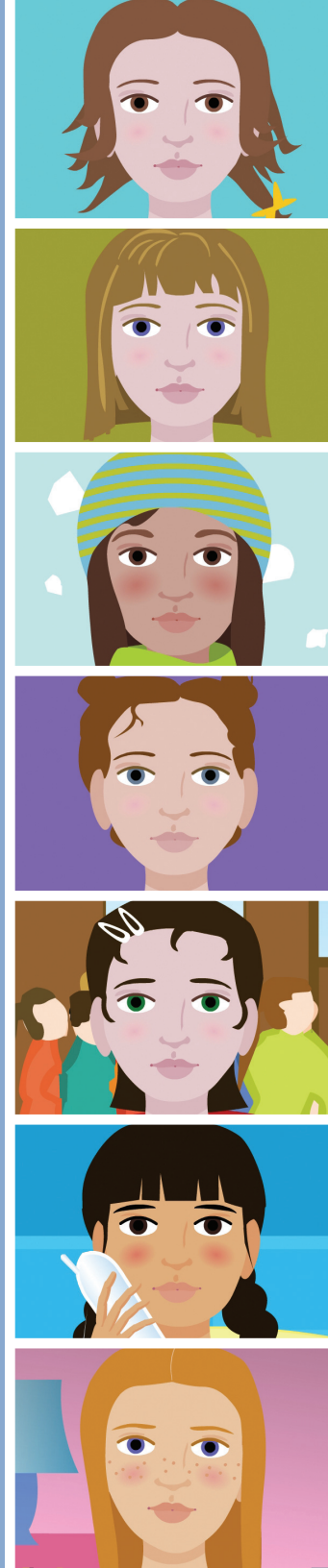


EARLY SEXUALIZATION: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF PRETEEN GIRLS



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Thank you.

EARLY SEXUALIZATION: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF PRETEEN GIRLS

A bit of history...

It was my grandson's eighth birthday and as I watched him play with his friends I noticed a girl, a bit older, who was not joining in the games the others were playing. When I looked a little closer I realized why she was standing on the sidelines. She was wearing a very tight mini skirt and was constrained by her clothing. She was also wearing a short tank top and platform shoes, her hair was coloured and she was wearing makeup. A "Lolita", I thought to myself, but such a young one.....

Weeks past and with the onset of spring, I noticed more and more girls similarly dressed, parading around in sexy clothes at an age when seduction should not be part of their lives. It was then that my desire to understand this phenomenon was born.

Early Sexualization: a new reality

The early sexualization of girls is a phenomenon occurring as a part of society's present and pervasive climate of hypersexualization. Little girls in sexy clothing, the overtly sexualized act of seduction, "fuckfriends", sexual internet chat, the use of webcams for sexual exhibition and the consumption of cyberporn represent real situations in the lives of young people. The extent and effects of this environment on their development are not fully known and this is a motivating factor for us to continue working on our project on early sexualization. Further research into the lives of young people, which is currently being carried out, will help us develop training and awareness tools, in collaboration with the Service d'aide aux collectivités of UQAM and professors Francine Duquet and Anne Quéniart.

Today, almost three years later, that desire has led me to develop a research project at the YWCA on the early sexualization of girls. One of my priorities has been to create spaces for exchange and reflection with those who are also concerned about this growing trend. It is a complex issue, one that needs to be examined from various angles and approached according to its many facets.

In May 2005, we organized a day of reflection on the subject at UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal), whose proceedings are available on our website www.ydesfemmesmtl.org. With very little publicity this event attracted a large number of participants, evidence that our concern for girls was shared by many other people involved in their lives, whether at school, in youth centres or CLSCs. From the recommendations that emerged from that day of reflection, we set to work to develop some tools. Here we present the first one; a guide for parents of preteen girls.

The growth of this atmosphere of hypersexualization among young people has been fostered by some important changes in society; such as the glorification of consumerism, the media's growing erotization of teenagers and children, the normalization of pornography's standards of beauty through popular music and the Net, and the increasing social pressure which encourages girls to have boyfriends as early as possible.

What is really troubling is that this hypersexualization is appearing among younger and younger children, promoted by the media, the Internet and the many industries that profit from this trend. Preteens are specifically targeted by marketplace interests because they are considered the most important demographic after the baby boomers. This generation is being encouraged to grow up faster. It is more connected and informed and has more money, more influence and more personal

power than all previous generations. Marketing companies scrutinize the behaviour and dress of young people in order to sell a stereotypical image back to them. Kids see these images and aspire to become the stereotype they are being sold. In turn, the media reacts by offering new images based on what young people have recreated from the stereotype, and this circle repeats itself unceasingly.

Commercialization has invaded our social and domestic space with images that border on pornography. Magazines, commercials, music videos, television programs, songs and Internet sites are among the agents used to promote and sell sex. Emphasis is placed on women exposing their bodies, seduction, exhibitionism and performance. Little girls are seduced by these images and products, and are encouraged to adopt behaviour borrowed from adult sexuality without having the corresponding maturity needed to deal with the repercussions that can follow. Furthermore, the media offers contradictory images: girls must be innocent and yet seductive, virginal and knowing...

