

10 Questions. 10 Answers.

Children, feelings, playing doctors and nurses



A PARENT'S GUIDE

Book tips for parents and children

It helps when children not only have books about farms or fire brigades but also about body, family, love and sex education. You can look through them together.

Title	Author & Publisher	From age
Alles Familie	Alexandra Maxeiner, Anke Kuhl Klett Kinderbuch Verlag	3 years of age
Wir entdecken unseren Körper	Doris Rübel Ravensburger Verlag	4 years of age
P.S. Es gibt Lieblingseis	Luzie Loda Marta Press Verlag	5 years of age
Mein erstes Aufklärungsbuch	Dagmar Geisler Loewe Verlag	5 years of age
König und König	Linda de Haan, Stern Nijland Gerstenberg Verlag	4 years of age
Mein Körper gehört mir	Dagmar Geisler Loewe Verlag	3 years of age
Peter, Ida und Minimum Familie Lindström bekommt ein Baby	Grethe Fagerström Ravensburger Verlag	5 years of age
Die Gefühle Bande	Clemens Fobian, Mirjam Fels Marta Press Verlag	4 years of age

Legal notice

10 Questions. 10 Answers. A parent's guide

Published by:
pro familia Landesverband Hamburg e.V
Seewartenstraße 10, 20459 Hamburg, Germany
www.profamilia-hamburg.de

Author: Christiane Kolb, Hamburg

Design: SÜDNORD Design, Hamburg

Picture credits cover: [Istock.com/courtneyk](https://www.istock.com/courtneyk)

Printing: Drucktechnik Bisping & Odenthal GmbH

© All rights reserved – pro familia Landesverband Hamburg e.V.

Sponsored by:

Förderverein für Pro Familia Hamburg e.V.

Stiftung Pro Familia e.V.

Bußgeldfonds Hamburg

Behörde für Justiz und Gleichstellung

1st edition 2019, 500 copies

PDF download at www.profamilia-hamburg.de

Dear Mums and Dads,
those involved in a loving upbringing,

Small children and sexuality – not something that appears to go together at first. But sexuality accompanies people throughout their entire lives, even children from 0–6 years. It begins with personal hygiene, moves on to what your child experiences in their gender role and finishes with the questions that children automatically ask: ‘Where do babies come from?’

This brochure gives you answers to those all-important questions about the body, love and sexual education – including protecting against sexual abuse. It has been developed in cooperation with experts from science and practice. In most cases, we have deliberately refrained from giving a specific age; you know yourself how children can develop at different speeds. Ultimately, it’s your decision on how you wish to deal with questions about sexuality. What would you have wanted yourself as a child? This brochure provides information and helpful suggestions:

10 Questions. 10 Answers.



Why is 'that' even a topic?

- REASON 1: Because sexuality is part of life
From an early age. It encompasses more than you think at first: affection, sensations with skin and hair, a good feeling for your own body as well as a general attitude towards intimacy, love and the sexes.
- REASON 2: Because children have questions
No wonder. They are growing up in a world where sexuality is ever-present: a baby arrives (from where?), a sloppy kiss (disgusting!), pink dolls and muscle men (why?), bikini models on posters (don't they get cold?), a sanitary towel lying around somewhere (what's that for?).
- REASON 3: Because it's not about 'sex' right now
Desire and excitement, dangers and problems? That's what adults see. But not children. They just want to know: why is yours different to mine? Where do babies come from?
- REASON 4: Because your child needs guidance
If you avoid the subject, you risk a child growing up with the 'wrong' ideas. It's better if the school playground or the Internet with its unsavoury images and incorrect information don't take over the educational role.
- REASON 5: Because parents are the most important people to trust
You know what's on your child's mind, what being age-appropriate is all about. Nowhere can knowledge and values be passed on in a more trusting way than in the family.

2

What does a child need to know about its own body?

Two-year-olds already know that sheep go baa, cows go moo and this is where milk comes out. And their own body? Belly button, bottom ..., but with genitalia, adults are often embarrassed. But it is important for your child to feel comfortable in their own body and be able to name everything.

Penis, vagina, testicles, labia, clitoris and glans are all part of it. Be careful not to put girls at a disadvantage when naming their sexual organs, simply because the vulva is less visible.

To say: 'This is all right and belongs to you' helps your child feel safe in their own body from top to toe and is a first step towards preventing sexual abuse.

Even pet names are okay. Just bear in mind that your child also needs to be understood at day care or school if something hurts or is not right. Which is why it is a good thing for children to know the neutral terms for genitals.

By preschool age at the latest, curiosity about the exact 'why' and 'how' of biological processes awakens. Parents can explain in more detail. For example, knowing where the urethra in a girl ends – at the front wall of the vagina, one to two centimetres behind the entrance to the vagina – is helpful information.

We now know that the sexual organs of children – the vulva and penis – sometimes get a stronger blood supply even in the womb; ultrasounds can show erections, for example. Anyone who has changed a boy's nappy will know that. It is good to know that this is normal, a biological fact of life that applies to everybody.

