Healthy Schools

Responding to children's questions about relationships, sex or health

Some ideas for parents and carers



This is a simple guide for parents, carers and teachers giving some ideas for responses to questions from children about relationships, sex and health. Because children are all different and will ask different questions at different ages, these questions and answers are not categorised by the age of the child. They start with a simple answer and build from that.

Any child of any age can be given the simplest answer but there is more information to give if a child asks for more or if you decide that further information is appropriate.

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Top tips for parents and carers

- Accept that children will have and will ask questions.
- Try not to be surprised, laugh or be angry.
- Assume it is a genuine question.
- Avoid changing the subject or saying, "I will tell you when you are older".
- Check your child's understanding before answering, ask them what they think first.
- Tell the truth, rather than giving made up stories.
- Clear, short answers are fine. You do not need to give lots of information. If children are still unclear they will usually ask another question.
- If you don't know the answer or how to answer to something, it is fine to say you don't know, but try to find out and answer the question later. For example say, "That's a good question but I need to think about how best to answer it, I'll come back to you later." (Make sure you do!)
- Have an answer prepared in case your child asks you a question in an inappropriate environment, for example, "That's a good question, let's talk about it later."

Most of the time, children are happy with short, simple, truthful answers.

Question	A starting point	More information	Detailed information
Where do I come from?	You were born in xxx, but some of your family come from xxx. All babies begin as a tiny cell. It grows inside their mother's tummy.	The cell is made from the seed (sperm) from a man's body which has joined up with (fertilised) an egg (ovum) from a woman's body.	
How was I born?	When a baby has grown big enough to be born it comes out of its mother's tummy. It takes nine months for a human baby to ready to be born.	The mother's body releases special hormones which makes her go into labour. This means the muscles in her body help to push out the baby. A special nurse called a midwife usually helps the woman to give birth to the baby.	Babies can be born in two ways. Most babies come out of the woman's vagina, but sometimes it's too hard for the baby to come out that way and then a doctor can make a small cut in the woman's belly and pulls the baby out – that's called a caesarean. It can hurt a lot, but there are special drugs that can help take the pain away and special ways a woman can lie or stand that help the pain.
Boys have willies don't they - why?	Boys and girls both have different sex parts – it's what makes them a boy or a girl. Boys have a penis (that's the correct word/science word for a willy) and girls have a vagina.	The sex parts are the part of the body that is used to make a baby when boys and girls grow into adults. A boy's penis is also needed to rid the body of urine (liquid waste). Inside the penis is the urethra - a long, narrow tube that carries the urine from the bladder and out through its opening at the tip. Girls have a urethra too, a small hole near the vagina.	

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How are babies made?	Babies are made from an egg (ovum) from a woman.	The seed (sperm) from a man's body joins up with (fertilises) an egg (ovum) from the woman's body. A baby develops and grows in the woman's womb.	Babies are made when a man and woman have sexual intercourse. The man places his penis inside a woman's vagina. After a while the penis releases sperm (ejaculates). The sperm travel up to the woman's womb. If there is an egg there ready, the sperm and the egg join together (fertilises). If the egg settles in the lining of the womb a baby develops. Although lots of sperm are released (in a sticky white liquid, called semen) it only takes one sperm to make a baby. Sometimes babies are made by a doctor joining a sperm (from a man) and an egg (from a woman) in a Petri dish so they fertilise. The fertilised egg is put into the woman's womb. If the egg attaches to the lining of the womb it develops into a baby. This method is called in-vitro fertilisation or IVF (it means in-glass fertilisation).
How does sex make a baby?	It puts the seed (sperm) from a man's body together with the egg (ovum) in the woman's body. This makes a baby.	The seed (sperm) from a man's body joins up with (fertilises) an egg (ovum) from the woman's body. A baby then develops and grows in the woman's womb.	When a man and woman have sexual intercourse the man places his penis inside a woman's vagina. After a while the penis releases sperm (ejaculates). The sperm travel up to the woman's womb. If there is an egg there ready, the sperm and the egg join together (fertilises). If the egg settles in the lining of the womb a baby develops. Although lots of sperm are released (in a sticky white liquid, called semen) it only takes one sperm to make a baby.

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Can men have babies?	No. Men's bodies are not designed to have babies.	Men do not have the right body parts to grow a baby inside them. However, when a baby is born they can look after them.	A man does not have uterus/womb (the place where a fertilised egg lives and grows until it is ready to be a baby and be born). A man's sperm is needed for a woman to become pregnant – the man produces sperm to fertilize the woman's egg. The only animals known where the male has the baby are seahorses!
What is sex? **What actually happens during sex?**	Sex is about whether you are male (boy or man) or female (girl or woman). Sex is also when two adults / a couple show they love each other by kissing, touching each other's bodies or cuddling with no clothes on.	Often when people say 'sex' they mean when an adult couple join together with their sex parts.	Sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is when a man's penis becomes hard (an erection) and he places his penis inside a woman's vagina and moves it around. This is often what people mean when they say 'having sex'. Sex between a man and woman can mean a baby is made.
Does it hurt to have sex?	Sex should feel good for both adults.	It is very important the adults have agreed that they want to have sex and that they are gentle with each other.	Some people might find it a bit painful the first time they have sex because their bodies are not used to it.
What does 'animals mating' mean?	All animals 'mate' to make babies. It is when a male and a female come together to produce offspring.	All animals need a sperm (from a male) and an egg (from a female) in order to successfully mate.	Different animals may use different methods to mate. Lots of animals do this inside the body (internally). The male has a penis or special organ which he places inside the female so that the sperm can go inside and fertilise the female's eggs. But some animals' babies develop outside the body. For example, female frogs lay eggs which are fertilized when the male frog sprays them with sperm.

