



## Daughters and Sexuality

**We grow up watching how our parents treat and talk (or don't talk) about their own bodies, relationships and needs, and this can go a long way to supporting our own positive sense of our body and self.**

*Imagine you're a baby getting your nappy changed. Your mum screws up her face and says 'Stinky poo!' You don't understand the words yet but you hear the disapproving tone as she cleans up the 'mess' that you had enjoyed pushing out. Over time, you learn to hide your bodily pleasure.*

*Imagine you're a toddler, and your parents teach you to wash yourself 'down there' and never actually use the word vulva. Over time, you learn that talking about your sexual organs is not acceptable.*

*Imagine you're primary school age, and it's normal for you to hear your mum complaining about her weight, wishing that her belly were smaller, comparing other people's legs to hers and seeing her go on diets. Over time, you learn to compartmentalise and objectify your body.*

*Imagine you're a teenager, and your parents have only ever talked with you about sexuality once, when your body first started changing. They've never talked with you about the pleasures of intimacy with a partner. Over time, you learn that this is not something you learn about or discuss with your loved ones.*

Developing a healthy connection to your sexuality begins early in life and continues through your primary school years, even before puberty's changes. Five-year-olds can learn about consent and internalise their rights and skills in giving a clear yes or clear no to how they are treated by others. I've heard that sexual predators prey on the less confident children. If a child doesn't know the parts of their body or can't speak up about their boundaries, it's easier to keep them silent around something they sense is shameful.

### **Criteria for emotional well-being ... and sexual interest and satisfaction**

**If a young person has low self-esteem, limited ability to self-soothe, poor coping skills and negative body image, they will struggle,** according to Evelyn Resh, author of *The Secret Lives of Teen Girls*. We want our children to connect with themselves and their own needs, and enjoy intimate relationships. Resh's criteria for this are:

1. Self-esteem
2. Strong health-seeking behaviours (diet and exercise)
3. Optimism
4. Creativity
5. Compassion for self and others
6. Sense of humour

In what ways do you help your daughter with developing the above? Does this go beyond giving her praise and her seeking praise from others?



## Reflection questions and/or strategies

### Around your own approach

- Your markers for emotional well-being: are they present and intact? Has this always been true or have you had to work hard as an adult to achieve this?
- Have you lived with a disinterest in sex and a lack of sexual satisfaction and if so where do you think it comes from?

### Around conversation about bodies and sexuality

Normalise sex and sexuality in conversations, both with your daughter and in your own life.

- Be positive/congratulatory/reassuring about her growing up and getting her period
- Refer to puberty/body changes as normal, including gaining weight around thighs, bum and hips (normal to gain 3-4 kg as she gets her curvy woman's shape)
- Don't emphasise appearance (even positive commentary can be treating bodies as objects)

### Around self-care

She needs to see you live a life that includes sensual pleasure for you! How do you feel about your own body? Are you connected to your menstrual cycle and its associated changes in body, mood and energy?

- Create healthy lifestyle habits your daughter sees
- Create awareness around whether you're driven in an obsessive way to "eat right and exercise all the time"
- Exercise regularly and enjoy it – and encourage your daughter to, too.

### Around rules

Reflect on your experience as a teen and your parenting now. Are you repeating your mother's style or have you adapted your rules to what's appropriate for your daughter and these times?

- Be clear about rules you consider the most important for your daughter to abide by and why
- What consequences does she experience when she breaks your rules? Are they working?
- Do you have enough rules or too many?

### Around Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

- **Learn about the STIs** that sexually active young people might be at risk for.
  - Curable versus manageable: *HPV, chlamydia (bacterial = antibiotic), HSV/Cold sores, HIV/AIDS, Hep B and C, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis*



## Around Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), cont.

- Are you familiar with **using a condom correctly** and could you explain this to her?
- Do you know about available **contraception options** and how effective each one is?
- **Values versus facts** of having sex; remember there is a difference between these two.
- Regular **gynaecological exams and annual pap smears**. Would you take her?

## References I mention during the workshop

Here's a list with some overview of what each reference is about. If you recall one that I mentioned that isn't here, please ask me!

