

## **It's Time ... to Talk About It.**

Sexual violence is an issue that affects everyone in our community regardless of age, ethnicity, income or education. Understanding and talking to your children about healthy sexual development can help parents and caregivers protect their children from sexual violence.

### **Why talk to your children about sexuality?**

**Prevent sexual abuse.** Talking to your children about sexuality provides them with information that may help protect them from abuse. Basic information can help children understand boundaries, identify abuse and tell someone they trust.

**Open the lines of communication.** Talking to your children about sexuality builds trust and lets children know that they can come to you for help. Talking discourages secrets and establishes that no topic or question is off-limits.

**Lower their potential risk.** Children whose parents talk to them about sexuality are more likely to delay intercourse and more likely to practice safer sex when they do become sexually active (Martinez, Abma, & Copen, 2010).

### **Tips for talking to your children:**

**Do your homework.** Many adults never received information on sexuality or sex education. Many parents don't know what to say. The good news is there are great resources on the topic of sexuality and on how to address sexuality with children. If you feel unsure, read up on the topic.

**Don't panic.** If you appear nervous or embarrassed, children will notice and react to it with uneasiness. Keeping your composure can help children see that sexuality is not something to be ashamed of or embarrassed to talk about.

**Don't lecture.** Lecturing doesn't promote open dialogue. Make sure you are talking and listening.

Stay age-appropriate. Children need to know different levels of information at different stages of human development. For example, a 4-year-old should know the names of their body parts, but doesn't need to know details about sex.

**Start a conversation.** Ask a question to start the conversation. For example, for younger children ask "Do you know all the names of your body parts?" For older children, ask "Your Aunt is pregnant, do you know what that means?"

**Communicate your values.** Children may be able to get factual information from other sources, but family is often the primary source for helping to develop an individual's sense of values around sexuality. Understanding your own values, feelings and beliefs when it comes to sexuality will help you communicate these values to your child.

**Pay attention to what your children see, hear and say.** Children are influenced by the world around them. Music, TV, Internet and peers all provide children with messages about sexuality. Be aware of what they are hearing and look for teachable moments. For example, if a 10-year-old says their classmate has a girlfriend, ask them what they think that means. This is a great way to start a conversation.