Preteens and teenagers are especially sensitive to outside influences (peer pressure and media role models). They long for attention and want to be "normal" and fit in with the crowd. The sexual discourse, however, is so pervasive that certain girls feel pressured to engage in sexual activity prematurely. Unfortunately, the sexuality promoted by the media is one of sexual acts without consequences, which glorify the domination of men and where women are portrayed as sexual objects rather than equal partners. There is much to be concerned about. In the past ten years, among other issues, we have seen an increase in the practice of oral sex between teenagers and preteens and the subsequent spread of oral-genital infection. In

addition, preteen girls are increasingly likely to put themselves on diets and to suffer from eating disorders, as they try to emulate the media's restrictive standards of beauty.

Faced with this new reality, parents and other adults responsible for educating children (extended family, foster parents), sometimes find themselves confronted by unforeseen and disturbing situations that challenge their values. These situations leave them uncertain, embarrassed and not knowing how to respond. Apart from its commercial aspect, sexuality is at the core of our identities, our relationships, our growth and well-being. Young girls and boys risk being short-changed if their perceptions of seduction, loving relationships and sexual relations are tainted by artificial and limited propositions. It is therefore essential that parents accompany their children on this voyage of discovery towards self-knowledge and self-affirmation, making sure that the essential elements of human relationships- love, intimacy and self-respect -are given full measure.

Our Objective

As a response to the questioning and uncertainty of parents and other adults, we have created this guide to assist them. We are offering various strategies that we hope will enable them to make thoughtful choices and find their own answers and ways to communicate them, for the welfare of their children and to promote family harmony.

The role of parents and other adults responsible for the welfare of children

Early sexualization is a social phenomenon, making it incumbent on everyone to prevent and counter this trend. It is, however, parents and other adults responsible for children who must take the lead to encourage their children to develop critical thinking when exposed to the commercialization of sex.

Parents are primarily responsible for the education of children. Consciously or not, each parent promotes certain values (those that are meaningful to them) to instruct their children. These values influence parents' speech, gestures and actions during their child's developing years. They are also reflected in the rules they establish to shape their child's behaviour. Children will be raised according to these values and will either accept or challenge them throughout their formative years.

At about 9 or 10 years of age, children begin to detach themselves from their parents and look to their peer group for validation. They are exposed to diverse influences and subjected to many social pressures, which can have an impact on their behaviour and the attitudes they have towards parental rules. At this time, parents can begin to feel that they have less influence over their children and that they are losing their parental authority. Confronted with this “commercial machine”, as well as the influence of peer group pressure, they may feel that any action they take will be ineffective and might be tempted to abdicate their parental roles.

We feel that parents must take a stand regarding the phenomenon of early sexualization. It is necessary for them to reaffirm their personal values to their children not only by what they say, but more importantly through their daily actions. This will help to reassure children; giving them clear guidelines and helping them develop their own critical judgement.

Content

This guide concerns girls, between 8 and 12 years old. Girls and boys of this age are both faced with the pressure of early sexualisation but are affected in different ways. In this guide we will explore the specific repercussions that girls must deal with. We hope that the impact of early sexualization on boys will be the subject of a future guide.

Seven scenarios have been chosen inspired by real life and linked to early sexualization. As a parent, you may have lived through one or more of these situations. Please note that the language used to describe or comment on these situations is in some instances frank and direct, and may be shocking to you. Nevertheless, it is the language heard in the schoolyard and we encourage you to read the entire guide to familiarize yourself with the vocabulary.

In each example, a girl expresses a desire or a comment to her mother or father. We have imagined three possible reactions on the part of the parent, reactions that you may have had in a similar situation with your daughter.

For each reaction, we present parents with an example of a response and a course of action to follow. We do not want to impose predetermined and inflexible responses. We know that every family; each parent and each child are unique and that the relationship between parent and child has distinctive characteristics as well. We also think that all parents or adults have the right to take some time for reflection before responding to a child. A short period of introspection is often necessary to adequately respond to your daughter's questions or comments.

Following each suggested response and course of action, the guide provides some information about the development and needs of girls. The impact of the parent's reaction on their daughter is put into perspective as well.

We hope that the information in this guide will be of use to you and your family.

*Lilia Goldfarb,
Coordinator of the YWCA's research project on the early sexualization of girls.*

Provocative clothing and fashion...

Your daughter wants to wear sexy clothing.



A

HOW TO SAY NO

If I say no, is she going to have a tantrum in the store?

You're worried that your daughter wants to wear sexy clothes that expose her body. This type of clothing will give her a sensual look that is not appropriate for a girl her age. However, saying no may provoke a crisis. How should you react? Here is a response you might try. "I can see you really like this top but don't you think it shows off a little too much of your body? Let's choose something else. Look at this top with the "lasagne" straps. What do you think? If you like it, we'll buy it. Next time we go shopping we can talk about what kind of clothes you like to wear, before we leave the house."

This type of response allows you to intervene in different ways. First, you acknowledge your daughter's request. Then you explain the reasons why she should not wear provocative clothing. She will realize that you have made your decision with her welfare in mind. Finally, by proposing further discussion about the clothes she wants to wear, you have encouraged future dialogue and communication with your daughter.

Remember that your daughter depends, for the most part, on your financial resources to satisfy her needs

and desires. Exposed to a multitude of products, she will try to persuade you to buy everything she wants. It may be tempting to give in to all her wishes and save her disappointment and frustration when you say no. By saying no and imposing some age-appropriate limits, you will prevent your daughter from prematurely entering adolescence, even if these restrictions displease her in the short run. Moreover, expressing your values and standing firm will have a reassuring effect. Your daughter needs to learn how to distinguish between what is good for her and what may do her harm. If she throws a fit to get what she wants and sees that getting angry will achieve her goals, she may become agitated in the absence of clear boundaries. Clear limits will let her know and respect the values you are trying to convey.



