

Reality vs false expectations

How to address sexuality with teenagers

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the spirit of our efforts to promote reconciliation, we acknowledge the traditional territories and oral practices of the Blackfoot, the Tsuut'ina, the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, the Métis Nation Region 3, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta. We also respectfully acknowledge that the province of Alberta is comprised of Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territory, the traditional lands of First Nations and Métis peoples.



What is sex education?

Comprehensive sexuality education

- It gives young people accurate, age-appropriate information about sexuality and their sexual & reproductive health.
- Tailored for different ages and comprehensive, meaning they cover a range of topics on sexuality and sexual & reproductive health, throughout childhood & adolescence.
- Topics: respect, consent and bodily, anatomy, puberty & menstruation, contraception & pregnancy, and sexual transmitted infections.



Why is it important?

- Sex education equips children and young people with the knowledge, skills attitudes and values that help the protect their health, develop respectful social and sexual relationships, make responsible choices, and understand & protect the rights of others.
- Evidence suggests that high quality sexual education delivers positive health outcomes, with lifelong impacts (ES Goldfarb 2021.)



Why is it avoided?

- I don't know what to say.
- I don't know the answer.
- I don't want to look dumb.
- Talking about sex is giving permission to do it.
- My child is too young to talk about sex.
- My parents didn't talk to me about it.
- I don't need to, my child will learn at school.
- I've taught them the basics.
- I am waiting until my kid asks.
- I am too embarrassed and don't know how to address the topic.



What's an appropriate age to start talking about it?



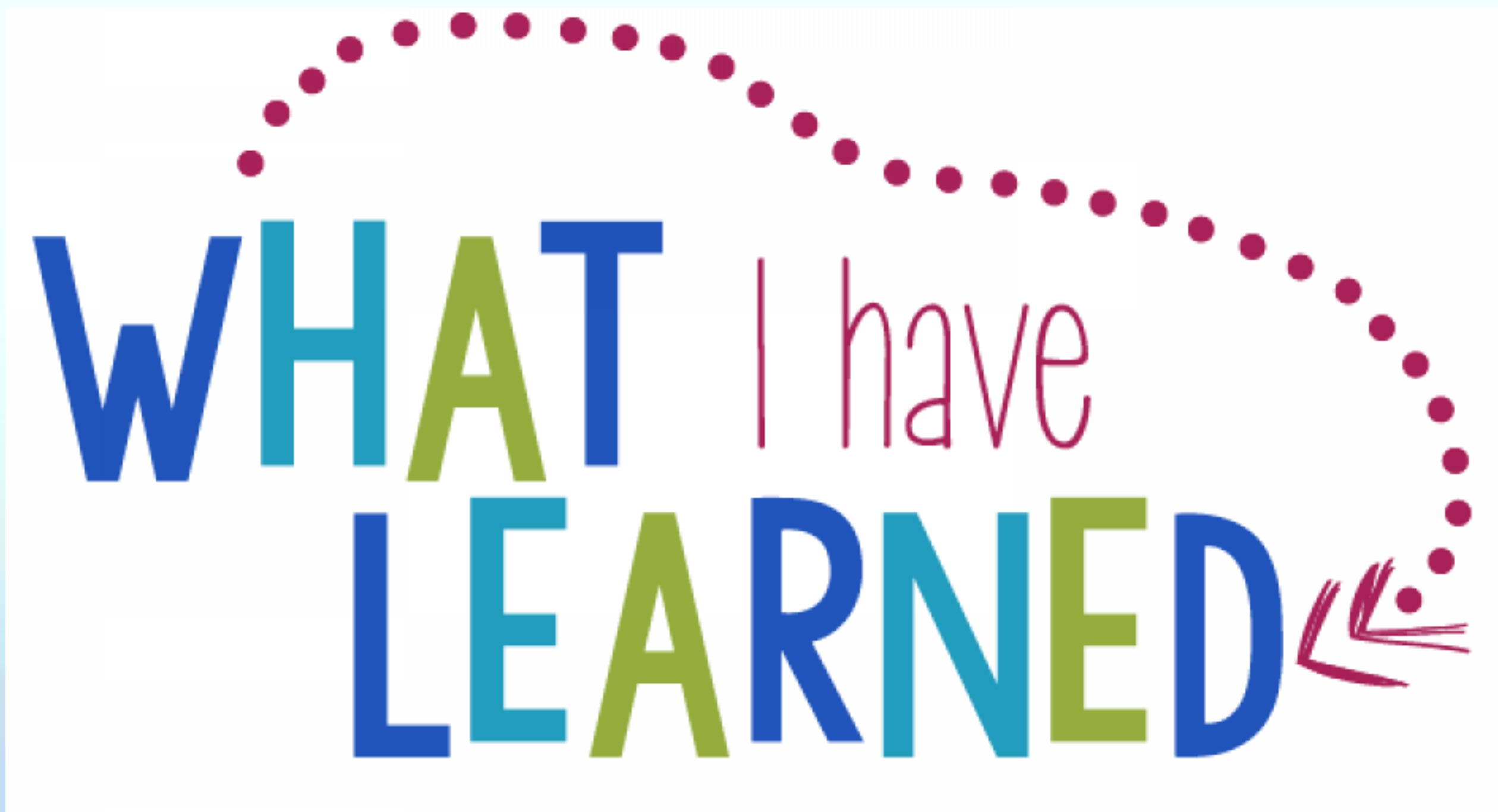
- The UN's global guidance indicates that comprehensive sexual education can start at the age of 5 years, when formal education typically begins.
- Sex education is a lifelong process, sometimes beginning at home with trusted caregivers.
- Learning is incremental, what is taught at the earliest ages is different from what is taught during puberty and adolescence.
- With younger learners teaching about sexuality doesn't necessarily mean teaching about sex.

