Tips for Adults Talking to Teens

Let's face it! Talking to your tween or teen about difficult subjects can be awkward. But trust us... it is important! The world they live in is full of hard decisions to make about sex and dating, drugs and alcohol, and much more. They need an adult they can trust and talk to. Check out the tips below for how to start (and continue) these important conversations!

1. Talk EARLY and talk OFTEN. Healthy conversations about their body can help a child learn privacy, autonomy and safety. This should include using the proper names for body parts (i.e. vagina or penis) and teaching children that no one should touch these body parts except for a parent or doctor (when mom or dad are present and the child has given consent to be touched). Also, it’s a great idea to let children choose who they do or do not want to hug. This fosters body autonomy and safety. It also lays the groundwork for understanding what consent means.

2. Be APPROACHABLE and ASKABLE. You won’t be thrilled when your 9-year-old asks about a sexual word or drug use term they heard on the bus. Before you respond take a deep breath. Remember the WAY you respond to this either communicates that you ARE or ARE NOT their “go-to” person for future questions and conversations. Think about it... if you asked someone a question and they freaked out, would you ever ask them anything again?

3. Be INTENTIONAL. Plan time to talk, but be open to impromptu conversations and teachable moments.

4. TALK in the car. The distraction of driving (and not making eye contact) can relieve the pressure for you or your tween/teen.

5. PRACTICE. Role play the conversation with an adult or practice in the mirror. It can help you feel prepared and focused.

6. ASK ADVICE and SEEK INFORMATION. If you are unsure where to start, research information that is appropriate for your tween/teen. You can search online, ask another parent, consult a pediatrician, etc. Asking your tween/teen if they have any questions is also a great idea! Be familiar with the ages and stages of adolescent health. For example, a 10-year-old will need to start learning about puberty and human reproduction, while a 13-year-old needs to begin hearing about STDs and teen pregnancy prevention. Check out this link for information about adolescent development: bit.ly/2Hg5l2d

7. Be HONEST. Teens can tell when you are not being real with them. If you aren’t sure about something look it up. Search in advance to choose medically accurate, unbiased sites with appropriate images that can be viewed together or separately (ex: centerstone.org/teens).

8. THANK THEM for talking with you! Ask if they understood and make sure they feel like they can come to you for more information. Be sure to check in with them many times as they grow and develop during their teen years!