REACTING TO PEER PRESSURE

If I don't buy it for her, will she feel left out?

You think that your 10-year-old daughter will feel left out if she doesn't wear the sexy clothes that her group of friends considers fashionable. On the other hand, you are not comfortable with the idea of her wearing unsuitable clothing. Here's a possible response. "Do you want this top because all the girls are wearing them? Do you really want to look like all the other girls? Everyone is entitled to their own personality. You don't have to dress a certain way to keep your friends. I don't think this top is appropriate for someone your age because it reveals too much of your body. Why don't you invite your friends over for a costume party? I'll lend you some of my clothes and jewellery and you can all dress up like sophisticated ladies.

Acknowledging your daughter's desires, and taking the time to explain that there is an appropriate age and place to wear certain types of clothing, will demonstrate that you have considered her wishes and opinions. When you explain that she does not have to do everything that her friends suggest, you are helping her develop her ability to think and judge for herself. It is also possible to suggest a creative alternative that will encourage the development of another aspect of her personality. This discussion will teach your daughter how to handle a disagreement between two people who have made different choices or who have different opinions.

Your daughter knows that some clothes attract attention, but what she doesn't understand is that they may also provoke desire and stimulate sexual excitement in certain adults. She wants to be noticed, feel beautiful and fit in with her group of friends. At ten years of age, your daughter is conscious of her body, her clothes and the look she projects. If a leader in her group or one of her friends wears a particular piece of clothing, she will be tempted to imitate this choice. She can't wait to grow up and she will try to convince you to give in to her demands by telling you that all the kids are wearing this style of clothing. Being in contact with other parents and discussing common parenting issues will reveal that all parents hear the same arguments from their children. Other parents can become important allies as you search for common ways to respond to your children's demands.



RESISTING SEXY CLOTHING

She looks cute in it, but is it appropriate for a girl her age?

You like to compliment your daughter's taste in clothing, but you also want to guide her choices and encourage her to develop her self-esteem and unique personality. You could respond as follows: "I agree, the colour of this top suits you, but the style is not appropriate for someone your age. Let's find something really special, something really eye-catching. Do you remember when your cousin came over last week, you really liked her top? I saw something similar in the same blue, come look at it. The other girls will want one just like it and you could start a trend."

This response will allow you to praise your daughter in an age-appropriate way. You have acknowledged what she wanted and proposed an alternative which could appeal to her sense of originality. You have also encouraged her creativity and helped her realize her special and unique character.

Wearing sexy clothing generally attracts attention and compliments, and for some people this attention adds value to their physical appearance. This type of attention can lead girls to believe that their value as human

beings depends on the way their body looks. At 10 years of age your daughter is in the process of building her character and self-confidence. Your praise and attention should focus primarily on her personal qualities and abilities rather than on her physical appearance.

Make-up and fashion magazines...

Your daughter wants to wear make-up.



THE AGE FOR MAKEUP

She's only 10 years old, but maybe it's normal to wear makeup at a younger age than when I was growing up.

Your daughter idolizes a certain pop star whose face is on the cover of all the teen magazines. Does she admire her looks only or is she drawn to her talent as a performer? "Why do you like this singer so much? I can see you want to copy her makeup but she's much older than you. You still have a few years to go before you're a teenager and I think you're too young to wear makeup. She's very talented and I can see why you like the way she sings. You love to sing too, so why don't you learn one of her songs and create a dance routine with some of your friends? You could perform the song at a friend's birthday party."

Use this occasion to talk to your daughter about her favourite singer's talent and abilities. Emphasize her musical talent, her poise and her determination. These are traits your daughter can aspire to and emulate. You can encourage her creative talents and expression by suggesting she create a dance routine that stays clear of provocative gestures.

Between the ages of 6 and 12, it's normal for your daughter to be fascinated by pop or film stars. She will look for an idol or role model that she can look up to. Many magazines marketed to young girls are full of

advertisements for beauty products and often rely on stars to promote these products. It's not surprising, then, that your daughter wants to imitate them by buying and wearing the makeup products they say they use. Your daughter does not yet have the maturity to understand that certain stars are specifically chosen to attract and influence consumers. Wearing makeup at this preadolescent stage places a great deal of importance on physical appearance to the detriment of character-building. Your intervention is necessary to encourage your daughter's healthy development and to praise her aptitudes and her potential.



PUTTING ON MAKEUP FOR FUN

Maybe she just wants to have fun playing dress-up.

Are you wondering why your daughter wants to wear makeup? Does she want to play dress-up or does she want to present a more grown-up image? Here's how you can respond to your daughter. "Why do you want to wear lipstick? You and your friends can use makeup crayons to play with at home, but I don't want you to wear makeup when you go out of the house, it's not suitable at your age. I could buy you some lightly-coloured lip balm but I prefer that you use makeup just for play."

By asking your daughter why she wants to wear lipstick, you are showing her that you recognize her desire and you feel her opinion is important. You can limit the wearing of makeup so it stays in the realm of play and does not become a springboard to an early entry into adolescence.

