

What Elementary Schoolers Need To Know About Sex

Ages 5-10



Developed in partnership with Authentic Intimacy.



First, make sure you've covered—and your child is familiar with—all the principles in What Preschoolers Need to Know about Sex.

Here are your talking points for necessary conversations with your kids about their bodies. Tell them what's happening to the bodies of the opposite sex, too.

This prevents kids trawling for information (e.g. searching on the internet or asking friends) when they feel ignorant, and allows you to set their first impressions and worldview on this information. It also sets you up as the trustworthy, go-to answer person for their questions about sex and other vulnerable topics—empowering you (not the internet) to disciple your kids now and in continued “many and mini” conversations about sex.

In short, being the first to tell your kids information about sex protects them. Check out our article, “Talking To Your Kids About Sex: Why, When, and How.”

School-age children are curious and sensitive.

At this age, many kids continue to be curious about their bodies and may ask questions about sex, reproduction in nature, the relationships between people, and their own bodies. It's important to respond with accurate, honest, and age-appropriate information.

What this looks like:

- Lean in to the questions your child asks. For example, during a baking project your child may ask if the eggs you're using could ever become chicks. As you bake, talk about how you need a rooster and a hen to make a baby chick. Later, get out a book about birds

and look at pictures of the parts of an egg. Mention that girls and women have eggs in their bodies, too, which is part of how human babies are made. Explore the topic as long as your child has interest.

- Recommit yourself to creating a shame-free environment for your child. Show your child grace when they make a mistake, make it clear that your love isn't going away no matter what, and show that they can talk to you about anything by always responding to their questions and confessions with gentleness and open dialogue.

They will start to develop stronger bonds with friends.

School-age children may develop close friends and might explore feelings of attachment in the form of innocent crushes or admiration. Social interactions and friendships become increasingly important and complex during this time.

What this looks like:

- Your child may come home from school and say that they have a girlfriend or boyfriend. Ask them questions about this person, what they like about that person, and what it means to them to have a girlfriend or boyfriend. Let this lead to a conversation about what it means to be a respectful and loyal friend. But think wisely about whether you'll encourage relationships. Check out ["Are Elementary Crushes All Innocent?"](#)

- After a playdate, your child may tell you their friend said they don't want to be friends anymore. Your child might be devastated and cry themselves to sleep, but the next day at school, they play together again. Have a conversation with your child about the importance of being both strong and kind, and give vocabulary to your child to tell their friend that their feelings were hurt.

This is the age to talk about both puberty and sex.

Girls begin puberty as early as 8, and boys start as early as 9 years old. It's imperative that they are informed about the changes about to take place during puberty, and they need to be protected from unsafe people and messages.

What this looks like:

- Read about the changes that will take place for your child, as well as the changes in the opposite sex. Be aware of signs that puberty is beginning, such as breast development in girls or nocturnal emissions in boys.
- Talk to trusted friends or mentors about how they talked to their kids about sex. The more you talk about it with others in a natural and healthy way, the easier it will be to talk to your child in a relational, natural and healthy way.

What terms and vocabulary to use:

Begin to provide a deeper understanding of sexual and reproductive anatomy:

