



The Well for  
Health Promotion

CAMPUS HEALTH

# a Tulane parent guide for Join the Conversation: Talking about Sex and Sexuality

*You can make a difference.*

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Comprehensive sex education, “provides young people with opportunities to explore their own identities and values along with the values and beliefs of their families and communities. It allows young people to practice the communication, negotiation, decision-making, and assertiveness skills they need to create healthy relationships— both sexual and nonsexual—throughout their lives” (SIECUS, 2020).

- ▶ On average, however, students in the United States throughout the tenure of their K-12 education receive less than 11 hours of instruction on human sexuality, HIV, and STI and pregnancy prevention (CDC, 2014).

As parents, we know we all have received different messages about sex and sexuality. Some of us may or may not have received education about sexuality from our own parents. Regardless of what we were taught when we were young, it is important to give our children accurate information, along with our family values, in order to help them make healthy decisions about sexuality.

Talking with young people about sex is something that many parents feel uncomfortable with or intimidated by, which is why if you feel this way, you’re not alone.

While talking with your child about sex may feel difficult, we believe parents are the most important sex educators for their children. We also know that early education on sexuality, consent, reproductive health, and sexual violence is an important component of violence prevention.

# Tips for “The Talk”

We encourage parents of incoming students to have these challenging conversations with their young people before arriving at Tulane University and to continue the conversation throughout their tenure here. If you could use some more tips on how to get the conversation started, this guide shares information and techniques to help facilitate these discussions and prepare students for college life.

## **1. NORMALIZE REGULAR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SEX. WHEN TALKING TO YOUR STUDENT ABOUT SEX AND SEXUALITY, CONSIDER DISCUSSING THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:**

### Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy

Give your students the vocabulary to accurately identify and describe their anatomy and the function of various anatomical parts. Suggesting they explore reputable sources like [www.scarleteen.com](http://www.scarleteen.com) can be a great place to start.

### Sexual Health

Sexual health goes beyond condoms and STI testing. Talk to your students about basic sexual health topics like breast or testicle self-exams, how often to get a pap smear, or how to seek treatment for UTIs or yeast infections.

### STIs and Pregnancy Prevention

Accurate information about STI and pregnancy prevention is hard to find. Empower them with information about abstinence, how to use various methods of safer sex protection, and the importance of regular STI testing. For medically-accurate information on STIs, refer to [www.cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std)

### Gender and Sexual Identity

From the time a child is born, they are receiving messages about gender from the people and world around them. Understanding the vastness of gender helps your student feel free to explore their identity and expression without limits or shame, equips them to be advocates for gender equity, and prepares them to respect the identities of others. Talk to your student about the importance of respecting other people’s identities.

### Characteristics of Healthy Relationships: Platonic and Non-Platonic

Talking to your student about what it means to have healthy relationships with others is an important part of preparing them for safer, mutually fulfilling, and respectful connections with others. When they can recognize features of healthy dynamics, they become less vulnerable to abusive relationships. Use the Healthy Relationships Section of our website at <https://campushealth.tulane.edu/well/sexual-violence-prevention> to start the conversation.



### Consent, Boundaries and Communication

Consent is often defined through the context of sex but the principles of giving and receiving consent apply to a variety of interpersonal interactions. To better understand the definition and elements of consent, watch “Consent is Like a Cup of Tea” with your student. This video is a simple, funny approach to understanding consent.

A national study of 18 to 25-year-olds found that 87% of survey respondents reported that at some point in their lives they had been the victim of some form of sexual harassment. In the same study, 76% of survey respondents—72% of men and 80% of women— reported that they had never had a conversation with their parents about how to avoid sexually harassing others.

### Sexual Misconduct

Although it may not be easy having these conversations, and sometimes you may not feel heard, this humbling statistic highlights the importance of having honest and supportive dialogue with young adults about what sexual respect looks like. Check out Tulane’s Guide for Parents and Guardians for talking with your student about sexual violence.

These conversations will help both you and your student feel more confident in their ability to navigate sex, sexuality, and healthy relationships during their college years and beyond.