It is normal for your daughter to use makeup to disguise herself at special times (Halloween, costume parties). When putting on makeup is no longer a question

of having fun but more an act of seduction it belongs in the realm of older teens and grownups. If your daughter begins to wear makeup in public, she is giving her face a sensual dimension which does not correspond to her age. Pay attention to the motivating factors behind your daughter's wants and desires.



MAKEUP AT ANY COST

If I don't buy it for her, will she take my makeup and put it on in secret?

You observe your daughter's reactions and behaviour: she is not respecting the limits you set. Here's a way you can respond. "I can see that despite our talk, you're wearing makeup. Why is it so important to you? I don't approve; you're too young. If you really want to use makeup, how about learning face painting?"

Whatever your daughter's reaction to the limits you set, you must continue to reaffirm your position and your views. You should question your daughter in order to

understand what is motivating her to wear makeup. Is it to look older or to enhance her appearance? Is it to seduce or because her group of friends is into makeup? If you understand her motivation, it will be much easier to intervene. Offer your daughter an alternative by suggesting that she volunteer to do face painting at her friends' birthday parties.

It's possible that despite your wishes, your daughter will wear makeup anyway. Some children are tempted to

disobey to test the limits that have been imposed. Even if your daughter breaks the rules, don't give in. Reaffirm your position and restate your values. Children tend to internalize what is often repeated. They will remember the values you tried to teach them and eventually adopt the appropriate behaviour in their daily lives.

Ultra-thin models and body Image...

Your daughter wants to be thin.



THE WEIGHT OF DIETING

*I think she could lose a few pounds.
Maybe she could go on the diet I'm on.*

You are on a diet yourself. Should you suggest that your daughter follow this diet? She might lose some weight. But is it really a good idea? As your daughter enters puberty, her body will begin changing and it may be dangerous to encourage her to eat less. Rather than opting for a diet, you can teach her healthy eating habits and encourage her to lead an active lifestyle which will help her achieve better health and a better body image. This approach to weight will place it in the domain of health rather than appearance. "I see that you're concerned about your weight. I think you're fine as you are, but if it's really worrying you, we can look at the foods we eat and make better choices for our

health. We can get some books on the subject or ask the advice of a nutritionist. What would you think of exercising a little more, you could take a dance class or karate? I'm also going sign up for something that will get me moving, we could encourage each other."

Body image begins to develop in infancy, and as a child reaches puberty it takes on increasing importance. The constant talk about weight and dieting can promote unhealthy eating habits among girls and young women. Forbidding or limiting consumption of certain foods as a reward or punishment, or to correspond to a particular body shape, can lead some girls to eating dis-

orders such as bulimia and anorexia. Body image can become an overwhelming priority, even an obsession. Your daughter can begin to distort her own body image when she compares herself to the advertising industry's presentation of ultra-thin models who give the illusion that their silhouette is the norm. She doesn't know about the extremely strict diets these models must follow to remain rail thin. She's unaware that their photos are manipulated by computer programs to correct "imperfections" and present the "perfect body". Bombarded by these images, it is not surprising that younger and younger girls compare themselves to this standard of beauty. Many women put themselves on popular diet regimes that are often expensive and sometimes dangerous, in the pursuit of a certain image rather than to achieve a healthier lifestyle or a sense of well-being.



TEASING AND NAME-CALLING

She's fine as she is. She should ignore the teasing.

Your daughter is the victim of teasing. How can you help her? You can start by listening to her and empathizing with what she's been through. "I'm glad that you talked to me about this. It's important to tell someone and also important to do something to stop the teasing because no one has the right to make fun of you or anyone else. If we do nothing, it will give the person who is making fun of you the impression that it's not serious and they can continue doing it. What do you want to do? Do you want to talk to them yourself? We can look at different ways to deal with this together. Would you like me to talk to your teacher or the school principal about it?"

When your daughter goes through a difficult situation such as being rejected by others, it is very important that she feels she is being listened to and comforted. The first step in reassuring your daughter is to listen to her story and not minimize the pain she has endured because of the teasing. As you discuss ways to react and intervene, you are giving her the opportunity to express her opinion and find solutions to this situation or any other difficult situation that may arise in the future. Your daughter needs to assert herself in diverse situations to develop her self-confidence. Encourage her to communicate and take the initiative. Taking action and making decisions will put your daughter in charge of her life:

she will not be a passive victim if she can express her feelings and assert herself.

At six or seven years of age, children begin to express negative comments about other people. Saying or writing mean things about someone else is sometimes a way for children to exert power and to demonstrate solidarity with their group of friends. The child who is being teased about her appearance is hurting. She is counting on adults, especially her parents, to help her deal with this trauma. When your daughter talks to you about the problems she is confronting, she hopes she will be listened to, whatever the problem might be. She will trust you if you take the time to listen to her with respect. You will help develop her self-esteem if you allow her to express herself and help her to find solutions.



PUBERTY AND BODY CHANGE

She's approaching puberty. Maybe her body is starting to change.

