

relationships. They are also more likely to coerce their partners or act violently in a sexual relationship. Parents can be mindful of potentially gendered language they might use to speak to their children.

## RACHEL SAYS:

Kids should be allowed to “choose for themselves what they want to wear or play with,” and when kids are too small to pick for themselves, parents should choose toys and clothes that aren't directed towards a certain gender. Even shampoo, body wash, etc. have different products for boys and girls—and girls' products are sometimes more expensive than the boys'! If they grow up using stuff directed towards their gender, then when they're older and they're into different stuff, they might think that something is wrong with them.

I have a lot of friends that are non-binary, transgender, gay, bi and lesbian, and they aren't any different than my friends who aren't. I feel safe and loved whatever my sexual identity is.

It is difficult to encourage others to make gay or trans friends while avoiding tokenism; however, being open to diversity is an important value to communicate. This could be as simple as seeking out books and shows with diverse characters (Google is your friend here!), or attending family-friendly Pride celebrations.

### *Media Matters (It Does)*

Monitoring and curating what shows kids are watching, what video games they're playing, and what music they're listening to can reduce harmful messages they might be getting around diversity and gender norms; studies have shown diverse exposure can actually delay sexual activity. Even better is watching/playing/listening *with* them, making observational comments, and talking about their thoughts. This allows parents to communicate their values, and teaches skills of media literacy and critical thinking. This strategy might start while watching *Sesame Street*, but the skills are transferable to *Riverdale*. A close relationship with a parent makes it more comfortable for a young person to ask questions about sexual content – especially important if the child happens to view pornography.

### *You Matter (You Do!)*

Parents can acknowledge the pleasure of sex, especially in the context of a committed intimate relationship. Kids benefit from seeing their parents share healthy affection with others. When youth expect, and feel entitled to, sexual pleasure, they are more able to advocate for their sexual health. Furthermore, when youth are empathetic to the experience of others, they are more likely to be attentive to the sexual health of their partners. Attributes of self-advocacy, self-esteem, and empathy are associated with orgasm, pleasure, and reciprocity in sexually-active youth. Although it is best for young people to delay having sex, I would always rather any sexual experience be a pleasurable one! A close relationship with a parent also increases the likelihood that sexual activity will be conducted in a safer manner, occur in a trusting and consensual relationship, and result in a higher quality experience.

Ultimately, although every family will have different values around sexuality, there are some foundational principles that will promote sexual health and well-being in youth, and are great talking points to get the conversation started!

- » You have the right to be loved and cared for, and to feel safe and protected.
- » Your body is yours and no one else has the right to touch it or comment on it without your consent.
- » You are valuable and worthy, no matter who you love or are attracted to.
- » If you are ever uncomfortable with the way someone is looking at, touching, or talking about your body, tell an adult who you trust.
- » Body parts should be called by their correct names.
- » It is your responsibility to take care of your body.
- » Sexuality is a natural and healthy part of life.
- » Everyone has the right to sexual safety, privacy, and pleasure.
- » You are responsible for expressing your sexuality in a way that is respectful of others.
- » You have the right to have your questions and concerns about your body answered honestly and accurately. Communication and trust are key. If you cannot talk to a potential partner about having sex, you should not be having sex with that person.
- » Masturbation is a natural and healthy way of exploring sexuality, delaying sexual intercourse, and learning about your body.
- » You have the right to access confidential health care resources regarding sexuality, reproduction, contraception, and health. If you are going to engage in sexual activity, a barrier method (e.g. condom) should be used every time.
- » Sexually-transmitted infections (STIs) lead to serious consequences and are preventable.
- » Abstaining from sexual intercourse is the most effective way of preventing pregnancy and STIs. •



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For references and websites to check out please see [ecoparent.ca/extras/FALL18](http://ecoparent.ca/extras/FALL18)