### **2. DON’T AVOID ANSWERING QUESTIONS.**

When you are asked a question, try to remain calm and answer the question to the best of your ability. By remaining calm, not avoiding the question, and sharing your knowledge, you are sending your child the message that you are open to talking about sexuality and it is normal to seek out this information. This will enable your child to become comfortable talking with you and to continue to come to you for answers. A lot of parents worry more about *what* they will say when asked a question about sex but your *tone* is just as important, if not more so, than what you say. Your young person will more vividly remember your warm, welcoming tone than the content of what you said.

### **3. GIVE MEDICALLY ACCURATE INFORMATION.**

When answering your student’s question, be sure to give them accurate information while also letting them know your views and values. If you are unsure about an answer, it’s OK to say, “You know, I’m not sure. Let’s look for that answer together.” It shows your child the importance of being a life-long learner and to seek out accurate information on any topic.

### **4. KEEP YOUR ANSWERS BRIEF AND UNCOMPLICATED.**

Start with a simple answer and give your child more information if they continue to ask more questions. If you happen to ramble (as we tend to do when caught off guard) or give your child incorrect information, you can always go back and clarify. And remember, if you don’t know the answer, it’s okay to admit it. Learning and teaching about sexuality is an ongoing process.

# Other Important Conversation Topics

## **NORMALIZE NOT HAVING SEX.**

Let them know that while they may feel pressured, it is absolutely normal and common to not have sex in college. In fact the majority of college students have had one or less sexual partners in the last year. Encourage them to wait until they are ready.

## **TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING TO KNOW SOMEONE BEFORE YOU HAVE SEX.**

Consider pointing out that feeling comfortable with a partner and developing trust can be the foundation for fulfilling and enjoyable sexual experiences.

## **TALK ABOUT CONSENT WITH YOUR STUDENT.**

Encourage them to communicate with partners and agree on what is going to happen during sex. Remind them:

- Give and ask for verbal consent before having sex.
- If they want to stop in the middle, that is okay.
- If their partner wants to stop, then stop.
- Talking before, during, and after sex is a normal, healthy, and important sexual practice.

For more tips and conversation starters regarding healthy relationships, refer to:

[The Talk: How Adults Can Promote Young People's Healthy Relationships and Prevent Misogyny and Sexual Harassment<sup>2</sup>](#)

Online at: [mcc.gse.harvard.edu/thetalk](http://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/thetalk)

## **KNOW TULANE UNIVERSITY CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT**

Tulane University has set its own sexual behavior and assault policies. At Tulane, affirmative consent is required. This means that a student must consent in some way to each sexual activity. Your student should know what the consequences are for policy violations, how to report incidents and what their rights are should something go wrong.

# Tulane University Resources & Services

The Tulane and New Orleans communities have many student resources and support services.

## **CONFIDENTIAL RESOURCES**

### **The Student Health Center**

[campushealth.tulane.edu/emergency/sexual-assault](http://campushealth.tulane.edu/emergency/sexual-assault)  
504-865-5255

### **The Counseling Center**

[campushealth.tulane.edu/emergency/sexual-assault](http://campushealth.tulane.edu/emergency/sexual-assault)  
504-314-2277

### **The Well for Health Promotion**

<https://campushealth.tulane.edu/well/sexual-health>  
whp@tulane.edu

## **PRIVATE RESOURCES**

### **Case Management and Victim Support Services**

[cmvss.tulane.edu](http://cmvss.tulane.edu)

504-314-2160

504-920-9900 (24/7 on-call)

[srss@tulane.edu](mailto:srss@tulane.edu)

## **REFERENCES**

1. Center for Disease Control. (2014). Results from the School Health Policies and Practices Study.
2. Future of Sex Education Initiative. (2020). National Sex Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12 (Second Edition).
3. Schneider M, Hirsch JS. Comprehensive Sexuality Education as a Primary Prevention Strategy for Sexual Violence Perpetration. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse. 2020;21(3):439-455.