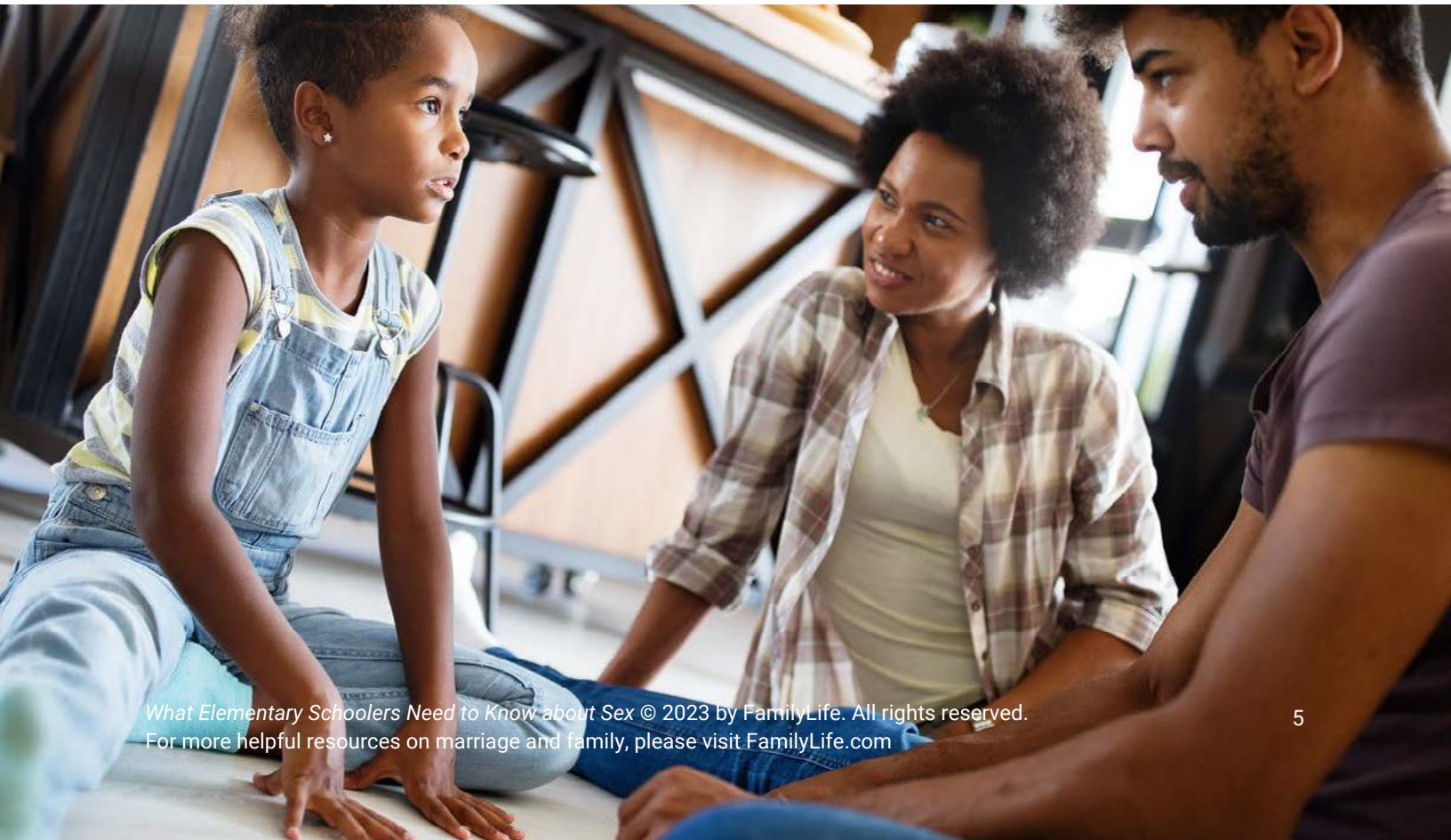
- **Labia Majora:** The outer lips of the vulva.
- **Labia Minora:** The inner lips of the vulva.
- **Vagina:** The muscular canal leading from the vulva to the uterus in females; also called the birth canal.
- **Uterus:** The organ in females where a fertilized egg implants and develops into a fetus during pregnancy; also called the womb.
- **Ovaries:** The female reproductive organs that produce eggs (ova) and female hormones.
- **Testicles/Testes:** The male reproductive organs that produce sperm and male hormones.

- **Vaginal discharge:** A clear or whitish fluid that comes out of the vagina, helping keep it healthy and clean, and from getting irritated or infected.
- **Nocturnal emission:** When semen, a white fluid with sperm in it, comes out of a male's penis during sleep. This is also called a "wet dream." This is not something he can control about his body.
- **Period/menstruation/cycle:** In females, when blood and the lining of the uterus come out of her vagina for five to seven days. This happens every 28 days or so, starting when a girl begins puberty. (Puberty is when a boy's body turns into a man's body, and a girl's body becomes a woman's body.) Usually she has a period every month until she turns about 50. But she doesn't have a period when she's pregnant.

It's time for your child to know what pregnancy is, and how it happens. Gauging your child's interest, you can discuss how babies grow with detailed information about the body.

You may want to give more details than less. This is a tender age to be the first one to introduce concepts to your child and set a tone of trust between you and your child, and in God's loving, trustworthy ways—rather than your child looking to Google or listening to older kids. (Feeling ignorant is a powerful force for a child to search for information!)

Statistically, many kids are exposed to explicit content by age 11, so the older your kids are, the more facts and discussion are needed.



5 Important Conversations with Your Elementary Schooler

1. Puberty and Sex

Girls usually begin puberty between the ages of 8-13, and boys begin between the ages of 9-14.

It is essential you tell your child about these changes before they take place. No one likes to feel ignorant about their own body changing (or a friend talking about the subject, with no frame of reference). And again—establishing yourself as a trusted “expert” to whom they can come with all their questions protects your child and builds a bridge for vital future topics.