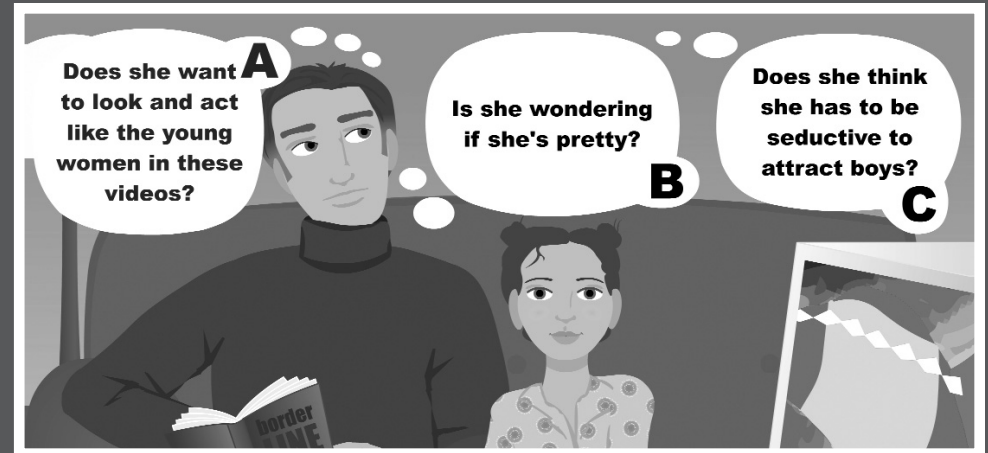
Your daughter's weight gain can be attributed to the physical changes associated with puberty. As she approaches adolescence, her body will begin to change. How can you help her deal with her concerns about these inevitable changes? You can respond as follows: "Are you concerned about your weight? During puberty, boys' and girls' bodies begin to change and those changes often involve gaining weight. You'll see changes in other girls your age. Eating healthy foods and exercising is the best way to maintain a healthy weight. Together we can set a realistic goal for you and with a change in your eating habits, a little more physical activity and your usual determination, I'm sure you'll reach it."

This response will give you an opportunity to talk to your daughter about the biological, emotional and psychological changes associated with puberty that affect both boys and girls. It's very possible that your daughter will become even more preoccupied with her appearance during this period so take this opportunity to reassure her and encourage her to lead a more active lifestyle. Suggest activities you can do as a family as this will strengthen the bonds you already have. Place the emphasis on her character and abilities, so that her attention is not entirely centred on her body and physical appearance.

The importance attached to appearance and the pressure to be thin can sometimes take on excessive proportions and can very often obscure reality. It is important for your daughter to be proud of her changing body. Having a positive body image is a significant part of self-esteem but not the only part. Praise your child for her accomplishments and encourage her talents and abilities. It will help her develop self-confidence and build true self-esteem. She needs your help to develop her personality and learn to assert herself.

Seduction and music videos...

Your daughter wants to know if she is attractive



MAKING GOOD CHOICES IN LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

Does she want to look and act like the young women in these videos?

Your daughter seems preoccupied with her appearance. You want her to think about what attracts two people to each other. You can respond as follows: "Do you ever wonder why you think someone is really cute and your best friend doesn't? People have different ideas about "who's hot and who's not". What do you think boys look for in girls, and what do girls look for in boys? What do you think about boys who like girls just for their looks? What would you prefer: a boy who liked you only for your looks, or a boy who appreciated all your good qualities? Why are you friends with this girl or that boy, and why are they friends with you? You have some great qualities that make you a good friend and it's these qualities that attract and sustain relationships between people."

This discussion will allow you to talk about how "beauty" means different things to different people and help her understand that beauty is a very subjective issue. A person can be beautiful to some people and unattractive to others. You can encourage her to think about why she prefers the company of the people she likes. She will then be better able to make good choices in friendship and eventually in love.

With the onset of puberty, children begin to interact in different ways; groups of boys and groups of girls begin to disperse as they are attracted to the opposite sex. Some young people try to prove their popularity and raise their status among their friends by adopting certain stereotypical behaviours that are popular within

their group. Others don't rely on the stereotypical qualities of physical beauty or popularity to influence whom they form relationships with. Instead, they are guided by personal qualities such as honesty, kindness, generosity, humour, etc. You can encourage your daughter to make enlightened choices based on true friendship and real emotions, rather than the superficial criteria of beauty and popularity.



DO YOU THINK I'M SEXY?

Is she wondering if she's pretty?

Your daughter asks you if she's sexy. How do you reassure her and at the same time make her understand that you do not need to be "sexy" and have a "perfect" body to attract someone? You can respond as follows: "I think you're beautiful. You have lovely eyes and a beautiful smile, a smile that lights up a room and shows your great sense of humour. These are qualities that attract other people."

It is important that your daughter be aware of her value as a whole person. You can compliment her on her appearance, but at the same time you should also praise her personal qualities, talents and skills. This will show her that beauty goes beyond the physical and includes positive character traits.

Being attractive is important at any age. By praising her looks, her qualities and her talents, you will teach her how to love herself. A father's non-sexual admiration and attention can help a girl recognize her own beauty. A mother has an equally important role to play by making her daughter aware of all her attributes.



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION

Does she think she has to be seductive to attract boys?

How does your daughter define beauty? Does she think that beauty means being sexy? You would like her to know that beauty is defined by more than physical appearance and provocative behaviour. You could respond to her as follows: "What do you think it means to be beautiful? Do you think you're beautiful? Each person has their own unique beauty, a little something beyond the physical that attracts us to each other. The girls that you see in the music videos are playing roles based solely on their appearance. They are being paid to attract boys in a very bold way. It doesn't always happen that way in real life. A boy could be attracted to you,

and you could be attracted to him based on qualities other than physical appearance. It could be your personal qualities and common interests that attract you to each other."