How can it be addressed with teenagers?

Normalization

- Safe space: If they feel embarrassed reassure them that it's ok, but that there is nothing to be ashamed of. Let them know that they can always come to you to talk things through, for advice, information, or get access to health care.
- No judgement: Be open and listen to their answers. Fill in the gaps of knowledge and correct misinformation.
- Call things by their names





How did you first learned about it?

- Did you learn from a parent? From a sibling? From a book? From a magazine?
- Opportunity to identify how you may want to approach it. What would you do different? What worked well?
- It helps you identify what you know about and what you may need to learn before having the conversation with your child.

How to start a safe conversation?

- Don't address it all at once, it can become overwhelming for everyone.
- Lifelong & regular conversations.
- Allow your kid to ask questions. They can come for support without fear of shame or judgement.
- Why are they asking questions? Don't assume.



When can you start a conversation?

Everyday life provides opportunities

- When there is an announcement about pregnancy.
- When dating.
- If sex comes up on a movie or a tv show.
- When gender stereotypes are pushed in ads, games, tv, books, movies, etc.
- When you see unrealistic portrayals of, or very sexualized bodies.
- Ads for pads and tampons, birth control, or condoms.



Questions that you can ask

Ask open ended questions

- What do you know about how pregnancy happens?
- What would you do if someone you were dating started acting like that character on this tv show?
- When older, you can ask about crushes, dating, or relationships.
- You can ask how they think they'll know when they are ready to have sex, including responsibilities that come with it.





How to answer your kid's questions

- Can you tell me what you already know about that? What have you heard?
- Keep the conversation going: What other questions do you have? What made you ask that question?
- Check their understanding: Does that answer your question? What do you think about that?
- If you don't know: I'm glad you asked that question. I'm not sure, let's look it up together!

Who should be involved?

- At home
 - Parents, family member
- Formal education
 - Teachers
- Informal education
 - Social workers
 - Counsellors



Consequences of not talking about it.