Create space for conversations about both puberty and sex. Remember: This can be an ongoing conversation, building a worldview and your relationship around authentic, vulnerable topics. So avoid that big, overwhelming information dump. Many wonderful resources exist to help you do this well.

What this looks like:

- Read through a book together, set up a regular “date night” to get ice cream and talk, or plan a fun weekend away to get uninterrupted time to have these big, important conversations about sexuality. As your child’s questions accumulate, they’ll know they can talk to you when new subjects arise.

Some kids will be naturally curious, and may ask you questions that initiate conversations about sexuality. Other children may be less interested, or even resistant to talks about puberty and sex. But this doesn’t mean you should put it off! Now is the time to inform your child in gentle and age-appropriate ways.

2. Emotions

Relationships and sexual feelings are inseparable from emotions. The journey of understanding sexual development, attachment, identity, and boundaries requires learning to identify and express emotions.

Help your child develop and become fluent with an emotional vocabulary. So often for kids—then preteens, then teenagers—the depth to which they experience emotions far surpasses their cognitive and reasoning capabilities. The hard work of teaching your child about emotions now will reap huge rewards in the future.

Counselor and author David Thomas writes of three “Rs” in coaching kids toward emotional health:



Recognize

notice how your body
signals an emotional
response



Regulate

employ calming
strategies when the
nervous system goes into
higher states of arousal



Repair

take ownership and do
any needed relational
work¹

What this looks like:

- Consider posting and frequently using a [printable feelings wheel](#) or chart. Gradually identify more complex emotions (further out on the wheel) as kids grow older and more fluid in their ability to articulate their feelings.

¹ Thomas, David Scott. Raising Emotionally Strong Boys: Tools Your Son Can Build on for Life. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bethany House (2022).

Whenever your child experiences a strong (or even unclear) emotion, ask, “How do you feel?” Help them see that every emotion is valid—and that in “Recognizing” our feeling(s), we now have power to “Regulate” and “Repair” them as needed—rather than emotions managing us.

- After validating your child’s emotions, remember not to take responsibility for making the emotion go away. “Repair” is the child’s job—to take ownership and do needed work—rather than you trying to fix or add drama to the situation. Don’t blame others for your child’s emotions or problem, either. You want your child to know that emotions are a natural part of life and something they can handle.
- This work can be exhausting and repetitive, but lean in to the daily task of helping your child identify their emotions.



3. Same-Sex Romantic Relationships and Trans Identities

Cultural understanding of sexuality and gender is changing rapidly. As a result, young children are exposed with messaging encouraging exploration of sexual orientation and gender identity. As they ask questions about sexuality earlier and earlier, your response to this should be to talk about it more, not less, with your child.

What this looks like:

- Talk about the goodness of God’s plan for gender, romance, marriage, and family. But also explain that not everyone knows God or agrees with what the Bible teaches us about things like marriage and being a boy or a girl: “Everyone’s life is a little different. Some people have made different choices. Or don’t think about God the same way we do.” Although kids this age have difficulty with nuance, it’s important for them to begin to understand the complexities of people’s lives and stories— offering compassion and understanding rather than judgment.

We’re teaching kids how God responds to us in our own temptations, sin, and differences. How we meet others, and our own kids, in their weakness, vulnerability, and potential mistakes gives them a snapshot of how God might be responding to them. What are they learning about the gospel from how we’re encountering others right now?

- When your child asks a question about same-sex romantic relationships or gender identities, you can simply and matter-of-factly acknowledge that some people experience their bodies and romantic feelings differently than God intended, but it doesn’t mean he loves them any less. Then you can reinforce that even when Christians have these experiences, we believe God has a good plan for us that looks different than what our culture tells us.
- Help your child recognize the difference between feeling close to someone —“attachment”—and seeing that as romance or sexual feelings. Many girls this age begin assuming a gay identity because their first attachment is with other girls.
- The conversation must have another component if your child knows or meets someone who is gay or trans. The most essential reality in this situation is that each person reflects God’s image—and is someone whom He loves very much. God has trusted us with His passion to show the world His love and truth that come toward us in kindness (Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20). As our love and compassion grow for people, so should our desire that they come to understand how much they are loved by God and, eventually, how good and trustworthy His plan is for their lives, including their sexuality and gender. (Read FamilyLife and Cru’s official position on these topics [here](#).)

For more understanding around God’s design, consider [Axis’ Parent Guides to Gender Identity](#) and [LGBT and Your Teen](#).