The music video can be a pretext for you to talk to your daughter about beauty. How do you define beauty? What is her self-image? What image does she want to project? You have a great opportunity to talk about other positive personal qualities that attract people to each other. This will help your daughter discover her many attractive qualities beyond her physical appearance.

Many of today's music videos, which are watched by a younger and younger audience, show very sexy young women using provocative behaviour or submissive attitudes to seduce young men. Between 8 and 12 years of age, it's difficult to make the distinction between fact and fiction and your daughter can easily blur the line between the two and think that she has to be provocative to attract a boy. She may be tempted to imitate the behaviour she sees in music videos - behaviours that conform to mass media stereotypes. You can help her think about the concept of beauty, her self-image, the image she wants to project and the difference between fact and fiction.

Love and respect...

Your daughter wants to know if she will have a "fuck friend"



THE MEANING OF WORDS

A what? Does she understand what that means?

You're shocked to hear your daughter use these words. You have never used that kind of language in front of her and you wonder if she really understands what the words mean. You could ask her: "What do you think "fuck friend" means? Some people are only interested in the physical pleasure of sexual contact and do not have feelings of love or affection for their partner. They are not involved in each other's lives and are not committed to each other in any way. This type of relationship can sometimes lead to disrespect and abuse, where one person takes advantage of the other. It's important to define our limits and be clear about what we don't like. There are also sexual relationships based on love. Two people decide to have sex based on their mutual love

and desire. They are involved in each other's lives, share their emotions and trust each other. They are sensitive to their partner's likes and dislikes, and they use their bodies to express their feelings for one another. Sexual contact is just one of the many different expressions of love."

Your daughter has reached out to you by asking you questions about sex. She may feel awkward and she needs reassurance. Make her feel comfortable and answer all her questions as best as you can, so she can get the information she needs to make good decisions. You may prefer to discuss loving sexual relationships with your daughter rather than give her more informa-

tion about the sexual act. The "fuck friend" relationship can be summarized as a sexual relationship without involvement or emotional connection between the sexual partners. Sometimes this type of relationship is respectful but it can also be abusive. Stress the importance of respecting others and of respecting oneself. Take the time to talk to her about loving relationships where people make a commitment to each other, and where the bonds of love strengthen over time.

Your daughter is exposed to sexuality from many sources. She might repeat what she hears without really understanding what the words mean and come to you for clarification. You may be surprised to hear words that are not part of your vocabulary. Get the information you need by asking other parents or teenagers the meaning of these words.



THE “FUCK FRIEND” TREND

Is it “cool” to have a “fuck friend”?

Will your daughter want to imitate her friends one day and engage in certain sexual practices just because everyone else is doing it or to fit in? Here's how you can respond: “Is this the first time that you heard these words? Some girls and boys say they have “fuck friends” to be cool and show off, but they don't necessarily have one. Maybe the 6th grader you overheard in the schoolyard was just pretending. In the future, someone might suggest that you engage in sexual contact with them. It's very important not to jump into something you're not sure of. Please come to me and we'll talk about it together.”

Invite your daughter to talk to you about her friendships with girls and with boys. You will help her develop the critical judgement needed to make sense out of all the sex talk out there, whether it comes from her friends, magazines or the media. She will then be able to decide what's right for her and what she should stay away from. Encourage her to express herself and to make choices that respect her values. You might also want to notify school personnel about what the 6th grader said; they may want to discuss it with the child's parents.

Your daughter may have heard the term “fuck friend” from her friends or from magazines aimed at adolescents. Lacking information or critical understanding, your child may think that having a “fuck friend” is the thing to do or the path to popularity. If you are not sure about a magazine's or a favourite TV show's content, you can read it before you buy it for your daughter or watch the show with her, to see if it's appropriate for someone her age. However, you can't supervise all the conversations your daughter will hear or overhear in the schoolyard. That is why it's better to encourage her to develop critical thinking skills, a capacity for judgement and self-esteem.



TALKING ABOUT LOVE

Will she have one anyway?

Do you feel powerless to protect your daughter from outside pressure? How can you influence your daughter's future choices? Take the initiative and talk to her about love, sharing your own experiences with her. “You're wondering if you will have a “fuck friend”. I also had many questions about sex and love when I was your age. Do you sometimes wonder how people get together? I had a few “boyfriends” but they were mostly just friends. Then I met a boy I fell in love with. I was really attracted to him, I thought about him constantly and we spent a lot of time together. We discovered that

we had the same feelings for each other. We couldn't stop touching each other and thought about being intimate. We were really in love. If he had been my “fuck friend” I would have missed all that. One day, you'll find someone special who feels the same way about you, and you'll want to share a loving relationship.”

