

TABLE 17-1

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT SEX

Age (School) Level	Concepts to Be Learned
3-5 (preschool)	Correct names for body parts (e.g., penis, vagina); differences between boys and girls; both boys' and girls' bodies are special and each of us can be proud of our special body; adults kiss and hug each other to show how much they care; respect for the privacy of others; their bodies belong to themselves and they have a right to say "no" if they don't want to be touched; how to respond if a stranger offers candy or a ride.
6-9 (early elementary school)	Continue to use a proper vocabulary when talking about body parts; continue to promote self-esteem (their bodies are special); people have body parts that feel good when touched; touching those body parts should be done in private; "sex talk" is done at home; the basics of reproduction and that our genitals and reproductive organs enable this; a fetus is inside the uterus and a baby usually comes out of the vagina; milk comes from breasts; people can have babies only after puberty; meaning of heterosexual and homosexual; awareness of sexuality of people of all ages (parents and grandparents); understanding that there are different types of caring homes and families (e.g., single-parent families); promote non-stereotyped gender roles both inside and outside the home (both mothers and fathers have important jobs and there are no jobs just for boys or just for girls); good hygiene
9-13 (upper elementary school)	Changes in <i>both</i> boys and girls during puberty (e.g., girls menstruate; boys ejaculate and have wet dreams) and that the changes occur at different ages in different people; the idea that human sexuality is natural and that sexual feelings are normal; sex is not just for reproduction, but is also pleasurable; masturbation (many people do it, it's not harmful, often a child's first experience with sexual pleasure); intercourse can cause pregnancy and having children is a long-term responsibility that should be planned (include basics on contraception); children are not ready for sexual intercourse; physical appearance does not determine a person's value—liking yourself; communication and assertiveness skills; people can disagree and have different values but still be friends; men and women have equal talents and strengths; recognition of the potential of sexual abuse (including that it is most often committed by someone the child knows) and how to react to it; continued encouragement of good hygiene; encouragement that it is okay to talk to parents about sexuality (<i>even if our opinions differ</i>)
13-15 (junior high school)	It is normal to have sexual feelings, desires, and fantasies; sex is pleasurable; the size of one's penis or breasts does not determine whether one will be a good sexual partner; people of all body shapes (including the disabled) have sexual feelings and desire; understanding the differences in sexual behavior (sexual orientation, abstinence, marriage); love is not the same as sexual attraction or desire; understanding the possible consequences of unprotected sexual intercourse (pregnancy); contraception; young teens are not yet ready for sexual intercourse; dating (why, when, how) and relationships (e.g., going steady); peer pressure and your right to say "no" and to disagree with your friends; respecting the limits that are set by your partners; awareness of exploitive relationships (psychological coercion, alcohol, physical force, date rape); physical health (e.g., breast and testicular self-exams); establishing a value system (and consideration of the above topics within that system)
15-18 (high school)	People of all ages are sexual beings; sexuality is only one part of your total personality; integration of sexuality into your value system; feeling good about your body, sexuality, and sexual orientation; how to express your sexual feelings in appropriate ways; communicating your sexual feelings, desires, and limits to partners in an open and honest manner; expressing your sexual feelings without intercourse; further understanding of sexual exploitation among adolescents; for those who engage in sexual intercourse, choosing a method of contraception that will be used consistently; knowledge of the responsibilities of parenthood and child care; understanding that long-term commitments (including marriage and parenthood) require work and that people's sexual and emotional needs change over time