Risk Behaviours

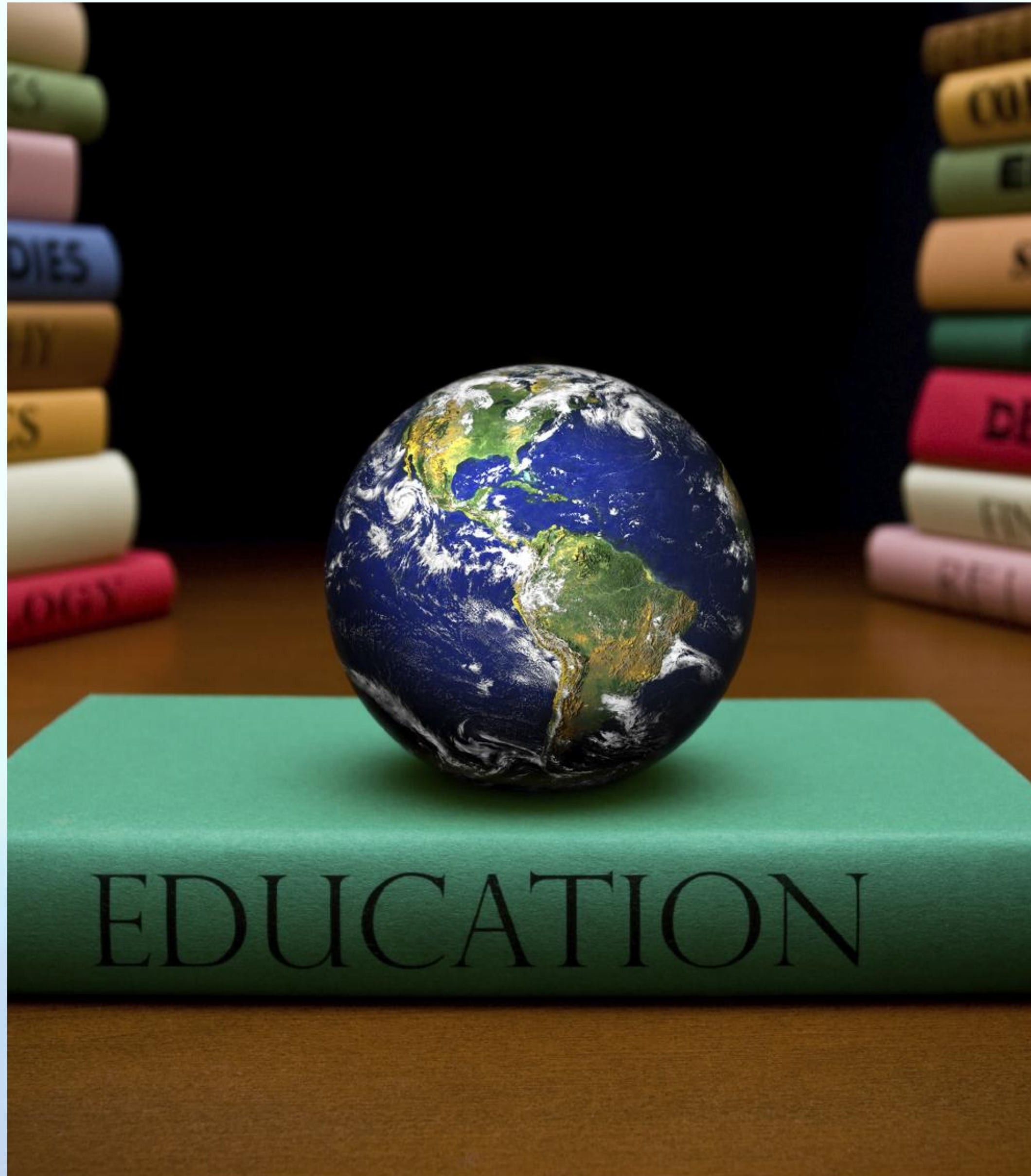
- Unprotected intercourse
- Starting sexual activity at a young age
- Having multiple partners
- Sex trade work
- Undesired pregnancy



Reasons for risk behaviours

- Not understanding the concern about STIs and how they are transmitted.
- May not talk about safer sex practices
- Aren't prepared or don't understand how to use protective measures.
- May not be aware of symptoms of STIs.
- May not seek medical care for STIs symptoms.





Does sex education encourage early or risky sexual activity?

- Well-designed and well-delivered programs support positive decision making around sexual-health
- Young people are more likely to initiate sexual activity later and practice safer sex when better informed about sexuality, sexual relations, and their rights (ES Goldfarb 2021.)

Boundaries

Setting healthy boundaries

- Reasonable boundaries will make it less likely for teenagers to engage in risky behaviours such as drinking, smoking, having unprotected sex, or having sex before they are ready.
- Give your kid your take based on your values.
- Establish clear expectations (like curfews, dating, rules about alcohol) and check in regularly that they are being met.
- Make this a conversation with your kid, by listening and allowing them to negotiate, it shows them that you respect them and understand them as they are becoming more independent.



Reality or fiction?

Porn

- It can create false expectations about sex.
- It can promote risk behaviours.
- Good or bad?
- Not sex education.



Effects of porn on the brain

- Pornography releases such high levels of dopamine that frequent viewings can leave the brain unresponsive to natural sources of pleasure.
- Desensitization of our brain reward circuitry and can mess with natural ability to produce dopamine.
- Addiction



Masturbation

Objectives to address

- Talk about it when you suspect puberty is arriving or if your child asks about it. You can also address it if culture or peers have brought it up to the child's awareness.
- Define masturbation in proper terms. Let your children know you are an emotional safe source of information.
- Give directions as to why they are getting the feelings they have, as this helps prevent problematic and addictive masturbation.
- Teach them how they might respectfully relate to their urges and normal development.



