

Grading our Parents and Ourselves

Overview

Either unintentionally or by design, every family teaches their children about sex, sexuality, and relationships through spoken and unspoken messages and behavior. The messages children hear and behaviors they observe impact their future sexual health, relationships, and decision-making. This activity introduces some “rules” for raising sexually healthy children and offers a safe way to assess how well their parents did, as well as look at their own options for parenting.

Objectives

During this activity participants will:

1. Reflect on how their behaviors impact their children’s attitudes and behaviors regarding sexual health.
2. Recognize specific things they can do to raise sexually healthy children.
3. Identify which behaviors will be easy for them to do and which may be difficult.

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials/Preparation

Create a stack of 3x5 cards of “things you can do to raise sexually healthy children.” Write one suggestion/rule per card. Use the list below as a starting point but add other ideas on blank cards that are relevant for your parents.

Instructions

1. Spread out suggestion/rule cards on the table face up.
2. Tell parents that these are some suggestions for things parents can do to raise sexually healthy children.
3. As parents to select cards that reflect their parent's behavior. They can choose one thing their parent(s) did particularly well and/or something they didn't do.
4. Encourage parents to discuss the impact of these behaviors on their lives.
5. Ask parents to select cards of behaviors/rules they hope to follow with their children.
6. Encourage parents to discuss which of these behaviors/rules will be easy and which may be difficult for them to follow.
7. Discuss what support they will need to be able to follow the “rules” they hope to follow.

Adaptations

Include additional messages that are appropriate for your group, considering culture, identity, and lived experience.

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Adapted from Its That Easy: A Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Children

Ferguson, Gloria. (2010). Health Start/West Side Community Health Services, Saint Paul, MN

Sample behaviors/rules to include on the cards:

- Answer questions simply and honestly.
- Teach all young people to respect others boundaries.
- When your children are hurt, don't blame them.
- Avoid saying things like: "You shouldn't have been running." or "You shouldn't have led him on."
- Listen.
- Give more freedom as children are ready for it.
- Provide your child with role models of healthy relationships.
- Admit when you don't know an answer and offer to help find out more.
- Consider how you role model use of alcohol and drugs.
- Don't expect your child to learn from your mistakes.
- Don't shame, blame, or judge.
- Be a consistent source of unconditional love for your child.
- Teach your child skills that reduce sexual abuse.
- Give kids practice in making decisions.
- Help your child deconstruct gender based stereotypes.
- Appreciate bodies of all shapes, sizes, shades, and abilities.
- Don't assume sexual orientation of your child.
- Offer age-appropriate information. Use good online resources and books.
- Use accurate terminology for body parts.
- Help your child learn to navigate media messages about sex and gender.
- Answer questions as they come up. Don't put things off for a "big talk."
- Know where your kids are and what they are doing.
- Embrace diversity in your family and in the community.
- Know your child's world (jokes, music, games, friends, etc.).
- Talk about values and what they mean in your family.
- Give kids information before they need it.
- Allow space for your children to develop their identity and independence.