What this looks like:

- Impress upon your child the goodness and dignity of each person, even if—or especially if—this person is different from you.
- Welcome opportunities to meet or befriend people in the LGBTQ+ community, especially in natural settings like neighborhood barbecues, at the library, or among your family members.
- We all need mercy, grace, honor and reconciliation from God. As followers of Jesus, we want our relationships to be marked by both God's undeserved kindness as well as truth (Ephesians 4:15). That means we neither condemn each other nor condone each other's sins. Talk openly with your child about what faithfulness to God's Word could look like with their friends.

4. Sexting and Pornography, and How to Handle Exposure

The issue is not if your child will be exposed to porn, but when. Prepare your child for these first encounters by helping them recognize “bad pictures,” giving them scripts for these situations, and helping them understand the effect these pictures will have on their brain.

Talk about sexting with your child, especially if they have a phone or their friends do. Your child should know what sexting is and what it includes (e.g. “bad pictures of someone without their clothes on”), and that this is never, ever okay. In her curriculum, Christian sex educator Kristen Miele recommends kids use the acronym S.T.O.P.:



Shut your eyes.



Tell an adult you trust right away.



Open your eyes to good things around you.



Play with something else.

If your child forwards a sexting image they receive of someone under-aged—even from a friend’s phone—[they can be charged with distribution of child porn . . . and even be publicly labeled a sex offender.](#)

If you said “yes” to a phone, weigh the pros and cons of being able to send your child images via text (not just using AirDrop or email)—and [consider disabling this technology.](#) Consider your parental access and viewing abilities. Parents should be able to see all material on the child’s phone.

What this looks like:

- Find a helpful resource, like *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids* by Kristen A. Jensen, M.A. Read this book to your child and use the included discussion questions to foster a straightforward and age-appropriate conversation about porn.
- If you ever come across porn or nudity in public with your child, reinforce that these pictures are harmful and inappropriate.
- Your child may be curious if nudity in art or at the doctor's office is also porn. A concept such as "good naked/bad naked," may be a helpful way of drawing a distinction between the beauty and goodness of the human body versus when pictures or videos are using nudity to trick your brain into feeling excited.

5. Boundaries

As your child enters the school-age years, their relationships will become increasingly important, deep, and complex. Your child may experience their first romantic feelings, their first conflicts, and may encounter unsafe adults or children.

Helping your child establish healthy limits and boundaries within all their relationships will both protect them from unsafe people and also help their healthy relationships flourish.

What this looks like:

- Talk to your child about being both "strong and kind." If your child's friend calls them a name, encourage your child to be strong and kind by saying something like, "I don't like that. Please stop."

- As your child gets older, help them navigate increasingly complicated relationships and conflicts. Even when your child is required to show a lot of strength to stand up for themselves in a relationship, brainstorm together how they can do this with kindness.
- Certain situations do not require your child to be kind. If someone tries to touch or look at their private parts, if someone is hurting them or someone else, or if an adult makes them feel uncomfortable, your child can use all their strength to stop that person and get out of the situation.



What you might be curious about:

You and your child's questions on this topic can be endless, but we wanted to bring up a few we've heard often. Short paragraphs likely aren't enough. Still, we hope to offer some perspective to get you started.

Is it ok for my child to spend so much time playing on his iPad? When is my child ready for a smartphone?

When it comes to technology there are a lot of issues at play, but one of those is the online safety of your child. Just like you wouldn't take your child on a hike without creating some boundaries and limits (Stay on the path! Watch out for poison ivy!), it would be naive to give your child unlimited access to the internet or online platforms and expect them to stay safe. Many devices' safety features and settings empower you to limit and monitor your child's online use.

Consider creating house rules for tech like, "No tablets or phones in the bedroom or at the dinner table," or "No smart phone until middle school." Be clear and consistent with these rules, so your child understands them and learns to abide by them. As your child grows, you will be helping them build a healthy relationship with technology. Respecting limits with devices is a good place to start.

Are YouTube, Roblox, Fortnite, and Minecraft safe places for my child to play?

Not all online platforms are created equal, it's each parent's responsibility to research and intentionally decide what games, websites, and platforms you give access to your child. For example, the *National Center on Sexual Exploitation* (NCOSE) placed Snapchat, Instagram, and Roblox on the 2023 Dirty Dozen List of companies and organizations that profit from pornography and are contributors to sexual exploitation in society.²

And while YouTube Kids is a much more contained environment, there's still a small chance your child could be exposed to nudity, violence, or extremely weird content.