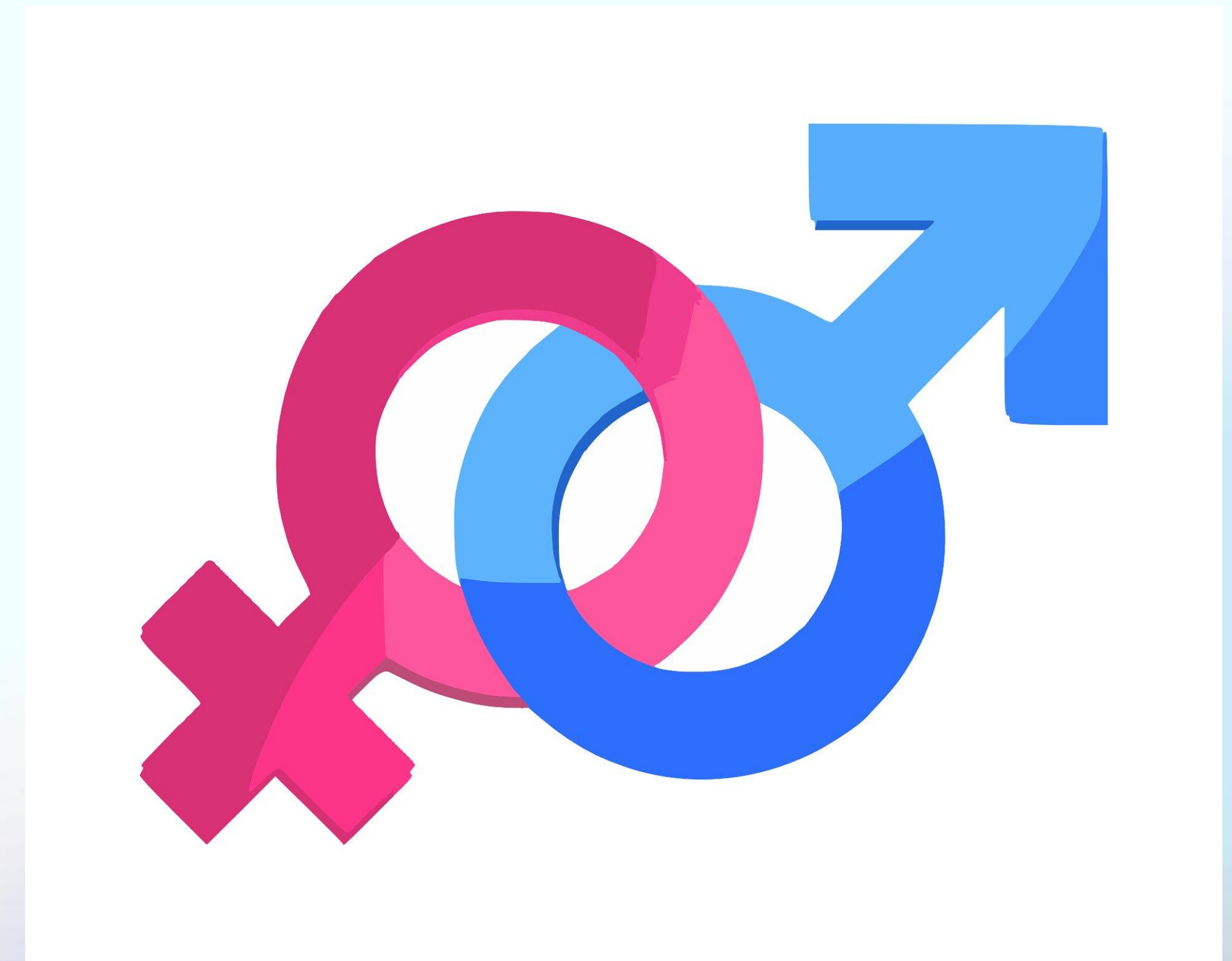
How to address it?

- You can begin the conversation by acknowledging that this might feel awkward for both, but as a parent your goal is to support their healthy development.
- Let them know this is a natural and important topic and that you are there to help them navigate it.
- Don't jump to conclusions, ask open-ended questions about what they have seen, heard, or learned about it.
- Normalization.
- Teach healthy boundaries.
- Address common myths and misconceptions.



Gender Differences

- Early adolescence (10-14 yrs) is a period of increased expectations for boys and girls to adhere to socially constructed and often stereotypical norms that perpetuate gender inequalities.
- Gender norms are closely linked to poor adolescent sexual and reproductive outcomes (Kagesten A. et al., 2016).
- Make sex education appropriate depending on gender.



References & Resources

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Questions?