How should you explain things?

3

And when?

The best answer is: every now and again. Compare sex education with learning road safety: it starts by playing with wooden vehicles, saying 'car' for the first time, being careful walking across a zebra crossing, right up to getting a driving licence that allows you – finally – to take part in traffic responsibly.

In all spheres of life, parents and teachers explain what children should know. Also about sexuality.

WHAT TO SAY?

That's for you to decide. It's best to explain in a simple, age-appropriate way, honestly and without straying from the point. For three- or four-year-olds, a simple explanation is enough: a baby grows in mummy's tummy. That a penis, vagina, sperm and egg are also part of this, and that babies come out through the vagina is a good answer for preschoolers.

WHEN DO YOU SAY IT?

When questions about the body, love and partnership come up. But also use occasions that crop up in everyday situations. For example, when washing the vulva, penis and bottom every day, or when looking at the hair on dad's chest or mum's breasts. When you come across different family set-ups, separation, young love in your social circle, in books or films, you can show a preschool child the various ways in which love exists.

Teach your child about the world they grow up in.
This will help your child to cope properly.

4

What would be too much for a child to cope with?

Children are not overwhelmed when parents explain bodily development and love in an age-appropriate and child-appropriate way according to the facts. There's even an opportunity in this: you pass on a positive image and knowledge about your own body, love and procreation, with respect for yourself and others.

Concerns are occasionally raised that children may be overwhelmed with information about sexuality. But knowing where children come from and how your body works is not a dangerous thing. Parents and teachers do not discuss topics that go far beyond a child's personal sphere. By explaining what a child wants to know and is capable of understanding, you are doing everything right.

Incidentally, studies show that teenagers who were educated step-by-step in a positive way when they were children, start with 'adult' sexuality later. Those in the know, know better. According to studies, their 'first time' is later and they are more conscientious about contraception. Because:

Knowledge and openness create a sense of responsibility.

Ignorance and fear tend to lead to uncertainty and risky behaviour.

5

**What are normal doctors
and nurses games?**

Childlike play with bare facts can upset adults. Isn't that embarrassing? Or even harmful? For example, when a young child wants to look at the genitals of a friend or parent. Little ones may also talk about 'sexing' when they mean body games.

Children are curious. They have no sexual interests like adults. They just want to know what other bodies look like, small and big. They want to cuddle and be held. If your child's curiosity gets too much for you, set limits. By the same token, grown-ups also respect the child's boundaries when hugging and holding.

These are common games among children: From about 3 to 4 years, many children play mummy-daddy-child and compare their bodies. They play doctors and nurses, and from 5 to 6 years of age, they play what they understand by love – and yes, 'making love'.

Children at this age do not have ulterior erotic motives. They don't think about partner satisfaction, climaxes, passion and other sexual issues that are central to adults. As soon as they know that their game is being looked at in a critical way or a sense of shame starts to develop, they would rather retreat from view.

When playing, children classify what they observe in the world – that is a developmental task. That's why playing doctors and nurses, as it's generally known, is totally normal. Some children play it, some don't. Banning the game is not appropriate. It is better to give them a few rules.

6

What are the rules for playing
doctors and nurses?

- 1 SAME AGE.
Ideally, the children are about the same age (plus or minus one year) and there is no imbalance of power. Big ones can't play.
- 2 CONSENT.
Everyone only plays what they want to. No hurting is allowed. No forcing either.
- 3 NO MEANS: STOP.
Stopping and saying no need to be respected. Getting help is not being a tittle-tattle.
- 4 NO INSERTING ANYTHING.
Nothing is inserted into the body, no matter which opening. That can do harm.
- 5 UNDISTURBED.
Children need space for this – perhaps an adult could take a quick look every now and again or keep half an ear open.
- 6 DISCUSSION.
Assess whether you should tell the parents of a visiting child what they were playing. Being open pays off. It is a good idea to share your own rules with the children and other parents.
- 7 A GOOD PHRASE:
'You know, it's only adults who really do "sex," don't you?'



How to deal well with feelings of embarrassment?

'Stop, mummy. I'll wash myself.'
'Daddy, look away!'
'I want my own changing cubicle.'

Oh yes, embarrassment has arrived. When embarrassment develops, parents ask themselves, 'What's going on? Already?' It's best if you accept the change when it happens – no matter at what age your child begins to draw boundaries.

Sometimes body embarrassment starts at the age of 3 to 4, often at primary school age, sometimes just before puberty. That's all fine. Even the fact that this behaviour is absolute for now – parents know this from other developmental phases.

It's similar to the 'no phase'. Your child discovered they were an autonomous being, a valuable learning step on the way to independence. That's how it is now. The positive thing about it is that embarrassment has a protective function. People use it to defend the privacy of their bodies.

