

What Should I Tell My Child?

In today's age we live with easy access to explicit information. Magazine covers are displayed all over the supermarkets showing every type of immoral act. The danger of the internet are well known. With all these environmental hazards, can our children remain sheltered? In today's world it is almost impossible to shield our children from all this shmutz. Putting a paper bag over their heads just won't work.

Parents, wake up and smell the coffee before it is too late. Beware: the way your child finds out about the facts of life could have a negative and

long-lasting effect.

From the day my children were born, I had a plan all worked out in my head. I would be the first one to tell my kids about the facts of life, before someone else did! The way your children are told about this inyan creates a foundation for a healthy marriage and for life.

My first goal was to create a trusting, loving relationship with all my children. I instilled in them that they can come to me with any questions in their mind, no matter how big, small, ugly or embarrassing! I will never be upset no matter what

questions they have. This trusting relationship will enable your child to come to you at any age, in the event that someone decides to tell them information that they are not ready for. When your children know that you are open to all their questions no matter what the subject is, they will trust you and always come to you with questions.

My friend had such an experience when her child was at the tender age of eight. He came home from yeshivah and told her about the "education" he got from an older boy in the locker room. Of course, it was given over in a



very ugly, distorted way. She would have preferred to wait until her son was a bit older to educate him about this part of life, but under these circumstances, she immediately stepped up to the plate. She lovingly thanked him for coming to her immediately and not trying to deal with this overwhelming information alone. She told him that this child did not have the information right. She told him the Torah perspective, about the holy relationship with a husband, wife and Hashem. How beautiful this relationship is, when we follow the guidance of Torah. Only a lack of Torah can make this beautiful act into shmutz and ugliness.

She ended by telling her son that this is such a kedushah'dik subject that one does not go talking about it with one's friends. Let their Mommy and Tatty tell them in the right time. She reminded him that he was always welcome to ask her any questions that he might have in the future. He walked away with a very peaceful expression and went back to his usual play activities.

Many parents live in fear of educating their children about this touchy subject. They may be embarrassed to share this information with their children. No, it is not an easy topic to teach. Some parents are afraid to tell their child about it, lest the child become too aware of the parents' personal life!

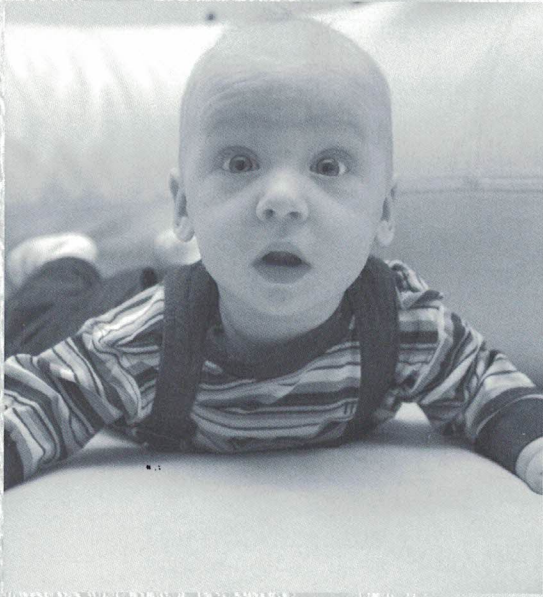
However, no matter how embarrassed you may be in sharing this topic, once your child reaches the age of eleven or so, it is almost guaranteed that he or she will find out something. Unfortunately, what your child will be exposed to is not the holy or beautiful version. With explicit billboards and advertisements all over the buses and subways, our children are at risk of finding out the wrong version at a younger age than ever. In that event you will have to try to straighten them out and undo the damage that was already done.

When broaching the subject with your child, you must tell yourself that this is Torah and it is a mitzvah and there is no need to avoid it. I must add that many adults are ashamed to discuss this subject with their children because they may have found out these facts in an inappropriate way, and were not given parental guidance when they needed it most. You do not want to repeat this cycle; you don't want your children to be misinformed about something that can cause damage later in their adult married life.

If you are concerned about giving away your private life, I have some news for you. Your children probably already know more than you wish they would know. But if you sit down with them and give them the Yiddishe, holy, beautiful version, you will have a chance to prevent much

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damage to their innocence.

When a child of mine nears the age of puberty, my approach is to take the child aside privately and lovingly, and tell them about their upcoming developmental changes. I discuss with them how their body will change and how it will affect them, and explain that this is the way Hashem planned for His creations to develop. I go on to explain that one day they will get married and enter into a very kedushah'dik relationship with a husband or wife, with Hashem as a third Partner. This very beautiful,

loving, holy partnership creates more Yidden in the world. I always end off by allowing them to ask me any questions that they may have. They are told to come back to me and only me to discuss anything else that may come up in the future. I stress that the information I just imparted to them is very holy and they should not tell this to any of their friends. Their friends need to discuss this topic with their own parents!

