*



# WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

## WEBSITES

[www.theword.org.nz](http://www.theword.org.nz) – Family Planning’s website for young people. It has information on the mechanics of the body, sexual safety, sexual orientation and gender identity, relationships, society, culture and technology and frequently asked questions.

[www.familyplanning.org.nz](http://www.familyplanning.org.nz) A Family Planning website. You can find your nearest clinic and details of courses held across the country.

[www.youthline.org.nz](http://www.youthline.org.nz) – Youthline is a nationwide youth-development organisation. This website has information on the body, mind, drugs and alcohol, relationships, sex, beyond school and our society.

[www.rainbowyouth.org.nz](http://www.rainbowyouth.org.nz) Rainbow Youth is an Auckland-based organisation that provides support, information, advocacy and education for queer young people and their families.

[www.raisingresilientkids.com](http://www.raisingresilientkids.com) This United States based organisation disseminates information to assist adults to raise, develop and support stress hardy children.

[www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz) Netsafe is an independent, non-profit organisation that promotes confident, safe and responsible use of cyberspace. This site has information for young people and adults. Netsafe also has a website [www.inmyday.org.nz](http://www.inmyday.org.nz) which is focused on web safety. The site has information and activities for parents.

## **FREE PHONE LINES**

Youthline has a 24-hour helpline Call them on 0800 376 633

Healthline is a free telephone health information service for all New Zealanders. The service is staffed by registered nurses who will assess your health needs and give information and advice to help you decide on the best level of care. Call them on 0800 611 116.

0800 499 488 is the free phone number for the Parents Legal Information Line for School Issues (PLINFO). This is a free nationwide service which aims to provide parents and caregivers with knowledge about their own and their children's legal rights and obligations within the state and integrated school system. PLINFO offers callers legal information and assistance on a wide range of issues involving children, young people and the school system - a student's right to an education, school discipline, suspensions, searches, privacy, uniforms, truancy, fees, bullying and making a complaint.

## **HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**

Your GP or the staff at Family Planning Clinic can help with contraception, STI testing or other sexual health issues.

Family Planning has a team of health promoters working across the country. They run a range of courses and workshops for parents and caregivers. Check details of courses near you at [www.familyplanning.org.nz](http://www.familyplanning.org.nz)



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