

Son, We're Going to Talk About Sex

How does a dad start the conversation?

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I've asked hundreds of men if their fathers ever talked to them about sex and relationships, beyond the usual exhortation to wear a condom. Thus far only one has said yes.

A friend recounted how as a boy back in New Zealand his school hosted a father and son evening on this very topic. On the day, however, dad made an excuse and backed out, sending older brother along instead. When the two boys arrived at the school, there were almost no men to be seen. Most of the lads were with an older brother, cousin, or on their own.

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Judging by the boys I meet, things have not changed much. With no teaching from our own fathers, I meet very few men who have had meaningful conversations with their sons about sex and relationships. Many find the topic too difficult and don't go there. Others out source the job to school. Some say it's better their boy finds out for himself from his friends or online. These men don't realize a father's input is the most important of all, in spite of the groans and push back they might receive bringing up the topic!

How do you start the conversation? I've taken groups of fathers and sons out to the bush where we gather around a fire. We create a 'sacred space' where anything can be said with no fear of judgement or ridicule. Getting away from the normal routine of life allows for something new to emerge.

The boys squirm and smirk at the beginning, uncomfortable at the prospect of men talking about sex. The fathers must push through their own embarrassment. But soon they share openly how their bodies started changing at puberty. I'm always glad to hear an excruciating story of the first wet dream or masturbation. Everyone laughs and the ice is broken.

The men share about their first crush, what it was like to fall in love, the mistakes they made, and how women should be treated. Some men talk about their struggle with porn. The boys listen raptly because they hear total honesty from a variety of men, not just their own dad.

The boys ask questions which different men answer. Father and son take the discussion deeper later on. Some men have had the first conversation with a son who thinks he is gay. This is so critical. Anything can be discussed because a channel of communication and trust has opened.

How does it affect the maturation process of our boys
when we avoid these conversations?

What do the boys really want? Honest stories from men they trust and then your advice. No matter how promiscuous or inexperienced you were, how awful your introduction to sex might have been, or how (in)adequate you feel for the task now. Your authentic experience, for better or worse, will counteract the avalanche of false information he receives everywhere else. Even better, he will feel comfortable coming to you with questions and concerns, without shame or embarrassment, if you keep the channel open.

How does it affect the maturation process of our boys when we avoid these conversations? I hear complaints from many young women of how men brag about real or imagined sexual encounters not just at the pub but on social media. For them, women are conquests, not human beings. No one taught the young men the importance of treating women with respect and dignity.

I heard of a mother recently saying her teenage son won't introduce her to a girl because the relationship is 'just for sex.' The woman condoned her son's contempt toward the young lady, telling her friends she

wished such arrangements were available when she was at university. That father never taught his son sex is a profound, intimate expression of love between two people.

And what about porn? What do our boys expect of real women after watching two-dimensional images online? I know young women often feel compelled to comply with something they don't want to do. Some are traumatized by men's weird, degrading demands as discussed in the TED Talk [The Great Porn Experiment](#) by Gary Wilson.

Do you think your son knows how intimidating he can be to girls? Is he aware of his power? A friend's daughter challenged the behavior of a group of boys at a social event and became the target of many abusive, threatening messages on social media. Their fathers did not teach them about restraint or honor.

A father's calm and loving voice, sharing wisdom as well as mistakes, provides guidance to a boy on his sexuality and how to treat the opposite sex with dignity, care, and respect.

If your son thinks he is gay, he needs you just as much to both to listen and guide him.

It's not just for your sake of your sons and their sons, but all the women they will interact with in life.

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