By the same token, you can also appreciate the pleasure small children take in showing off. They are proud, they just feel comfortable in their own bodies. Isn't that something to be envied? Rejoice in it and gently steer the nakedness along the right path. Being completely naked and bare is something you can do indoors or in a safe environment. And if it gets too much, a boundary communicated in a gentle way is a learning experience. Children see that everyone has their own personal limits. And there are rules for living together that apply to everyone.

8

How can I protect my child from abuse?

In the case of sexual abuse, a child is powerless against an adult. But there is still some good advice:

- Knowledge protects. Ignorance and not being allowed to ask any questions about sex make it easier for people who commit sexual abuse to carry out their intentions and keep them secret. If the genital area is taboo, a child may not even know what is happening to them. Then they are afraid or ashamed to confide in their circle of loved ones.
- Talking about the ‘bad man’ doesn’t help. Your child knows that they shouldn’t go off with strangers. It is better to explain in a general way that adults can have bad intentions and that you don’t have to believe every adult.
- Abusers are not usually strangers. Parents should know that abuse most frequently occurs in their immediate surroundings, in families, among acquaintances, in institutions. It starts where adults act for their own pleasure.
- Openness about privacy. Educate in such a way that privacy is private, but not taboo. Your child should know and be able to name all the parts of their body. And know that they can ask questions at home – on any subject.
- Trust helps. Explain good and bad secrets: Good ones feel nice, like surprises or presents. Bad secrets create pressure and fear. Nobody should be left alone with them.
- Self-confidence makes you strong. ‘My body is mine.’ A child needs this certainty. Keep it that way in the family, too. Daily personal hygiene is important, but a goodnight kiss or grandma’s hug is not a must. That’s how your child learns ‘I can set limits, too’.



How should you react if a child touches themselves?

It happens. Sometimes little boys forget themselves and put their hands down their trousers and little girls rub their genitals, on a pillow, for example. It feels nice.

Grown-ups are often surprised when children discover such bodily reactions before puberty. Is this possible? The answer from experts is – yes! Even the sexual arousal reflex is inborn. Not many people know that, though.

Even babies can react to the relaxing effects of breastfeeding with a swelling of the labia or a flow of blood to the penis. Small children can discover the ticklish feelings in their intimate areas without any help from others, some actively induce them. Trained day-care staff say the same.

If you see it happening, don't panic. A child doesn't know this sort of behaviour is awkward for grown-ups. They experience a lovely feeling, free of purpose or ulterior motives.

Making them feel bad or telling them off is not appropriate. Such a ban makes sexuality disgusting, wrong and leads to secrecy. Which doesn't mean that touching in public is right. Act in accordance with your values and feelings. For example, you can explain, 'That feels nice, doesn't it? People do it – but on their own. Others don't want to and shouldn't be there.'

Ideally, you'll react calmly, but make the rules for everyday life clear.

10

How do you deal well with gender issues?

Do we raise our children to be girls and boys?

To what degree are we shaped by biology, parents and society?

There's probably no definitive answer to this question. What is becoming increasingly clear, however, is that social ideals influence us more than we thought.

What role models do parents pass on to their children?

It's worth thinking about the pros and cons of your own ideas on masculinity and femininity. And to ask yourself how the world should be for the next generation. So that all children can develop their identity the way they are.

- FROM THE AGE OF 2
children can tell the difference between the genders and understand which gender they are.
- FROM THE AGE OF 3
children know the differences between men and women and can explain them based on external characteristics.
- FROM THE AGE OF 4
the gender role becomes more firmly established in many children. The game of engaging with the roles now begins. Doctors and nurses, mummy-daddy-child, dressing up. A boy who wants to wear skirts is as normal as a girl who hates pink.
- FROM THE AGE OF 5
children sometimes live out their gender roles to the extreme. You often hear 'I don't play with girls' or 'boys are stupid.' Or vice versa. It isn't true – but for many children defining boundaries is part of it and helps to stabilise identity.

People who don't (or didn't) feel right in their assigned gender or people who love the same sex often report later, 'I sensed it even before I started school'. There is no answer as to why any specific sexual identity or orientation manifests. But everyone can understand, this is something you feel deep inside – and isn't something you can change at will.

From a statistical point of view, there will also be children growing up in your environment who do not correspond to the usual norms and ideas. Be careful how you handle it. Accept your child with their feelings and needs as they are.

Do you have any questions?

Would you like more support on matters of parenting, sexuality and sex education? Good places to go are the Child Guidance Centres in your city. Educational specialists in preschools and later schools are also useful contacts.

The following sources of information are also recommended:

www.bzga.de

Brochure 'Liebevoll begleiten' from the Federal Centre for Health Education for download

www.isp-dortmund.de

Expert lectures on the topic in the Downloads section

www.familienhandbuch.de

Reference book on all topics related to parenting and family

www.profamilia.de

Personal counselling on all aspects of sexuality in 180 counselling centres throughout Germany. Web portal and online consulting with lots of information

www.zartbitter.de

Information centre against sexual abuse, various information on the subject of playing doctors and nurses, development, abuse