

Tips to Aid Parents' Communication with Children

By: Dr. Bene Madunagu, GPI South East Co-ordinator, during the GPI Forum with Parents/Guardians and Teachers held in Calabar.

1. You ought to be the primary sex educators of your children /wards. You are the ones who should communicate to them specific values about sexuality. Tell them what you believe and what you want from them. It is your right as well as your responsibility.
2. Don't wait for children to ask questions about sexuality, initiate conversations. Be alert to "teachable moments" and seize them, use everyday occurrences like watching TV to begin conversations about sexuality, but get to the point. Remember, silence is not golden.
3. Go beyond the obvious, but with caution and stop when you think you should stop.
4. Be discreet about your own sex life.
5. Talk to your adolescent on making decisions about sexuality, peer pressures, media messages. Don't wait until the child is a teenager, start early to promote positive attitudes. Although it is best to start talking to your children/wards about sexuality when they are young, it is never too late to start.
6. Don't pass the responsibility on the educational system and the society. Do it yourself.
7. You can be an effective sexuality educator, eventhough that role may seem difficult or uncomfortable at first.
8. Remember that changes during adolescent years are inevitable. So learn to examine expected behavior and handle feelings.
9. If your children ask questions, do

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not worry about whether they are too young to know the answers, children understand what they are ready to understand. However, answer at your child's level of understanding and ask feedback to determine what he or she has understood. Remember, every question is an opportunity to discuss values, information and feelings.

10. Listen attentively to your children. Let them know that you care about their feelings and respect their ideas, even if you do not agree with them.

11. You communicate with children about sexuality both verbally and non-verbally. Children are aware of what you do and don't say, your reactions and your behaviour. Try to make sure that your actions are consistent with the values you hope to teach to your children. Ask questions to find out more about a child's understanding. Explain relationships between things.

12. Use simple language and be sure the meanings of new words are clear. Link new information with old ones. Be honest.

13. Remember sexuality is a natural and positive aspect of being human. Sex is a topic that children can and should discuss with their parents, teachers, relatives, guardians and friends. Your adolescents' feelings about sexuality would therefore be a reflection of your behaviour.

14. Be wary of the changes in your own attitudes and feelings as you enter the middle age (roughly 35-60 years). This is a time of physical, mental and emotional adjustment for adults, just as it is for adolescents. Attitudes are either opposing, parallel or outrightly inappropriate. After all, you are also a sexual being.