Minecraft is complex and flexible, so it's not immune to misuse. But it can be a safe space for creative and social play with the right settings.³

As a parent, you are responsible for your child's safety online. Staying up-to-date on what is safe and what is not takes concerted effort and dedicated time.

Are sleepovers safe?

Sleepovers and overnight camps have been the source of a lot of controversy. On the one hand, many parents remember these occasions fondly as some of the most fun and bonding social experiences of their childhood. On the other hand, sleepovers and camp have often been the setting for sexual abuse, sexual experimentation, and exposure to porn. Access to the internet, the presence of older children or adults, and unsupervised alone time are all risk factors. There may be families, situations, or organizations that provide a safe and healthy environment for these overnight experiences, but parents must carefully evaluate risk factors in order to protect and safeguard their child's sexuality.

What is an appropriate use of physical affection and play?

Appropriate, loving physical affection is one of your child's most basic needs. Give your child lots of snuggles, hugs, massages, high-fives, and kisses (if kissing is a part of your family culture). Hold them, wrestle with them, dance with them, scratch their back, hold their hand, and tickle them. In studies, children who receive physical affection from their parents are happier, less stressed, and even have better brain development!

With that said, don't smother your child. Pay attention to your child's comfort level and know that it will change as your child goes through different stages.

² <https://fightthenewdrug.org/what-companies-profit-from-sexual-exploitation-the-2023-dirty-dozen-list/>

³ <https://www.common sense media.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-minecraft#:~:text=Because%20of%20its%20complexity%2C%20potential,some%20of%20the%20tougher%20stuff>

How can I protect my child from a predator?

There is no one single method to protect your child from predatory behavior, which is why teaching your child about healthy sexuality from an early age is so important.

Early conversations about privacy and boundaries, correct anatomical names and what a loving relationship looks like create safeguards so that your child recognizes inappropriate behavior when they see it.

Use resources like *God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies* by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb to have deliberate and age-appropriate conversations about protecting your body. Foster a shame-free environment so your child knows they can always talk to you about anything.

What role do parents of the opposite gender play in conversations about sexuality with their child?

In two-parent families, both parents can take an active role in teaching about sexuality. Each of you can be the expert on your own gender, celebrate your child through big milestones, and use your marriage to model a loving, affectionate relationship. And remember that being a supportive listener is one of the best ways to foster trust and a shame-free environment between genders.

In single parent families, you can lead the conversation on sexuality in the home. You're becoming the empowered expert as you converse with your kids organically over time. Opposite-sex parents, too, have the right to own this conversation with your kids in all situations!

There's high value for single parents—as well as every parent—in looking for trusted friends or relatives as a safe place for same-gender influence and affirmation. For example, it may be important for a preteen girl to hear from a female trusted role model how to deal with her period or for a young man to hear from a trusted male role model how to navigate sexual urges and masturbation.

Are you co-parenting? Consider an intentional conversation with the other parent on your desire to discuss sex and puberty with your kids. Think about approaching them via values you both hold.



What your child might be curious about:

Why are my nipples getting pointy?

Puberty will arrive earlier for girls than for boys, and a girls' breasts will begin to develop about two years before her period starts. If your daughter asks you about her developing breasts or the breasts of her friends, let her know that this is a natural part of growing up.

Find a book with pictures that shows pictures of breast development and explains what is happening. It may be time to go shopping for a training bra. Some girls love to do this with their mothers as a celebratory rite of passage, while others might feel shy or embarrassed and will appreciate their mothers doing the shopping for them.

Either way, remind your daughter that her body is awesome and this is a good thing that's happening: She's becoming a woman, and her body is preparing for the great purposes God has for her future.

Is this a bad word? Why?

Kids may hear slang and curse words and be curious about the meaning behind them. This will be a good opportunity to highlight the fact that you know a lot more about this kind of thing that they do!

Say something like, "I know all the cuss words! What are you curious about? What do you want to know?"

You are the expert, and they can come to you instead of friends or Google for answers. Then remind them that our bodies are good, not bad or shameful, and we should always use our words to show love and kindness, not to tear people down.

My friend says he doesn't have a dad. How does that happen?

As your child's world opens up and they meet new people at school, church, or extra-curricular activities, they're going to have questions about people and behaviors that are different from their own family.

Welcome these questions as ways to introduce more and deeper conversations about sex, sexuality, gender, and the goodness of God's plan for sexuality. Again, you can add to this, "Everyone's life is a little different. Some people have made different choices. Or don't think about God the same way we do."

At this age, your child will probably accept most of your answers at face value, so aim for simple, clear, and grace-filled conversations that will deeply affect the way they view sexuality.