

Informing Families

Building Trust

A Partnership for Better Communication
on Developmental Disability Issues in Washington State

Healthy Relationships: The Middle School Years

The middle school years are a challenging time for both parent and child.

For the child, it is a time of rapid change as relationships with their friends become more important, and they begin to exercise more independence from their families. Children also experience profound changes in emotional and physical development.

This time is even more challenging for parents of children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) because of fears about physical development, specifically puberty.

Despite the need for children to understand what is happening to them both physically and emotionally—to help them move successfully through puberty—parents may resist providing them with information during this sensitive time.

There are as many reasons parents are reluctant to talk to their children,



including:

- ❖ feeling that the child is too young or not ready;
- ❖ uncertainty about how to discuss the subject;
- ❖ fearing that the child will take information as permission and become sexually adventurous or inappropriate;
- ❖ discomfort with the topic; and,
- ❖ feeling uneducated on the subject and afraid that they will “do it wrong.”

The good news for parents is that there are excellent resources

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available to help. Information is available on topics such as:

- parents as teachers;
- the importance of family perspective on sexuality education; and,
- tips for talking with your children.

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Visit [Partnership 4 Safety](#) for information on ways to feel more prepared to support your child’s education and development.

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Healthy Relationship Tips

- ➔ Emphasize personal boundaries and space.
- ➔ Teach your child that she/he gets to choose whether or not to hug.
- ➔ Use correct anatomical terms.
- ➔ Recognize behavioral changes that indicate possible sexual assault.

For Additional Reading...

[Healthy Bodies Toolkit](#) Parent guides for talking to children with disabilities about the changes of puberty (comes in a boys and girls version).

[What Parents Need to Know](#)

Information emphasizing how parents are an important part of a child’s sexual development.