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Do women always get pregnant if they have sex?	No, not always, but if a man and woman have sex there is a chance the woman might become pregnant.	The egg (ovum) from a woman has to be in exactly the right place for the sperm to find it (fertilise it). The fertilised egg has to settle successfully in the lining of the womb to grow into a baby. Sometimes women cannot get pregnant through sexual intercourse –there are lots of reasons for this. A doctor can help them get pregnant in other ways or people might adopt a baby.	A couple might have sexual intercourse lots of times before the woman gets pregnant. If man and woman want to have sex but do not want to have a baby they can choose to use contraception. This means they can have sex without the woman becoming pregnant. Contraception prevents the sperm from meeting the egg (ovum). There are lots of different types of contraception; like a pill a woman can take every day or a condom that a couple can use during sex.
What is a condom?	Something used by a man and a woman to stop them from having a baby.	A man puts it on his penis to stop sperm entering a woman's body. It can also prevent germs being passed from one person to another when they have intercourse.	A condom is made from thin rubber or plastic. It fits on a man's penis when he has an erection (his penis goes hard). It needs to be put on before he has sex. When the man ejaculates, the semen (sperm) stays in the condom. The woman cannot get pregnant because the sperm and the egg (ovum) cannot meet. In addition, HIV and other germs are not able to be passed on during sex.
Why is _____ so moody?	Maybe they are not feeling very happy. People can feel moody when they feel sad about something or something has happened that has upset them.	Sometimes, when people are growing up (going through puberty) their moods can change very quickly. This is because lots of hormones (special chemicals released in the body) are being activated in their bodies.	

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Are all women's breasts as big as that?	No, everybody's body is different. Every person is special and unique.	Woman's breasts come in all shapes and sizes – just like their feet, faces and other parts of their body. Some women have big breasts and some women have small breasts. Just like some people are taller and some people are shorter. That's why there are so many different bra sizes.	Nipples are also individual to each woman and can be all shapes and sizes. People's bodies change shape at different times in their lives and women find their breasts may change also. One breast may be a different size to the other.
Why doesn't everyone look like me?	Everyone is different and looks different. It is what makes each person special.	Everyone is a mixture of cells (genes) from their mum and dad / parents. People's genes affect what they look like. Everyone has a different mixture of genes which is what makes people different. It is important to remember that each person is unique with their own special look and qualities.	
Why does my body have to change?	Everybody grows and changes. Baby humans grow into children and then adults, just like baby animals grow into adult animals and seedlings grow into bigger plants..	It is part of growing up and is a natural part of life / the human life cycle. The time when bodies change from a child to an adult body is known as puberty. During puberty the body begins to prepare for becoming an adult. This is important as the body must change so that adults can have babies in the future.	When bodies change it can feel exciting or sometimes a bit scary or worrying. It is important to remember that the changes will be gradual and over time and that everybody changes at different times and at different rates.
Why do some boys and girls have / grow hair?	We all have hair on our bodies. It helps to protect different parts of the body. As boys and girls get older they grow more hair on their body in different places.	It is part of growing up – from a child to an adult. During puberty (the special time in a person's life, when they change from a child to an adult) hair may grow thicker on arms and legs, under arms (arm-pits), chest, on their face and around their pubic bone/vagina or penis (pubic hair).	Hair grows on the body to keep the body temperature regulated (not too hot and not too cold). It also keeps parts of the body clean - in noses, under arms and around the genitals – it collects sweat and stops dirt from getting in the body. Hair can also trap special smells from sweat that attracts humans to each other.