**A Blessing not a Curse: A Mother daughter guide to the transition from girl to woman**, Bennett, Jane *A great guide, with stories, practical tips and great cultural stories, too.*

**The Secret Lives of Teen Girls: What your Mother Wouldn't Talk About but your Daughter Needs to Know**, Resh, Evelyn 2009, Hay House Inc, California, USA. *This was the book that inspired me to first present this workshop on daughters and sexuality. I highly recommend it.*

**Queen Bees and Wannabes** Wiseman, Rosalind. *Really readable, insightful and practical, including examples of what to say to your daughter in various tricky friendship situations, looking also at pressures of body image and expectations in teen relationships. Eye-opening and helpful.*

### **Things Girls Need from their Fathers**

An article from the Huffington Post, posted 06/18/2013. *This is really great for all parents to read, and makes infinite sense. As soon as you have a baby is a great time to read this! Linked to a similar article for what is needed from mothers.*

**Talk Soon. Talk Often. A guide for parents talking to their kids about sex.** *Free downloadable booklet from Government of Western Australia Department of Health. A great guide for what is appropriate to say when, with examples. Nice layout with lovely pics, too!*

**When can teenagers have a partner sleep over?** Article by Maddy Silver, Sydney Morning Herald 17/3/14. *Really great food for thought. Compares the Netherlands and the USA; in the former case, with parents more open and accepting of teen sexual relationships, there's less teen pregnancy.*

**Puberty Girl** Movsessian, Shushann 2004 Allen and Unwin, Sydney. *This is for mature pre-teens and teens – really friendly language that tells you the straight-up facts in a non-medical way.*

**TED Talk: Your body language may shape who you are**, Cuddy, Amy (who also researched and wrote the great book called Presence: Bringing your boldest self to your biggest challenges, 2016 Orion, London. *Great research on power poses and how you can develop greater self-confidence.*

**TED Talks Listening to shame** and **The power of vulnerability** by Brene Brown. *Her work is powerful. If you haven't seen these or read any of her books, please do!*



## The cost of hidden stress

**When the body says no: Exploring the stress-disease connection,**

Mate, Gabor, 2003, John Wiley & Sons, Inc, NJ. *This book both shocked and inspired me.*

It may seem odd that I'm referencing a book called *When the body says no: Exploring the stress-disease connection* from my *Daughters and Sexuality* workshop, but I really believe we need to help our children to listen to their bodies, recognise what they need (and deserve to have), and then have the confidence to speak up for this, either in relationships or with health professionals.

This book freaked me out a little, because it looks at all the ways that putting others before yourself, denying your own needs (and gut feeling, which can be ignored so often that you no longer recognise it), staying cheerful and repressing anger lead to long-term stress on your body, which can then emerge with scary effects on your auto-immune system. *And parents beware: we learn these 'skills' from our family of origin.*

## Maté's seven As of healing and how I believe they relate to our topic

### Acceptance

The willingness to recognise and accept how things are, and the courage to permit negative thinking.

### Awareness

We can learn to read symptoms not only as problems to be overcome but as messages to be heard.

### Anger

Repression of anger is a major risk factor for disease, but anger differs from rage or hostility. Healthy anger is an empowerment, but repression and rage represent fear of the genuine experience of anger.

### Autonomy

People suffer when their boundaries are blurred. Boundaries and autonomy are essential for health. Autonomy is the development of that internal centre of control.

### Attachment

Connection is vital to healing. Behind our anger lies a deeply frustrated need for truly intimate contact. Healing both requires [...] regaining the vulnerability that made us shut down emotionally in the first place.

### Assertion

Assertion challenges the belief that we must somehow justify our existence. It is *being*, irrespective of action.

### Affirmation

Health rests on 3 pillars: the body, the psyche and the spiritual connection. To ignore any one of them is to invite imbalance and dis-ease.

**If you're true to yourself, speaking up for what you like and don't like, you're much more likely to have friendships, relationships and sexual experiences that are mutually pleasurable, fun and nurturing for you. Which means that you can live well, do good and care for our world.**



Please join me with and  
for your daughter in one of our programs

**Step into Womanhood**

**Mother-Daughter Bali Retreat June/July**

A beautiful and affirming adventure to share with your 11-13 year old daughter.

Please call me for a chat about it.

We're also taking expressions of interest for next year

**A Celebration Day for Girls** 1.5 day workshop

for 10-12 year old girls and their mother/female carer. Please call me to arrange a day for your daughter and her friends and their mums.

**Fathers Celebrating Daughters** workshop for fathers of tween and teen girls to prepare for a positive transition to puberty and growing up.

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