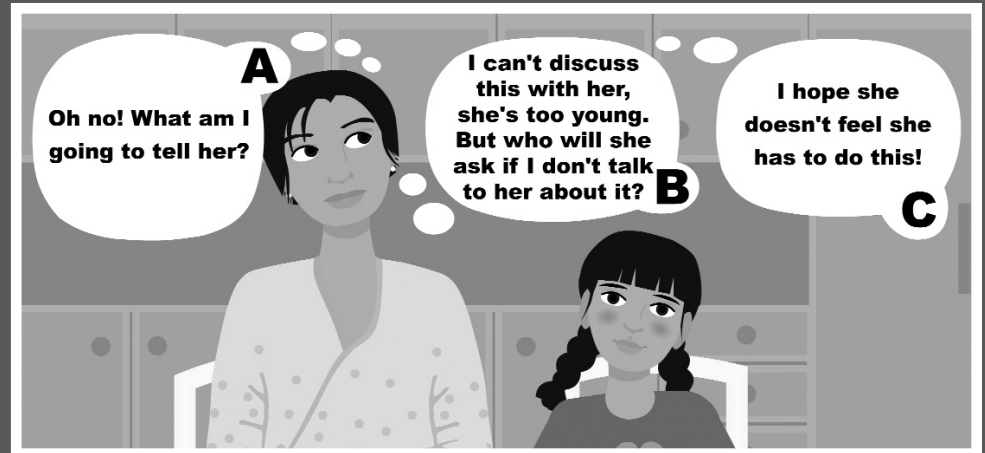
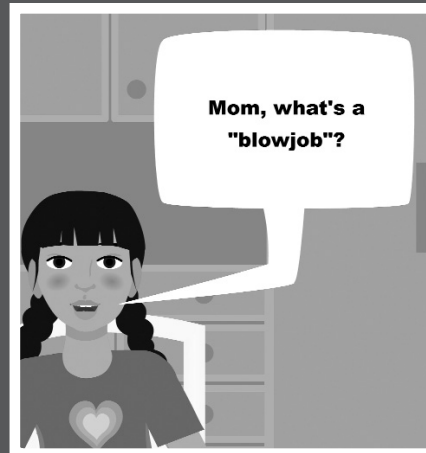
Use this time to talk to your daughter about the various aspects of loving relationships, such as sharing, intimacy and trust. These are the elements that are often missing when sex is just about physical sensation. Use your

own experiences to share information with your daughter; it will give your conversations a more personal tone that might encourage her to confide in you about her own experiences and questions.

Your daughter may sometimes indirectly ask you about sex. She wants to know your opinion. Respond to her questions seriously, without judging or teasing her. Show her that she can confide in you and discuss sexuality in complete trust and discretion. Let your daughter know that you love her. It will encourage her to love herself, love others and be loved in return, when the time is right.

Sexuality and peer pressure...

Your daughter wants to know what a "blowjob" is



WORDS THAT SHOCK

Oh no! What am I going to tell her?

The question can be shocking! How should you respond? Calm down before you talk to your daughter. "Is this the first time you heard this word and where did you hear it? It's a word that some people use to describe a sexual act that takes place between two consenting people in private. It's a part of sexual behaviour. But there's a lot more to sexuality than blowjobs."

Don't jump to conclusions about your daughter's guilt. She's not responsible for what she's heard. In addition, your respectful attitude will show her that she can talk to you about anything, even if the subject is embarrassing and awkward. Before responding, you can take a few moments to decide what you want to say by asking her some questions. This will allow you get your thoughts together so you can give her the appropriate

information and convey a healthy understanding and respect for sexuality.

There is a trend nowadays for some young people to take part in oral sex in public places, with multiple partners. It is not surprising that your daughter has heard the expression "give a blow job" without necessarily understanding what it means. You can put this sexual practice in the proper context by presenting it as a sexual act done in private, between two consenting people who are mature enough to have sexual relations.



TALKING ABOUT SEX

I can't discuss this with her, she's too young. But who will she ask if I don't talk to her about it?

You hesitate to respond. Does your daughter really need to know what these words mean, at her age? Maybe it's better to pretend that you didn't hear her or wait until she is older to have this discussion. You feel your daughter is too young for a discussion about sex, but if she's asking you questions it means she's already talked about it with her friends. She has asked you because she trusts you and wants your reassurance. You can respond in this way: "I think you are too young for us to have this conversation, but I want you to talk about this with me and not someone else. It's an expression used to describe a sexual act called oral sex, where you caress a man's genitalia with your mouth. This type of caress can also be done to a woman's gen-

italia. You might not understand it now, but when two mature people have a strong sexual attraction, they sometimes want to explore different ways to give each other pleasure, in private. Not everyone enjoys this type of sex."

It is always preferable to answer your daughter's questions. If you avoid them she will look for answers elsewhere. The answers that she finds might be inadequate and incomplete. Moreover, the people your daughter turns to for information may have their own agenda, promoting sexual practices that are questionable, risky and inappropriate for a girl her age. It is therefore preferable that you overcome your discomfort and

answer her questions. By talking about the emotions that go along with sexual acts such as oral sex, you can give your daughter an appropriate and complete understanding of sexuality

It's normal for your daughter to ask questions and look for answers about sex. All children do it. They turn to people they feel close to and trust. Sometimes their questions can be embarrassing and awkward, but not responding gives the impression of secrecy and mystery and possibly shame. If you feel uncomfortable responding, they will find answers elsewhere, from other children or in magazines or on the Internet. There is a risk that the information they find will concentrate on genitalia or performance. Take this golden opportunity to talk to your daughter about the emotional dimension of sex.



PLEASURE FOR WHOM?

I hope she's doesn't feel she has to do this!

How can your daughter resist pressure from a partner or her peers? You can give her the tools to make informed decisions. Where should you begin?

You can help her recognize that she has choices. "This sexual act should be done in private between two consenting people and for the pleasure of both partners. If someone or a group of people ask you to you to perform this sexual act or any other sexual act that you feel uncomfortable doing, it is extremely important to say no clearly."