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Why do people shave / wax their body hair?	It's just something that some people choose to do. An example would be that some grown up /adult men like to shave their faces and some men prefer to grow beards.	During puberty, people grow more hair on their bodies, some adults /people do not like this and choose to remove the hair from some parts of their body.	Some people have strong views about whether people should remove hair from different parts of their body. This can be to do with religion, tradition or personal opinion. It may also be to do with influences from the media, fashion or celebrities.
Why do people use deodorant	Deodorant can help people to smell nice. Older boys and girls and grown-ups /adults usually use it.	As people grow older they start to sweat more and sweat can get smelly by the end of the day. Deodorant can help because it reduces the amount of sweat released onto the skin and masks bad odour.	People who use deodorant still need to wash every day because deodorant only works if it is put it on when the body is clean. It is important to wash under the arms and around the genitals especially.
What are periods?	A few days each month a woman has a period. A small amount of blood comes out from the vagina. It happens to older girls and women.	Each month a woman's body makes a thick lining in her womb and an egg (ovum) is released from her ovaries. The egg travels down to her womb (through the fallopian tubes). If the egg is fertilised (with sperm from a man) it can settle into the lining of the womb and grow into a baby. If the egg is not fertilised, the thick womb lining is not needed. The blood from a period is the lining of the womb that is not needed, leaving the woman's body.	Girls start their period at different times (usually between the ages of 8 and 18). Everybody is different – lots of girls get their first period in primary school. By the time they have left secondary school most girls will have started their period. It does not hurt but some girls and women might get headaches or stomach/back aches when they have their period.
What is that? (tampax / tampon or sanitary towel/pad)	It is called tampax / tampon or sanitary towel/pad. It is something older girls / women use.	It is used when women have a period (when a small amount of blood comes out of the vagina) – this happens about once a month.	A sanitary towel/pad is put inside a woman's knickers, it soaks up the blood. Tampax/or a tampon is put inside a woman's vagina to soak up the blood.

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Will I have wet dreams and what do they mean?	Wet dreams are usually something that is experienced by older boys, during puberty.	During the night it is normal for a boy's penis to grow hard and then soft again several times over. Sometimes teenage boys wake up in the morning and find out there is a sticky patch on their pyjamas or bed sheets. It means they have ejaculated (some semen has come out from their penis) in their sleep. No-one really knows why boys have wet dreams but we do know they are completely natural. Many boys experience this - it usually stops later in their teens.	Some people say a wet dream is caused by a sexy dream. Some girls experience wetness in their vagina when they wake up after a sexy dream.
What does masturbation/ wanking mean? **Why do people say it/do it?** **Is it dirty/ wrong/unsafe?**	This is when a person touches or rubs their sex parts (penis or vagina) because it feels nice.	Not everyone likes the feeling of masturbating, but lots of people do. It is normal and natural. It does not cause any medical problems. It is not something that people do in public, it is something people do in private, for example in the bath or in bed. Because it's a private thing people do not tend to talk about whether or not they masturbate – it is not really anyone else's business!	Sometimes masturbating means that a male ejaculates – that means semen (the liquid containing sperm) comes out of the end of his penis. Girls might experience wetness in their vagina. People might get a special feeling all over their body or just where they are touching themselves.

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Why do people have boyfriends or girlfriends?	Some people like the idea of having a special friend to spend time with, to go and do nice things with, like go to the cinema.	Adults often like having one really special person in their lives who they see a lot, they can talk to about anything, and they really trust. Sometimes that person will be their girlfriend or boyfriend for a long time and sometimes they may choose to marry them, live with them and maybe start a family together.	When people choose a boyfriend or girlfriend, as well as liking them as a friend, they will probably also love how they look and how they feel when they are with them. They may be attracted to them sexually (fancy them) and want to cuddle or kiss them. If they are adults, they may want to have sex together.
Why do people want to kiss?	A kiss is a greeting (a way of saying hello/goodbye) or a way showing love or affection for another person.	There are lots of different kisses. Some people kiss each other on the cheek or both cheeks to say hello. Parents often kiss their children to show they love them. Two adults may kiss each other a lot (sometimes on the mouth) as a way of showing that person they are attracted to them (they fancy them), love them, and they are special to them.	When two adults make love they may kiss using their tongues and opening their mouths. If a person does not like the way they are kissed they have a right to say 'no'.
Why do you have a double bed?	Double beds are made bigger than single beds. They are usually for adults / grown-ups / parents.	When adults/grown-ups form a special /intimate relationship and commit to each other they often want to be close together when they sleep...	... sometimes for having sex but mostly to be close to each other.
What is a lesbian?	A lesbian is a woman who will fall in love with women, not men. Men who fall in love with other men are sometimes called gay or homosexual.		

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Why are people lesbians/gay?	It's just something that some people find out about themselves as they grow up.	Nobody really knows for sure why some people grow up 'straight' (fancying people of the opposite sex) and why some people grow up gay (fancying people of the same sex).	Some people feel they know if they are lesbian or gay when they are very young, others may not be sure until they are older.
Does everyone have a mummy and a daddy?	Everybody has a mummy and a daddy, but not everyone lives with their mummy or daddy.	Every baby is formed from an egg (ovum) from a woman and a (seed) sperm from a man, which we might call their mummy and daddy, but once they are born there are lots of different kinds of families. Some children live with their birth parents. Some children live with their mum, but not their dad, or their dad, but not their mum and some children have two mummies or two daddies.. Some children are bought up by people who aren't the mum and dad who created them as a baby, but have become their carers and look after them.	
What is love?	Love is when you really, really like something or someone.	Love is a strong and good feeling. There are all different kinds of love: love for family, animals, things and special people. Love is when you care for that person or thing, want to be with them and have them in your life.	As a person grows up and becomes an adult they also might feel romantic love for another person.



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