



# Making the **'Big Talk'** many small talks

Supporting conversations between  
parents and their children about  
relationships and healthy sexuality  
development



[sexualwellbeing.ie](http://sexualwellbeing.ie)





## What is this booklet about and why is it important?

**For many parents and carers**, it can be difficult to find the right words to talk with children about relationships, sexuality and growing up. To help you to have these conversations from your child's early years through to adulthood, this booklet lists some recommended books available through the 'Healthy Ireland (HI) at Your Library' programme and a range of other supports.

**Taking the opportunity** to have many small conversations as your child grows, minimises the potential awkwardness of having a single 'Big Talk' and can nurture a family habit of talking about important issues. This will help your child to develop a healthy attitude to their body, sexuality and relationships - and see you as a trusted source of information and advice in a world of confusing and conflicting messages.

# What the research says...



- Knowingly and unknowingly, parents constantly pass on knowledge, attitudes and values to their children about the body, relationships and sexuality.<sup>1</sup>
- Most parents want to help their children to develop positive and healthy attitudes to their bodies, relationships and sexuality.<sup>1</sup>
- Sexuality education has a positive impact on young people's sexual health knowledge and their related behaviours.<sup>2, 3</sup>

So having accurate and supportive conversations with your child, in an age-appropriate way, can help them make wiser choices and develop healthy behaviours in relation to sexuality and sex. With this in mind, the resources and subject matter listed in this booklet reflect children's different life stages.

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1 Conlon, C. (2018) Supporting Parents Communicating with Children Aged 4–9 Years about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up.

2 UNESCO (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education; WHO(2010) Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe.

3 ESRI (2020) Talking about Sex and Sexual Behaviour of Young People in Ireland.

The information listed in this booklet suggests some topics you might talk about at different ages. However, you know your child and are best placed to understand and meet their individual relationship and sexuality education needs.



## Some Healthy Ireland recommended books to get you started



**Making the ‘Big Talk’ many small talks** - series of booklets for parents of children of different ages  
Health Service Executive (HSE)



**Conversations that matter: talking to children and teenagers in ways that help**  
Margot Sunderland



**Help your kids with growing up**  
Robert Winston

### Note

The word ‘sexuality’ is used in this booklet to refer to all aspects of a person’s sexual development. It is not restricted to sexual orientation and sexual activity.

CHILDREN  
AGED

0-5

### Let's talk about...

- How it's okay to ask questions about anything and expect a reasonable response
- Understanding and naming feelings and emotions
- Gender - that feeling of being a boy, girl or other
- Appropriate and inappropriate touching of others and by others
- The correct names of body parts, including genitals
- How touching their own private parts is okay but shouldn't be done in public



### Healthy Ireland Reading List

**Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks: 4-7 years**  
Health Service Executive (HSE)

**And Tango Makes Three**

Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell and Henry Cole

**The Great Big Book of Families**

Mary Hoffman and Ros Asquith

CHILDREN  
AGED

5-8



### Let's talk about...

- Bodies and emotions in a positive and respectful way
- Being assertive about body ownership
- Gender and its healthy expression
- Where babies come from
- Different family structures (e.g. single-parent, two-parent, same-sex parents)

### Healthy Ireland Reading List

#### Where Willy Went

Nicholas Allen

#### Let's Talk about: Where babies Come From

Robie H Harris and Michael Emberley

#### Let's Talk about: The Birds and the Bees

Robie H Harris and Michael Emberley

#### Let's Talk about: Girls, Boys, Babies, Bodies, Families and friends

Robie H Harris and Michael Emberley

CHILDREN  
AGED

8-12



## Healthy Ireland Reading List

**Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks: 8-12 years**  
Health Service Executive (HSE)

**Busy Bodies**  
Health Service Executive (HSE)

**You are awesome** Matthew Syed

**What's happening to me? (Boy)** Alex Frith

**What's happening to me? (Girl)** Alex Frith

**The Care and Keeping of You Book 1**  
Valerie Lee Schaefer and Cara Natterson

**Dr Christian's guide to growing up**  
Christian Jessen

**Dr Christian's guide to dealing with tricky stuff**  
Christian Jessen

**The girls guide to growing up great**  
Sophie Elkan

### Let's talk about...

- Changes in puberty and how to prepare for them
- Hygiene and how to look after the body
- Healthy and unhealthy friendships
- Using the internet and how to stay safe online and offline
- Gender and gender stereotypes in the media