When parents discuss this topic with their children, it creates a deep trust, and bonds the child-parent

Book for Parents Is Now Available

“When I asked a friend who worked at the local frum girls’ school what issues were not being addressed adequately, both for her students and in the community at large, she did not hesitate to tell me,” says Mrs. Sara Diament. In response to the need, Mrs. Diament began conducting a workshop at the high school as a companion piece to their taharas hamishpachah course and it was a big success, appreciated by parents and students alike. Since then, she has led workshops in many girls’ schools, and at the behest of many parents she worked with, wrote a parenting book entitled, “Talking to Your Children About Intimacy: A Guide for Orthodox Jewish Parents.” (See ad on opposite page.)

“Prior to writing the book, I was flooded with phone calls from parents who were very anxious about talking to their children about this subject. While I could strategize with them, there wasn’t a book available on the mass market that was appropriate for a frum audience, or one that I felt comfortable recommending.” When Mrs. Diament embarked on the project of writing the book she immediately sought rabbinic support, and was pleased to

receive haskamos from Rabbis including Dr. Abraham J. Twerski.

One of Mrs. Diament’s primary goals was to alleviate parents’ anxiety by explaining how to explain the Torah’s outlook on the relationship between a husband and wife. “Physical intimacy in the context of marriage is filled with kedushah,” says Mrs. Diament. “When parents focus on this they realize that talking to their children about it is a wonderful opportunity to convey Torah hashkafos which are so counter to the attitudes that prevail in modern society.” She emphasizes that despite attempts by frum parents to shield their children from outside influences, all our children are hyper-exposed to the coarse views that unfortunately exist in the secular world.

An additional goal in her writing the book was to empower and inform parents so they can answer their children’s questions. “Our children have so many questions, starting from such a young age,” says Mrs. Diament, “and I know that many parents shy away from answering or even literally run away when they are asked

relationship forever.

What if parents just cannot bring themselves to educate their children on this subject? My suggestion is that they find a frum, trusted, professional educator, who will discuss this topic in the presence of both parent and child. Having the parent there when this sensitive information is shared will also enhance the bond between parent and child.

Another approach is to find kosher literature that presents this topic in a kedushah'dik way. Read it with your child. The book will provide you with the words and information, but you will be there for your child in person, to create that bond and trust.

Our parents and grandparents tried to hide this topic from us until our weddings. In our generation we can no longer afford to do this. It just won't work; the risks are too high! The way our children find out initially becomes the foundation for their future adult life. Children who are educated with the knowledge that the marriage relationship is holy, wholesome, pure, and beautiful will go into their future married life with much happiness and peace of mind. ■

Tzipora Clapman is a registered nurse and family nurse practitioner who lives in Crown Heights, New York. Stay tuned for her upcoming two-part series in the N'shei Chabad Newsletter; Adventures of a Camp Nurse!

a question that makes them uncomfortable."

She asserts that when we are able to calmly and confidently answer our children, at an age-appropriate level, it conveys that this is a topic that is important to discuss. In addition, it sends the message that the parent is open and available to their child to discuss this and other important issues. The reverse is true as well. When parents avoid answering questions or do so in an overly short or anxious manner, it implies that there is something negative about the topic and that children should not be broaching it with their parents. "We want our children to feel that they can always approach us with their questions and concerns," says Mrs. Diament, "and I want to make sure that parents have the confidence to guide their children on this issue whether the child is four years old or a teenager."

The topic of preventing abuse is also a theme in Mrs. Diament's book. "Whenever I speak to groups, I always leave that topic for last," she says. "Obviously, I prefer to focus on healthy development and not a behavior that is so damaging to children." Nonetheless, Mrs. Diament feels that it is very important that parents talk to their children about this issue as well. She explains that while we would wish that none of our children are at risk, unfortunately, that

"must reading for responsible Jewish parents"
-Rav Dr. Abraham J. Twerski

Talking to Your
Children About
Intimacy:
A Guide for
Orthodox Jewish
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SARA DIAMENT, M.A.

info/order: TorahParenting.com

is not true. "It is imperative that we explain to our children what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior and touch," she states. Even more than that, she explains that children need to be confident that they can approach their parents should they feel that their privacy has been breached in any way. "You want to make sure that they would come to you should anyone behave towards them in an inappropriate manner. Often children do not speak up, but talking to them in advance increases the likelihood that they would report an abusive event or environment should it occur, G-d forbid."

Mrs. Sara Diament's book is written in a sensitive, conversational manner and provides user-friendly guidance to address the questions that parents have when broaching this topic with their children and teenagers. With recommendations on how to overcome discomfort and effectively engage children throughout childhood and adolescence, this guide is the perfect resource for parents who are seeking religiously appropriate advice and information. To view haskamos and excerpts or to contact Mrs. Diament regarding a speaking engagement, please go to Torahparenting.com. The book may be ordered on-line through the website or via barnesandnoble.com and amazon.com.