Explain to your daughter that this type of sexual act, just like all sexual acts, should be done to please both partners, not out of fear that you will lose your partner if you refuse. Put the emphasis on shared pleasure and desire.

As your daughter grows up she will always be surrounded by other children. These encounters will provide her with good and bad experiences and she will be exposed to both positive and negative influences. How will she recognize and deal with the nega-

tive influences? By setting limits for your daughter, you will help her begin to learn the advantages, disadvantages and repercussions of certain acts and behaviours. Give her opportunities to assert herself and to say no to situations that arise in her daily life. Of course, this means that she will sometimes reject your suggestions. Little by little she will develop her own sense of judgement and the capacity to make good choices - choices that are right for her and for others.

Internet safety...

Your daughter is looking at pornographic images or is "chatting" with strangers.



A

INTERNET IN THE BEDROOM

She's still on the computer! She's up late, but at least she's studying.

Does your daughter have a computer in her bedroom with Internet access? Besides doing her homework, what else is she using it for? The Internet brings a world of uncensored information into your home, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. About 4.2 million Internet sites and 372 million web pages have pornographic content and these sites are often accessed by links to innocent sounding words, such as "horse" or "Barbie." The webcam on your daughter's computer can also be used to send intimate pictures, and this has become popular among some young people. Parents must take control of the computer and supervise its use. Talk to your daughter about what she's using the computer for. "I know you spend a lot of time on the computer, but I don't want it in your bedroom. The whole family can use it if it's in a

common room. We'll work out a schedule that will suit everybody's needs."

The Internet offers your daughter unlimited access to information, whether she's researching a subject for school or for a leisure activity. It's possible that she can unintentionally end up on a pornographic site and if the computer is in her bedroom, it's more difficult for you to monitor what she's looking at. When the computer is in a common space and time limits are set for surfing the Net, there is less risk that your daughter will be confronted with pornographic images.

There are different ways to better supervise your family's computer and Internet use. You can establish clear

guidelines by installing a password and placing the computer connected to the Internet in a common area. Make sure that the other computers in your home are not connected to the Internet. This change may displease your daughter. Justify it by explaining that the computer belongs to all family members and that a schedule for its use will be set according to the needs of each member of the family. The new schedule will encourage your daughter to get involved in other activities. In addition, if you have a web camera, its use needs to be well supervised. It is also possible to purchase software which will block almost all access to certain Internet sites. Although this kind of software is not 100% effective, it will prevent access to many inappropriate websites.

B

A FALSE REPRESENTATION OF SEXUALITY

If she clicks on a pornographic site, what should I do?

How should you react if you discover your daughter looking at a pornographic website? What will you say to her if she admits to having consulted one? Here's how you can respond. "I'm glad you told me. I would prefer that you didn't see these images. It's too bad there are so many sites like this that give a false view of sexuality. If you have questions about sex, I can suggest some books or websites that are more appropriate for a girl your age and that give accurate information."

If you catch your daughter on a pornographic website or she tells you about it herself, don't overreact; stay calm. This is an opportunity for you to explain the differ-

ence between pornography and sexuality. Now your daughter will have the information she needs to make the distinction between fact and fiction and correct any false ideas she has about sexuality. If you don't respond, your daughter could believe that these pornographic images are a true representation of sexual relations. She could also be tempted to look for other pornographic sites to find out more. If your daughter tells you about what she has seen, use this opportunity to praise her for coming to you to talk about it. Remember that parents are still the first source of information for children with questions about sex.

Between the ages of 8 and 12, your daughter will continue to have questions about conception, childbirth and adult sexuality. If she stumbles on these types of images, she may be repelled by them or they may awaken her curiosity. At the very least, these images will give her a false impression of sexuality. She might think that this is the behaviour that she will be expected to perform or that is awaiting her when she finds a partner.

C

INTERNET CHAT

She's always in chat rooms. Who is she talking to?

Do you remember the hours you spent talking to your friends on the telephone? "Chatting" online is the way young people stay in touch with each other today. Your daughter is no exception - she loves chatting with her friends online. Why is she so absorbed in this activity? Who is she really communicating with? Show your interest in what she is doing and ask her questions: "Who are you chatting with? How old are they? What would you do if the conversation took a direction that made you feel uncomfortable? I would prefer you to "chat" only with your friends, but if you make a new friend online I would like you to let me know. Sometimes adults pretend that they're your age so they can communicate with you. What they talk about may

not be appropriate for someone your age. I would prefer that you send e-mails only to your friends. If you really enjoy writing, how about starting a daily journal or writing a short story?"

It's worrying to think that some predatory adults are using the Internet to contact children. You have a right to know who your daughter is corresponding with and to warn her of the dangers of chatting with strangers. By talking about the risks, you can help her develop critical thinking skills and prepare her to deal with unpleasant or dangerous situations. Suggest other ways she can express her creativity if she has a genuine interest in writing.

Your daughter loves to chat online. She can spend hours chatting with her friends. It is well known, however, that pedophiles use the Internet to solicit children. It is estimated that 89% of sexual solicitation of children is done in chat rooms. These adults can quickly steer innocent conversations towards sexual matters, using terms that are inappropriate for children, and explaining them in a way that suits their purposes. Be vigilant, as the goal of some of these predators is to meet your daughter in person.



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