## Let's talk about...

- The media and peer influences on body image and sexuality
- What makes a healthy relationship and the importance of boundaries
- Sexual orientation, attraction and love
- Developing personal values about sexuality
- The law in relation to online and off-line sexual activity
- Appropriate internet use and how to stay safe
- The practice of safer sex including contraception, STIs and sexual consent
- How to get trustworthy information on sexuality, sexual health and related services



## Healthy Ireland Reading List

### **Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks: 13-18 years**

Health Service Executive (HSE)

### **The Care and Keeping of You Book 2**

Cara Natterson

### **Growing Up for Boys**

Alex Frith and Felicity Brooks

### **Consent - The new rules of sex ed**

Jennifer Lang

### **Let's talk about: changing bodies...**

Robie H Harris and Michael Emberley

### **Trans Mission** Alex Bertie

### **This book is gay** Juno Dawson

### **Spare me "The Talk"!** Jo Langford

YOUNG PEOPLE  
AGED

13-18

## Tips for talking about relationships, sexuality and growing up

**Be prepared:** Use books and videos at each stage of their development to decide what messages about relationships and sexuality you would like to communicate.

**Start early and keep it simple:** Start talking to your child about relationships, sexuality and growing up from a young age. This helps to normalise these conversations and build healthy habits.

**Make it relevant:** See a pregnancy or new baby in the family, or a sexuality issue on screen or in the media, as an opportunity to talk.

**Teach body ownership:** It's important your child understands that their body is their own and they don't have to let anyone touch them in a way that's unsafe and/or unwanted. This is the beginning of teaching them about consent. As they get older you can talk about consent in relation to posting text or images online, and later on, about sexual activity.

**Layer, don't load:** It's not a one-off performance, so don't try to fit everything in at once. You can revisit topics as your child's interest and understanding develops with age.

**Be an 'askable' parent:** Through your words and tone, welcome your child's curiosity. Ask gentle questions to see what they already know. If you don't have the answer to a question, it's OK to say that you don't know but will find out.

**Be a 'tellable' parent:** Really listen to what your child is saying to you about their lives; about their joys, concerns and worries. They will do this through their words and actions.

**Teach facts, then go further:** Talk to your child about your opinions and beliefs on all aspects of sexuality, including what makes for healthy relationships.

## Additional Relationship and Sexuality Resources

- **sexualwellbeing.ie** is the HSE's sexual health website and has a section to help parents talk with their children about relationships, sexuality and growing up.
- **healthpromotion.ie** is the HSE's site for viewing, downloading and ordering **free resources** on a wide range of topics including sexual health.
- **mychild.ie** is the HSE site that provides information on all aspects of pregnancy, baby and toddler health including healthy sexuality development.
- **staysafe.ie** is the website for the Stay Safe Programme which is taught in most primary schools. The site has a section for parents.
- **webwise.ie** is part-funded by the Department of Education and offers advice and information for parents and schools to help them promote online safety to their children and students.

## Parenting Courses and Support

- National Parents' Council Primary **(NPC) www.npc.ie**
- National Parents' Council Post Primary **(NPCPP) www.npcpp.ie**
- Irish Family Planning Association **(IFPA) www.ifpa.ie**
- BeLonG To Youth Service **www.belongto.ie**
- Transgender Equality Network Ireland **(TENI) www.teni.ie**



## Contact your local library



The books listed in this brochure are available and free to borrow through the public library network. For information on library locations and all the services available, see [www.librariesireland.ie](http://www.librariesireland.ie)

The ‘Making the ‘BigTalk’ many small talks’ series of booklets for parents is available to download or order from [healthpromotion.ie](http://healthpromotion.ie)

Further information and advice for parents on the topics of relationship and sexuality health can be accessed at [sexualwellbeing.ie](http://sexualwellbeing.ie)



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